

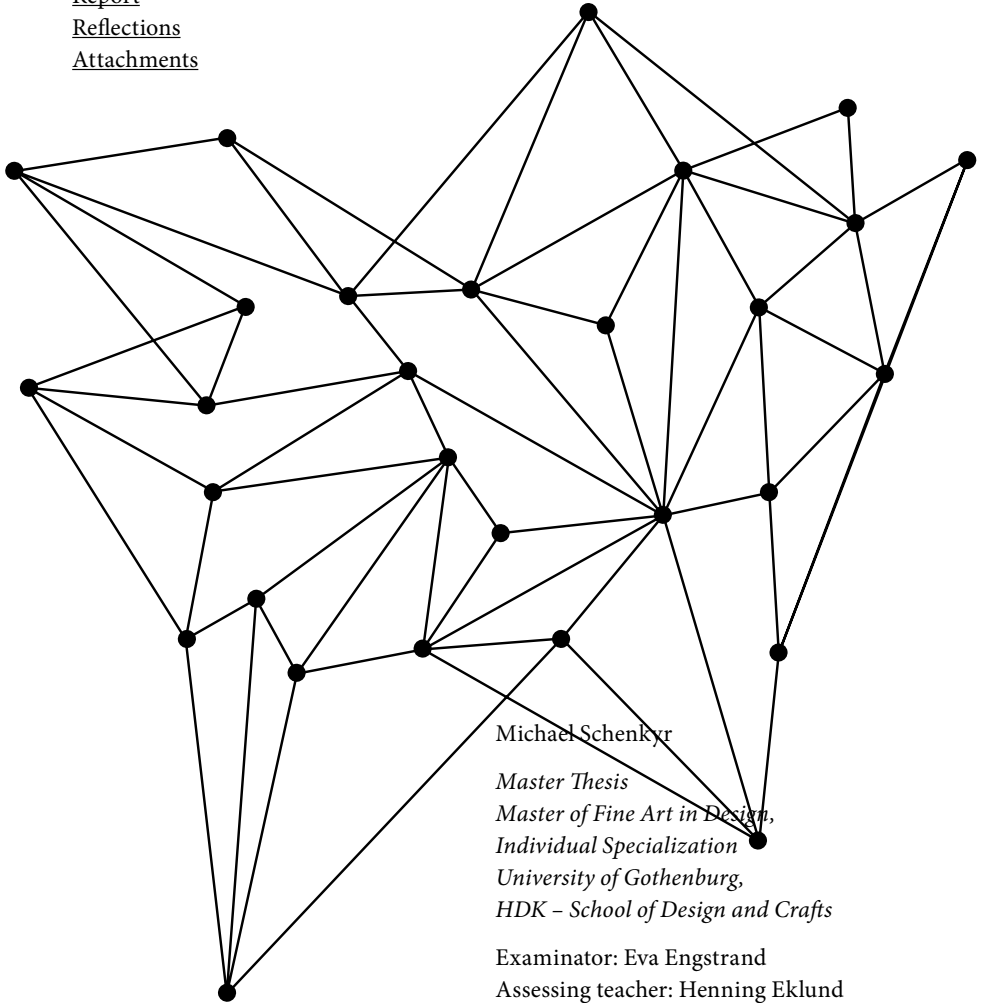
**New Land**

*Structures for a changing  
working world*

Report

Reflections

Attachments



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## Abstract

During this thesis the challenges of the working world were explored from the perspective of self-employed designers. Our working world is changing. Gone are the days when young professionals moved from position to position within one business during their entire working life. Nowadays we hop from workplace to workplace or decide straight away to pursue the path of self-employment. In addition, flexible work structures allow us to work from anywhere, at any time—blurring the once rigid line between professional and private life.

All this makes life diverse, challenging and offers new opportunities. However it also means that we must find our own structures and draw new boundaries. How do we work? Where and when do we work? How do we separate work and private life? Do we even have to?

The digital publication *New Land* answers these questions from the perspective of self-employed designers. It shows how people have found their own way of facing the challenges.

### Keywords

Self-employment, design, structural design, blurred boundaries between work and private life, way of life, flexible work, entrepreneurship, small scale, creative collaborations, quality of life.

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## Background and goals

This part of the text will describe where I started from and discuss the primary goals I had with my project. I should mention that the following passages show my early assumptions when dealing with the issues surrounding my work. My later process made me question these initial hypotheses, making the problem focus shift at least once. However, I think it is necessary for you as a reader to be sufficiently informed about my starting point, in order to fully benefit from the insights that followed later on in my process. To provide a clear understanding of my progress, I will try to give a transparent account of my steps and thoughts.

Several weeks of preparing my thesis ended in formulating a project plan, a sort of *living document* that was designed to be open for changes and development during the subsequent process. A full version of the final project plan is attached to this paper (see p. 50). I will summarize the contents and additional editing of this document in the following lines. The primary purpose of the plan was to formulate the most important goals of my thesis and the necessary steps I wanted to take in order to reach this aim.

The working title of my project was *'Hinterland. Small design studios in the countryside'*. I chose the phrase *hinterland*<sup>1</sup> as it expresses the locality of peripheral, non-urban regions I was interested in. The subtitle describes two main issues that I was interested in. Small businesses—as in contrast to large agencies—and the issue of place, namely working in the countryside instead of cities or urban areas.

The main research question included in the project plan was: *What are the problems and opportunities small design businesses face in the countryside?*

The reasons for my interest in that topic were manifold. First, I am planning to start my own business together with my partner in a small town in Southern Germany. I felt that deciding for self-employment in combination with the locational choice of working in the countryside would result in specific challenges.

Moreover, I realized that nowadays an increasing number of designers work independently. May it be because they decided for that way of life, or simply because the employment market, no longer offering a sufficient amount of permanent jobs, is pushing people into independent labor conditions.

<sup>1</sup>— “Borrowing from German Hinterland, from hinter ('behind') + Land ('land'), cognate to English hind ('back, rear') + land.” hinterland - Wiktionary. (n.d.). Retrieved June 11, 2013, from <http://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/hinterland>

These were the keywords that surrounded the early stage of my project:

- *Small*. As a contrast to working in larger agencies.
- *Countryside*. As a contrast to cities, or urban environments.
- *Flexibility*. Pointing to the mobility of a new type of worker.
- *Isolation*. My personal fear when working individually.
- *Community*.<sup>1</sup> As a source for stimulation and chance to exchange views with other. Furthermore, I asked myself, how I could contribute to a community.
- *Collaboration*. How to network and break the isolation.

As mentioned above, the project plan was mainly a tool for formulating goals, generating questions and identifying fields to investigate further. The research and process that followed was aligned to these initial guidelines. However, my later work also showed that not all assumptions I had made were correct, and neither were all of my questions of equal relevance to the topic. The following passages disclose my process and the associated insights which shifted part of my focus.

<sup>1</sup>— I should mention that my understanding of community was quite manifold. It included everything from a physical neighborhood, a village or city district to communities such as networks with no physical boundaries. For example, social communities on the Internet.

## Process and insights

### Literature Review

I started my thesis work with literature review based upon the questions and keywords of my project plan. This classical research phase can be described as looking for *what's already there*. I immersed in studies, surveys, newspaper articles, interviews and other related discussions which led me to my first conclusions and reflections, not at least concerning my early assumptions and ideas connected to my project plan. The next chapters contain notes on my readings and should give an extensive account of my research material.

### Small design studios

The following paragraphs contain my notes on the article “Effizienz und Eigensinn” from design magazine PAGE (9.2012)<sup>1</sup> The text introduces three Berlin based design agencies that are—or once were starting off as small studios. How can they compete with big agencies in times of large multimedia campaigns? What are their recipes for success?

*anschlaege.de*, the first design studio introduced in the article, describes itself as “neither a cube farm nor a one-man show.”<sup>2</sup> Their core team includes three partners and three employees, but they bring in freelancers if projects require that. *anschlaege.de* says that it is very important for them to do one or two free projects to socially relevant issues every year. They very often receive jobs from cultural institutions because they themselves take part in culture. Their experiences with summer camps, creative workshops and free, self-initiated urban planning projects are reasons that customers decide for them.

*anschlaege.de*'s recipe for success includes that structures for each project are planned and organized at the beginning. Each job, its costs, benefits, number of employees and planning state is extensively documented and customer receive the same Excel sheet with all dates and templates. This leads to production on schedule and culture institutions are most grateful for this service because they usually do not have a person responsible for these managing jobs.

1— Effizienz und Eigensinn. (2012). PAGE, (9), p. 40–44.

2— Startseite – *anschlaege.de*. (n.d.). Retrieved April 9, 2013, from <http://anschlaege.de/#PID8:CID10>

According to *anschlaege.de*, another need when being small, is to build on flat hierarchies. The more strict a structure is, the more difficult it is to get good results. The article mentions examples such as workshops, which are most efficient among friends as one complements one another, and brings each other further mutually. Furthermore, open architecture contributes to sharing. If one can never really close the door, this automatically leads to discourse and transparency inside a company.

*anschlaege.de* is planning to work every Friday on self-initiated projects and use that time to get inspiration. For example, one should be able to build new office furniture in the workshop or plant a cherry tree in the garden. This free time must be *worked in* from Monday to Thursday. However, there are also more and more customers that appreciate this time of experiment.

*Stan Hema*<sup>1</sup>, a branding agency of around 15 people and the second studio introduced in the article, tries to be active in a wide variety of channels. Therefore they tend to recommend matching partner agencies (programmers, architects, etc.) to clients, coach them and coordinate the process. A similar analytical approach, an alignment of methods and mutual respect is essential for these collaborations. *Stan Hema* points out that one should never think that one can assess everything alone.

*wirDesign*<sup>2</sup>, the third and last presented company, started off as a small design collective in the beginning of the eighties and now is one of Germany's leading brand agencies with 50 employees in two locations. When it comes to positioning oneself inside the market, they suggest to go for a strategy that combines services which one can do, enjoys doing and at the same time are demanded by the market. If new market areas are addressed, one always pays dues. This is worth it, but only if the new field fits into the company profile.

According to *wirDesign*, customer growth and acquisition happens through a well edited online portfolio, networking and inforatory publishing (e.g., a corporate magazine).

1— Stan Hema. Retrieved April 9, 2013, from <http://www.stanhema.com>

2— *wirDesign*. Retrieved April 9, 2013, from <http://www.wirdesign.de>

### Conclusions

- The advantage of small agencies lies in their flexibility in combination with a consistent (design) attitude.
- Lean staff structures allow agility and rapid response to any form of change.
- Flat hierarchies allow equal communication with customers, employees and partners.
- Tight structures in organization and business enable reflection, free creative experimentation and personal training. — Important parameters, which determine the strategic sustainability of a company.
- Agency profiles are, at best, living organisms. They show their own character and develop further.

### Collaborative design

The following paragraphs contain my notes on the chapter “In the Midst” in “We-Design: A Learning-based Approach to Emergent and Collaborative Design Practice”<sup>1</sup>, master’s thesis of Ariana Amacker. The text gives insights into ways people in several North American communities work collaboratively and problems and opportunities that arise from it. This knowledge can be of help when planning collaborative projects, running an open studio or hosting workshops and likewise get-togethers. The paper also made me think of my relationship towards places. How do we choose the surroundings that we want to live and work in?

*What is a good place? What kind of spaces are people looking for? What does a place need to start and support communication?*

Amacker mentions that identity, culture and place are intertwined. “The identity of ‘place’ is culturally created and maintained”<sup>2</sup> by the people that use it. The identity of a place creates a certain feeling of home for the participants. “Culture is what alters the perception of the place. It is [...] the stuff of life—music, food, art, language.”<sup>3</sup>

1— Amacker, A. (2011). *We-Design: A Learning-based Approach to Emergent and Collaborative Design Practice*. A thesis submitted to the University of Calgary, Faculty of Environmental Design.

2— Amacker, A. (2011). p. 114.

3— Ibid., p. 128f.

The more people contribute to a place and the more they “do interesting things”,<sup>1</sup> the more other initiatives are established. A place becomes “richer, more diverse, and complex.”<sup>2</sup> The physical space (of a building, e.g.) does not necessarily need to change for that. Buildings are instead “reused while [only] communication and the interaction is taking on new forms.”<sup>3</sup>

In most cases, the collaborative projects Amacker mentions were not necessary about the physical place itself, but about “creating this particular kind of collaborative environment that supports [...] interests and aspirations”<sup>4</sup>—a feeling of home. A good space should “encourage people to come and hangout.”<sup>5</sup> One can find examples in “coffee shops, bookstores, bars, record shops, vintage clothing stores, studios and galleries which all have that living room [...] atmosphere. [...] These independent spaces [...] take on an expressive, personalized and often off-beat quality.”<sup>6</sup>

At the heart of a social entrepreneurial project lies mostly an open discussion space, a communication forum, or a wiki. These multipurpose places facilitate communication. Amacker refers to Clay Shirky who said: “When we change the way we communicate we change society.”<sup>7</sup> Communication changes the structure of how we think about things.

A good place works as a multi-directional “platform for people to express ideas and get ideas out.”<sup>8</sup> “Openness is a critical part of facilitating change. [...] There has to be room for that ‘conversation’.”<sup>9</sup> “Communication in open contexts provides feedback that allows the network [or community] to continually test and develop design ideas.”<sup>10</sup> “Looking at design in the context of collaboration, information does not travel only in one direction. [...] Ideas and knowledge travel in many directions.”<sup>11</sup>

1— Ibid., p. 128.

2— Ibid.

3— Ibid.

4— Ibid., p. 140.

5— Ibid., p. 135.

6— Ibid., p. 135f.

7— Shirky, C. (2008). *Here comes everybody: the power of organizing without organizations*. New York: Penguin Press. p. 17.

8— Amacker, A. (2011). p. 157.

9— Ibid., p. 166.

10— Ibid., p. 190.

11— Ibid., p. 194.

Amacker alleges that “social entrepreneurial spaces are not exhibiting the same possessive individualism”<sup>1</sup> of their commercial counterparts. “Profit is not the sole motivation for their work. This allows that their time is slow, their development is slow, people are sharing and connecting.”<sup>2</sup> There is more flexibility in places that are developed for social exchange as much as for profit. “Because they are open access, there is a certain sense of freedom and flexibility in these spaces.”<sup>3</sup>

*Small is beautiful, or the human scale*

Amacker states that large corporate businesses do not support individual small scale actions. Whereas, small businesses own that freedom to have sidewalk seating, or hang paintings of local artists on their walls. Different “people can make different choices.”<sup>4</sup> There is a “capacity for sympathizing with someone.”<sup>5</sup> Working small scale “actually requires a more nuanced skill of dealing with people.”<sup>6</sup> In this context, Amacker quotes Barry Schwartz and Kenneth Sharpe who wrote that it requires “a skill that enables us to discern how to treat people in our everyday social activities.”<sup>7</sup>

Small local businesses “retain a human quality and uniqueness to a place.”<sup>8</sup> Their “behaviors and motivations can follow from treating people as people.”<sup>9</sup> Also, “the money they make stays local [as most of their] action is [rather] performed through social relations than market-proprietary relations.”<sup>10</sup>

Amacker relates to Charles Leadbeater who wrote that small businesses can “[resurrect] the old-fashioned notion of craftsmanship for the digital age.”<sup>11</sup> The new generations “value the freedom to control their lives, (...) to feel autonomous, take initiatives and be rewarded with a sense of achievement and recognition.”<sup>12</sup>

1— Ibid., p. 136.

2— Ibid.

3— Ibid., p. 155.

4— Ibid., p. 139.

5— Ibid.

6— Ibid.

7— Schwartz, B., & Sharpe, K. (2010). *Practical wisdom: the right way to do the right thing*. New York: Riverhead Books. p. 8.

8— Amacker, A. (2011). p. 138.

9— Ibid., p. 138f.

10— Ibid., p. 138f.

11— Leadbeater, C. (2008). *We-think*. London: Profile. p. 111.

12— Ibid.

Finally, small does not mean ineffective. “Individual efforts quickly accumulate.”<sup>1</sup> “The human scale strategy alters the way changes are made.”<sup>2</sup> Small is the motto and “small things, small decisions, can have a big impact.”<sup>3</sup> “When people can matter, their actions can matter and the things that are important to them can matter.”<sup>4</sup>

*Is there such a thing as neighborhood everywhere?*

“When everyone around you seems involved, you feel as if you could have an impact, and the thought inevitably crosses your mind, ‘I want to do something too.’”<sup>5</sup>

Malcolm Gladwell calls this the Power of Context.<sup>6</sup> He says that “behavior is a function of social context”<sup>7</sup> and that “creative individuals are stimulated by elements such as their circle of friends”<sup>8</sup> and “the dynamics of the society in which they live.”<sup>9</sup> According to Amacker, social trends and cultural movements come from this everyday level of influence.

Local business networks in the cities Amacker visited wanted to start a place “that would [...] encourage people to come and hangout.”<sup>10</sup> The concept paid off because of the acceptance of a close neighborhood. But how could this idea of a casual meeting place look like in the countryside, when the next neighbor might be a several minutes’ drive away? How does a rural understanding of neighborhood differ from an urban setting? Do the described scenarios only apply to urban areas, or also to sparsely populated neighborhoods?

*What is the creative class looking for?*

People are mobile and “searching for a type of geographic kinship that has a specific identity.”<sup>11</sup> The creative knowledge-worker is highly flexible. Most of them can work by their laptops. Thus they can live anywhere they want. Because of this

1— Amacker, A. (2011). p. 173.

2— Ibid., p. 173f.

3— Ibid., p. 173.

4— Ibid., p. 174.

5— Ibid., p. 148.

6— Gladwell, M. (2002). *The Tipping Point: How Little Things Can Make a Big Difference*. Back Bay Books.

7— Ibid., p. 150.

8— Ibid.

9— Ibid.

10— Amacker, A. (2011). p. 121.

11— Ibid., p. 119.

flexibility, people have a certain “hunger for place.”<sup>1</sup> This hunger can be fulfilled in rural areas because of the possibilities of the Internet and more affordable housing prices.

Moreover, Amacker states that “creative people value an opportunity to participate in the culture of a place ‘to do interesting things’”,<sup>2</sup> or to be around people that are doing interesting things. Creative people are looking for ways to shape their own identity by social interaction. This demands affordable access to a cultural life and other types of social interaction. “Creative people are looking for places with a platform for participating in these cultural interactions and production [...]. They are not looking for ready-made place.”<sup>3</sup> The creative class favours “the hands-on and DIY attitude of [...] creative communities.”<sup>4</sup>

What does the creative class value additionally? They “want to live a very interesting life”<sup>5</sup> and are “not interested in making a ton of money.”<sup>6</sup> They are looking for “social affirmation through their choice of work and place.”<sup>7</sup> Choosing a location cannot be reduced to simply well paid jobs, cool bars and affordable real estate. People value other things that make their lives richer—friendships, family, social relations, opportunities of creation and action. A choice of place is highly relevant to those issues.

Amacker mentions accordingly that there are multiple values to a place. Of nonmarket value could be an openness to diversity, a Do-It-Yourself-mentality, or the opportunity to validate oneself as a creative person.

*Why do people care about their community? What is a social entrepreneur? How do collaborative networks work?*

According to Amacker, people are looking for places and “communities that share their values.”<sup>8</sup> They hook up with other people who share their values. “Social entrepreneurs are intrinsically motivated to construct identity of place in their own image [...] through social behavior.”<sup>9</sup> They work collaboratively and by social interconnectivity. “Social designers are giving space to noncommercial

1— Ibid.  
2— Ibid., p. 122.  
3— Ibid., p. 129.  
4— Ibid., p. 144.  
5— Ibid., p. 122.  
6— Ibid.  
7— Ibid.  
8— Ibid., p. 125.  
9— Ibid., p. 126.

activities and what we might see as cultural development.”<sup>10</sup> Social entrepreneurs are “figuratively and literally [...] a community bulletin board.”<sup>11</sup> For the social entrepreneur, “change is a process”,<sup>12</sup> and change takes time. So it is important to “keep trying”,<sup>13</sup> “fight”<sup>14</sup> and have “commitment’ and ‘persistence.”<sup>15</sup>

Social entrepreneurial organizations embrace “open, lateral and informal communication.”<sup>16</sup> They make people get to know other people and give them “access’ to [...] participate in the community.”<sup>17</sup> An open collaborative group chooses “democratic self-distribution of labour.”<sup>18</sup> Participants are willing to work on projects they are simply interested in. The “self-selection”,<sup>19</sup> “self-distribution”<sup>20</sup> and internal motivation is the most powerful force behind these groups. Finally, it is also about having fun.

Amacker quotes Teresa M. Amabile<sup>21</sup> who observed that creativity is largely driven by inner motivations while external rewards can have a negative effect. This means that “working for monetary and external incentives changes why decisions are made.”<sup>22</sup> “Social incentives bring about a special and more fulfilling type of personal satisfaction.”<sup>23</sup>

“Social communication, informal networking and information sharing [...] facilitates social entrepreneurs’ work.”<sup>24</sup> Local publications, such as society newsletters, artists newspapers and local listing are other physical ways of communicating. Social designers operate both by networking and interacting face-to-face in space and also using social technology.

1— Ibid., p. 141.  
2— Ibid., p. 139.  
3— Ibid., p. 174.  
4— Ibid.  
5— Ibid.  
6— Ibid.  
7— Ibid., p. 156.  
8— Ibid.  
9— Ibid., p. 160.  
10— Ibid., p. 161.  
11— Ibid., p. 160.  
12— Amabile, T. M. (1983). The social psychology of creativity: A componential conceptualization. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 45(2), p. 357–376  
13— Amacker, A. (2011). p. 162.  
14— Ibid., p. 163.  
15— Ibid., p. 184.

Amacker writes that the “human scale process [demands that] [...] action is manageable in small steps.”<sup>1</sup> You do something “one person at a time”<sup>2</sup> and step by step. “Goals have to be accessible to be achievable.”<sup>3</sup> This scale also makes “reflection-in-action”<sup>4</sup> possible. However, “we do not learn anything by not taking risks.”<sup>5</sup> So there also has to be a “chance of failure”<sup>6</sup> involved, otherwise we do not challenge ourselves. “Openness requires that people creatively deal with the unknown”<sup>7</sup>, and with the idea of surrendering to a challenge.

*Why should I do voluntary collaborative work?*

According to Amacker, people invest time and effort on independent alliances, grassroots organizations, neighborhood associations, NGOs and other voluntary project groups because they like a place, an idea, or agree with a group of other people. They do it because supporting each other corresponds with their attitude of solidarity. By setting up collaborative projects, we simultaneously build supportive structures for ourselves and our place/community. By this we can transform or keep a place in a way we like it. We could for instance “prohibit certain forces of globalization.”<sup>8</sup>

“Social networks are what generate knowledge, support commerce, and create place.”<sup>9</sup> As Leadbeater puts it, “community and conversation are at the roots of creativity. Ideas live within communities as much as they do in the heads of individuals.”<sup>10</sup> Amacker says that “these creative contexts for ideas, as experiential contexts, ‘help to birth’ other processes and groups.”<sup>11</sup> They are places of “practice-based learning.”<sup>12</sup>

Gatherings and events (“arts fests, happenings, meetings, dinners, outings, openings, concerts, fairs, launch parties, and block parties”<sup>13</sup>) are a way for people and communities “to network without being ‘networky.’”<sup>14</sup> Festivals are

1— *Ibid.*, p. 172

2— *Ibid.*

3— *Ibid.*

4— *Ibid.*

5— *Ibid.*, p. 182.

6— *Ibid.*

7— *Ibid.*, p. 190.

8— *Ibid.*, p. 124.

9— *Ibid.*, p. 127.

10— Leadbeater, C. (2008). *We-think*. London: Profile. p. 54.

11— Amacker, A. (2011). p. 153.

12— *Ibid.*, p. 189.

13— *Ibid.*, p. 155.

14— *Ibid.*, p. 156.

“networking events”<sup>1</sup> for not only the organizers but for anyone interested. It are these networks the individual can later benefit from, as social relationships are important in every relationship driven community. “Although entrepreneurs might be ‘plugged in’ and have global network connections”,<sup>2</sup> their work still operates to attributes of their given local situation. “Face-to-face organizing helps their project to find local opportunities and resources, develop and become embedded in the community.”<sup>3</sup>

“[Social] entrepreneurial agency is a direct expression of a desire to improve things for [oneself] [...] and for others.”<sup>4</sup> Another framework that fits in here is “small supports small.”<sup>5</sup> A lot of small business owners support each other.

*How can regional development nurture from cultural development and small scale interactions?*

Amacker says, when “developing community, you cannot focus solely on the infrastructure, but you have to ‘bring up the people’ at the same time. The ‘build it and they will come’ approach does not create community.”<sup>6</sup> Amacker quotes David Brooks who wrote in an article in the *New York Times* that cities and regions boom because “they host quality conversations, not because they build new convention centers.”<sup>7</sup> Hence, there has to be a culture of communication and dialog, and a lot of things are depending on that people are also listening to those conversations.

City administrations and “institutions in pursuit of predictability, efficiency, optimization, etc. leave little room for experimentation or doing things for the experience alone. But, social entrepreneurs are often looking for that space of cultural plasticity. [...] They value creativity [...] and are establishing platforms to create cultural experiences. In doing so they nourish the social side of place.”<sup>8</sup> By involving culture, social entrepreneurs make sure that a town is not just made of buildings. “By focusing on cultivating small local interactions, the structure of the larger whole can be more elastic, more integrative.”<sup>9</sup>

1— *Ibid.*, p. 157.

2— *Ibid.*, p. 191.

3— *Ibid.*

4— *Ibid.*, p. 187.

5— *Ibid.*, p. 158.

6— *Ibid.*, p. 128.

7— Brooks, D. (2011). *The splendor of cities*, Opinion, *The New York Times*.

8— Amacker, A. (2011). p. 141f.

9— *Ibid.*, p. 151.



Amacker says that “nurturing culture and informal arts helps builds social connections in rich ways.” Social entrepreneurs in that way are connectors, they create projects that link people.

Social entrepreneurs “help [to] build social space and nurture creativity. [...] All human intelligence, including scientific and political knowledge, is derived from artistic actions.”<sup>1</sup> We need cultural activities for our creativity. “Without practice and without culture there is no community, nor identity.”<sup>2</sup>

#### Rural creative

The following paragraphs present my notes on the article “Creative sector has role to play in rural areas, says Nesta”<sup>3</sup> by Lucia Cockcroft in *Design Week*. The text deals with the situation of creative businesses in rural Britain. It is based upon results of *Nesta’s* “Rural Innovation report”<sup>4</sup> that investigated the role of innovation outside major urban centers in the UK.

#### *Why do creatives move to the countryside?*

Cockcroft says that “traditionally, cultural and economic innovation is firmly linked to urban centres.”<sup>5</sup> However, Sami Mahroum, lead author of *Nesta’s* report, says that “the prominence of the creative community outside cities is being fuelled by ‘in-migration’—people mainly in their forties who decide to move out for economic and lifestyle reasons.”<sup>6</sup> According to Cockcroft, an important reason for “the growing influence of the creative industries in greener areas” is “the spread of broadband Internet access”<sup>7</sup> outside large cities and towns during the 1990s. Other forces letting creative workers move to the countryside, come from “trend towards downshifting” and “concerns about work/life balance”<sup>8</sup> that motivate people to migrate to more peripheral regions.

1— Ibid., p. 154.

2— Ibid.

3— Cockcroft, L. (2008). Creative sector has role to play in rural areas, says Nesta | News in Depth | Design Week. Retrieved April 9, 2013, from <http://www.designweek.co.uk/news/creative-sector-has-role-to-play-in-rural-areas-says-nesta/1137189.article>

4— S. Mahroum, J. Atterton, N. Ward, A. M. Williams, R. Naylor, R. Hindle and F. Rowe (eds). (2007). *Rural Innovation*, London: NESTA.

5— Cockcroft, L. (2008).

6— Ibid.

7— Ibid.

8— Ibid.

#### *How do rural regions benefit from their creative communities?*

According to Cockcroft, the group of creative workers that decides to move to the countryside often “brings with it ready-made social and business ties with cities and wider communities that can benefit rural areas. [...] This helps to reduce the historic disadvantage of isolation in rural locations.”<sup>1</sup> *Nesta’s* report also states that “the creative sector is now a key part of the tourism offering in many rural areas—taking the form of festivals, performances, open studio events, galleries and craft centres.”<sup>2</sup> One example mentioned in the article is the *North Yorkshire Open Studio* event<sup>3</sup>, which “attracts younger visitors and buyers from Manchester and other local urban centres”<sup>4</sup> by inviting the public into a variety of rural working spaces.

#### *The challenges and problems rural businesses face.*

Mark Jones, managing director at *Work House Marketing*,<sup>5</sup> a full service agency in rural Ribblesdale Valley, points out both positive and negative effects of running a rural business: “We are based by a river and a barn and have planning permission for a new 170m<sup>2</sup> photographic studio. It’s a fantastic place to work. [...] The negative comes when clients feel they need recognized city centre-based groups, which they perceive as having less risk. It’s perhaps harder for us to attract large clients.”<sup>6</sup> The article goes on mentioning that “many creative businesses report difficulties with planning applications while trying to change the use of agricultural buildings to creative premises.”<sup>7</sup>

Generally, *Nesta’s* report calls for “more research into how [...] creative industries operate in rural regions—the practicality of forging stronger ties with local business, for example.”<sup>8</sup>

1— Ibid.

2— Ibid.

3— North Yorkshire Open Studios - Home. (n.d.). Retrieved February 18, 2013, from <http://www.nyos.org.uk>

4— Cockcroft, L. (2008).

5— Workhouse Marketing | Preston. (n.d.). Retrieved April 9, 2013, from <http://www.workhousemarketing.com>

6— Cockcroft, L. (2008).

7— Ibid.

8— Ibid.

### Small versus big

The following chapter holds notes on the article “Small wonders show the way”<sup>1</sup> by Thom Newton in *Design Week*. Newton says that “small specialists provide a better service than larger groups.”<sup>2</sup> He brings down the argument around large versus small to the “respective merits of specialization versus one-stop shopping.”<sup>3</sup>

#### *What is the difference between big and small?*

To Newton “big groups are particularly well placed to capitalise on global brand exercises that are being implemented across several regions simultaneously”,<sup>4</sup> because these project are “difficult to handle without global reach.”<sup>5</sup> Small businesses, on the other hand, “find it easier to balance the involvement of their principals across new business and client work. They also tend to be quicker on their feet.”<sup>6</sup>

#### *The merits of specialization.*

Newton also names an advantage of specializing. “It often feels far more credible and reassuring to a client if you focus on fewer key areas of the design and branding mix.”<sup>7</sup>

### Creative industries in policy making

The following paragraphs contain notes on my reading of Pauline White’s article “Creative industries in a rural region: Creative West: The creative sector in the Western Region of Ireland”<sup>8</sup> in the *Creative Industries Journal*.

The article states that over the past ten years the creative industries have become noticed by policy makers as a key sector of the knowledge-based economy, and an important factor when it comes to triggering regional development. According to

1— Newton, T. (2005). Small wonders show the way | News | Design Week. Retrieved April 9, 2013, from <http://www.designweek.co.uk/news/small-wonders-show-the-way/1108061.article>

2— Ibid.

3— Ibid.

4— Ibid.

5— Ibid.

6— Ibid.

7— Ibid.

8— White, P. (2010). Creative industries in a rural region: Creative West: The creative sector in the Western Region of Ireland. *Creative Industries Journal*, 3(1), p. 79–88. doi:10.1386/cij.3.1.79\_1

the *Western Development Commission*<sup>1</sup>, the creative sector “has experienced higher growth rates than other sectors”<sup>2</sup> and “generates high-quality employment.”<sup>3</sup> In addition, it “stimulates innovation in other sectors; and plays an important role in social inclusion and community building.”<sup>4</sup>

However, much of recent debate about the impact of the creative sector focuses solely on an urban context. A big influence on policy discourse made, for example, Richard Florida’s term of the “creative city.”<sup>5</sup> However, a large number of creative businesses are active in areas outside urban centers. “In the EU-27, 24 percent of cultural employment is in sparsely populated areas.”<sup>6</sup> Consequently, the paper at hand discusses “place’ strengths that exist in rural areas”<sup>7</sup> using the example of Western Ireland.

#### *Who belongs to the creative sector? What does creative business look like in the countryside?*

White’s definition of the creative sector in Western Ireland is based on an earlier research by the *Western Development Commission*.<sup>8</sup> That paper used the following definition for creative sectors: “Occupations and industries centred on creativity, for the production and distribution of original goods and services.”<sup>9</sup>

In detail, the creative sector is composed of three broad categories. The first category, *creative application*, includes “industries that develop products or services primarily based on meeting a market demand”<sup>10</sup> (e.g., art/antiques trade, architecture, fashion, publishing, advertising, crafts). The second category, *creative expression*, covers “industries where products or services are developed for audiences with an expressive story in mind”<sup>11</sup> (e.g., music, visual and performing arts, video, film and photography, radio and TV broadcasting). The third category, *creative technology*, covers “industries that rely most on technology and digital

1— The WDC is ‘a statutory body that was set up to promote both social and economic development in the Western Region’ of Ireland. Retrieved February 19, 2013, from <http://www.wdc.ie/about>

2— White, P. (2010). p. 80.

3— Ibid.

4— Ibid.

5— Ibid.

6— Ibid.

7— Ibid., p. 79.

8— WDC. (2009). *Creative West: The Creative Sector in the Western Region*. Ballaghaderreen: WDC.

9— Ibid., p. 10.

10— White, P. (2010). p. 82.

11— Ibid.

media, particularly for their core functions<sup>1</sup> (e.g., internet and software, digital media, design).

282 creative businesses in the Western Region participated in a survey<sup>2</sup> that was carried out by *Perceptive Insight Market Research*. The research showed that Western Ireland's creative sector was dominated by self-employed persons (39 percent) or small micro-enterprises with less than ten employees (49 percent) and had low export activity.

*Why do creatives move to the countryside? What are challenges and problems rural businesses face?*

The combination of the survey results, additional interviews, a stakeholder workshop and the input of an expert group identified a framework of three main categories, that influence creative businesses in the Western Region.

Creative place issues: According to the study, "quality of life, the natural environment and the region's creative legacy"<sup>3</sup> were main arguments that attracted creative workers to rural areas. Particularly, people active in the creative expression and application categories named issues such as "landscape, remoteness, natural surroundings, waterways, lighting, space and heritage"<sup>4</sup> as important elements that nurture their creativity. All interviewees, that had moved from larger cities to rural areas, said that they were looking for the quieter country life and wanted to escape city life's "hustle and bustle."<sup>5</sup> According to White, similar results were found in the United States by David McGranahan and Timothy Wojan.<sup>6</sup> Their research identified the "access to outdoor amenities and activities, the quality of local schools, and social and cultural interaction in rural counties"<sup>7</sup> as crucial factors for the share of employment in their creative sector.

Other reasons for knowledge workers to move included the expansion of broadband Internet access in the past years, and better accessibility by extended

1— Ibid.

2— Oxford Economics. (2008). *Baseline Research on the Creative Industries Sector in the Western Region of Ireland, for the Western Development Commission*. Ballaghaderreen: WDC.

3— White, P. (2010). p. 79.

4— Ibid., p. 84.

5— Ibid.

6— Mcgranahan, D., & Wojan, T. (2007). *Recasting the Creative Class to Examine Growth Processes in Rural and Urban Counties*. *Regional Studies*, 41(2), p. 197–216. doi:10.1080/00343400600928285

7— White, P. (2010). p. 82.

transport links. The "region's connectivity, both physical and virtual",<sup>1</sup> seemed to be a crucial location factor for creative businesses.

Creative people issues: According to the study, knowledge workers, who decided to settle and start a business, expected to find a high level of creative talent in the chosen region. However, interviewees mentioned that it was sometimes difficult to locate this "skills base";<sup>2</sup> and find out exactly who is available in a region's creative sector. The fact that the creative workforce is highly mobile, increased the challenge "to attract and retain current and future creative talent"<sup>3</sup> in a rural region.

Creative support issues: All interviewed creative businesses, organizations and individuals reported low levels of networking activity in the region. In the last year, for example, only one out of four creative businesses joined forces with a partner to accomplish a project. This indicates a high level of isolation amongst the respondents. However, particularly small business operators could benefit from networking with others. Joining forces could help creative individuals to overcome their isolation and enable them to meet demands of larger clients.

*Why do rural areas benefit from the development of their creative communities?*

"Given declines in rural employment in agriculture, traditional manufacturing and construction, the creation of alternative employment options in rural areas is fundamental to their continuing viability."<sup>4</sup>

White states that over the past years economic strategies for rural areas include the creative industries as a key segment and driving force for regional development. "As interest in the creative sector has grown among policy-makers, its potential for reinvigorating rural areas has received increased attention."<sup>5</sup> Examples include the *Community Improvement Plan*<sup>6</sup> and *East Midlands in the United Kingdom*.<sup>7</sup>

White says that these economic strategies assume that the development of the rural creative sector holds "the potential to generate sustainable high-quality enterprise

1— Ibid., p. 84.

2— Ibid., p. 85.

3— Ibid., p. 79.

4— Naylor, R. (2007). *Creative Industries and Rural Innovation*, in S. Mahroum, J. Atterton, N. Ward, A. M. Williams, R. Naylor, R. Hindle and F. Rowe (eds). *Rural Innovation*, London: NESTA. p. 44–58.

5— White, P. (2010). p. 81.

6— Prince Edward County — Development Services. Retrieved April 9, 2013, from [http://www.pecounty.on.ca/government/eng\\_dev\\_works/development\\_services/index.php](http://www.pecounty.on.ca/government/eng_dev_works/development_services/index.php)

7— Burns, J. and Kirkpatrick, C. (2008). *Creative Industries in the Rural East Midlands: Regional Study Report*, Nottingham: Culture East Midlands.

and employment opportunities and contribute to rural diversification.”<sup>1</sup> If more creative people are drawn to rural areas, additional knowledge workers, businesses and inward investment will be attracted.

Reports from the UK found that “the 50 fastest-growing rural districts in Britain had a higher share of creative and cultural employment (5.5 percent) compared with the 50 slowest-growing rural districts (4.6 percent).”<sup>2</sup>

#### *How can the creative sector be supported?*

However, this “potential role of the creative sector in stimulating rural development is not always fully recognized, or addressed, by policy approaches to the sector.”<sup>3</sup> To support the prosperity of creative businesses an initial “development of policy and networking opportunities”<sup>4</sup> is needed.

The demand for more networking opportunities also emphasizes the previously mentioned need of creative businesses to meet, interact and establish informal networks. The WDC advises regions and communities to host events and meetings, where creative businesses can interact with other stakeholders inside, but also outside the creative sector.

The experience in Western Ireland and other rural regions showed, that preserving “creative place”<sup>5</sup> strengths, such as quality of life, nature, landscape, or local heritage, should be a focus of every policy discourse.

#### Reflection on literature review

After spending some time reading, I noticed that most of my input tended to generalize issues or oversimplify contexts. Almost all of the literature I collected speaks, for instance, about the *creative class* as a whole, homogeneous group of people, while I was very much missing a focus on single voices, on individual examples and stories to learn from and be inspired by. I attributed this lack of example cases to the nature of the texts I read. The context of policy surveys, for instance, requires a certain amount of generalization in order to come to conclusions that are based upon commonalities. This common ground, though, is often created at the expenses of the individual case.

1— White, P. (2010). p. 79.

2— Ibid., p. 81.

3— Ibid., p. 80.

4— Ibid., p. 79.

5— Ibid.

## Interviews

This contrast between the individual and the class had eventually become a main challenge to the further development of my project. I constantly felt I needed to succeed in a balancing act of looking at the whole (without being lost in generalization) and at the same time not allowing myself to be completely absorbed in singular, personal questions.

I felt a good way to manage this juggling act would be to talk to others and hear their stories. I had three talks with self-employed designers working from the countryside. Anthony Burrill from the UK, Hanna Andersson from Sweden and Monika Burger from Germany. By deciding for the small amount of three interviews, I wanted to be able to hold deeper and longer talks instead of building on impersonal questionnaires. Considering the limited amount of interviews, I nevertheless tried create a diverse content by picking international interviewees of various ages, gender and life situations.

The insights I got from these talks were a major step in my process, since they made me rethink assumptions I had made earlier, and brought me to reflect upon my subject. Let us have a closer look at three keywords of my project plan and reconsider them against the insights I got from the interviews.

- Being *small* comes with advantages and disadvantages. The interviewees mentioned that individual work brings freedom, yet at the same time it can create a continuous feeling of uncertainty.
- The *countryside* was not that much of an issue. At least, none of my dialog partners felt that being placed in the countryside had hindered their professional life by restricting their reach or market situation. A shared consensus was rather that location and place matters in a personal sense, when deciding for a way of life, for instance.
- To the interviewees, a main challenge of our changing working world arises from the new *flexibility* in time and space. Since the boundaries of work and private life are becoming more and more blurred and modern communication technologies offer unknown mobility, managing the balance and getting one’s mind off the job are challenges to take up. Place and immediate environment matter when creating own structures to deal with these new situations.

To sum up, one could say that these interviews shifted my problem focus and with it also my research question. From the issue of how to make a living as a small

business in a rural region to the questions of how the individual can find new structures to face a changing working world.

However, these changes also came with a threat to the continuation of my project. What I particularly learned from the talks I had was that all of us have to define our own structures, and find our own way of life. It lies—so to speak—in the nature of living conditions that they are diverse. As a consequence I was wondering how my work could contribute to a solution to this challenge, when there isn't just one definitive path to take.

I tried to solve this dilemma of multiple solutions through the design decisions I took in the process of creating the result of my project.

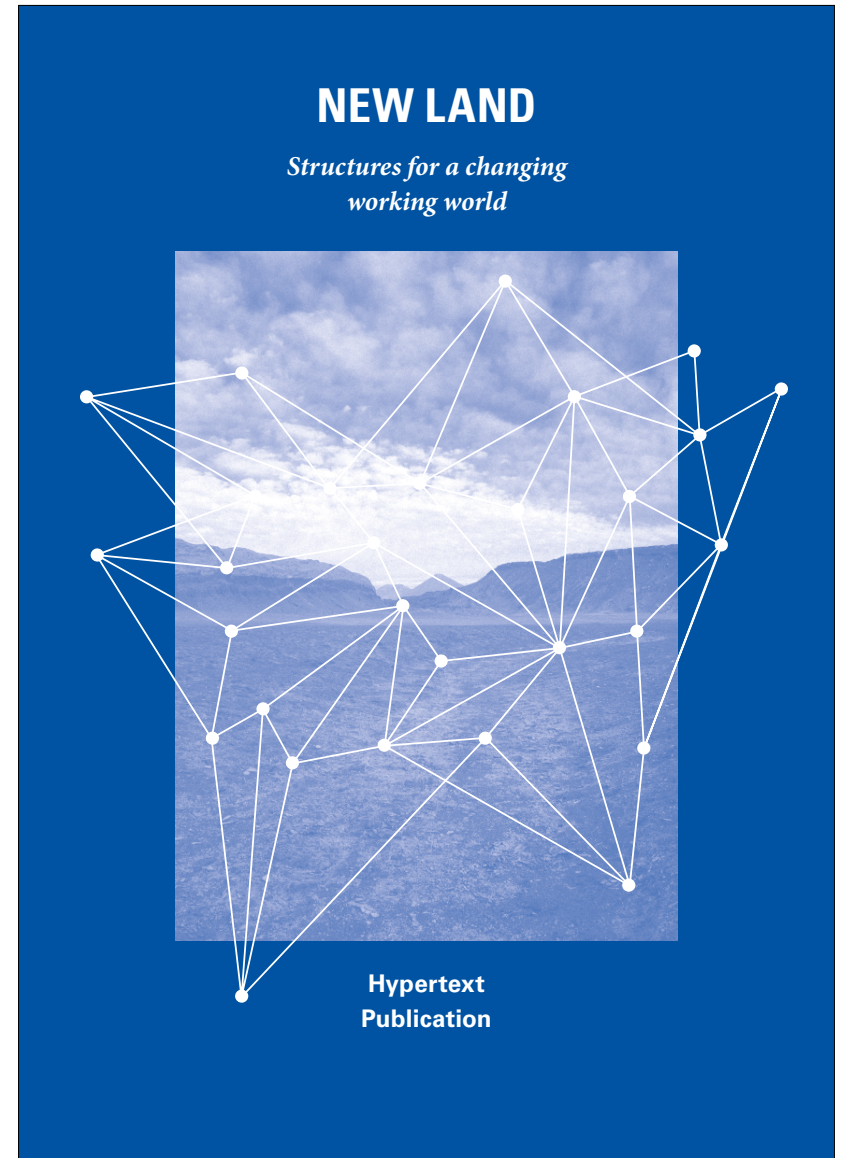


Figure 1 — Cover of digital publication

## Results

What I eventually possessed after my research phase were the transcripts of the three interviews I conducted with self-employed designers working from the countryside and a theoretic concept for my own company *KRAUT*, which basically visualizes my personal idea of structuring work and life and builds upon the knowledge I acquired in the previous steps of my process.

At that point I saw my task as that of making this generated content accessible. I had to edit the material in a way that would enable others to make use of my work and allow them to find their own individual answers to the various issues addressed.

My project resulted in a digital publication, packaged as a PDF document.

### Preface

The PDF starts with a preface, introducing the topic and setting a context. The function of this short text is to invite in. The preface text was written as a summarizing abstract in the later period of my project time. (Fig. 2)

### Table of contents

On the second spread, one finds the table of contents. The publication's first part, the *Book of Questions*, contains the questionnaire I used as a framework for my interviews. After this comes the different talks, concepts and ideas on structuring work and life. (Fig. 3)

### Book of Questions

As mentioned above, the *Book of Questions* (fig. 4, next page) was based upon the questionnaire I used for the interviews. I chose to additionally include the questionnaire in the publication because the questions are a good tool for getting the reader's attention for the publication's topics by providing food for thought concerning the readers' own lives.

The list considers questions like:

- 'What gives you energy?'
- 'Does place matter to you?'
- 'How do you separate work and private life?'

The questionnaire can be described as the entrance to the publication.

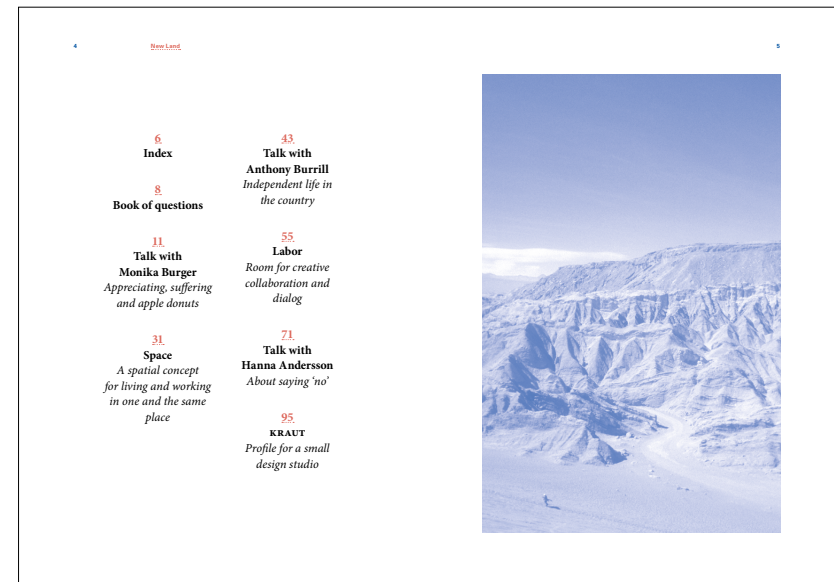
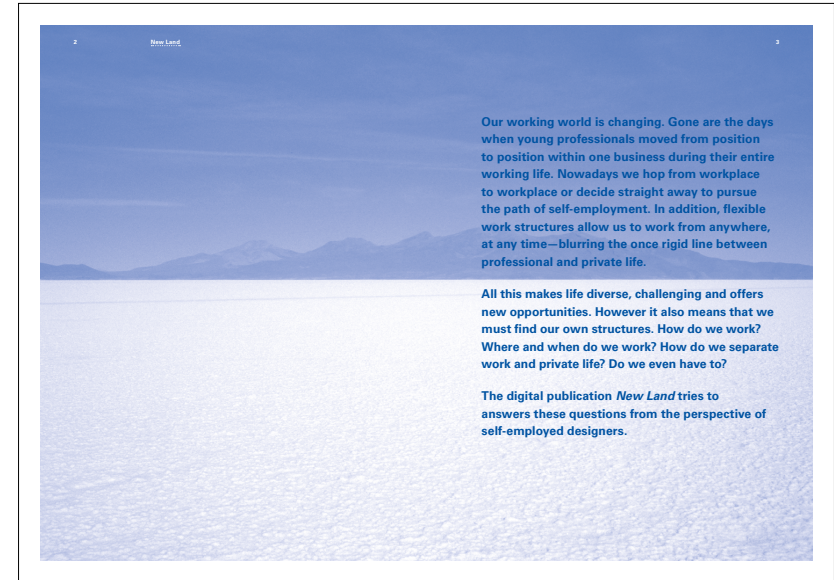


Figure 2 — Preface spread

Figure 3 — Spread with table of contents



### Index page and navigation

The index page (fig. 5) is the heart of the publication, listing all keywords assigned to the various parts of the content. Together with these keywords are linked page numbers, that lead the reader to the respective text passages. The index page also holds a short paragraph explaining the document's navigation. The publication's interactive parts, for instance, are colored red and links are underlined.

### Sample tour through the content

Let us assume that we are interested in the issue of separating work and private life. We are offered several links under that keyword (fig. 5). By clicking on the first link we get to the interview with Monika Burger (fig. 6, next page). Our current position shows through the column title at the top of each page. Keywords inside the texts are marked red, and in the right column of the left page we will find the reference concerning separating work and life that led us here.

I asked Monika:

*You work from home. How do you manage to separate work and life?*

Monika answered:

*Honestly, this is not the ideal. Like everything, it has its advantages and disadvantages. You've got to create spatial boundaries. Don't work in the living room, or bedroom. We live and work on separate floors. That works all right. If you do this job full-time, you will notice that it's hard to get the mind off the job and relax. Regular working hours are very important. Rest at night. Above all, it is important to allow yourself leisure time.*

We can navigate back to the index page by clicking the *New Land* text link on the top of each page. If we take a look at the next link assigned to the keyword separating work and life, we end up in the transcript of my interview with Anthony Burrill (fig. 7, next page). Again, keywords in the text are marked red and the passage discussing the topic of separation can be found on the right side of the spread.

I asked Anthony:

*How do you separate work and private life if you're home? Do you have some strict rules?*



Figure 4 — Spread displaying the 'Book of Questions'

Figure 5 — Index spread.



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How does the first contact with a customers come about?

People usually write an E-mail. Most of the times, I do a quick call and check what they want and who they are. You make an appointment and they come by.

*Which means that the customers come to you?*

**Always offer something good to eat. It's bad if you go hungry into a meeting.**

Yes. This is where we sit (points at the meeting table behind her). There is always something good to eat. Apple Donuts. Something sweet. Super Gusto! That soothes people. It's bad if you go hungry into a meeting.

I like having appointments in the morning when you're fresh. Or after lunch.

**STRUCTURE**

*I saw on your website that you have distinct working hours. How do you stick to them?*

That's very easy: You just don't answer the phone. You have to impose that on yourself, and educate your customers too. Just because you are self-employed, people think you will also work at night. You can do that once in a while, but it shouldn't become the rule. That must be

quite clear from the very beginning. We must set ourselves clear limits, to stay healthy. Simple as that.

**You work from home. How do you manage to separate work and life?**

Honestly, this is not the ideal. Like everything, it has its advantages and disadvantages. You've got to create spatial boundaries. Don't work in the living room, or bedroom. We live and work on separate floors. That works all right.

If you do this job full-time, you will notice that it's hard to get your mind off the job and relax. Regular working hours are very important. Rest at night. Above all, it is important to allow your self leisure time.

With Fabi and me, it is also good that we often work on different things. He is, for example, often over at a customer. We also go our separate ways. You cannot always do everything together. You have your relationship, a child, spend time together in your free time, work together. What's it that you don't do together? It's an extreme situation.

But there are also clear benefits when working from home. Mattis has a dai who's always there. He is maybe working, but he is always physically tangible. It's nice that we can combine that. Family, child and job. Even the grandmother lives next door.

20 [Talk with Monika Burger](#)

*Actually, quite like a traditional farm, with several generations living together.*

Yes. Except that we do not have animals. Well, maybe the blockheads in the neighborhood. (laughs) No, we have a real idyl here, but I must admit that it is also a world of illusion. It can be hard as well.

Especially if you have a family, you have more responsibility. You can no longer be as tight-headed. Before, I used to work mostly for the fun. I didn't care too much about the money and didn't put much aside. That has changed. We are pushed to make more money, simply because of the responsibility.

But that helped us also to become more professional.

*If I compare this to myself, I am often selling myself below market value. Actually, that's a good thing you've learned through your child. That your time and work is valuable.*

Absolutely. What I've learned by having Mattis is that health is the most important thing. If I was doing badly, it was mostly because of work, which previously took about 90 percent of my life time.

You no longer meet with friends, have no time for other things besides the job, and nevertheless, at the end of the month, there is no money left. That

happens. And then you're doing something wrong.

When I started out, a friend of mine said I should make 3000 euros a month. So you can put a little money aside. **Back taxes** often come unexpected. That can break one's neck.

You really got to consider whether you want to live with this uncertainty. It's a major drawback of self-employment that you simply cannot know what the next month will bring. Then it's great if you have those **bread-and-butter jobs**. Recurring jobs, always the same, that always bring you the same money.

**PLACE**

*Do you think that the countryside as a place carries disadvantages? Would it be easier for you in a larger city?*

No. It's more difficult in the city because there is a lot more competition.

**But also more customers, right? A larger market.**

No. You have the same market as the people in Munich, only that you are not based in Munich. You also have the advantage of being cheaper than the Munich guys. The customers do not care where you are.

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How do you separate work and private life if you're home? Do you have some strict rules? — M

A — Well, for me there isn't any real separation. I really love what I do and it just all kind of flows into the same thing. It's not like at six o'clock, I switch off the computer. It depends on what I'm doing. If I'm really busy, then I work in the evenings as well and it's feasible that way. But yeah, I don't know, I think if you saw it more as a job then it wouldn't be as easy. But for me, because I love it, I love what I do. The whole thing is fun really.

This really sounds like an ideal vision somehow. But I also know that there are more and more designers going into self-employment and work individually. And I think it's good if you're passionate for your job, but there is also a risk of not getting the balance right. That you have pressure on you and it becomes normal that you work nights and weekends. — M


A — One other way of doing it would be to have a shared space with people. Say in your village or something. Where we live, there are lots of very creative people. Lots of our friends are involved in creative projects. You could potentially have a shared space. That would help you having an outside stimulus as well.

Like a structure, giving rhythm. Leaving home, going to work and coming back home again.

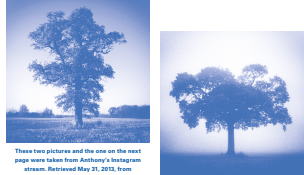
What I also remember from your talk is that you got some collaborations with local suppliers and craftsmen. How important is it for you to have your local community network. — M

A — I work with a wood-type printer and with a screen printer as well. They are both kind of 30 minutes from where I live. So I got a very close working relationship with both of those people. That's really good. It's the kind of work I produce as well. It's more a crafted thing, less of a regular graphic design. I suppose I'm more like an illustrator than a graphic designer.

49 [Talk with Anthony Burrill](#)



*Anthony's local woodblock print shop Adams of Bay. Still taken from a video showing the printing of a commissioned work by Wallpaper magazine. Retrieved May 9, 2013, from <http://www.anthonymburrill.com/projects/made-by-hand>.*



*These two pictures and the one on the next page were taken from Anthony's Instagram stream. Retrieved May 21, 2013, from <http://instagram.com/withanburrill>.*

Figure 6 — Part of the interview with Monika Burger

Figure 7 — Part of the interview with Anthony Burrill

Anthony replied:

*Well, for me there isn't any real separation. I really love what I do and it just all kind of flows into the same thing. It's not like at six o'clock, I switch off the computer. It depends on what I'm doing. If I'm really busy, then I work in the evenings as well and it's flexible that way. But yeah, I don't know, I think if you saw it more as a job then it wouldn't be as easy. But for me, because I love it, I love what I do, the whole thing is fun really.*

These two examples from the text demonstrate two things. First, it provides a good example of how two persons, obviously fitting into the same *creative class* category, still have very different ideas on how to structure their lives and to what degree separating work and private life is important. Secondly, it also shows why I chose this way of structuring the content. The cross-reference navigation enables the user to read non-linear, picking short related parts of the publication, thereby getting contradictory ideas on a subject, or different solutions to problems. Eventually, this system enables the reader to create ideas on her/his own way of structuring working life.

## KRAUT

The following passages deal with my personal scenario *KRAUT*, a concept for a small design studio. The theoretic concept shows how I utilized the generated content, the interviews, the research—basically, how I created my own structure using *New Land*. *KRAUT* can therefore also be seen as a case scenario exemplifying how others could make use of the material in order to create their own concepts.

## Mapping

The living conditions Monika Burger described in her interview are very similar to the ones I imagine for my future, for instance, working and living in the same place. When starting to map out my imagined future (fig. 8, next page), I realized that my life will generally consist of three parts and one challenge will be to get the balance right between these different parts of life.

- Private life
- Working life
- Work+, which is time and space for free projects, further training and experimentation.



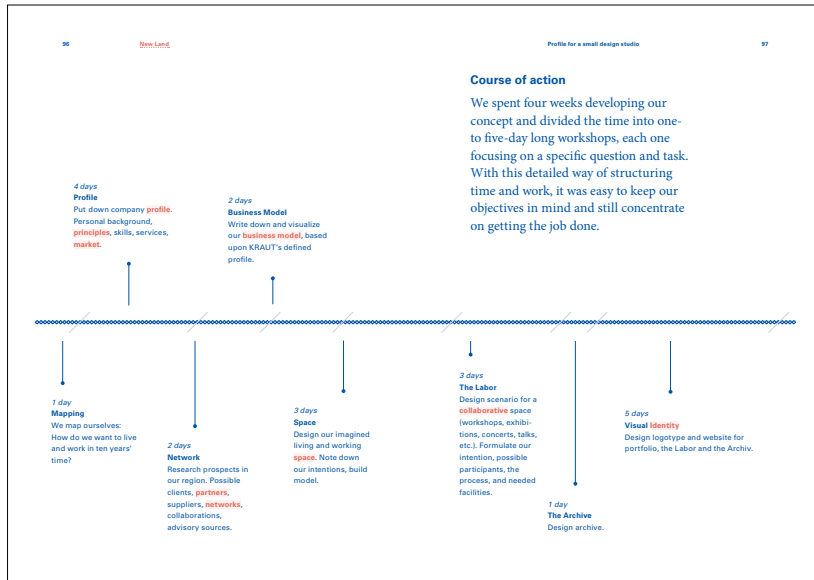
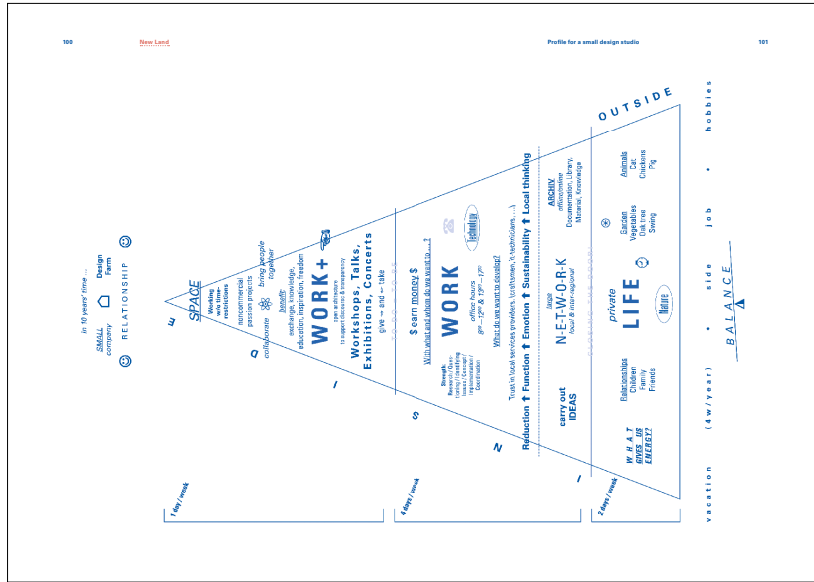


Figure 8 — Spread displaying the mapping outcome

Figure 9 — Spread with 'Course of action'

My company concept is based upon the mapping method and the insights I got from the talks with self-employed designers. The different articles I wrote for *New Land* can be seen as the attempt to visualize a desired future by formulating a holistic work-life-scenario.

Course of action

The development process of my company concept was divided into several steps, each one specified by a task and focusing on a particular question (fig. 9). I set up workshops for myself ranging from one to five days to handle various duties.

The eight workshops included:

- **Mapping.** How do I want to live and work in ten years' time? (1 day)
- **Profile.** Put down my company profile, my personal background, principles, skills, services and market. (4 days)
- **Network.** Research prospects in my region. Possible clients, partners, suppliers, networks, collaborations, advisory sources. (2 days)
- **Business Model.** Note down and visualize my business model based upon previously defined profile. (2 days)
- **Space.** Design my imagined living and working space. Note down my intentions and build model. (3 days)
- **The Labor.** Design scenario for a collaborative space (workshops, exhibitions, concerts, talks, etc.). Formulate my intention, possible participants, the process, and needed facilities. (3 days)
- **The Archive.** Design an archive of things that interest me and I find inspiring. (1 day)
- **Visual Identity.** Design logotype and website for portfolio, the Labor and the Archiv. (5 days)

Dividing time and work into small sections allowed me to focus on getting the different jobs done. The workshops resulted in a conceptual business scenario with several subtopics of which I will discuss some in the following paragraphs.



Space

*New Land's* chapter *Space*, for instance, shows my idea of how to separate working and private life by creating clear spatial boundaries (fig. 10). Working on a space mockup also brought me an idea of how to deal with the fact that I will be running a small business. This spatial approach identified the wish concerning my working space to be expandable (fig. 11). Starting with a nucleus, a small room with two desks and computers—basically all you need in daily design work—more space can be added if necessary. This extra space could be useful when meeting clients, or working collaboratively.

As a self-employed worker, even when working in pairs, I will face isolation in one or the other way. To handle that situation, I want to establish ground for collaborative work. I need an exchange of views and will want to work in larger teams sometimes. This possibility of exchange and sharing should also be enabled by my spatial environment.

Labor

My idea of combining individual work with regular collaborations is the reason why my concept also includes a platform for creative cooperations (fig. 12, next page). I called it *Labor*, which is German for laboratory. The idea is to invite people to hold workshops, exhibitions, or seminars in my office space. This will benefit me with further learning, exchange of views, inspiration and informal network activities. The platform will break my isolation temporarily and eventually open doors to places beyond the day-to-day design practice.

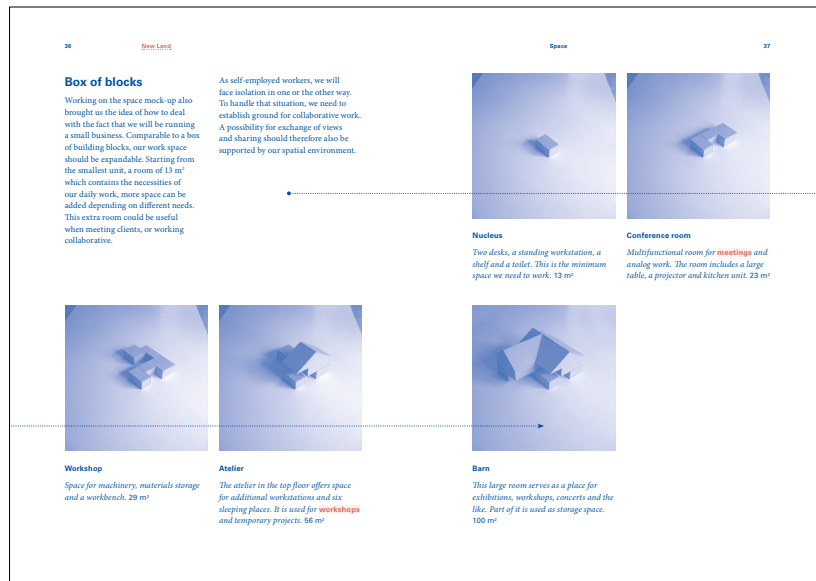


Figure 13 (next page) shows two examples for imagined workshops. One lab session deals with the reuse of old clothing, a second one thematizes barriers in everyday life and how design could contribute in removing them. These posters also show how I used visual identity in the development of my company concept. Since I was not focusing on developing a graphic profile, incorporating logotype, website, letterhead and so forth, the graphic design work was used more as a finish to support theoretic ideas of my concept. The posters, but also my screen design for the *Labor's* website (fig. 14, next page) are examples for this concept-driven identity work.

Since it is integrated in the context of the publication, my company concept can work as an exemplary framework for readers, showing how to apply *New Land's* content on themselves.

Figure 10 — Spread with spatial concept  
 Figure 11 — Spread explaining the expandable workspace

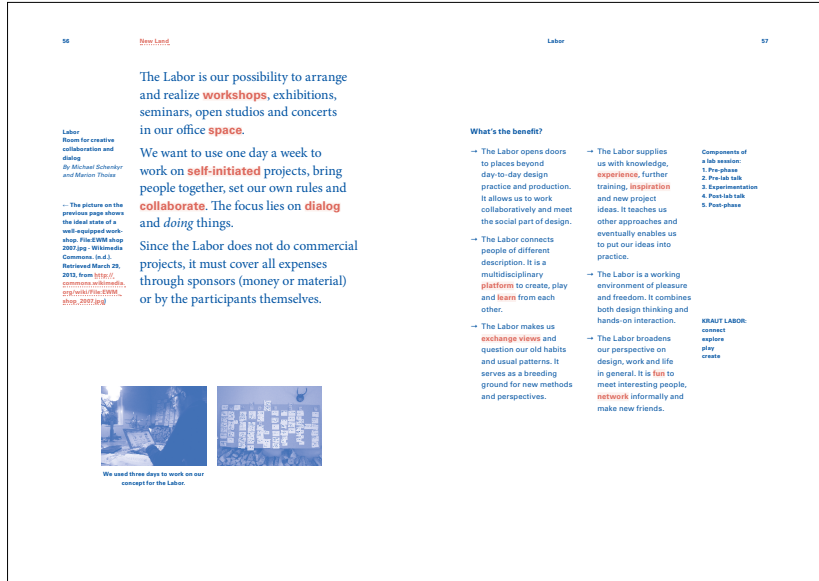


Figure 12 — Spread introducing the Labor

Figure 13 — Spread with posters promoting imaginable lab issues

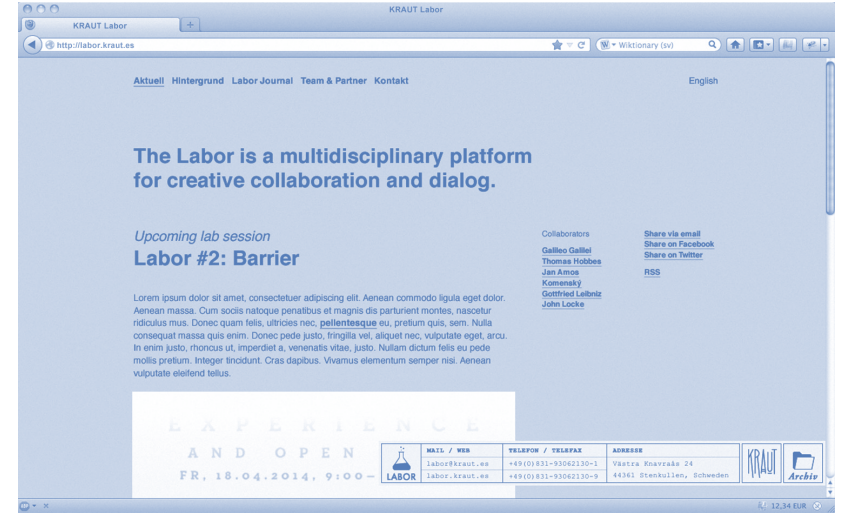


Figure 14 — Screen design of the Labor home page

## Reflections

By allowing myself to take a step back and reflect upon different aspects surrounding my work, the following chapters should bring the core of my project to light. Basically, it results in a discussion with myself.

### A. Design issues, or the issue with design

*New Land* is an exploratory project, touching several knowledge fields, such as social science, human geography and work science, and investigating them by applying design methods. However, if I am supposed to reflect upon the design methods and issues comprised in my work and relate *New Land* to the design's knowledge field, it's inevitable not to question the definition of design in general. In other words, to contextualize my project I first need to gain an understanding of the context I am supposed to put it in. What constitutes a design issue? What is my general understanding of design?

I wrote in my project plan that I wanted my thesis to become a communication design project. In simple terms, I thought my work would be about talking and making. I had the idea of getting in touch with people by setting a framework for good communication. Hence one can say that communication was a major design skill applied in my process, and in addition, one I wanted to develop further. The idea of design being a communicator supported my initial aim of meeting others and learning from their stories, but my first assumption also proved right when I now look back at my project. *New Land* is a work of communication. From the talks I held to the later editorial design work—reasoning how to visually communicate the content in the best way. In fact, even as I am writing these lines, I am communicating and adding knowledge to my project.

#### Design as householding

Furthermore, my work on *New Land* also extended my understanding of what design is and could be. The self-employed designers I interviewed mentioned the need for them to literally take on different characters when juggling their various activities in daily design practice. They are not only designers in a classical sense, but are confronted with diverse duties from acquisition and support activities to self-marketing and managing. If we place this idea of a designer being more a project manager into the specific context of freelance work, the task of *householding*

becomes even more obvious. Individual workers are responsible for balancing their economics<sup>1</sup> and managing their resources—may it be time, money, or manpower.

In a way, this questioned and, at the same time, broadened my personal understanding of what a common design knowledge could be. It had already been clear to me that design means making choices, or, as Otto von Busch puts it in an online article about design activism, “design is the designation of action.”<sup>2</sup> Consequently, designers decide upon, and develop ways to do things. However, this concept appears in a new light when put into the context of the multifaceted professional lives of self-employed designers. I had initially thought that the most relevant design choices take place in a professional's esthetic work. My insights into actual design practice taught me differently. For me, decision-making and economic activity, or the art of sustainable *housekeeping*, represents a new understanding of what design could be. Consequently, I used *New Land* to investigate, document and display different examples of current design work.

However, my new understanding of design coincides with questioning the myth of the creative person. If we compare the design profession to project management, what is it then that separates the creative from any other steward of resources? How can our specialized design expertise be of help when handling those additional entrepreneurial challenges? Yet again, answers to these questions can be found in the experiences of working designers, who are confronted with these organizational tasks on a daily basis and whose stories and solutions I have therefore included in my publication.

In a way, I can also see similarities between the multifaceted working lives and projects handled during design education. Most of the projects during my studies held the label of multiplicity as they did not assign me a clear, singular designer's role. As a student—comparable with the life of an independent worker—you obtain the role of a project leader, managing time, resources and goals. You are the person directing, while keeping the project's objectives in mind and furthermore the one carrying full responsibility when taking choices. In this respect, the basic knowledge for independent work might be taught during design studies with neither students nor teachers being aware of it.

<sup>1</sup>— “The term economics comes from the Ancient Greek οἰκονομία (oikonomia, ‘management of a household, administration’) from οἶκος (oikos, ‘house’) + νόμος (nomos, ‘custom’ or ‘law’), hence ‘rules of the house(hold).’” Economics. (2013, May 19). In Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia. Retrieved from <http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Economics&oldid=554997505>

<sup>2</sup>— Design Activism ← Dr. Otto von Busch ← Textile Toolbox. (n.d.). Retrieved May 8, 2013, from <http://www.textiletoolbox.com/posts/design-activism/>

### Structural design

In my eyes, *New Land* not only includes reading material on what design work is, but also constitutes a design process in itself. Speaking in terms of design disciplines, *New Land* is a graphic design project. It is divided into the steps of generating content, putting this content into context, and structuring it, so it eventually gets accessible for other.

Since I aligned my whole esthetic approach on the intention of curating the generated content in the most accessible way, this is also where the key design questions within my project came up. Applying design methods based on my personal expertise helped me to understand, visualize and communicate the subject in other ways than social science, for instance, would do.

The publication's index page, down to the details in typography, is a good example of my design approach, since it summarizes and, at the same time, unfolds the content, eventually leading the reader to the respective text passages.

Yet again, this supports the idea of design being a structuring mechanism, editing, formatting and communicating whatever content in the most suitable way. In order to make my project graspable, my work on *New Land* was characterized by defining hierarchies and assigning different levels of importance to the generated content. If the material would have been left "undesigned" and all parts presented equally, people would be lost in similarities. One could compare this to an archive with no hierarchical structure. If one wants to exhibit this archive, it must be curated, certain parts need to be highlighted and varying elements must be given different shapes.

For me, the whole idea of (contemporary) design is about structuring and editing information, space and time. We must establish structures that help us in our decision-making. As there is often not one single, final solution to a problem, it is about choosing the right framework to properly make multiple choices. These supporting structures will furthermore enable design to increasingly concentrate on content, especially since the esthetic form becomes more and more predefined by templates and ready-made platforms.<sup>1</sup>

*New Land* taught me the necessity for design to communicate in structures, but it also points out the importance of frameworks and settings in other parts of life.

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<sup>1</sup>— This trend becomes especially visible in digital media, where open-source website solutions like Wordpress or Drupal offer designed frameworks of high quality that are ready to use.

The interviewees shared the consensus that contentment in work and private life is highly depending on the framework, the *home* you build for yourself.

### **B. Why would anybody be interested?**

For me, relevance is accompanied by the creation of value. Does the world need *New Land*, or would it be better off without it? Who am I aiming my work at? What is my audience, and how could it make use of my work?

I think the publication is of value for freelance workers and newly graduates considering self-employment—basically all people floating around in a job market of precariousness, searching for lifestyles and concepts to be inspired by and hold on to. My work gives practical ideas on how to position oneself in the working world, and how to create identity by looking at one's personal visions and aims in life. Finally, *New Land* is a reading source and the particular value for its audience lies in the true-to-life examples it provides. The publication shows how to cope with today's uncertainties and the market's constant demand for flexibility, mobility and unshakeable motivation.

*New Land* is a piece of storytelling, not a self-help guidebook with a 10 point action plan to mindlessly follow on the way to salvation. Since *New Land* is based on people's own stories, the content's strength rather lies in its honesty. *New Land* supplies the reader with real life alternatives instead of empty phrases or stereotypical characters, and can therefore be truly motivating. Eventually, the publication's realistic stories of everyday life are something the reader can relate to.

*New Land* is moreover of interest for the design field, as it describes daily working life from a professional's point of view. Indeed designers more often talk about what they produce than what the procedure looks like. Design issues and knowledge can therefore more easily be identified in design results than in design processes. *New Land*, on the other hand, gives insights into approaches and provides the reader with examples of how design expertise and methods can be even applied within contexts such as individual work, collaborations, or conduct of life.

However, this distinct focus on the design discipline might as well be called a weakness of *New Land*. Although I tried to keep the publication many-sided by picking international interviewees of various ages and life situations, my decision for interviewing only designers surely makes a statement. The reason for my choice probably lies in the fact that I reasoned I would understand the issues best by investigating examples in my own field of expertise.

Personally, I see no substantial difference between the challenges for independent designers and other freelancers such as writers, musicians, programmers or actors. If *New Land* should however speak to those occupational groups as well, it probably must incorporate specific examples of their daily routines or be formulated in a more general manner.

### C. *New Land* put into context

*New Land* is very much dependent on, and shaped by the context it is placed in. I will use the following paragraphs to try to map out relations between *New Land* and current societal issues.

#### Counter movements

During a discussion in the beginning of my project, Ariana Amacker drew the connection between my work and several counter movements in present society. She referred to examples such as local thinking, the slow-food movement, quality over quantity, or new crafts movements. In Amacker's opinion, people she interviewed in the United States (see p. 8) have noticed that a desired change has to come from within and cannot be steered by external forces such as political programs. The logical conclusion is that some people start to take responsibility themselves by changing their behavior and attitude according to their beliefs.

Looking at the context of *New Land* and comparing it to the movements mentioned above, I am not sure whether to call the confrontation with changing working conditions an actual contrary action. Naming it a counter movement would imply that it clearly manifests what workers are opposing. In case of the ever-changing employment market, this simply isn't possible.

I rather think that people start questioning things—not at least because they experience more and more threats and uncertainties. Somehow, we are involuntarily pushed into a counter movement. It is the precariousness in form of non permanent jobs and financial meltdowns that make us—under the banner of self-help—think differently, look for alternatives, securities and eventually question the established systems.

*New Land* highlights changes in our present society and their effects on people's choices, behavior, thinking and understanding of values. The publication tries to show both sides of the coin, shedding light on the pros and cons of a change and people's dealings with that change. In fact, I would say that several hints of counter movements lie hidden in the various inter-related topics and subtopics addressed in

my work, the big and small decisions in everyday life. How we live, how we interact with others, how we use technology, etc.

*New Land* tells the stories of personal decisions which the decision-maker him-/herself probably would not dare to call counter movements.

#### Human scale

During my research, I looked into how small businesses work and what the benefits of freelance work are. One of the most interesting things I learned was that working on a small scale requires a more nuanced skill of dealing with people as even decentralized business scenarios are still accompanied by large human networks. Consequently, many small businesses build on flat hierarchies, which enable open and flourishing communication because they put customers, partners and employees on an equal basis. Nevertheless, it would be naive to believe that the dismantling of hierarchies would come as the solution to all problems. With the resolution of old structures and the subsequent lack of order, new challenges arise. Even if new structures resemble a multidimensional surface rather than a pyramid, people still have to position themselves somewhere on this grid. In an ideal case, however, small businesses supporting flat hierarchies can play a major role in practicing human based design processes.

Ariana Amacker relates in her paper<sup>1</sup> to Charles Leadbeater who wrote that small businesses can “[resurrect] the old-fashioned notion of craftsmanship for the digital age.”<sup>2</sup> This is also compatible to the fact that people start questioning the growing technologization and our increasing dependence associated with that. Deciding to restrict oneself in the usage of technology could indicate one of those counter movements mentioned above, triggered by small rulings on a personal level: “I don't want to check my mails every 10 minutes.”

Another aspect of human scale processes is that action gets understandable and is manageable in small steps. In other words, you do something one person at a time and little by little. In my opinion, this idea also refers to the concept of socially sustainable type of work conditions truly based on human needs.

If we bring this understanding of a human scale back to the notion of flat hierarchies, we can find specific examples in design practice. Workshops, for instance, are most efficient among friends. Collaborators should complement one another and push each other further mutually. Openness is required when people

1— Amacker, A. (2011).

2— Leadbeater, C. (2008). *We-think*. London: Profile. p. 111.

want to creatively deal with the unknown, and surrender to a challenge. A human scale makes goals achievable and moreover enables “reflection-in-action.”<sup>21</sup> In that case, the more restricting a structure is, the more difficult it will be to get good results.

#### Places, structures and collaborations

What does place mean in times of globalization? Travel becomes cheaper and modern technologies connect even regions that are totally off the beaten track. Nowadays, you don’t even have to go anywhere since face-to-face meetings can be held sitting by the computer. For many people, *Skype* talks have become a daily routine. Why do we choose a certain place to live when location apparently no longer influences our reach or market situation? During my work on *New Land* I have, more than once, reconsidered my understanding of what place or location could mean to us.

Location is seemingly not restricting our professional lives any longer, but place matters even more in a personal sense, when deciding for a way of life, for instance. Since the established boundaries of work and private life are becoming more and more blurred and modern technologies offer unknown mobility and flexibility, our homes and immediate environments gain more importance when creating our own structures and limitations.

Furthermore, the people that have their say in *New Land* describe multiple values to a place. Openness to diversity of all kinds, a Do-It-Yourself-mentality, or the opportunity to validate oneself as a creative person could be non-market values of a place. *New Land* also provides insights on how architectural characteristics can contribute to the quality of a place. In work environments, for example, open spaces contribute to sharing. If you can never really close the door, this will automatically lead to discourse and transparency. In that sense, a good place works as a (multi-directional) platform for people to communicate, express themselves and come up with ideas. As in human scale processes, openness is a critical part when establishing places that should support conversations and facilitate change. Spaces that support communication in open contexts provide feedback that allows people, networks and communities to continually develop and test ideas.

Looking at design work in the context of place, a connecting issue addressed in *New Land* is that good collaboration very much depends on spatial circumstances. Setting-up physical working environments according to specific activities is

1— Amacker, A. (2011). p. 85.

crucial for the success of cooperations. If we work collaboratively, communication and information does not travel in one way only, but knowledge and ideas have to literally move in many directions. It is necessary to keep this in mind when choosing a place and designing its structure.

Another spatial aspect connected to the issue of design is that ideas can emerge from a place itself. We choosing a place one should question how it could trigger imagination and inspiration.

#### **D. Process, methods and materials**

In my last reflection I will shed light on my process, trying to identify obstacles and challenges, and reconsider my methods and design decisions. In order to look back and reflect upon the project’s result and my personal learning, it feels helpful to first ask what *New Land* actually means to me.

One of the goals I formulated in my project plan was to make my master thesis a bridge between my studies and working life. I wanted to use the given time to generate a practical tool for my later life as a professional. Looking back, I think I succeeded in two ways. First, I used my thesis to develop a personal understanding of how to work as a designer, and created a tangible concept which I can take further. Secondly, and maybe more importantly, *New Land* extended my understanding of how to develop a personal question into a relevant design project. This insight broaches an issue I constantly struggled with throughout my studies. Since most student projects start with a self-centered formulation of a question, the later descriptions of a target group or real life relevance often seem far-fetched or, at least, subsequent formulations are connected to some difficulties. The problem lies probably in the fact that, when starting from yourself, one likely makes many assumptions. Nevertheless, this could be alright as long as you manage to be sharp and precise in the following thinking and reflections.

*New Land* arose from a private issue, therefore it came as no surprise that I experienced the same uncertainties concerning the relevance of my topic during my thesis work. As I mentioned previously, I constantly struggled in investigating an issue without allowing myself to be taken in by too many personal questions.

My feelings at that point could be described as a continual switching between the individual and the general. Surveys on rural creative industries, for instance, which I read during my research, felt far from reality. They were talking in numbers, manifesting their main interests in topics like regional development, when I was very much missing individual standpoints, the voices of real people. This is why I remained convinced that my work would profit from a personal starting point.



Telling a story would make the issues I was planning to talk about graspable and eventually touch people more directly.

Since my initiative was based upon my individual case, it nevertheless needed to be transformed into a project of broader relevance. Yet again, I tried to face this challenge with the means of communication. The interviews with self-employed designers and the chance of hearing their stories and points of view, was a good possibility to take a step back from my personal issue and observe it from the outside. The insights I received from these external people were a major step in my process, since they made me rethink the assumptions I had earlier and reflect upon my whole subject formulation. I would conclude that including other people in my process was the key to a broader relevance for my project.

It's not a book.

The front cover of *New Land* bears the prominent classification *Hypertext Publication*, which points to the fact that the choice of medium was an important decision in my process. Actually, there are several reasons, why I chose to publish my content with digital means.

First of all, the PDF format allows my work to be inexpensively published, widely spread and easily accessible to others. Instead of distributing printed copies, interested people can simply be provided with a download link. The document type furthermore holds many classic advantages of digital assets. It is easy to search through, space-saving, enables digital bookmarking and can be browsed by cross-referential links. Nonetheless, the PDF is an encapsulated format that can, unlike a web page, be easily transformed into another medium—by printing it out, for instance.

Finally, and most importantly in the case of *New Land*, PDF documents are perfectly suited for non-linear reading. A fact that also the term *hypertext* on the title alludes to. By providing the reader with flexible navigation tools, an index page, hyperlinks, bookmarks, and avoiding heavily nested structures, I wanted to enable diverse ways of browsing the content.

Another factor that made me distinguish *New Land* from a classical printed book format was my thought of producing an open, dynamic collection of discussions rather than a static piece of knowledge.

If I should sketch a usage scenario, *New Land* is a downloadable e-book whose articles the reader can browse by keywords of interest. Since I have also focused

on making the publication suitable for home printing, readers themselves can pick which parts of the publication they want to hold in their hands.

If it hadn't become a digital publication?

The content of *New Land* could also work as a film, a talk, seminar or workshop—basically all formats that enable communication and storytelling. The reason that *New Land* eventually became a publication probably lies in my intention of transforming my work into a document for archiving and easy distribution.



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## Attachments

### Project Plan

Version 2, 4 February 2013

# HINTERLAND

*small design studios  
in the countryside*

*Michael Schenkyr  
Master Thesis – Project Description  
HDK – School of Design and Crafts  
University of Gothenburg, Sweden*

**Version 2**

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Project Description – Version 2

Master Thesis

HDK – School of Design and Crafts

University of Gothenburg, Sweden

4 February 2013

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*This is a slightly updated version of my project description. After two weeks of first research and talks with my supervisor and others, I felt a need to narrow, clarify and define my approaches and objectives a bit more.*

*Two main insights I gained recently are:*

*(a) I should rather not formulate too general. Investigating*

*“the creative industries” opens a waste field that is hard to embrace.*

*(b) The project’s process will be less linear as I imagined it earlier.*

*The research, its visualization and translation into practice will rather run parallel and more intertwined.*

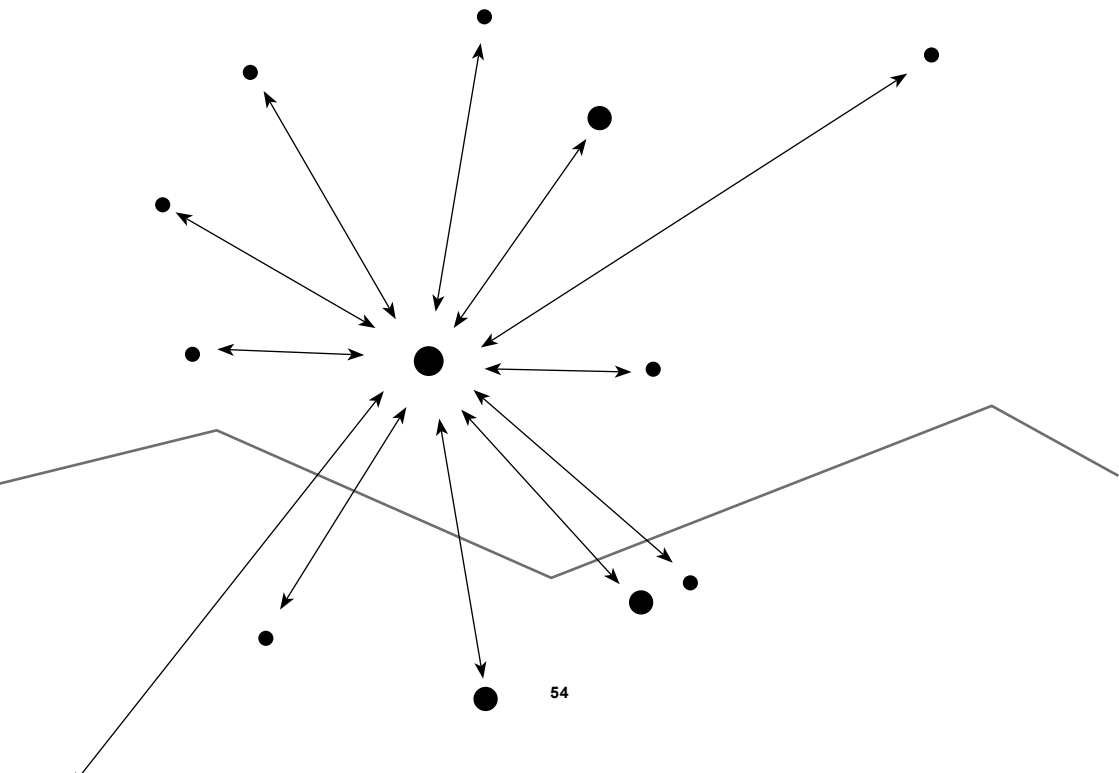
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*Background*

I grew up and studied in small cities in Southern Germany. After my graduation, me and most of my fellow design students moved to larger cities like Munich, Berlin or – in my case – Gothenburg. We were in search for the urban amenities that would benefit our further design education and careers.

Being a country lad, I will return to my provincial hometown after my master studies. I am planning to establish a small design studio there together with my partner (an interior-architect). Besides the usual risks and difficulties every start-up has to struggle with, I see us facing other challenges that are particularly linked to running a design studio in the countryside.

*My goal with this thesis is to gain insights into the problems and opportunities small design businesses face in rural regions.*



—

**I am a communication designer that likes typography, books, stuff made out of paper, making lists and taking photographs. I am into the web and its possibilities. Sometimes I fear talking to people.**

**I am a communication designer and this is a communication design project. Therefore I will focus my work on communicating. May it be oral, written or visual communication.**

•

*Small*

My thesis will deal with small design studios. How are they set-up? How and for whom do they work? Can self-employed designers and micro-studios compete with large all-rounders in times of 360°-campaigns? What networks do they build and with whom do they collaborate?

*Countryside*

The second focus will be of geographic dimension.

The creative class is highly mobile and designers move to the cities in search for the amenities a metropolitan area has to offer: a rich cultural life, great exchange of knowledge and high-quality educational and research infrastructure.

Furthermore, agglomeration economies in cities offer concentrated job opportunities. Purely the high amount of people living in urban areas creates a great demand for design services.

On the other hand, there are designers that choose to move to rural areas and start their own small business there. Some regions even experience counter urbanization of people in-migrating from the city to the countryside. What are the rural amenities that compensate the loss of favorable urban conditions?

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Research Question #1

## **What motivates designers to move to the countryside and start a small business?**

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But can we designers even make a living in more peripheral regions? Do rural areas offer a sufficient supply-demand structure? Is it possible to specialize in services when our pool of prospects is limited? Studios that are solely locally-oriented might have problems finding enough clients.

*"[...] I have never been able to specialize in a niche. I think of myself as specializing in my community. [...] This comes from being deeply embedded in the life of the community. If you want to earn local business, you can't hold yourself aloof." Laurel Black<sup>1</sup>*

Successful rural studios must have managed to either extend their reach towards a metropolitan area or adapt themselves to the regional market. In what way do designers change their market orientation when they move to rural areas?

In addition to the problem of finding prospects, rural designers might face lower budgets than their colleagues in urban areas. Local industries and private businesses could simply withstand the need of spending money on design and marketing services. Should we therefore lower our fees towards local standards, or should we stick to prices that are more in line with the design profession as a whole?

This leads us to the question of how design services are valued in the countryside. Compared to larger cities, prospects in small town communities might have problems understanding the value of design or see a different value than their counterparts in the cities? Should we try to educate them? How do we build credibility? What language should we use when arguing the quality, value and cost of design?

The chance to demonstrate the value of design to prospects is probably based upon how we are perceived in and outside our community. Urban clients may think designers from the countryside do not

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<sup>1</sup> <http://juliareichdesign.com/blog/out-in-the-sticks-the-joys-challenges-of-running-a-design-business-in-a-small-community/?replytocom=71>, 19 January 2013

offer the same professionalism as studios from metropolitan areas. Whereas prospects in our small community may think we will be too expensive because we took our education “away” in the big city. The key to this problem might though lie in our own behavior. How do we avoid acting aloof and thinking small-town stereotypes ourselves?

*“[...] Many times when I have made assumptions about a person or client as to their levels of understanding, budget, etc., I have been wrong. [...] Keeping an open mind sets a good example for the client who will be judging us as well.” [Laurel Black](#)*

The last issue concerns the rural situation itself. Working in the countryside, my greatest fear would be to be isolated professionally. Certainly, the internet and modern communication offer great tools, but what other ways are there to reach out to colleagues, draw inspiration and stay current? The lack of urban amenities such as diversity, stimulation and inspiration could be compensated by a stronger integration into the local community. But what regional, national and international networks could we actually build and how do we manage them?

And thinking local again: The smaller the town, the more important its community. Most work is through word of mouth. Relationships are everything, but they take time. How and with whom do design studios collaborate in small towns? What impact do designers actually have on their communities and how can they nurture from them? Is there a need for online social networking, or is real life networking the key?

All these issues could be summed up into one question:

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Research Question #2

**What problems do rural design studios face and how do they try solve them?**

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My last concern observes the country design phenomenon a bit more from the outside: As a key sector of knowledge-based economy, the creative industries (and designers as part of it) have recently become an important factor in triggering regional development.

Several European studies show that the cultural and creative industries are mostly concentrated in the major cities as the creative class is looking for special urban amenities. Thus cities as leading centers of the creative industries often showed above average economic growth in the last years.

Rural regions—unlike urban areas—were not affected by the growth of the cultural and creative industries and therefore also did not benefit from the industry’s positive impact on general development.

A reason for stagnation or even decline of the creative industries in rural regions can be unfavorable locational conditions. This assumption brings us back to the issue around the first research question: *Why are some creative talents attracted to rural areas?*

Finally, if more cultural and creative industries would settle in peripheral regions, would they trigger growth as they do in urban areas?

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Research Questions #3

**Can rural regions benefit from the growth of their cultural & creative industries?**

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I see the thesis as the bridge between my studies and my working life.

I want to use the four months to set-up a framework for my company. The thesis should generate a practical tool that I can take with me when moving back to Germany. Thus it is important for me to use the time to establish first contacts and possible collaborations in my home region.

The outcome of my master thesis will consist of two parts.

(1) The research paper *HINTERLAND*, which will summarize the theoretic knowledge I collect during the project. To expand my academic research by case studies, I will look for examples of small design studios. To be able to evaluate different geographic situations, I will document experience from both rural and urban design studios. How do their challenges and needs differ? Can countryside qualities compensate the advantages of large cities? Are there new markets and forms of collaborations? Can we change the image of provincial design and thereby widen the understanding of the design profession as a whole?

(2) The case study of my company *KRAUT* will be based upon the insights I gain during the research. I will develop the studio's profile, set-up a (rough) business model and design the studio's visual identity. The case study will also contain the theoretic background for a physical and/or digital platform (workshop space, internet forum, or the like) that should support the exchange between rural designers, their partners and their community.

The scenario of the self-employed designer or small design studio working from the countryside is actually quite common. In case of my home region, Upper Bavaria, 44% of all design agencies are located outside Munich, the federal capital. 98% of those agencies are one-person companies or micro-enterprises (< 10 employees).

Regarding the impact of rural design businesses on regional development, other interest groups can be political officials, chambers of industry, commerce and crafts, design and trade associations and educational institutions.

Lastly, I feel rural insights could also benefit urban businesses. The goal of every entrepreneur—from countryside or city—is the same. It is about forming relationships. It is about being trusted for the services you sell. It is about thinking long-term and bringing customers to your business time and time again. All things successful companies in small communities are good at. Therefore, I think that every business could profit from learning about small-town rules.

*Fields of investigation*  
*(These keywords help me in my research*  
*and in formulating my field of interest.)*

co-creation

self-employment  
small design studios  
micro-enterprises

Demography

urban vs. rural

Sociology

networks  
local micro-networks

Geography

country entrepreneurship

Economics

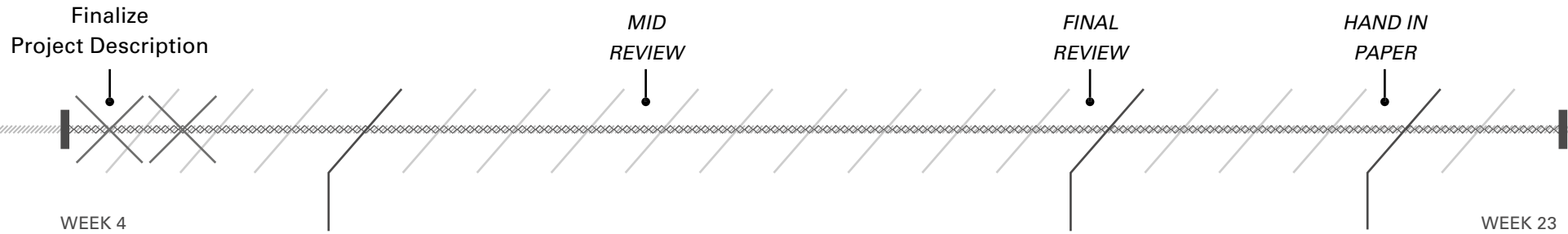
social media

coworking

rural development  
cultural landscape



PLAN OF ATTACK

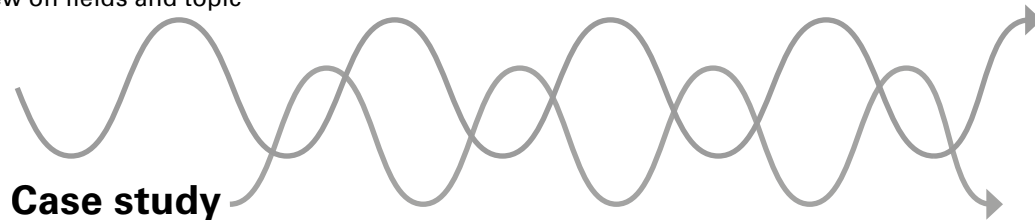


Look for interest groups, partners, sponsors and scholarships

Look for examples of rural design studios, networks, collaborations, ideas

Literature review on fields and topic

**Research**



**Case study**

Business Model

Company's profile

Visual communication

Platform/Network for exchange

*The research, its visualization and translation into the case study will run parallel and intertwined.*

**Research paper**

Final reflect upon case study with the help of research

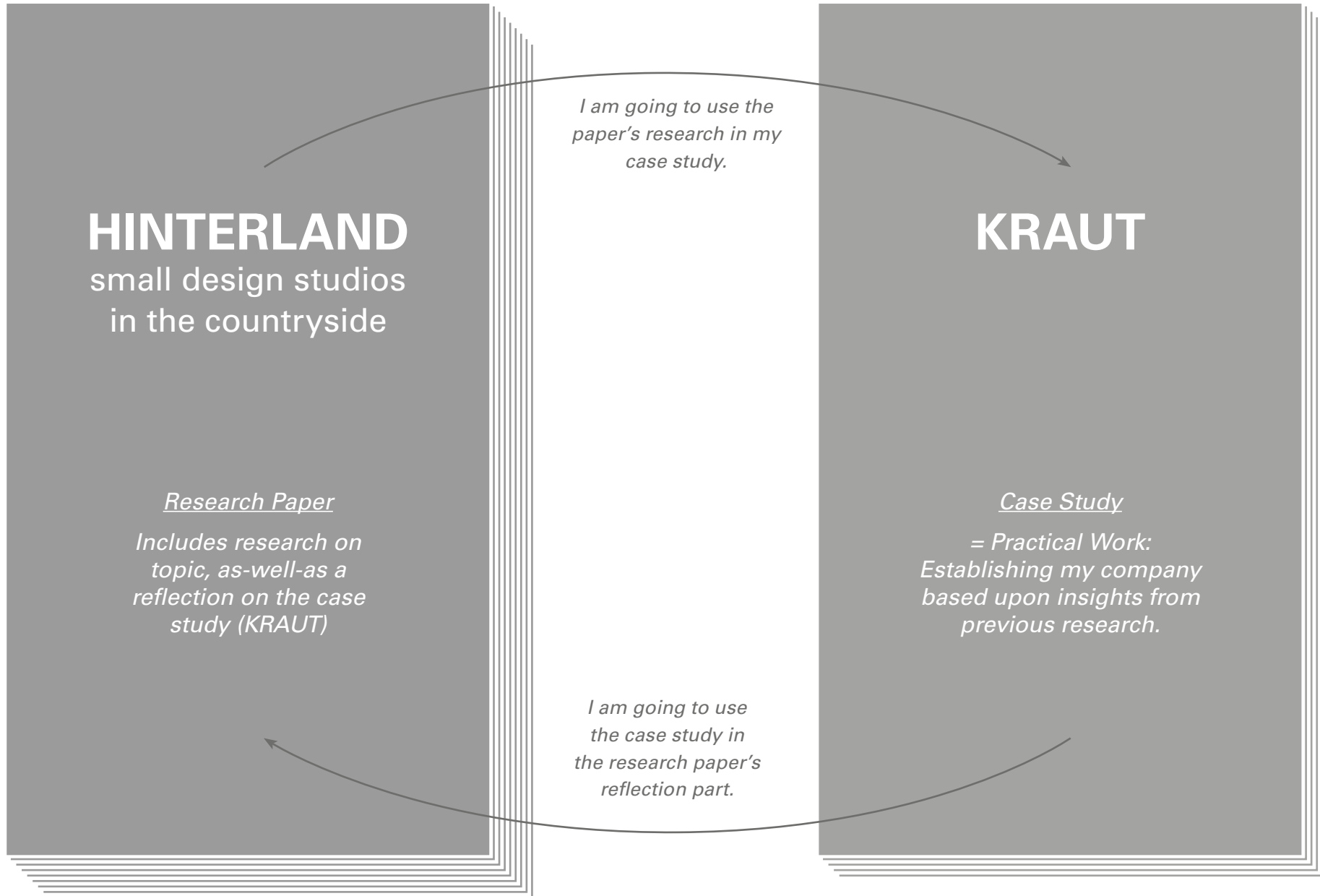
Conclusion

Layout & finalize paper

*As I want to set up a routine of reading and formulating throughout the whole thesis project, I see this last phase more as a chance to reflect, conclude and edit than to create additional content.*



Basic visualization of my thesis's outcome



**I will look for examples of rural design studios all over Europe.**

**The case study of my own company will then focus on Southern Bavaria being the area I am planning to work from in the future.**

New Land