

Shared Spaces or Shelters for Precarious Workers? Coworking Spaces in Italy

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Abstract

This paper critically discusses the relationship between new workspaces, such as Coworking Spaces (CSs), professionals using such spaces, and the related work patterns, looking at the Italian context in particular. There appears to be a mismatch between the educational level of such workers, their expertise and expected professional status on the one hand, and their reality in terms of employment precariousness and low income, on the other. It appears that CSs and, more in general, new shared workspaces act more as shelters from a difficult and exclusionary job market than as mainly "serendipity accelerators." The hypothesis of this article is that, through a careful interpretation of the emerging dimensions and spatial effects of CSs, it is possible to more clearly identify some dynamics of inclusion and exclusion on the one hand, and of sharing and competition on the other, that characterize the job path of new knowledge-based occupational groups.

Keywords

Professionals, knowledge workers, coworking spaces, inclusion, precariousness, Italy

The changing nature of professions and the role of new workspaces

The debate on professions has acknowledged, in the last few years, the changing position of professionals in the job market and society, and even a shifting definition of professionals themselves, in such changed conditions (Bellini & Maestriperi, 2018; Gorman & Sandefur, 2011; Leicht, 2015;). Differently from the past, professionals, today can be defined according to their expertise, even if they lack specific educational credentials, codes of ethics, qualifications to access professional associations (such as those including lawyers, or architects, or medicine doctors). Professionals as a specific category, and knowledge workers as a broader field, increasingly share some common elements: "In the eyes of contemporary scholars, the commonalities between traditional professions and new forms of knowledge-based work are more important than the differences" (Gorman & Sandefur, 2011, p.277). The underlying trend is connected to the "emergence of new occupations offering services based on expert knowledge but lacking the autonomy, service orientation, or prestige of traditional professions (e.g., biochemists, management consultants, financial analysts, public relations specialists)" (Gorman & Sandefur, 2011, p.280).

In the face of such increasing differentiation and increased heterogeneity in the field, these 'new' professionals may experience, in turn, exclusion mechanisms and forms of marginalization vis-à-vis other traditional professionals. This is visible both at the theoretical level, in terms of definitions of different professional roles, and practice, in empirical observations of labour market dynamics (Bellini & Maestriperi, 2018).

Besides, the concept of professionalism may be redefined as a 'practice,' highlighting the practicality of the wisdom used by professionals in performing their everyday tasks. Since practitioners of newer occupations increasingly lack formal representation and associations, they tend to convene in building informal 'communities of practice' (Gorman & Sandefur, 2011; Wenger, 1998; Wenger, McDermott & Snyder, 2002). Such communities of practice can be sector or theme-specific (around defined professional areas, or emerging challenges, or tools), but they can also be place-based, as far as they convene professionals from different sectors in specific places; innovative workspaces such as coworking spaces, maker spaces, fab-labs or urban hybrid spaces are among those typically hosting these communities.

Coworking spaces, in particular, host different types of professionals, specifically those engaged in start-ups, early-stage entrepreneurs, freelance, self-employed and independent knowledge workers, who need social and professional interaction to overcome the risk of isolation and loneliness (Spinuzzi, 2012). Moving from this first empirical observation, in this article, we will try to identify some connections between the emergence of new professionals, the increased heterogeneity in their work path, the mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion at play, and the diffusion of innovative workspaces.

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Emerging professionals (Maestripieri & Cucca, 2018) have assumed the market logic as naturally constituting their essence while not perceiving the insecurity determined by exposure to the market as problematic in an era of hegemonic neoliberalism (Murgia, Maestripieri & Armano, 2016). As a natural consequence, less power implies a weaker association between professional status, social status, and financial rewards (Bellini & Maestripieri, 2018, p. 7). Being on the market, however, is not always sufficient to ensure adequate income levels and access to welfare, in particular in difficult labour markets, such as the Italian one (Maestripieri & Cucca, 2018).

Within this context, a good case in point is that of professionals belonging to the creative class; the increasing relevance they have assumed is, however, also linked to the reorganization of the forms of work in the knowledge economy, that is characterized by a progressive fragmentation of working relationships. These working relationships are accompanied by an increasingly accentuated insecurity of workers, whether they are low-skilled workers or individuals with high-level skills and networks. These workers share some characteristics with a larger population "floating, composed of female workers and independent workers, precarious, poor at work, skilled and mobile workers, subjected to permanent flexibility" (Allegri & Ciccarelli, 2013, p. 219) (*author's translation*), so much so that some observers have proposed to assimilate them to a Fifth State, in the "desperate search for emancipation and equality" (Allegri & Ciccarelli, 2013, p.11).

If one looks in particular at urban and metropolitan contexts, in which high skilled professionals in the knowledge-based economy typically move, one can see the emergence of these new professionals either as self-employed workers ("lone eagles") (Spinuzzi, 2012), or joining forces in start-ups and, more in general, in the formation of small and flexible management entities (Gandini, 2015). As main subjects in a context of distributed work, they pose novel questions in terms of positionality, both in the labour market and in society at large. Unlike in the past, the struggle for workers' rights and the same resistance strategies appear to be deployed on a purely individual level, while structured representation strategies, as well as a process of collective identification of these subjects, are missing: "The price for freedom and serendipity paid by many freelancers and creative entrepreneurs—categories who represent the lion's share of coworking creators and users—is often precariousness: low or fluctuant income, fragile health insurance and retirement scheme" (Moriset, 2013, p. 20).

In Italy, this general trend is exacerbated by a stagnant labour market dynamic, that coupled with underinvestment in education, training and career paths, leads many young people to retreat into defensive educational and career strategies (if not in the refusal of strategies at all, as is witnessed by the high ratio of NEETs) (Bonanomi & Rosina, 2020).

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To better understand how looking at coworking spaces may provide further evidence about the role and characters of emerging professional, thus contributing to the international debate on this issue, in the next sections we will first critically introduce the trends and drivers connected to the diffusion of CSs, and the related proximity and sharing dimensions; we will then, try and characterize who are the professionals using CSs, and how they can be defined based on intrinsic characters, such as their expertise and employment status, but also in relation to their choice to settle in CSs, and the impacts that opportunities related to this choice may have on their careers, impinging on some evidence emerging from a survey on coworkers (CWs) across Italy. Finally, we will propose some concluding remarks about the professionals and CSs, regarding knowledge sharing, proximity and the creation of communities as defensive strategies in a difficult labour market.

The emergence of coworking spaces: Trends, features, role

Coworking spaces are places of knowledge concentration, production and exchange, strongly based on relational and collaborative dimensions, which have been diffusing worldwide in the last fifteen years, due to different concurrent trends in contemporary production patterns, connected to the emergence of the knowledge economy. CSs are innovative workplaces where independent (and frequently precarious) knowledge-based, creative, and digital workers—mainly self-employed professionals—share their workspaces: they have been interpreted as "shared workplaces utilised by different sorts of knowledge professionals, mostly freelancers, working in various degrees of specialisation in the vast domain of the knowledge industry" (Gandini, 2015, p. 194).

Moreover, CSs are working environments in which people, who are not linked by any hierarchical or organisational structure, decide to work side by side, to overcome isolation and to take advantage of proximity (Boschma, 2005); this, in turn, may enhance forms of community building and opportunities for cooperation, but also, more specifically, the strengthening of new working connections and the creation of knowledge spill-overs (Capdevila, 2014; Spinuzzi, 2012). In the end, CSs can be seen as interesting experiments in the creation of enabling environments for the diffusion and exchange of tacit knowledge, and this is in fact one of the aspects investigated by literature; in this perspective, the proximity factor acquires specific importance: "just by belonging to a local community, an insider will have access to the shared knowledge among members of similar but distant communities" (Capdevila, 2014, p. 2).

The spread of these new spaces and places of work across the world has been linked by literature to a multiplicity of phenomena: among these, of relevance for this article are the diffusion of ICTs, which have enabled different forms of smart working (Johns & Gratton, 2013), by freeing people from the need of being located in a specific place, with some advantages, as well as downturns (Isin & Ruppert, 2015); the emergence of a metropolitan creative class and the ways, methods, and tools of knowledge transmission and exchange

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that characterize it; *the reorganization of forms of labour* in the knowledge economy and the difficulties of their representation.

The emergence of a new so-called metropolitan creative class has been the subject of extensive literature (Florida, 2002; 2004), which has highlighted the potential linked to the spread of professional activities based on knowledge and creativity for cities; there have been recent critical reviews, in light of the dilemmas, the growing forms of spatial and social polarization, the difficulty of an excessively simplifying interpretation (a good summary of the literature in Scott, 2014). The new professions lead to the creation of widespread and fragmented networks, but at the same time to processes of strong spatial agglomeration, clearly visible in the main urban areas.

Concurrently, there have been significant changes in the labour market structure, connected to the diffusion of jobs that differ from forms of full-time regular employment (Allegri & Ciccarelli, 2013; Cappelli & Keller, 2013). These phenomena, differently combined in each political, institutional and economic context, result in an increased diffusion of highly skilled professionals, characterized by different forms of expertise in the creative domains (arts, architecture, design, digital media, communication, etc.) and tertiary level education; such workers are, to a certain extent, forced to be always innovative, while at the same time a precarious and fragile segment of the job market (Allegri & Ciccarelli, 2013; Moriset, 2014).

Finally, as far as new urban economies are concerned, there has been a renewed attention to their social and relational dimension, one interesting, albeit controversial example being the emergence and diffusion of the sharing economy (P2P Foundation, 2012; Rifkin, 2014). Several characters define this semantic field: the progressive transition from ownership to access, the sharing of goods and services or "sharing of idle capacity" (Frenken & Schor, 2017, p. 5), otherwise largely underutilized, the rediscovery of the importance of social networks, which are at the same time the end and the medium of this profound renewal (Frenken & Schor, 2017).

The emergence and spread of forms of coworking and workspace sharing has often been related to this paradigm shift, although it is perhaps worthwhile to problematize this relationship, by investigating more in depth the tension and dynamics between collaboration and competition, which is articulated in much more complex ways than what emerges from the current debate. While CSs can be seen as strengthening cooperation and knowledge sharing by impinging of proximity, the competitive dimension is necessarily present, particularly for precarious and marginalized professionals. Thus, as far as professionals are concerned, the article investigates their relationship with CSs, and looks in particular to how CSs can be seen as springboards in their professional careers and life, or if they rather act as shelters and defences from a difficult labour market, in particular in the light of the increasing differentiation in the professional world, the increased heterogeneity and, therefore, the emerging risks of marginalisation and exclusion that concern the most

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fragile and precarious segment of this universe. As we will see in the final section, the concept of sheltering implies a double-edged and ambiguous situation.

Sharing and proximity

Before the huge reorganisation in workplace uses due to Covid-19 pandemic and the related restrictions, coworking spaces tended to attract users from varied backgrounds and professions: the so-called coworking-users or coworkers can vary from freelancers, self-employed individuals and entrepreneurs to consultants, and small and micro enterprises (Butcher, 2018; Garrett, Spreitzer & Bacevice, 2017).

A study by Krauss, Le Nadant and Marinos (2018) on coworking spaces in small and medium size cities in France and Germany has categorized coworkers as: (i) freelancers; (ii) microbusinesses; (iii) employees or self-employed workers. CS can host both microbusinesses and self-employed workers, based in the coworking spaces themselves, and employees whose activity is done on behalf of a company based outside the coworking spaces. In the latter case, coworking can be considered a mode of telecommuting that allows companies to relocate part of their activity to places distant from their headquarters, to deal with strategic and management needs or to meet the needs of their employees. This strategy, which will probably become more diffused in the light of the new work habits, has thus far mainly been adopted by multinational firms in the USA, and, more recently, also in Europe.

New workplaces may attract diverse professional profiles and competencies, ranging from the creative industry - such as architects, designers, journalists, etc.- to engineering and digital sectors-namely IT, software developers, consultants, etc. (Akhavan & Mariotti, 2018; Gandini, 2015; Spinuzzi, 2012). Therefore, coworkers can learn from each other through sharing spaces and interaction. Despite the heterogeneity among coworkers regarding their organisational status (Parrino, 2015), there is for sure one common aspect among all coworkers: they all seek a workplace to 'work-alone-together' (Spinuzzi, 2012).

Some scholars have classified coworkers based on what they may earn from being located in a CS (Bilandzic & Foth, 2013):

- *Utilizers*, use CSs for their need of technological infrastructure
- *Learners*, make use of CSs to gain and exchange knowledge, attend events, etc.
- *Socializers*, seek recognition and acknowledgment in CSs

Researches on the Global South also confirm the above-mentioned profiles of the users (mainly based on the Western World). On this matter, a study on CSs in Manila, Philippines, shows that coworkers are mainly among 'digital entrepreneurs of start-up companies; highly skilled knowledge workers such as freelance lawyers, consultants, and architects; and

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foreign digital nomads who often form a community among themselves, which are occupations and work cultures that contrast starkly with the roles that online Filipino freelancers often assume' (Tintiango & Soriano, 2020, p. 78).

In other words, early-stage entrepreneurs, freelancers, self-employed and independent knowledge workers need social and professional interaction to overcome the risk of isolation and loneliness – typical of working from home – and also to increase meeting and networking opportunities (Johns & Gratton, 2013; Moriset, 2014; Mariotti, Pacchi & Di Vita, 2017). From a proximity study point of view, Boschma (2005) has underlined the impact of geographical proximity, and agglomeration economies, on interactive learning and innovation. Furthermore, the importance of geographical proximity should always be examined with other dimensions of proximity: social, institutional, cognitive, organizational.

Besides, Kwiatkowski and Buczynski (2011) have defined coworking based on five main values: collaboration (the willingness to cooperate with others to create shared values), community (intangible benefits, shared purpose), sustainability (do good to do well and offset the environmental footprint of the space), openness (free sharing of ideas, information, and people), and accessibility (financially and physically accessible, diversity).

The Italian context: Results from empirical research

Data and methodology

Looking more closely at the Italian situation can enable us to highlight some specific trends, which help us to investigate more in-depth the relationship between level of expertise, professional status, and location in a CS for a wide variety of professionals.

In 2018, 549 CSs have been registered in Italy, according to the Italian Coworking Survey (Italian Coworking, 2018). They have been founded in the last ten years and are mainly located in cities, following some dynamics similar to those in other regions of the world, but also with some peculiarities. While concentrations of such spaces are visible in metropolitan regions (which host about 47% of the total), there are also CSs diffused in less dense areas, both in suburban regions and in marginal inner (rural) areas. The city with the highest presence of CSs is Milan, which has been a pioneer in this trend in Italy (Mariotti, Pacchi & Di Vita, 2017; Pacchi, 2018), and in which around 100 CSs are located (depending on the definition). Besides, while some CSs in Italy are promoted by the public (in particular, by Local and regional administrations, aiming at fostering local development and innovation), many are private, promoted in this last case either by for-profit or non-profit organizations.

Data about coworkers come from a survey (on-line questionnaire) that has been carried out in 2018 and was addressed to the CWs working in the 549 CSs in Italy (Akhavan & Mariotti, 2018). The respondents, 326 in total, work in 138 CSs (about 25% of the total), located in 83 different cities, homogeneously distributed in the four macro-regions of Italy (north-west,

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north-east, centre, south, and islands). There is a concentration in metropolitan areas (34%), with Milan registering 60 CWs. The survey was sent to coworking managers, that in turn diffused it to their coworkers, and this two-step process probably explains the relatively low level of respondents. Thus, although the sample is not representative of the entire community of coworkers in Italy, it covers a significant share of the CWs, thus offering interesting insights to explore the phenomenon. Further research might focus on the more representative, sector- or regional area-specific surveys that might allow to deepen and consolidate the results of this first exploration.

The questionnaire was composed of the following sections: (i) socio-demographics (gender, age, education, etc.); (ii) employment status, skills, and sector; (iii) income and revenues increase or decrease; (iv) the motivations for selecting the CS; (v) the advantages/disadvantages; (vi) facilities provided and the most used ones; (vii) proximity measures: social, institutional, organizational, cognitive; (viii) satisfaction for working in the CS and wellbeing; (ix) urban effects of the CS as perceived by the interviewee; (x) willingness to work in CS in the next 3-years.

Results

It results that 44% of the respondents are female and 56% male; 52% are aged 36–50, followed by CWs aged between 25 and 35 (38%), over 51 (9%), and those aged 19–24 (1%).

About 37% had spent at least 6 months abroad, for the purpose of education or work.

As far as the educational level is concerned, the majority (about 78%) is highly educated: about 41% holds a Master degree, 18.4% a bachelor degree, and 18.7% achieved a specialising master or PhD degree. The remaining: high school (20.9%), secondary school (0.9%) and primary school (0.3%).

The CWs' sectors of specialization mainly belong to the creative industry (65%), followed by management consultancy, training, and other sectors.

The analysis of the employment status shows that the majority of CWs are freelancers (59%), followed by employees (30%) and other categories (11% – apprentices, interns, students).

Looking at the size of the firms the CWs work for, 64% have up to 5 employees, 17% 6-10 employees, 14% 11-25 and about 5% more than 50 workers. Besides, about 11,7% are start-up firms.

The CWs declared to have, on average, a low-medium income: 32% earn less than 15,000 euro gross per year, followed by 41% between 15,000 and 30,000, 17% between 30,000 and 50,000, and the remaining 10%, more than 50,000. Those earning more are managers and

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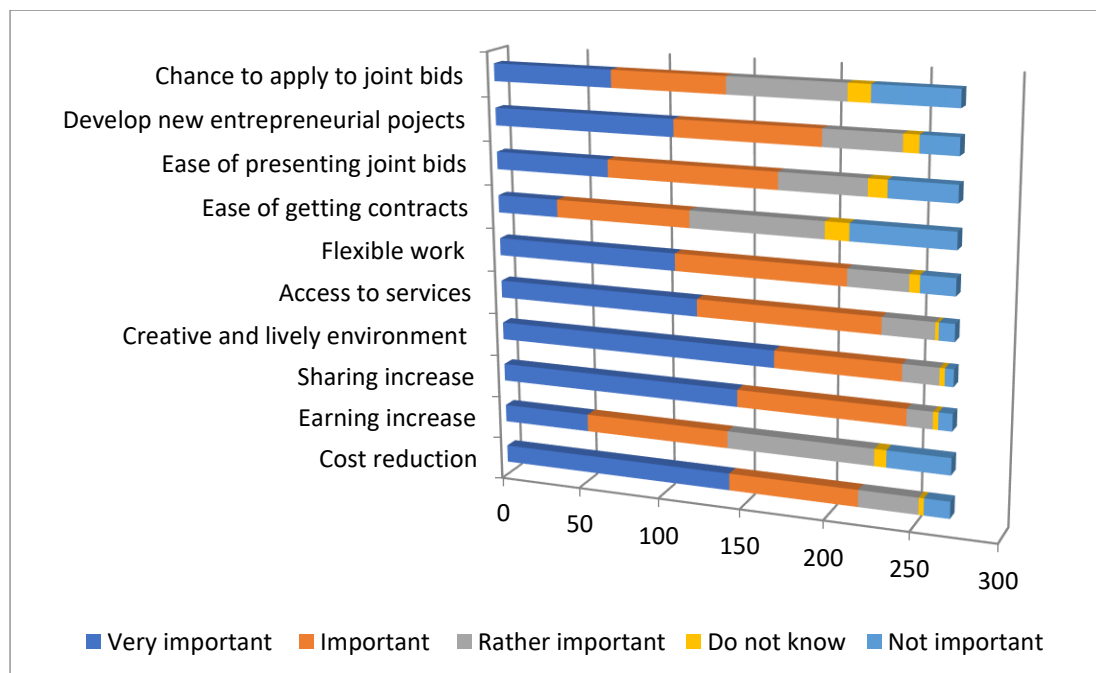
entrepreneurs. There is not a concentration of higher income in specific sectors. The firms CWs belong to are rather young: 77% was founded after 2010.

What are CSs offering to CWs? About 49% are attending or have attended training courses organized in the space: only 12.3% of the CS did not offer any course to their coworkers. Therefore, the spaces favour the professionalisation of coworkers, also through investment in education and skills.

The CWs underlined that the main ("very important") motivation supporting the selection of a CS was related to cost reduction (Fig. 1). Indeed, during the economic downturn, CSs represent a valid and cheaper alternative to traditional offices. Other pull factors applied to the opportunity: (i) to work in a lively and creative environment, that well fits the CWs that were mainly specialized in the creative industry; (ii) to increase knowledge sharing; (iii) to access shared services and instruments (i.e. IT, secretary, common rooms, meeting rooms, etc.); (iv) to access a flexible labour organisation; (v) to develop new entrepreneurial projects; (vi) to apply for joint bids and the ease in presenting joint bids; (vii) ease in getting contracts; and (viii) to increase earnings.

Figure. 1. Motivation for selecting the coworking space (pull factors)

Source: Mariotti and Akhavan, 2020 (p. 46).



These answers stressed the importance that respondents attribute to the main advantages of being located with CSs: cost reduction and the lively and creative environment, characterized by the sharing of services, spaces and knowledge, which could increase new business opportunities. These answers underline the role of organisational proximity that

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CWs experience in a CSs (i.e. services, facilities, training courses, etc.), which enhances knowledge sharing and business opportunities growth.

The role of most of these aspects, which depict the attractiveness of the CSs, has been further explored through questions about the advantages the respondents were expecting to exploit in the CS. The comparison between expectations and actual perceptions by the coworkers allows us to understand whether what is perceived overcame the expectations or the other way round.

As shown in Table 1, what is perceived by the respondents overcomes the expectations as far as the supply of spaces, facilities, services are concerned; besides, it appears that CWs have also developed more friendship with other CWs, than they were expecting.

These results confirm the importance of the working environment (a proxy of organizational proximity), which ranked in the first positions also in the analysis about the motivations, and that might have been responsible for the ease to establish friendships. A lively and creative workplace might enhance the sense of community (a proxy of social proximity) that plays a key role in CSs.

Table 1. *The expected and perceived advantages to work in a CS*

	expected	perceived	expected	perceived	expected	perceived	expected	perceived
	Very important		Important		Do not know		Not important	
New professional relations	196	167	71	108	1	14	3	37
New friends	123	164	117	113	15	14	16	35
Access to new info channels	143	136	101	129	15	14	12	47
Access to new training opportunities	99	97	116	117	14	25	42	87
Access to facilities and instruments	111	138	123	132	10	10	27	46
Access to new spaces	147	197	102	117	5	3	17	9
Access to services	97	127	118	120	9	14	47	65

Table 1. *The expected and perceived advantages to work in a CS*

Source: Akhavan & Mariotti, 2018

Moreover, the survey investigated an aspect that is not well analyzed in the literature on CSs, which is the way the physical dimension and the organisation of space are conducive to better interaction patterns: many CWs stressed the importance of the layout of CSs, which fosters meeting opportunities.

For instance, about 38% of the CWs (always or very often) discussed issues related to their work during lunchtime, mainly in the kitchen or in other devoted spaces of the workplace.

Overall, all the effects of the workplace on coworkers we have analyzed might have positive impacts on their economic performance and well-being: indeed 39% of the CWs and 29% of the firms experienced revenue increases since they had started working in the CS.

Interestingly, about 73% of the respondents declared to have developed new products and

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services, of those 52% have done it jointly with other CWs. Additionally, almost all CWs (97%) confirmed they were satisfied to work in the current CS. It can, therefore, be stated that CWs have evaluated positively their CSs, indeed 57% declared that they intended to work in the same CS in the next three years, 5% would move to another CS, 34% did not know and only 4% would not work in a CS anymore.

Conclusions: Lessons from workspace evolution

The emerging patterns from our empirical research in Italy offers new insights to the international debate by describing a diverse world of professionals choosing to locate in a CS, some of whom belong to recognized professions (with Charters, certification, accreditation tests, etc.), some not, with a very diverse array of employment status and career paths. What certainly those people have in common is the level of expertise, predominantly in knowledge-intensive fields, in creative industries as well as in the ICTs and digital sectors.

As we have seen, around 60% of those located in CWs obtained a Master or PhD Degree, while in Italy, in general, less than 20% of citizens in the 25-64 years age bracket hold a tertiary degree. This confirms the trend we mentioned at the beginning of the article, which identifies professionals essentially based on their expertise. Moreover, 65% of professionals in CWs work in the creative industries, and around 60% are freelancers, which again confirms that they can be solo professionals, which are rarely embedded in large organisations, or even in smaller units.

Knowledge sharing via physical and social proximity and the related knowledge spill-overs play a significant role in both the choice to settle in a CS, and in the reasons for remaining in one. Moreover, by sharing different forms of practical knowledge and milieu knowledge about the characters of specific segments of the labour markets (clients, providers, etc.) professionals in CSs can form and strengthen communities of practice, which do not use exclusively online connections, but can enjoy some form of physical interaction.

At the same time, if we look at income, most professionals earn uncertain and low incomes, and CSs do not appear to work as springboards in securing them a more stable career and recognized social status.

Moreover, as far as the representation of their needs and interests is concerned, the emerging picture is double-edged, because it is not clear yet to what extent coworking spaces have the potential to become places for a new collective identification and to produce forms of empowerment, or else if they will remain isolated bubbles, shelters for weak and precarious knowledge economy professionals, in which growing forms of social, professional and economic polarisation will perpetuate and intensify. The sheltering metaphor appears particularly appropriate to describe this double-edged situation: CSs are places in which precarious and insecure professionals find some form of protection from the

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difficulties of their labour market, but at the same time this does not become for them neither a springboard for securing more stable and profitable careers (only a minority mention an increase in their income), nor, more importantly, an occasion conducive to building form of political representation vis-à-vis neoliberal professional markets.

Even if such emerging evidence concerns the Italian situation, if we widen our perspective to issues and questions from the international debate, as reconstructed in the first sections of this paper, it appears that the relations between the status, careers and forms of representation of knowledge professionals and CSs in Italy are not dissimilar from those that can be found across Europe. Various sources in literature, as well as the first pieces of evidence emerging from a EU funded a COST Action on New Workspaces in more than twenty European countries, point in this direction. The first suggestions from this research may thus become a starting point to open up new research paths about the double-edged potential of such workspaces in different national and territorial contexts. Such new research paths lead us to some final remarks about the role of this debate in the current pandemic situation, and the possible directions emerging for the post-pandemic one.

Looking at what has been happening in the last few months, coworking spaces have been struggling during the Covid-19 pandemic, when physical distancing needed to be guaranteed and people have been confined into their homes to minimize the risks of contagion and transmission of the virus. A large majority of service workers had to move from traditional work in the office, what Oldenburg called the Second place (Oldenburg, 1989) to work at home (First place) through forms of smart or remote working (Ozimek, 2020), as in the case of the creative professionals, to which most of those located in CSs, or Third place, belong. This has had a massive impact on those coworking spaces that were founded on the 'sense of community amongst CWs, which may enable them to benefit from knowledge transfer, informal exchange, cooperation, and forms of horizontal interaction with others, as well as business opportunities (Spinuzzi, 2012). Recent surveys focusing on the effects of the pandemic on CSs have underlined (among the others, see Coworker, 2020) a significant drop in the number of people working from CSs since the outbreak, which, in turn, has been followed by a negative impact on membership and contract renewals, and a drop in the number of new membership inquiries.

Within this scenario, CSs will possibly be forced to reinvent their role by hosting remote workers, i.e. mainly employees, whose activity is done on behalf of a company or organisation based elsewhere, and/or offer services to the neighbourhood (i.e. family membership, baby-sitting, re-training courses for those who lost their job).

This strategy, in perspective, may allow employees to work closer to their home, on the one side one side, and to avoid commuting to the city by working in less central areas that are considered safer than metropolitan cores, on the other side. The so-called resilient CSs (Gandini & Cossu, 2019), or Community-led CSs (Avdikos & Merkel, 2020), embrace the

evolution of work in a direction of flexibility and independence, by prioritizing strong relationships with their local context, to positively impact this one through entrepreneurial activities. If this trend will be confirmed, after the emergency phase, the relationship between different emerging professionals, their inherent increasing heterogeneity, and innovative workspaces will inevitably change, in the direction of a novel combination and interaction not just with other, diverse, professionals, but with workers with different knowledge, skills, expertise and career paths. Thus, CSs may become more mainstream, and precarious professional may lose one protected space, in favour of a more heterogeneous environment.

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