



NEW GEOGRAPHIES OF EUROPE

Collaborative Workspaces Beyond the Urban

Economy, Community
and Regional Development

Edited by

Vasilis Avdikos · Suntje Schmidt · Ilaria Mariotti
Ignasi Capdevila · Thilo Lang · Vera Fabinyi




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ISSN 2633-5891

ISSN 2633-593X (electronic)

New Geographies of Europe

ISBN 978-981-96-9058-9

ISBN 978-981-96-9059-6 (eBook)

<https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-96-9059-6>

The MSCA CORAL-ITN project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under the Marie Skłodowska-Curie grant agreement No 955907.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to thank all authors who worked with us in this book and who have responded to our feedback and reviews during the editing process. The book is part of the Marie Skłodowska Curie Innovative Training Network CORAL-ITN that explored the impacts of collaborative workspaces in rural and peripheral areas in the EU through funding 15 PhD candidates. The generous funding of the EC, between 2021 and 2025, enabled us to organize a large number of CORAL schools, conferences and seminars and discuss in depth the emergence and the multiple effects of collaborative workspaces in non-urban areas. We would like to thank all scholars who joined us during these schools and seminars and contributed with their knowledge and experience in unpacking the phenomenon. We are also grateful to our colleagues in the COST Action network ‘The geography of New Working Spaces and the impact on the periphery’ (CA18214) for their collaboration. For the past four years, the CORAL-ITN network provided a crucial meeting space for researchers in this young and interdisciplinary research field. At Palgrave Macmillan, our thanks go to Marion Duval, Commissioning Editor, for supporting the original idea for the edited book and, with his colleague, Vignesh Thandapani, steering us through the editorial process.

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Introduction

*Vera Fabinyi, Vasilis Avdikos, Suntje Schmidt,
Ilaria Mariotti, and Ignasi Capdevila*

I COLLABORATIVE WORKSPACES IN CITIES AND BEYOND

Since the early 2000s, coworking spaces—as the archetype of collaborative workspaces—along with other forms of shared spaces (such as maker-spaces, FabLabs, creative hubs, business incubators) have proliferated around the world, mainly in big agglomerations such as global cities and metropolitan areas. While in 2018 the number of spaces amounted to 16,599 by 2024, they had risen to 41,975 worldwide (Statista, 2023). On the one hand, the expansion and popularity of collaborative workspaces (hereafter CWS), especially in big agglomerations, can be linked to the turn towards cognitive capitalism intertwined with shifts in the economic

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V. Avdikos et al. (eds.), *Collaborative Workspaces Beyond the Urban*,
New Geographies of Europe,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-96-9059-6_1

structure. On the other hand, CWS stands in relation to the growing importance of globalisation since the late twentieth century and the parallel splintering of value-chains that resulted in more freelance work. Cognitive capitalism has increased the importance of knowledge (and knowledge workers) as an economic resource, because it leads to innovation for value creation (Reckwitz, 2021; Storper, 1997). The shift in the organisational structure of the economy manifests in the change of employment patterns such as new independent, project-based, non-routine work, mainly executed by freelancers and self-employed persons (Boeri et al., 2020; Broeckling, 2007; Pongratz & Voss, 2003; Spreitzer et al., 2017). Within this context, CWS in big cities have risen dramatically since the mid-2000s as they hosted the main actors of the shifts above. Freelancers, start-ups, SMEs and large corporations use CWS as sites where labour is performed, networks are enlarged, and collaborations are evident on various levels. Even though CWS remain to be primarily an urban phenomenon (Table 1), recently we observed the gradual spread of CWS in less densely populated communities in rural and even peripheral regions across the EU that face challenges such as brain drain, low investments level, little entrepreneurship, lower social capital and less high-skilled labour to name a few (Mariotti & Sasso, 2024). Recent studies show that CWS in predominantly intermediary and rural NUTS 3 regions count for about 34% of the total number of CWS in Europe, which can be counted at around 12.000 (Marmo et al., 2025). (see Table 1).

CWS in non-urban areas seem to differentiate themselves by those found in urban areas and metropolises and thus entail different scopes, functions and impacts, as they are embedded in their localities (Knapp & Sawy, 2021). By morphing in different spatial settings such as rural, peripheral, suburban or remote areas, CWS are partly shaped by and respond to the specific socio-economic situations of the localities and can be considered as a place-based solution for several structural deficiencies of small towns and villages (Avdikos & Papageorgiou, 2021; Capdevila, 2022).

2 DIFFERENCES AND SIMILARITIES BETWEEN URBAN AND NON-URBAN CWS

As laid out earlier, CWS in urban areas are configured under economic- and labour-related discussions departing from and crystallising in mainly large agglomerations, where the knowledge economy resides. Here,

Table 1 Shares of CWS in urban, intermediate and rural NUTS3 regions (Marmo et al., 2025)

	<i>Country</i>	<i>N. CWS</i>	<i>% of CWS in</i>			
			<i>Urban regions</i>	<i>Intermediate regions</i>	<i>Rural regions</i>	<i>Remote regions</i>
1	UK	2,761	91.5%	8.5%	0.1%	0.3%
2	Netherlands	549	86.7%	13.1%	0.2%	0.0%
3	Lithuania	38	78.9%	21.1%	0.0%	2.6%
4	Latvia	30	76.7%	23.3%	0.0%	16.7%
5	Spain	1,223	71.6%	27.2%	1.1%	3.3%
6	Greece	99	68.7%	19.2%	12.1%	12.1%
7	Germany	1,543	67.0%	25.0%	8.0%	1.6%
8	Italy	820	63.4%	28.5%	8.0%	3.5%
9	Finland	60	61.7%	23.3%	15.0%	6.7%
10	Estonia	25	60.0%	0.0%	40.0%	16.0%
11	Belgium	262	59.2%	35.5%	5.3%	0.0%
12	France	1,932	58.5%	22.1%	19.4%	5.4%
13	Bulgaria	109	56.0%	38.5%	5.5%	9.2%
14	Denmark	83	55.4%	32.5%	12.0%	4.8%
15	Switzerland	260	55.4%	41.2%	3.5%	8.5%
16	Portugal	398	50.5%	17.6%	31.9%	13.6%
17	Czech Republic	137	47.4%	40.1%	12.4%	0.0%
18	Sweden	296	44.9%	44.9%	10.1%	19.9%
19	Croatia	36	41.7%	36.1%	22.2%	27.8%
20	Slovakia	83	37.3%	39.8%	22.9%	0.0%
21	Austria	456	33.8%	39.5%	26.8%	5.3%
22	Norway	164	28.0%	55.5%	16.5%	27.4%
23	Ireland	645	21.6%	9.3%	69.1%	21.7%
	Total/ Average	12,009	65.9%	24.4%	9.7%	4.4%

The % of remote regions is a separate category of regions and is not added up to the urban, intermediate, rural regions sums

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