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# Concluding Remarks on the Evolution of New Working Spaces



**Ilaria Mariotti, Elisabete Tomaz, Grzegorz Micek,  
and Carles Méndez-Ortega**

## 1 Trends and Evolution of Types of NeWSps

NeWSps reflect the changing nature of work, the need for flexibility and collaboration, the desire for unique and tailored work environments and new lifestyles. They have emerged as a response to technological advances, shifts in workers' and firms' preferences and needs, policy changes, and the specific contexts of different locations. The COVID-19 pandemic was a catalyst as it accelerated the adoption of hybrid work modes that combine various elements and characteristics. Furthermore, an increasing number of types and models are emerging, fueling greater heterogeneity and hybridity.

NeWSps offer a wide range of benefits and opportunities that go beyond traditional offices and work from home. They provide professionals with flexible work options, allowing them to choose their working hours and locations. By bringing together individuals from diverse backgrounds and industries, these spaces create fertile ground for interdisciplinary collaborations, knowledge sharing, and skill development [15].

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The innovative approach to workspace design and culture developed by most NeWSps emphasize the importance of providing areas and activities for social gatherings to foster community building and work-life balance. Furthermore, accessibility and flexibility are essential to accommodate users' preferences and personal commitments.

The Covid-19 pandemic has accelerated the “remote working” trend, which was already in place and is an umbrella term covering the following working arrangements: teleworking, agile working, smart working, and working from home [13]. In addition, a new working arrangement called “hybrid work” has gained ground. It is performed partly remotely and partly in the official workplace. According to Eurofound [9], the percentage of employees engaged in hybrid working increased from 14% in summer 2020 to 18% in summer 2022, and most EU workers stated that in the long run they would prefer working from home several times a week.

Within this context, the demand for third and fourth places to work, which are becoming more and more hybrid to satisfy the users' demand, has increased. Besides, peripheral, rural, and remote areas and intermediary cities are becoming attractive places to live and work for remote workers and digital nomads.

Eurofound [10] states that the debate around hybrid work has been primarily concerned with the regulation/legislation around hybrid working. Specifically, they explored the optimal number of teleworking days per week and the types of company-wide policies required to ensure that the benefits of teleworking and office working are achieved. The studies show that the existing regulations and legislation in European countries—including those on telework—are inadequate.

An interesting and relevant issue policymakers and social partners should focus on, to reach an agreement, concerns the conditions under which hybrid working should ideally be performed, including health and safety aspects, work-life balance, working time, work equipment provision, reimbursement of costs (equipment, energy), commuting, and the leadership and management skills required to put all this into practice [10]. Within this context, NeWSps can play a key role, e.g., by addressing the interaction of the physical, temporal, social, and virtual elements of hybrid working.

In addition to the COVID-19 pandemic, another disruption, the Russian invasion of Ukraine, has impacted NeWSps, promoting their relocation to western regions and offering remote workers spaces not only to work but also to meet new people, network, and collaborate, fostering community building and support, and acting as caregiving spaces (chapter [The \(re\)location of Coworking Spaces in Ukraine During the Russian Invasion](#) by Zhurbas et al.). As Merkel et al. (chapter [Caring Practices in and Beyond Coworking Spaces](#) by Merkel et al.) underlined, coworking hosts and community managers provide care to “maintain, continue, and repair” community and the hospitable atmosphere in coworking spaces across Europe.

As the world of work evolves and adapts following new technologies, socio-economic changes, and other impactful events, it is essential to provide critical and long-term studies to evaluate whether NeWSps can adapt and thrive in the face of changing economic, social, and technological conditions. Furthermore, different cities and regions may face unique challenges and different effects regarding NeWSps, and in this sense, said evaluation may help to adapt strategies and policies in line with local contexts, especially beyond large metropolises.

## 2 The Role of NeWSps in Rural and Remote Areas

In the face of depopulation challenges in rural areas, NeWSps have emerged as a dynamic and transformative force. These shared work environments play a vital role in reinvigorating local economies and providing an enticing solution for individuals seeking an alternative to urban living. By offering modern infrastructure, high-speed internet access, and a collaborative atmosphere, NeWSps attract and retain talent within rural communities [6]. Professionals, entrepreneurs, and freelancers can now pursue their careers locally, eliminating the need to migrate to urban centers and contribute to their own regions' economic development.

Beyond their economic impact, NeWSps foster a culture of innovation and collaboration. The collective intelligence and creative synergy that emerge from coworking environments lead to cultivating local entrepreneurship, which is instrumental in generating new business opportunities and fostering economic growth [17]. By facilitating connections, mentoring, and support networks, coworking spaces empower rural residents to transform their ideas into successful ventures, further strengthening the local economy.

Moreover, NeWSps serve as community hubs that foster social connections and a sense of belonging among rural residents. In areas grappling with depopulation, these spaces become vital gathering spots, providing a platform for workshops, events, and networking opportunities [12]. By nurturing social cohesion, these spaces can improve the quality of life and encourage individuals to invest in their local communities. The resulting strong community ties, combined with professional opportunities, help reverse the depopulation trend and create sustainable rural areas where residents can thrive personally and professionally.

NeWSps have attracted the attention of policymakers worldwide, albeit with different intensities. Several policies have been implemented at different levels (from the European to the municipal level; see [3]). The main argument for supporting this type of space, namely CSs and fab labs, is that they can contribute to local/regional development, promoting employment and business growth, as well as social innovation (see, for example, [2, 15]).

Specific policies focus on subsidizing workers to remain in their communities of origin, thus preventing skilled migrations, brain drain, and supporting the NEET. This strategy aims to positively impact territorial cohesion to reduce economic, social, and territorial gaps and differences. Other policies specifically focus on workers wellbeing and work-life balance fostering the workers' "right to disconnect" [9], and to some extent even the right to "digital wellbeing". In 2021 the EU called for the right to disconnect from work outside working hours and in 2022, the European Parliament adopted a resolution on a new EU strategic framework on health and safety in the world of work ([https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/A-9-2022-0184\\_EN.html](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/A-9-2022-0184_EN.html)). It is up to member states and institutions to implement concrete prevention and protection actions. Within this context, it is interesting to consider to what extent new working spaces might promote wellbeing, work-life balance [1], and digital wellbeing.

Finally, at the urban level, some initiatives have promoted an approach based on space–time proximity principles, including workspaces. The Municipality of Milan, for instance, allowed its workers to work in other places such as public libraries, CSs, etc., close to their homes [16].

Nevertheless, the effects of these spaces on the socio-economic development of peripheral and remote areas and the working conditions of rural entrepreneurs and freelancers are still unclear [6]. The impact of remote workers and digital nomads relocating to peripheral and rural areas can be positive only if they contribute to developing community wellbeing within the local ecosystem [6, 8], thus embedding into the local community.

### 3 Further Research of NeWSps

NeWSps are a highly dynamic phenomenon in terms of number, types, and geographies. In light of these changing trends, some old and new conceptual and methodological challenges still pave an avenue for further spatial research of NeWSps. With regard to conceptual issues, first, current studies on NeWSps' location factors lack methodological integration with existing approaches (such as behavioral, evolutionary, institutional, etc.) within regional and urban economics and economic geography (chapter [Theoretical Framework of the Location of Coworking Spaces](#) by Mariotti and Micek). Most studies delivering statistical analyses of coworking spaces unconsciously or implicitly follow a neoclassical approach. Second, dialogue is weak with many similar constructs such as creative spaces [5, 7, 11, 14] or creative hubs (for some exceptions, see [4]). The links of NeWSps literature with creation class literature are still relatively weak. Moreover, there is a limited understanding of vibrant and trendy theoretical concepts and research strands (e.g., urban or regional resilience, new path creation) within NeWSps' studies. Third, there is a need to disentangle coworking spaces as heterogeneous objects. In spatial studies of NeWSps, the notion of CS is too often treated homogeneously as a black box (chapter [A Taxonomy of New Working Spaces](#) by Micek et al.), CSs' users are unknown or at least unspecified. Moreover, the distinction between hybrid and non-hybrid CSs is rarely applied in spatial analyses.

When it comes to methodology-related challenges, we lack qualitative research on CSs' location factors (chapter [Theoretical Framework of the Location of Coworking Spaces](#) by Mariotti and Micek). First, as mentioned in the Introduction, many location factors are qualitative in their nature, e.g., the role of the place where CS' founders live in the selection of a specific location. While studying location factors, it is sometimes difficult to quantify growth mechanisms and the use of proxies is not suitable. The soundest procedure to identify determinants behind NeWSps location is to apply a mixed-method approach. Second, the challenge to increase data reliability may be overcome by using data triangulation. However, there is still scarcity of comparable and reliable data for cross-country analysis (for exceptions see chapter [The Localization of Different Types of New Working Spaces in Central Europe](#) by Rafaj et al.).

Third, increasing the use of in-depth longitudinal analysis of the growth of NeWSps would help us to understand their changing role in local development. Hence, we hope for further studies to be carried out on the evolution of NeWSps' spatial patterns.

Another interesting issue to explore is the role NeWSps can play in fostering users' personal and digital wellbeing, as well as socio-economic development and innovation, especially in remote and rural areas. The European Commission's long-term vision for the EU's rural areas identifies several areas of action toward stronger, more resilient, and prosperous rural areas and communities by 2040, also referring to the role that coworking and hybrid spaces can play.

Finally, research should thoroughly focus on the contribution of NeWSps to the life of vulnerable segments of the population, such as refugees, whose living and working situations are ever more precarious, and frail and disabled people.

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