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Proposta: 12) *Percorsi alternativi di sviluppo e innovazione. La fabbricazione digitale nelle aree periferiche* (Marianna d'Ovidio, Lidia Greco). Contatto: marianna.dovidio@uniba.it, lidia.greco@uniba.it

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### **Urban vs distributed coworking: neo-corporate movement or resilient practice?**

The exponential growth of coworking spaces in recent years is often described as a phenomenon that is part of the increasingly distributed nature of work in the urban knowledge economy (Moriset, 2014). Initially understood as 'third places' between home and work (O'Brien, 2008) and largely framed as a response to the necessity of finding a place of work in an untethered context (Johns and Gratton, 2013), coworking spaces originally represent the epitome of a self-defined 'movement' that promotes an open source approach to work (Reid, 2007) based on collaboration and communitarian interaction among workers who are engaged in independent, externally-commissioned tasks.

A promising body of research has emerged around this phenomenon. Many researchers around the world have studied coworking practices over the past few years with different methods and techniques, aiming at understanding who accesses a coworking space, for what reasons, what workers do within it, and what social and economic outcomes the access to a coworking space might bring (for a review see Gandini, 2016). What we can take away from this initial set of empirical work on coworking practices is that this is by all means not a coherent phenomenon. Coworking spaces significantly vary in terms of purposes, forms and formats. Within the 'coworking' umbrella term we can find shared collaborative spaces for freelancers and startappers in advertising and marketing, 'hubs' for social entrepreneurs (Bandinelli, 2016), makerspaces and 'digital fabrication' (Soderberg, 2016) as well as, controversially, also firms with available office space that establish a 'coworking zone' in their offices and hire out desks to non-employed workers in exchange of a fee. The more 'communitarian' nuance of coworking practice is often juxtaposed to the 'branded' logic many spaces adopt to promote themselves, all within a context that is poised by the currently fashionable and trendy status around 'shared' means and spaces, thus leaving us with a fragmented context inhabited by contradictory nuances of the same phenomenon.

This paper builds on the assumption of coworking practice as a broad phenomenon, and develops a critique to the assumption of its irredeemably 'urban' status, so far largely taken for granted in the existing research. If it is arguably true that we are witnessing a proliferation of coworking spaces across knowledge economy hubs such as Milan, London and Paris, and that an emerging literature shows how it is not only a western phenomena, with a presence in China and South East Asia (WIng-Fai, 2015; Lindtner and Li, 2012), it may also be observed that a gradual diffusion of coworking spaces is taking place among non cosmopolitan, non metropolitan contexts - a much less observed aspect. Our point of departure, and hypothesis to explore, is that coworking spaces exist also outside of the usual context of the 'creative' city (Landry, 2000) as part of a variegated cultural ecosystem

made of practices that blend entrepreneurial activity with innovative economic ventures, up to forms of activism (d'Ovidio and Cossu, 2016).

This paper originates from work done both individually and together by the authors as part of the EU-FP7 funded project "P2Pvalue", that studied a wide range of international phenomena of commons-based peer production in the period between 2013-2016. Based on both primary data from ethnographic and digital methods research on coworking practices as well as secondary sources, we aim at assessing the analogies and differences of coworking practice between urban and non-urban context. Taking Italy as a main context of reference, we will undertake a comprehensive assessment of the distribution of coworking spaces across the country, and compare this to other geographic contexts (mainly the UK and France). Thus, we will evaluate the extent to which a distinction may be drawn between neo-corporate and resilient coworking practice - as franchised coworking chains coexist with coworking examples that aim to operate outside of the usual value logics, alternative to the corporatisation of the collaborative economy and more interested in local forms of sharing that give back various forms of value to the community they inhabit.

On the basis of such analysis, we will argue that a distinction can be made insofar as it takes into account the quality of relations implicated within the space, the territorial specificities wherein coworking spaces emerge, the networked relations with other spaces (both in diachronic and synchronic perspective) and the degree of reflexivity, ideas and values embedded in the foundations of each co-working space. We will contend that this gradual diffusion of coworking spaces and practices outside the usual boundaries of the creative city can be read as a sign of maturity of the coworking phenomenon - something we will term as a 'second wave of coworking'. The consolidated, fee-based business model of coworking spaces, together with their dual nature as both a collaborative environment and a 'brand', open up for their inclusion in more traditional entrepreneurial initiatives, in various ways. We will assess this evolution and highlight its critical aspects.

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