

PROMOTING WORK FROM ANYWHERE: AN ANALYSIS OF NEW WORKING SPACES IN PORTUGAL

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Recent socioeconomic and technological developments with significant impacts on work organization and labour relations, along with changes in the work/life relationship, have driven the emergence of new working spaces (NWS) such as coworking, fab labs, maker spaces, etc.

Also, in Portugal, the NWS phenomenon grew in popularity mainly due to the global economic crisis of 2008 and the subsequent sovereign debt crisis, in which an increasing number of self-employed workers, especially in digital technologies and creative industries, began to seek these shared workspaces.

However, in March 2020, the Covid-19 pandemic crisis imposed new challenges and demands on the work domain. Until then, the teleworking regime in Portugal had a weak expression, facing much resistance and mistrust from workers and employers in the public and private sectors. In March 2020, the State of Emergency was declared to mitigate the spread of the virus. The telework regime was mandatory as long as their function was compatible with working at home, regardless of the employment relationship. As a result, organizations and workers had to quickly adopt online platforms for telework and digital services to ensure the continuity of their activities. Consequently, the percentage of teleworking workers increased, especially in the service sector - notably in education, financial services, insurance, consulting, and public administration (Mamede et al., 2020; Mantey et al., 2020). According to Eurostat, the Portuguese employed population working from home rose from 6.5% in 2019 to 13.8% in 2020 (Eurostat, 2021).

After the lockdowns, many workers remained reluctant to leave the permanent or partial teleworking regime. Many employees underlined the reduction in time and cost spent on commuting and the greater flexibility and autonomy (e.g. Brandão, 2021; Eurofound, 2020). Companies also began to question the benefits in terms of optimization and cost reduction of their resources, indicating irreversible transformations in the work modes and spaces.

Thus, the growth of this workforce and companies that will continue to work remotely or experiment with hybrid forms is seen as an opportunity for many CWS.

Additionally, in 2021 the Portuguese Government launched a network of coworking spaces managed by municipalities in the country inland to boost these territories, increase the attractiveness of remote areas for both people and companies, reduce travel needs, and improve the quality of life.

Among the sectors most affected by the pandemic were the tourism and hospitality sectors. Many hotels and short-term accommodations have adapted to the new demands, offering spaces to meet the needs of remote workers.

It is also necessary to underline that in the last decade, Portugal has attracted more and more digital nomads, entrepreneurs and foreign investors due to the low cost of living, pleasant climate, quality of life, and security, among others.

The Portuguese Government has taken measures for the national innovation ecosystem's development and international visibility and legislative initiatives

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such as E-Residence 2.0. and the Golden Visa program (which was updated to promote international investment in low-density areas).

Following this trend, many municipalities and tour operators seek to benefit from this market segment. However, there is a lack of understanding about these dynamics, particularly the link between tourism and the development of the NWS and its locations.

This article focuses particularly on the location and development of coworking spaces (CWs) and other hybrid solutions in Portugal based on the unprecedented pandemic situation and the new development strategies and public policies undertaken that relate to these spaces and their users. The main objective is to critically understand these dynamics associated with the new ways of working and living, supported by spatial and statistical data, documentary analysis, interviews with key informants and focus group discussions. Besides, it will be explored the link between tourism and CWS location and development, looking at tourist destinations and political and industrial strategies to attract remote workers and digital nomads.

In total, 218 coworking spaces with different natures and facilities were identified through various sources. In addition, spatial analysis was performed at the NUTS II level. The findings indicated a high concentration in the Lisbon Metropolitan Area and Norte region, with a gradual spread to smaller cities, peripheral areas and less populated regions. Furthermore, it is possible to identify some trends in CWS development related to tourism destinations regarding the Oeste Region the surf spots or Madeira Island.

The results provide critical insights for further research and policymakers.

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