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**Working beyond boundaries: Redefining work modes
and spaces across geographies**

**Ilaria Mariotti, Mina Di Marino, Pavel Bednář, The
COVID-19 Pandemic and the Future of Working
Spaces**

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Book review of *The COVID-19 Pandemic and the Future of Working Spaces*

Gislene Feiten Haubrich¹

The COST Action CA18214 'The Geography of New Working Spaces and the Impact on the Periphery' (2023) plays an important role in producing and sharing knowledge regarding characteristics, dynamics, policies, direct and indirect effects on different working spaces (e.g., coworking, makerspaces, etc.). Moreover, through national and European workshops, reports and publications, the engaged group of academics has successfully dialogued with stakeholders beyond the academic realm. In publishing the book "The COVID-19 Pandemic and the Future of Working Spaces", 55 researchers from around the globe show how they learned from their core object of study. Because the project was foreseen before the pandemic that has shaken our ways of living, scientists from various fields and expertise had to pivot in response to unexpected events, growing on resilience and creativity.

In this review, we devote special attention to the recent open-access Routledge publication funded by the European Cooperation in Science and Technology (COST). Ilaria Mariotti (IT), Mina Di Marino (NO) and Pavel Bednář (CZ) are the editors of the volume compounded by 17 chapters and organized into three sections: (i) socioeconomic impact, (ii) policy development, (iii) users. The focus is on new working spaces - NeWSp - (Di Marino & Mariotti, 2020; Di Marino et al., 2023), aiming to explore, understand, and explain challenges in dealing with the Covid-19 pandemic. The diversity drives the work as the authors examine local, regional, and national transformation scales. Beyond the European landscape, the book crosses borders to Lebanon, South Korea, and United States of America to investigate additional events pushing the expansion of NeWSp, such as political instability and long-term governmental incentive to remote work.

Two main features differentiate the book from other publications on NeWSp. First, it provides a holistic understanding of the phenomenon, focusing on the consequences of an unexpected event like the pandemic. Second, it balances the spotlight between core and peripheral areas. In large cities and urban areas, coworking, maker, and other modern spaces are consolidated, and their influence on new ways of working is well-known. However, which types of NeWSp are more likely to succeed in rural areas? Did the pandemic possibly increase the presence and use of such spaces? The authors explore cases from different locations, provide insights for policymaking and business development, and open new avenues for research. The book's emphasis on coworking spaces is intriguing, prompting readers to question if and why it is the most common type of NeWSp beyond urban areas. This topic requires further research, exploring the potential of maker spaces or fab labs in rural and peripheral regions, for instance. In addition, this book's practical, concrete, and

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interdisciplinary approach is something that readers undoubtedly appreciate.

To show the book's versatility, its compelling perspective, and the independent exploration allowed by each chapter, I will maneuver its content in an order different from the original one. Hopefully, this detour will encourage readers to download and discover the work. First, I delve into the book's final section, which focuses on those who seek NeWSp to perform their work. Then, I circle back to the initial chapters, looking specifically at the pandemic impact on NeWSp. Finally, I turn to chapters in the second section and contemplate available and potential policies to support NeWSp. Additionally, instead of providing an extensive summary of the chapters, which can be found at the beginning of each section in the book, I will share some comments and ideas emerging from the reading, showing the inspiring set presented in the volume.

NeWSp are environments connecting people with shared interests and perspectives. Users can involve a range of actors, from remote workers and digital nomads to entrepreneurs and small companies. Beyond such professional statuses, the final seven chapters of the book show that other identity elements are relevant to connect workers in NeWSp. Gender elements and diverse types of knowledge workers (e.g., academics, service providers, and so on) are increasingly essential drivers in establishing communities, and spaces, with various services and styles, are relevant elements for the representativeness of those groups. In that sense, discussions around finding the balance among several dimensions of life (e.g., work, family, leisure, and more) are directly related to the communities we are looking at. Therefore, the authors engaged in understanding workers' experiences in NeWSp from Estonia, Norway, Netherlands, South Korea, Sweden, Italy, Finland, Czech Republic, Slovenia, and Hungary contribute to identifying clues on connecting people and strengthening collective bonds among coworkers.

In that sense, the book's initial five chapters show how managers' creativity and inventiveness added to coworkers' trust and willingness to collaborate were key to keeping the spaces running and increasing their resilience. They also explore NeWSp's forms of governance and how they require particular attention in terms of policies and funding. This is because NeWSp transformation goes beyond the economic context through taxes and consumption but impacts the internal and extended communities resulting from engagement and worldview sharing. The authors shared stories from Austria, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Slovakia, Poland, Lebanon, and the United States hold valuable lessons on how independent spaces survived the pandemic, focusing on the implemented changes. It is critical to consider that measures taken by spaces during the pandemic may never fade away; instead, they may confirm that hybrid environments are the best fit for knowledge workers and their flexible ways of working. If that proceeds, as researchers, we may be challenged to approach such hybridity differently; thus, our notions of core and peripheral areas may also need to bend to understand people's movements and organization in cities, towns, and the countryside.

NeWSp providers and users have been under pressure to overcome the limitations imposed by the pandemic, and those who resiliently resisted need consistent support to move forward with their businesses. In this context, the spotlight turns to a different set of stakeholders focusing on the NeWSp thrive: policymakers. The book's second section starts by devoting attention to the work performed by the European Commission, introducing the discussion further developed in cases from Germany, Switzerland, France, Portugal, Belgium, and Malta. The authors show the importance of inviting the public administration to create strategies for NeWSp, which is vital for local, national, and European development. Additionally, there is a call for cooperation among the different yet interdependent actors involved in such initiatives. Governments, citizens, and organizations must work towards a common ground, not only on pushing competitiveness but also fostering collaboration.

The study of NeWSp, in special coworking spaces, can inspire us to learn from independent and resilient practices. Likewise, the movement coworking and its five pillars – community, openness, collaboration, sustainability, and accessibility (Coworking, 2023) – are a valuable source of encouragement for thinking of policies focusing on development in a larger sense, considering financial, environmental, social, and political issues, as we are asked by the United Nations (UN) through the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Moreover, we should think of NeWSp not merely as spaces where and when we perform work but as opportunities to strengthen our collective commitment to the responsible use of resources, the improved quality of life for all, and the respectful set of formal and informal interactions. The book represents a real contribution

to such considerations. Hence, readers can be ready to be challenged on their concepts and understandings. Beyond narrating different realities, the authors of all chapters successfully inspire us to move forward with discussions about work, space, time, and other important elements needed for a healthy and prosperous life.

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