RES-MOVE

Resources On The Move

WP2 –T2.1 Desk research report

Collaborative Spaces: A Perspective on Inclusivity

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INTRODUCTION TO THE REPORT

In the past decade, collaborative and coworking spaces ("CWCS") have emerged as hubs of community and collaboration, fostering social innovation and reinvention of previously marginalised areas. These shared work environments provide flexible and dynamic alternatives to traditional office settings, attracting freelancers, startups, small businesses, makers and creators of new ideas. To successfully increase the recognition of their potential, CWCS serve as inclusive environments that support diverse populations, including marginalised communities, such as migrants.

The desk research report, *Collaborative and Coworking Spaces: A Perspective on Inclusivity?* is one of the first outcomes of the European project **Resources on the Move** (RES-MOVE), co-funded by the EU Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund, which explores the potential of CWCS as places of migrant inclusion. The project recognises that the various forms of collaboration, such as fab-labs, maker spaces, and coworking in public spaces, present a new scenario for the labour inclusion of qualified migrants, especially freelancers, those with craft skills, start-uppers and knowledge workers. Migrant inclusion in CWCS is not only a matter of social responsibility but also an opportunity to harness the diverse talents and perspectives that migrants bring. People on the move often need help with unique challenges, such as language barriers, cultural differences, and limited professional networks, which can hinder their ability to integrate into the local economy and community. CWCS can mitigate these challenges and promote social and economic integration by fostering an inclusive atmosphere.

Inclusion initiatives within CWCS can take many forms, from providing language support and cultural competency training to creating mentorship programs and facilitating networking opportunities. The

project RES-MOVE identified two challenges: the inclusion of migrants in rural (non-urban) coworking spaces and the identification of safe and welcoming coworking spaces that would better serve migrant women and the LGBTQ+ community. In practice, some initiatives that foster such ideas have already started and, in some cases, are thriving, but the field still needs to be thoroughly researched at a larger scale. To help open this field, the RES-MOVE project decided to trigger a research-focused work package ("WP") (Work Package/WP 2) that aims to look more closely into the inclusivity perspective of CWCS, especially in the project countries: Greece, Cyprus, Slovenia, Italy, Germany, Austria, Sweden, France, the Netherlands and Spain.

The research team behind the report, which is also leading the research WP, is part of the Slovenian Migration Institute ZRC SAZU, a research institute with 30+ years of experience in academic and applied work with migrant communities in Slovenia and abroad. The work package includes desk research, two focus groups with experts and professionals in rural coworking and gender-inclusivity, management of field research among skilled migrants and coworking stakeholders in 10 EU countries, and drafting the Guidelines for Inclusive Coworking Spaces (ICSs).

This report is a result of a comparative meta-study that focused on finding the challenges and best practices of inclusive collaborative and coworking spaces in the European Union, especially in the 10 EU countries where the RES-MOVE project is implemented. The objective was to create a state-of-the-art aggregation of the coworking background in three key areas: migrant communities, rural areas, and the gender perspective. The report is composed of two introductory/theoretical chapters and three thematic chapters, followed by a general discussion.

Chapter 1, *The History of Collaborative Spaces*, represents the theoretical basis of the desk research—the background of the brief, yet

contemporary history of these spaces as well as the transformation of the traditional concept of office work. It provides how the coworking movement continues to shape the future or work as a way to promote flexibility, innovation and inclusivity in the professional sphere.

Chapter 2, *Taxonomy and Typology of CWCS*, focuses on the variety of shared workspaces, and helps review the various typologies and forms of CWCS. Understanding the taxonomy of the coworking movement is essential for grasping the different forms these spaces can take, the unique services they offer, and the distinct communities they serve. With inclusivity in mind, this chapter aims to categorise CWCS based on their target audience, services provided, operational models, and cultural focus.

Chapter 3, *Collaborative Spaces, Minorities and Migration*, the report delves directly into the first key topic of the report: identifying the theoretical and actual background of the involvement of CWCS with migrant communities and minorities. The research data on this topic is very scarce and focuses more on the case of *digital nomadism* as well as racial and ethnic minorities, including some work with immigrant communities and migrant economic integration. Part of the chapter also includes a special mention of initiatives for Ukrainians who have sought temporary or permanent protection following the ongoing conflict to continue advancing their business remotely through the use of CWCS.

Chapter 4, *Coworking in Rural Areas*, is dedicated to a relatively new phenomenon in the coworking movement, CWCS that are located outside of urban and city areas. With wide-spread high-speed internet connection in almost all corners of Europe, as well as new funding opportunities in European rural territories, there has been more and more out migration from urban centres. These movements have also stemmed from new lifestyle choices, such as the previously mentioned *digital nomadism*, and escalated even post-COVID-19 crisis. The chapter highlights

globally-recognised good practices of rural coworking spaces, as well as new forms of third-places that evolved from previously successful ventures, such as *coliving* and *workation*. In addition, the chapter also considers the possibilities that rurally-based migrant communities may find in non-urban coworking spaces, particularly in light of the EU initiatives such as 'Welcoming Spaces'.

The last chapter, Chapter 5 *Coworking and Gender (In)Equality*, addresses the last key area of this report, the topic of gender equality in CWCS. It discusses the inclusion of migrant women in the coworking space movement, as well as the issue of providing safe and open spaces for members of the LGBTQ+ community of migrant or minority backgrounds. Furthermore, this chapter opens up important questions on gender-neutrality in the coworking movement, the challenges female entrepreneurs face in CWCS (namely gender bias), and especially women-led coworking spaces, with case studies from Europe and around the globe.

This report was a collaborative effort of the RES-MOVE community, involving project partners, as well as outside institutions and individuals around Europe. We are pleased to be able to work closely and especially learn from the experts and professionals who shared their knowledge of the field. By looking thoroughly into the topic, we hope this report will contribute to a better understanding of the inclusivity issues of marginalised communities, as well as to recognise that the coworking movement can become more inclusive, open and truly help foster social inclusion and innovation.

1. HISTORY OF COLLABORATIVE SPACES

According to the seminal work of Capdevila (2018), a collaborative space is "a localised space that offers open access to resources, such as machines and prototyping tools, and that is characterised by a culture of openness and collaboration concerning knowledge-sharing, skills and tools". Hence, collaborative communities can be defined as "collectives of individual entrepreneurs, project workers and managers who build lasting collaborations in order to share practices" (Mitev et al. 2019), in a sense consisting of a wide range of possible actors like coworkers[1] and hackers[2] relying on digital infrastructures, places of collaboration, and temporal structures often driven by a bottom-up logic (Capdevila 2018; Orel et al. 2021).

Therefore, CWCS may have multiple stakeholders and types of innovators with many distinctive individual goals and motivations, intrinsically and extrinsically, to participate to such collective creative dynamics and cross-pollination of ideas (Capdevila 2018), also able to facilitate networking and exchange of knowledge through face-to-face interactions. As participants' commitment may depend on the nature of innovative activities taking place in collaborative spaces, different experiences show that, in reality, those activities often overlap within

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[1] The term coworker commonly refers to people who work alongside one another in a coworking space, while co-worker refers to people who work together in the same organisation (Gandini 2015).

[2] Although hackers presently have a negative connotation related to individuals that illegally break into computers to steal information or sensitive data to condition public and private stakeholders, the term hack meant to open something up to understand its components (van Holm 2015).

typologies (hackerspaces[3], makerspaces[4], etc.). Nevertheless, from 2005[5] onwards, the concept of CWCS has gained significant traction as a promising and flexible response to traditional and increasingly anachronistic working environments, as such transforming workspaces into dynamic hubs of creativity, innovation and interaction.

Coworking is a relatively new phenomenon which has developed into a well-recognized social practice. Its rapid growth is an aspect of a society in transition as it reflects new realities in the professional world—for example, for skilled digital workers, freelancers, new entrepreneurs, or autonomously and remotely working skilled employees (Tremblay et al. 2024). According to Bennis, Martin and Orel (2021) "the past 15 years has seen remarkable growth in businesses that seek to package and sell *community* as part of their core product or service." They call this specific business a "community business" and focus on individual-purposed CWCS as the "best example of a community business they know." (Bennis et al. 2021). Capdevila stresses that over the past decade, several concepts of these spaces have appeared, such as Fab Labs, coworking spaces, Living Labs, makerspaces, hackerspaces, etc. (Capdevila 2018) When discussing CWCS, fablabs and makerspaces as new types of work environments which present an alternative to conventional office spaces, some authors prefer to focus on

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[3] Hackerspaces are workspaces for communities that operate under the principles of the hacker ethic: they are driven by an open culture, a sharing attitude and peer-to-peer approach that promote the development of distributed networks and social ties (Capdevila 2018).

[4] Makerspaces commonly attract individuals who identify as makers and are keen on spreading the cost of industrial tools and gathering communities with the goals of sharing knowledge, time, and effort on a wide range of projects. The maker movement, as a democratisation process to access the use of tools, moved from modest hobby to a meaningful lifestyle with relevant implications for public concern in consideration of the fact that previously tools were almost exclusively available to those working within firms and industry (van Holm 2015).

[5] Scholars generally refer to Brad Neuberg for the first environment characterised as a modern coworking space inaugurated in San Francisco in 2005 linking the word 'coworking' with the flexible working space and its collaborative use (Spinuzzi 2012, Capdevila 2015, Garrett et al. 2017).

"new working spaces" as an alternative to home (first place) and workplaces of production (second place). New working spaces, also recognised as open space labs, are "collaborative spaces that attract a diverse range of users, offer flexible infrastructure and services and foster a collaborative ethos." (Mariotti et al. 2024). Some also prefer to rethink the concept of "third places" (Oldenburg 1989). Others, such as Kraus and Tremblay also use the term "collective workspaces" which encompass coworking spaces, hackerspaces, makerspaces and fablabs. (Tremblay et al. 2024).

On the other hand, some authors see these spaces as an extension of open offices. Spinuzzi (2012) defines coworking spaces as open-plan office environments where "professionals from different backgrounds work together for a fee, with a focus on knowledge-sharing dynamics. They not only provide infrastructure and a specific design but also create a dynamic and inspiring environment for collaboration and knowledge sharing." Orel and Dvouletý (2020) stress that "modern times have seen an emergence of a new type of office spaces" and describe coworking spaces as modern hybrid workspaces perceived not only "as optimal places to work but as a source of social support for independent professionals and physical entities that sprung the creation of collaborative communities." They are viewed as an alternative to working in a classic office or at home, a new type of workplace strongly influenced by the open source movement. Their appeal is to offer a solution for growing ranks of independent creative workers who are escaping isolation from their homes by working and meeting in cafés (Jones et al. 2009). Namely, they facilitate interactional effects through accidental encounters with people from outside of one's organisation, team, and social circle. (Orel and Dvouletý 2020). Gandini and Cossu (2021) highlight different kinds of spaces that have ended up under the 'coworking' umbrella, including collaborative offices for freelancers working in advertising and marketing, 'hubs' for social entrepreneurs, makerspaces

and Fab Labs and also real estate space managed by firms that establish a 'coworking zone' at their premises.

According to Parrino, these spaces are characterised by the co-localisation of various co-workers within the same work environment, the presence of workers heterogeneous by occupation and sector in which they operate and organisational status and affiliation and the presence (or not) of activities and tools, designed to stimulate the emergence of relationships and collaboration among coworkers. (Parrino 2015). On the other hand, Gandini distinguishes two meanings of 'coworking': co-working as the cooperation between individuals who are interconnected with relations within a given organisation and situations where the individuals are placed in the role of co-workers. In that regard, coworking refers to the cooperation and sharing of workspaces between individuals working independently, given mutual relationships formed based on either spontaneous or moderate processes within a temporary-set or a permanent collaborative workspace. (Gandini 2015, Bennis et al. 2021)

At this stage, CWCS are commonly viewed as hybridised workspaces (Marchegiani et al. 2018), facilitating interactional effects both with the use of mediation mechanisms and through serendipitous encounters with individuals from outside of one's organisation and social circle. Indeed, scholars often state that coworking spaces can be regarded "as a new form of urban social infrastructure enabling contacts and collaborations between people, ideas and connecting places" (Capdevila 2015, Gandini 2015, Merkel 2015). Nevertheless, a spectrum of further definitions may certainly enlarge the concept, providing a more consistent overview of urban and non-urban coworking spaces. Spinuzzi (2012) describes coworking spaces as "open-plan office environments in which they work alongside other unaffiliated professionals for a fee. [...] Coworking is not a concrete product, like a building, but a service – in fact, a service that

proprietors provide indirectly, by providing a space where coworkers can network their other activities by engaging in peer-to-peer interaction". According to Merkel (2015), "coworking refers to the practice of working alongside one another in flexible, shared work settings where desks can be rented on a daily, weekly or monthly basis. [...] As flexibly rentable, cost-effective and community-oriented workplaces, coworking spaces facilitate encounters, interaction and a fruitful exchange between diverse work, practice, and epistemic communities and cultures". Gandini (2015) defines coworking spaces 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. Practically conceived as office-renting facilities where workers hire a desk and a Wi-Fi-connection, these are, more importantly, places where independent professionals live their daily routines side-by-side with professional peers".

Ultimately, coworking refers to a *working environment*, usually a spacious office, shared by individually-operating self-employees, e.g. computer programmers, designers, advertisers, writers, translators, etc. Sharing a space, at least in theory, leads to communication and collaboration and the meshing of skills and virtues instigates various kinds of innovations (products, working methods, advertising, etc.) (Kozorog 2021). These spaces intentionally bring people together in that work environment whether that would be through knowledge sharing, collaboration, mentorship, support, education, or in a meaningful community, where "participants give to and take from one another as part of a greater sense of group identity." (Bennis et al. 2021). Workers bring their own personalities and skills into a shared room where their teamwork can lead to innovation (on whatever level), which is the core value of modern-day capitalism (Thompson and Warhurst 1998; Wilf 2015). CWCS aim to recreate the physical space that enables the individual users to maximise their productivity by "combining the best elements of a

workspace" (Botsman and Rogers 2010). This is done by imposing minimal structure which allows part time users or regular members to "keep their independence, to use the space whenever they want and decide to what extent they want to participate in activities that they preselect." (Orel and Rus 2018). As DeGuzman and Tang clarify, "coworking spaces offer an alternative for people longing to escape the confines of their cubicle walls, the isolation and distractions of working solo at home, or the inconveniences of public venues". (DeGuzman and Tang 2011)

Bennis et al. (2021) consider that "coworking spaces are in its core work-purposed environments that support various types and degrees of social connectivity among entities that would not otherwise be connected if not for the physical and social support provided by the coworking itself". The transformative changes and developments of the coworking model (Orel et al. 2020) show that highly specialised workers tend to be location-independent and work on a flexible basis, frequently changing the location of their work: on one side, they positively feel a personal control over schedule and work environment, on the other side, they have a negative feeling of alienation and downsides of work individualisation.

Most individual users decide to work from a coworking space to raise productivity, knit relations through meaningful social interactions, and expand their personal networks. (Spinuzzi et al. 2019, Orel and Rus 2015) This way, they cross-institutional and project-specific barriers by bringing together people that would otherwise not be working together. The key attractiveness of coworking spaces can be a vibrant community of sharing and collaboration, one of the important features by the creative class. (Orel and Rus 2018) The motivation to work in a CWCS can be pool cooperation costs, affordable accommodation, work-related interactions, feedback, trust, learning, partnership, peer support, referrals, benefit from the resources of the place (equipment, skills, network, professional

appearance), possibility of collaboration with other coworkers or carrying out a common project, feeling of being part of a community, better work-life balance or social interactions. (Cabral 2023)

1.1. The historical development of CWCS

Authors such as Formica (2016) and Orel and Dvouletý (2020) consider *bottegas* (workshops) from Renaissance-era Florence as one of the earliest forms of homogenous communities of workers and artists (including painters, sculptors, and others). These workshops exhibited specific patterns of work processes and interpersonal relations, which fostered collaboration in transdisciplinary environments. "Within these spaces, individuals under the mentorship of older and more experienced artists co-created an organisational culture based on the shared values of cooperation and knowledge exchange." (Orel and Dvouletý 2020)

In the nineteenth century, collaborative work environments could be found in Paris and other French cities, particularly in the La Ruche building and local cafes such as La Café de Flore and Des Deux Magots in Paris' Saint Germain des Prés district, as well as in Cabaret Voltaire in Zurich. Both French and foreign artists resided in these common spaces (Foertsch and Cagnol 2013). In the case of these spaces, their primary domain was "the articulation of homogenous communities created within the framework of established organisational cultures based on the principles of cooperation and equality between individuals." (Orel and Dvouletý 2020) There were also other similar spaces in New York. (Foertsch and Cagnol 2013). In 1988, the Electronic Cafe in Seoul opened its doors as the first modern cyber-café, marking a new era where computers became essential working tools and the web became a significant medium for transmitting and accessing content and information. Its first Western counterpart was the

SFnet Coffeehouse Network in San Francisco, California, in 1991 (Liff and Laegran 2003). The concept was simple: these venues featured stationary computers with internet access. They functioned as temporary workspaces where access to a computer and the web could be rented, facilitating remote work. Additionally, they provided opportunities for collaboration among visitors and users.

In 1989, English entrepreneur Mark Dixon opened a space called Regus with the objective of offering flexible office space to customers in Brussels. This concept allowed individuals to share workspaces and conference facilities, and soon expanded to include accommodation services. The Regus brand has since focused on providing individuals with flexible office spaces for short durations, without emphasising networking opportunities (Orel and Dvouletý 2020). The precursor to modern CWCS emerged in Berlin, Germany, in 1995 with the opening of C-base. Initially categorised as a hackerspace, C-base primarily housed a community of individuals working with digital or analog technologies. It served as a hub where the community collectively pursued defined goals, whether profitable or non-profitable, placing emphasis on collaborative achievements (Foertsch and Cagnol 2013, Orel and Dvouletý 2020). Furthermore, Schraubenfabrik opened its doors in 2002 in Vienna, Austria, as one of the first shared work environments. The initiative was aimed at creating a collaborative environment where entrepreneurs could synergize, moving away from the isolation of working independently. It's for that reason Schraubenfabrik quickly became a space where professionals, including architects, PR consultants, startups, and freelancers could get together—a community hub where like-minded individuals could connect, share ideas, and create together. This approach not only facilitated networking and collaboration but also laid the foundational principles of coworking by emphasising community, shared knowledge, and mutual support among different professions. Rather than being known as a CWCS,

it was, for lack of a better term, for years referred to as an "entrepreneurial centre". (in Orel 2017) Another organisation to note was 42West24, established in New York City in 1999. It offered a flexible work environment with membership options for teams and individuals seeking workspace. However, it lacked a key element of today's notion of coworking: there was little emphasis on community. Community events were infrequent, and networking opportunities were rare (Foertsch and Cagnol 2013). In 1999, the American computer software developer Bernard De Koven proposed the term "coworking". He considered it as a method of participation by individuals who interact with one another without strictly defined or hierarchically-arranged relationships and on the principles of collaboration (in Orel 2017).

Most authors in the field of coworking agree that the first environment characterised as a modern coworking space and manifesting itself as such was set-up in August 2005 by Brad Neuberg in San Francisco taking the name of The Spiral Muse. He thought home offices and classic office hotels were antisocial and counterproductive and opted for "the freedom and independence of working for myself along with the structure and community of working with others. The space offered desks, free WiFi, shared lunches, collective bike rides, meditation and massage, and closed at 17:45 sharp". (Neuberg 2015) He was also active in The Hat factory which opened its doors in 2006. For that reason, he is recognized as the first individual to link the word "coworking" with the flexible working space and its collaborative use. (in Orel 2017) In the same year, The Hub, a collaborative space, opened in London's Angel district (Thorpe 2013), which expanded over the next decade into a global network of franchised co-working spaces (Foertsch and Cagnol 2013) under the name The Impact Hub.

In terms of evolution of the phenomenon, Orel and Dvouletý (2020) consider the development of the coworking model between 2005 and 2010

as the period of genesis for CWCS, followed by periods of popularisation between 2010 and 2014 and further hybridisation of the model. According to them, in the first phase, the entities were bottom-up formed and characterised by user solidarity within the cooperative communities, mutual assistance and reciprocity, and microfinancing support (e.g., Jelly-style crowdfunding). In the second phase, the CWCS have known a popularisation wave together with the digitalisation of work and digital nomadism. Then, in the hybridisation phase, they have recognised a top-down model with increasing capital investment in coworking, relevant gentrification effects in downtrodden neighbourhoods, and specialised coworking communities with fixed or flexible work spots along with cafés, recreational areas and accommodation units.

1.2. The popularisation of the coworking movement

While the first CWCS offered different working possibilities for "friends and strangers", it was the movement of individuals who popularised coworking as a model of flexible workspace use. In the beginning of 2006, two self-employed Americans from New York City organised the first one-off gathering of independent workers and named it as a Jelly event. (Heminsley 2011) The purpose was to open the doors of their apartment to both friends and strangers who, due to the independent nature of their work from home, were subjected to isolation and alienation. SWAT (Solos Working Alone Together) began to organise similar events in Chicago with the aim of connecting individuals once or twice a week in one of the pre-selected cafes. The attraction of these events was the possibility to share human and material resources among individuals. (Jones et al. 2009) There were four waypoints to organise a Jelly-style event which became the cornerstones of CWCS, namely free access to internet, a central easily accessible and free location for the meeting and a space with one or

more smaller tables serving as a working area with sufficient number of electric outlets. Also important was the access to foods in the form of hot and cold drinks or the possibility for the users to bring the desired food and drinks with them. (Orel 2017)

In Europe, the movement took shape in the European Coworking Assembly (ECA)[6] which was originally founded in July 2013 as a Belgian non-profit organisation and intended to lobby European governments and seek EU grants for projects. In 2017, it was reorganised into its current form as a Dutch non-profit. The ECA serves as a crucial link between independent coworking spaces in Europe and their entrepreneurial ecosystems. Using technology, the ECA organises and supports projects that aim to shape the future of coworking. This includes forming partnerships and alliances, facilitating introductions among members to foster future collaborations based on shared goals and values, promoting coworking through media and other channels, participating in and advising on projects supported by EU, national, regional, or local funding, and engaging in collective action initiatives aligned with their vision for the future.

The period of popularisation of the collaborative model between 2010 and 2014 witnessed significant growth in the number of newly created CWCS and their user base. By October 2010, there were approximately 600 CWCS worldwide. Two years later, in October 2012, this number surged by 350% to 2,072. By 2014, the count further increased by 215% to reach 4,500 open coworking spaces (Orel 2017). In 2015, the number rose to an estimated 7,800, reflecting an additional 175% growth (Orel and Dvouletý 2020). The increase in the number of these spaces has led to new trends in the model's development. Namely the coworking model became interesting for corporate use. This trend was exemplified by the opening of

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[6] https://coworkingassembly.eu/about/

TechHub in 2011 at Google Campus in London, as well as by WeWork, the rapidly expanding global network of coworking and flexible office spaces, which anticipated opening three to five locations per month (Orel 2017). WeWork's valuation soared, making it one of the most valuable tech companies in the US alongside Uber and Airbnb. This success attracted increasing interest from investors, leading other companies such as Knotel, Convene, Industrious, TOG, and Mindspace to expand aggressively on a global scale. Real estate companies also began developing their own coworking concepts to compete for tenants

This marked the rise of the 'neo-corporate' coworking model, blending real estate business with market intermediation to cater not only to freelance workers but also to a broader spectrum including entrepreneurs and social entrepreneurs. This model addresses the practical demand for flexible work arrangements while capitalising on a consumption-driven trend, offering workers the opportunity to inhabit a 'cool' workspace aligned with the lifestyle and ethos of the tech sector (Gandini and Cosu 2021). Global coworking giants like Google, WeWork, and Impact Hub embody this neo-corporate model, which essentially leases real estate space to individual workers, often through franchise operations where members pay periodic fees (Orel and Dvouletý 2020). However, WeWork's trajectory took a downturn in 2019 when its value plummeted from $47 billion to $3 billion (Orel and Billig 2021). The popularisation of coworking in recent years has shifted from a heterogeneous user community towards increased specialisation of spaces tailored to specific customer needs. This trend aims to cater to users requiring specific and defined working environments (Orel and Dvouletý 2020). In addition to traditional office spaces with fixed and flexible workstations, these spaces commonly include café facilities, childcare services, recreational areas, and even accommodations (Orel 2017). This evolution points to the "hybridization" of the coworking model, as spaces aspire to create

environments akin to a "fourth living place", blending collaborative workspace with habitat-like amenities (Orel and Dvouletý 2020). CWCS have spread globally across countries regardless of their economic growth and cultural backgrounds. In 2019, the United States and the United Kingdom each hosted approximately 19% and 18% of all CWCS, respectively. The Asia-Pacific (Apac) countries and the Emea region (Europe, Middle East, Africa) accounted for the largest shares, with 35% and 21% of CWCS, respectively. The remaining 7% of CWCS were distributed across the rest of the world (Akhavan and Mariotti 2022) Something to note is how the Covid-19 pandemic severely impacted the coworking industry, which raised questions about the necessity of physical offices in the future.

According to the Coworking Survey Europe, by the end of 2020, half of all coworking spaces in Europe reported a downturn in their economic situation. The outlook appeared more optimistic in September 2020 before renewed lockdowns exacerbated challenges for the coworking industry. CWCS targeting individual members were particularly affected. Those operating multiple locations or already receiving government aid rated their situation as worse. Suburban and rural coworking spaces faced difficulties, although conditions slightly improved over time. Overall, capacities diminished by 20%, with coworking spaces in larger cities experiencing sharper declines. Spaces primarily offering private offices prior to the pandemic saw a more limited reduction in leasable desks compared to the beginning of 2020. As the pandemic progressed, 80% of coworking spaces that were open before 2020 reported a decline in revenue by the end of the survey, with an average revenue loss of approximately 40%. Coworking locations in large cities were most heavily impacted, while smaller spaces reported revenue declines less frequently but often faced more severe percentage losses (Foertsch 2021). However, there did exist some upsides to the pandemic. Mariotti et al. (2021) identified positive aspects during the COVID-19 period, noting that the outbreak increased

the utilisation of NeWSp in cities and neighbourhoods. These spaces offered essential IT services such as reliable internet access and equipment for video calls. Additionally, shared spaces sometimes helped alleviate social isolation associated with remote work and reduced daily commuting costs to traditional workplaces, contributing to improved work-life balance. According to Deskmag (2023), by 2023, the coworking industry was showing signs of improvement and returning to pre-COVID-19 levels (Foertsch 2023). A significant development during this period was influenced by the aftermath of WeWork's bankruptcy in 2019. The closure of WeWork locations created opportunities for smaller, more innovative coworking operators to emerge and thrive. These operators began offering diverse and specialised services tailored to specific community needs. This shift not only represented a spatial redistribution but also marked an evolution in the coworking concept, with a growing emphasis on niche and hyper-localised offerings (Foertsch 2021).

In addition to these developments 2023 saw a growing emphasis on sustainability, integration of digital technology, and the rising popularity of co-living spaces within the coworking sector. These trends signify a potential shift towards eco-friendly, technologically advanced, and lifestyle-integrated coworking environments. In the current era marked by digital technology and artificial intelligence, the nature of work organisation is evolving due to intensified competition, hyper-specialisation, increased division of labour, outsourcing of independent professionals, and a growing need to capture new knowledge and ideas. This environment necessitates flexible and autonomous modes of working, alongside changes in worker status and job stability (Boutillier et al. 2020).

2. TAXONOMY AND TYPOLOGY OF CWCS

As the 21st-century economy becomes increasingly centred on knowledge and innovation, particularly in dense urban areas, the coworking industry has experienced rapid growth and significant evolution. What constitutes coworking has expanded and transformed alongside this growth, resulting in varied interpretations of the concept that diverge from its original meaning (Orel and Dvouletý 2021). Despite this evolving landscape, the coworking sector continues to thrive. In recent years, CWCS have hybridised to adapt to changes brought about by the 'gig economy'—a labour market characterised by temporary and part-time positions filled by independent contractors and freelancers—and advancements in technology. These shifts are reshaping traditional norms in space design, management, and utilisation, influencing how spaces are used for work, living, and social interaction (Migliore et al. 2021). This evolution demands greater flexibility in the built environment, leading to a phenomenon known as 'hybridization,' where multiple functions, users, and building types coexist and interact within the same spaces (Orel and Dvouletý 2021).

Morrison (2018) argues that coworking spaces are not simply third places as defined by Oldenburg (1997), but rather involve a hybridization of second (work) and third places (leisure spaces), creating what he terms a 'fourth place' capable of fostering knowledge sharing both within professional and personal spheres. According to this perspective, coworking spaces inherently embody hybrid characteristics. To qualify as hybrid, a 'fourth place' must facilitate a break from home and work routines, accommodate a diverse range of users and functions, and offer adaptable spatial features that can change over time. Migliore et al. (2021) describe these spaces as entities that allow disparate groups to coexist in a place with fluid boundaries and multiple functions.

Orel and Dvouletý (2021) propose four models for classifying contemporary coworking spaces:

Individual-purposed CWCS, which represent the original conception of coworking pioneered by Neuberg at The Spiral Muse. These spaces are primarily designed for individual use rather than group activities. They emphasise location and professional independence, providing support for community building and facilitating connections among members. Individual-purposed coworking spaces cater to knowledge workers, freelancers, remote workers, and other professionals who typically work in office-like environments but seek flexibility and community engagement within a shared workspace setting.

Creation-purposed CWCS, which are distinct from traditional coworking models and focus on providing physical tools, materials, and specialised activities for creating tangible objects. Examples include makerspaces, hackerspaces, and artist studios. These spaces prioritise community building, shared physical resources, and collaboration among individuals from diverse backgrounds and institutions. They often offer opportunities for professional development, education, and support tailored to hobbyists, creative artists, and others whose primary income source is not derived from using the space. Unlike office-centric hubs, creation-purposed spaces are specialised environments catering to specific domains rather than general office work. Hackerspaces typically operate in a decentralised, grassroots manner, while makerspaces are usually organised in a more structured, top-down fashion. These spaces foster creativity, innovation, and collaboration among members engaged in hands-on projects and creative pursuits.

Group-purposed CWCS, which target larger corporate groups and teams rather than individual professionals. These spaces uphold the original coworking ethos by facilitating connections among individuals and teams

across different institutions, both socially and physically. However, their primary focus is on providing flexibility through short-term leases and accommodating the dynamic needs of growing or shrinking teams. These environments prioritise team accommodations over individual memberships. In these spaces, individuals are replaced by entire teams occupying separate offices within the shared space. Inter-institutional connections are fostered at the floor or building level, or through virtual tools on internet-based social networks. Formal events and informal gatherings, such as parties and social areas like cafes or game rooms, serve to connect people across different institutions. Despite these community-building efforts, most collaborative work occurs within teams from the same organisation, reflecting the focus on supporting team dynamics and collaborative projects within a flexible, shared workspace setting.

Startup-purposed CWCS, which are specifically designed to foster the success of startup businesses. These spaces prioritise social connections across institutions, but with a distinct focus on providing essential support and facilitating access to potential team members crucial for startup success. Typically, access to these spaces is time-limited and competitive, based on merit. However, some coworking spaces incorporate startup-focused components without strict time limits or merit evaluations. They cater primarily to startup teams or individuals aiming to transform their business ideas into successful ventures. They may function as incubators, accelerators, or innovation spaces, offering resources such as mentorship, networking opportunities, funding advice, and shared infrastructure tailored to the needs of early-stage businesses. The goal is to create an environment that nurtures innovation, facilitates rapid growth, and supports entrepreneurial ventures through the critical early stages of development.

The classification of new working spaces is centred around user needs and their approaches to innovation and creativity. Makerspaces and fab labs are categorised by specific ideation and innovation methodologies. Creative hubs predominantly focus on social innovation, while living labs adhere to the open innovation model. Hackerspaces are known for generating user-driven innovations (Mariotti et al. 2024). Based on this taxonomy, new working spaces are defined by the primary needs of users and the tools they utilise. There are two main typologies: Collaborative and creative working spaces, which emphasise a 'do it together' approach, and makerspaces in a broad sense, which emphasise a 'do it yourself' approach. These spaces typically support collaborative work primarily focused on computer-based activities. On the other hand, 'do it yourself' spaces, including makerspaces, fab labs, open worklabs, and former techshops, centre around collaborative physical and production activities (people do). These spaces, often referred to as "dirty" makerspaces, facilitate the creation of physical objects using tools and machinery. Mariotti et al. (2024) classify these spaces based on whether they emphasise social interaction and collaborative work (clean spaces like coworking) or physical production and DIY activities (dirty spaces like makerspaces), reflecting the diverse needs and methodologies of their users.

Some spaces combine both approaches leading to the emergence of hybrid spaces in spatial-functional dimension. This taxonomy excludes business incubation centres (incubators and accelerators) since their primary objective is not directly related to foster collaboration. Their aim is to support start-ups and realise their ideas, increasing their chances of success, adding value, and accelerating their development. According to Capdevila, the typology of innovation spaces can be categorised based on their approach to fostering creativity and innovation:

1. **Fablabs**: These organisations provide a range of tools aimed at promoting collective creativity. Their primary objective is to facilitate exploration and enhancement of participants' creative abilities through hands-on activities and collaboration.

2. **Coworking spaces focused on social innovation**: These spaces are centred around individuals or communities with a social mission aimed at addressing and solving social needs. They emphasise collaboration and community engagement to achieve social impact.

3. **Living labs**: These organisations seek to integrate external sources into their innovation processes. They collaborate with diverse stakeholders, including users, to improve existing products or develop new innovative solutions. Living labs focus on real-world experimentation and co-creation with end-users.

4. **Hackerspaces / Makerspaces**: These spaces are driven by self-motivated users (often referred to as "lead users") who develop new products or innovations based on their personal or community interests. They provide a collaborative environment where members share tools, expertise, and ideas to prototype and innovate in a DIY (do-it-yourself) fashion.

Capdevila's taxonomy excludes business incubation centres (incubators and accelerators), which are primarily focused on supporting startups to develop and grow their businesses rather than fostering broader collaboration or innovation across different user groups. These centres aim to enhance the success and growth potential of startups by providing resources, mentorship, and networking opportunities. (Capdevila 2017)

Fab Labs

Digital fabrication laboratories, so-called Fab Labs, are places where objects can be produced from beginning idea to its digitalisation and final materialisation as a global initiative of workshops offering open access to technologies (Fleischmann et al. 2016) and encouraging free knowledge-sharing predominantly among experts and technology-oriented public. Hence, community-based digital fabrication workshops enable people to come together and learn how to use and develop digital tools, technologies and science projects in order to create objects, in a sense transforming practices of design, innovation, production and consumption (Fleischmann et al. 2016).

Generally, a wide range of hardware and software resources support the capabilities of creation in Fab Labs, such as 3-D printers, laser cutters, commercial and open-source applications, while organisational structures may be connoted as independent entities (Fleischmann et al. 2016) or laboratories hosted by universities or innovation centres. Fab Labs and open creative communities within the Fab Lab Network constitute examples that usually adapt a workshop model pioneered by the Centre for Bits and Atoms of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) on the morrow of the course "How to Make (Almost) Anything", and where a first laboratory was set up to develop the students' projects using new technological tools of rapid prototyping (van Holm 2015; Fleischmann et al. 2016; Capdevila 2018). In fact, MIT has retained a sort of control over the origin of Fab Labs through the Fab Foundation according to which four qualities describe genuine Fab Labs: public access, support and subscribe to the Fab Lab charter, a common set of tools and processes, and participation in the network of Fab Labs. (van Holm 2015). The main idea behind such Fab Labs concept is that knowledge and design have to be shared internationally without any border, while collaboration and

partnerships among Fab Labs in the network empower the whole community.

In essence, Fab Labs constitute a global network of local laboratories that enable access to a comprehensive set of tools for digital fabrication, facilitating the creation of a wide range of objects. However, Fab Labs are primarily situated within educational institutions, where access is typically restricted to established members. These labs often have a strong focus on supporting business activities, particularly through prototyping services (van Holm 2015). Within Fab Labs, the innovation process encourages participants to explore and enhance their creative abilities. This environment fosters practices such as Creative Problem Solving and Design Thinking, which are integral to the iterative development of innovative solutions (Capdevila 2018).

Living Labs

The initial concept of Living Labs originated at MIT, aiming to enable researchers to observe firsthand how users interact with technology within real-world environments (Capdevila 2018). Living Labs are characterised as rigorous research conducted on campus, involving operational and academic partners, sustainable analysis methods, and a range of formal and informal learning activities. Partnerships within Living Labs are diverse, and comprehensive data collection enables researchers to identify various patterns and insights from experiments conducted in real-world settings.

According to the European Network of Living Labs, Living Labs are user-centred collaborative spaces that function as open innovation ecosystems within real-life environments. They utilise iterative feedback processes throughout the lifecycle of an innovation to create sustainable impact. Living Labs serve as intermediaries or orchestrators that connect firms with external sources of knowledge. They facilitate the direct

participation of users in the innovation process, thereby enhancing the relevance and usability of innovations. In addition to fostering innovation, Living Labs provide various forms of joint value to stakeholders involved, including companies, research centres, government agencies, and others. These collaborations contribute to the development of innovative solutions that address real-world challenges and opportunities.

In the context of Living Labs, while online platforms can serve as intermediaries, open innovation workshops typically adhere to a top-down approach. These workshops prioritise the development of tangible and commercially exploitable outcomes. Users participating in Living Labs are often motivated by opportunities to enhance their skills, expand their professional networks, and achieve rewards or formal recognition for their contributions (Capdevila 2018).

Hackerspaces

The term "hackers" has evolved significantly from its original meaning to its present-day connotation. Originally, "hack" referred to the act of exploring and understanding the components of a system by opening it up. This exploration was often driven by curiosity and a desire to learn. However, over time, the term "hacker" became associated with individuals who engage in unauthorised access to computer systems with the intent to steal information or disrupt operations. Despite this negative association, the concept of hackers also encompasses a positive aspect. Hackers are often skilled individuals who use their expertise to innovate and improve technology. They contribute to digital communities by sharing knowledge, collaborating on projects, and pushing the boundaries of technological capabilities. (van Holm 2015)

According to Capdevila, hackerspaces are community workspaces guided by the principles of the hacker ethic. These spaces foster an open

culture, encourage a sharing attitude, and promote a peer-to-peer approach. The primary aim is to cultivate distributed networks and social ties among participants. Hackerspaces are inhabited by individuals who embody the hacker ethos—committed, motivated individuals who contribute to self-organised environments. These spaces emphasise experimentation, exploration, and the free exchange of knowledge. Their activities are geared towards community development and the advancement of society, particularly within the digital domain of computers and technology (Capdevila 2018).

Makerspaces

The term "makerspace" first emerged in 2005 in MAKE Magazine, introduced by Dale Dougherty. It refers to community workshops where members share tools and collaborate on various projects, ranging from everyday activities to more specialised productions. The increasing availability of information via the internet has democratised access to high-quality tools, enabling individuals to engage in tangible production activities that were previously limited to industrial settings (van Holm 2015). Makerspaces serve as gathering points for individuals who identify as makers—enthusiasts eager to share the costs of industrial tools and collaborate with others.

According to van Holm, the maker movement represents a significant shift from a modest hobby to a meaningful lifestyle characterised by the democratisation of access to tools. Historically, tools were predominantly accessible to those working within established firms and industries. However, with the rise of makerspaces and the maker movement, individuals outside traditional industrial settings now have access to high-quality tools and equipment. This democratisation process has broader implications, particularly in the realm of entrepreneurship. Van Holm suggests that the maker movement may attract "accidental

entrepreneurs" into product design and innovation. (van Holm 2015) These individuals, motivated by their involvement in makerspaces and access to prototyping tools, find themselves engaged in entrepreneurial activities that they may not have previously considered. Moreover, the accessibility to tools reduces the barriers to entry for prototyping, acquiring external funding, and fostering networks of collaboration and innovation. As a result, the maker movement not only facilitates individual creativity and innovation but also contributes to the broader entrepreneurial ecosystem by nurturing a new wave of entrepreneurial endeavours driven by hands-on experimentation and community support.

Coworking spaces

Generally, scholars attribute the inception of modern coworking spaces to Brad Neuberg, who established the first such space in San Francisco in 2005. Neuberg is credited as the pioneer who associated the term "coworking" with flexible working spaces designed for collaborative use (Spinuzzi 2012, Capdevila 2015, Rus et al. 2015, Garrett et al. 2017). However, the first known use of the term "coworking" dates back to 1999, when Bernie De Koven described it as "the method of participation by individuals who interact with one another without strictly defined or hierarchically arranged relationships and on the principles of collaboration." This early conceptualization laid the groundwork for what would later evolve into the modern coworking movement, emphasising community, collaboration, and non-hierarchical relationships among individuals sharing a workspace.

Commonly, coworking spaces are perceived as hybridised workspaces (Marchegiani et al. 2018), serving as a crucial source of social support for independent professionals (Gerdenitsch et al. 2016). They are physical entities that foster the creation of collaborative communities (Rus et al. 2015). These spaces facilitate interactional effects through mediation

mechanisms (Brown 2017) and encourage serendipitous encounters with individuals from outside one's own organisation and social circle (Spreitzer et al. 2015). This environment promotes networking opportunities and spontaneous collaborations, enhancing creativity and innovation among coworkers.

Moreover, coworking spaces promote community processes through predominantly informal interactions (Leclercq-Vandelannoitte et al. 2016), while co-constructing a sense of community at work (Garrett et al. 2017). The first wave of coworking spaces offered shared workspaces where professionals could enjoy a sense of community, collaboration, and social interaction that they might not experience in a traditional corporate office. The concept of community was central, emphasising the role of shared spaces in fostering social connections among its users (Micek et al. 2024). Coworking spaces in the second wave were owned by large real estate development companies like Regus, WeWork, and the Office Group. Freelancers, self-employed individuals, and even major corporations have become users of coworking spaces. The primary needs of users in coworking spaces are workspace and collaboration (Orel 2017).

Creative Hubs

Creative hubs serve as convenors, providing essential space and support for networking, business development, and community engagement (Matheson and Easson 2015). These environments are designed to bring together creative and innovative individuals, particularly social and creative entrepreneurs, fostering connections and mutual support while nurturing their ventures. One defining characteristic of creative hubs is their ability to tailor environments that cater to small and micro businesses at various stages of development. They cultivate workspaces built upon shared values such as community, collaboration, openness, diversity, and sustainability (Micek et al. 2024). These hubs attract

diverse economic activities, including cultural, creative, and high-tech industries, contributing to vibrant and dynamic local ecosystems.

3. COLLABORATIVE SPACES, MINORITIES AND MIGRATION

3.1. The background

Data regarding CWCS and inclusivity is limited. While research on the inclusion of women exists in these spaces, the same is not true for other types of minorities. The question of incorporating migrants into these spaces is also an unexplored topic, however, the experiences of these groups have been examined in a broader sense—in the form of skill-gaining or start-up entrepreneurships. Such studies are extremely important as an analogy to collaborative spaces. (Spreitzer, Bacevice and Garrett 2015) Granted, it's worth noting that CWCS are inherently migrant-oriented, especially with the rise of digital nomads, a term used to describe those who have chosen to continuously travel and work.

This chapter will focus on the question of minorities and CWCS. It's worth mentioning that the term "minority" will attempt to include non-gender-related minorities, as those will already be discussed in *Chapter 5*. The term minority therefore will only refer to racial and ethnic minorities in this chapter. A special part in this chapter will be dedicated for Ukrainian temporary and permanent protection holders, for whom certain countries have created systems to help boost their businesses in the ongoing fallout of the war.

3.2. The social theory of collaborative spaces and minorities

Social spaces i.e spaces where joint activities are organised within a certain metric are important for fostering social interactions, which can often bring together people who are not normally connected. CWCS as explained above are one such form, which bring together groups of people

with different backgrounds under one roof. Research shows that individuals who are located closer to each other are able to form better bonds and share information. This is not only tied to regions, but also buildings and rooms. (Boudreau et al. 2017) These bonds are what help minorities in sharing CWCS, as they are designed with neutrality in mind. The spaces themselves differ, however the underlying concept of a tight-knit community is what is important for a thriving start-up or exchange of ideas. During Covid-19, this was especially noticeable. In Italy for example, coworking spaces made efforts to maintain community engagement during lockdown. This was done through various channels of resourcing and organising events so that socio-cultural hybrid spaces would keep the communities tight knit. In Milan, this contributed even to helping the economy of the city. (Akhavan and Mariotti 2022)

Nonetheless, this organising can be challenging. The majority of CWCS are so-called "hot desk" areas, which means they function under a "first come—first serve" principle.[7] In that, it's important to note that minority entrepreneurs possess fewer average resources relative to non-minorities. Since it's more difficult for minority founders or businesses to obtain any resources in the first place due to explicit bias or racism, it's then important to take note that these spaces can often be a problem for those wishing to engage due to lack of resources. This can also make things difficult for the cohesion of social spaces, especially given the fact that racial discrimination is exemplified in the workforce—from direct cases of documented discrimination to more covert or everyday racism in others. (Younkin and Kuppuswamy 2018)

This makes the problem twofold: one, there is a general lack of minorities engaging with CWCS due to lack of opportunities to obtain a place within these hubs. Secondly, the discriminatory practices that exist

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[7] 92% of spaces on Coworker.com show this statistic (Howell 2022).

within regular working environments are not excluded from CWCS. Minority founders however, do experience different community relations than non-minority founders. This is due to a more collectivist nature, where a lot of emphasis is based on belonging to the community or wanting to engage with said community. One study found that this is due to a lack of connections within other informal and formal networks, which means there's a chance for bigger benefits, or equally as likely, drawbacks, should the space be not as inclusive. (Howell 2022).

Several studies, primarily arising from the business and entrepreneurship sector, have dealt with the question of social identities and intersectionality as it pertains to minority communities. As such, a parallel can be drawn to CWCS. It's important to note that the majority of coworking spaces that have been statistically surveyed are majority "white or Caucasian", at least in the United States. This amounts to over 90% in data. (Global Coworking Survey 2019) There is a heavy underrepresentation of minorities in these spaces. Experiences of "othering" can often be a financial pitfall and deal extra costs upon minority entrepreneurs. This is especially important since a great number of entrepreneurs do not wish to be homogeneous in their work. Entrepreneurial identity has shown to be an important part for minority entrepreneurs, especially when it comes to receiving funding and resources that help in increasing their legitimacy on the market for a business or start-up. And while CWCS may function differently in that regard, there is still the question of proximity within these spaces. In the technology sector in the UK for example, it is not uncommon for migrant minority women to adopt strategies to mitigate barriers while engaging in entrepreneurship. These include adopting masculine traits and emphasising expertise in the field. (Pugalia and Cetindamar 2021)

It's worth noting that members of CWCS often do not see any issues with integration or diversity within their communities. A study that aimed

to seek issues within coworking spaces as a space for reproducing inequalities in the Netherlands found that the members did not ultimately understand or wish to discuss the notion of inequality. Instead, the topic of conversation was mostly aimed towards professional diversity, while the topic of challenging inequalities was seen as not relevant for those who hosted the space. (Knappert, Cnossen and Ortileb 2024) The study found that these coworking spaces were just a side effect of the commercialisation of workplaces, where they play a key role in establishing and maintaining inequality regimes.

3.3. Digital nomads vs. remote migrant workers

CWCS often include digital nomads and remote migrant workers within their hubs, and they have become increasingly more popular as a choice for people wishing to work remotely. It is, however, important to distinguish between the two. Digital nomads, a term which has been popularised in the last decade, is used to describe those who are looking for flexible working arrangements. These are people who tend to travel frequently and find places where they are able to work. By that notion, it also means that it's not required for them to work in CWCS, however data shows that they do frequent them. According to Flatio, a platform that deals directly with rentals for digital nomads, around 26.5 million digital nomads use coworking spaces. (Flatio 2023)

While this number may be relative to mostly European destinations, it is important to note that these spaces are not as popular as those who are residing in a country for a longer period or permanently. In research done about coworking spaces and digital nomads, it was noted that a nomadic lifestyle is closely tied to the freedom of movement that allows individuals to take up creative and business endeavours no matter the

location. Something to note however, is that digital nomads, similarly to those who simply choose to work in CWCS, emphasise the importance of community-based places and socialisation. In fact, there exists a lot of overlap between effectiveness and network extending, as well as new opportunities as the main reasons why digital nomads decide to work in CWCS, similar to those who reside in the same locations. (Orel 2019a) Remote migrant workers on the other hand, are workers who have chosen a country to work and reside in permanently.

Similarly to any other form of migration, the patterns are based on individual and collective decisions which ultimately mean that these are immigrants who are adapting to new culture and languages within new cities. Because of this, the community-based aspect of collaborative spaces is extremely important. Remote working itself has made this a bigger possibility, with workers being able to work in numerous locations rather than traditional offices. This has made moving abroad easier, since most entrepreneurs, freelancers and independent contractors are most likely to emigrate to other locations, generating opportunities for networking, socialisation, peer-support and mentoring. (Brown 2017)

Immigration brings with it a lot of diversity. However, remote migrant workers have common attributes, and when it comes to qualified immigrants, the common denominator is the intent to enhance their career. There are whoever, some who have no choice but to move on account of external factors, and are qualified as refugees, asylum seekers or temporary protection status holders. These are all complex topics that are intertwined with the legal systems of each country where these individuals are (not) allowed to participate in the workforce, however it is important to note that temporary protection holders and refugees have the right to workCollaborative spaces are some of the few hubs where local community support may bring meaningful employment of skill sharing. For example,

Breaking Barriers is an UK-based organisation that helps refugees navigate the British social and employment system, by offering them various spaces to work and build skills for any future prospects.[8] While not a collaborative space in the definitional sense, it is important to note that such initiatives exist. One of the biggest coworking spaces in the world, WeWork, has created an initiative by the name of the WeWork Refugee Initiative, which began as a way to hire and include displaced refugees for a temporary time. Since then, it has grown and expanded into a partnership with the UNHCR to help refugee artisans access the global market through their craft.[9]

The topic of migrant inclusivity brings with it many similarities on social inclusion as with minority founders or professionals. Migrants often mimic professional work in the country they move to as a way to closely resemble native professionals. There's an overlap between ethnic minority groups and immigrants as well, which is why for example immigrants who closely resemble the nationals of the country they immigrate to are likely to be included in the community. In addition, there's an in-group/out-group dynamic that exists in most workplaces, which leads to direct and indirect discrimination on multiple fronts. (Almeida et al. 2015) Nonetheless, these interactions can mirror those in collaborative spaces, as they are also spaces in which there's majority residents working alongside immigrants or digital nomads for a certain period of time. Social events which are often deemed necessary for the functioning of these places can be a problem for members who may not fit in, are reserved or have limited social and language skills depending on culture or country of origin. (Grazian 2020)

Something to consider is the "community of work" aspect that is pivotal in including migrants within local communities. Coworking as a

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[8] For more information, visit: https://breaking-barriers.co.uk
[9] The refugee initiative remains an effort from WeWork and the UNHCR as a way to grant opportunities to displaced individuals who are unable to find work. For more information, visit: https://www.unrefugees.org.uk/take-action/become-a-partner/wework/

concept aims to put together diverse professionals in work environments aimed to share, mentor, educate and community build. This means that an environment can be created where there's a flourishing of both individual wellbeing and local development, which can work to promote inclusive and collaborative organisational culture aspects and even serve as a way to contribute to neighbourhood revitalisation, especially in rural communities. The whole notion of these strong-willed, work-based communities however can lead to emphasising the commercialisation of collaborative spaces as individual-led and focused areas, which can lead to conflicting outcomes if not organised properly. (Bouncken, Kraus and Martinez-Prezez 2020) For countries who have immigrants of similar cultures however, this type of space can foster an informal cooperative institutional framework that may help in inclusion while safeguarding a cultural identity.

3.4. Ukrainians and collaborative spaces

Community-driven models of work are one of the first areas of collapse during a conflict. The recent Russian-Ukrainian conflict has created numerous challenges for Ukrainians who have been living and working in Ukraine, which has caused a massive refugee wave that has paved across Europe. Naturally, there is not a lot of research done on collaborative spaces and Ukraine and how the war has affected them, considering the fact that businesses overall have been greatly impacted by the war.

However, one positive aspect about the situation have been the local communities within various European countries that have strived towards inclusion of Ukrainians within their workforce. Ukraine's coworking space development is relatively recent, with the first coworking space opening in 2012 by the name of Chasopys, in Kyiv. This figure rose to about 100 coworking spaces in Ukraine, the majority of which have been

concentrated within the capital. Something to note however, is that most of these spaces were open and made available for mostly IT professionals and were individual based, meaning they were spaces where individuals could go to for work instead of creating an open environment for inclusion and collaboration. (Mariotti and Monni 2023) This was especially important during the Covid-19 pandemic, which has also transformed the coworking space by adding an additional element of community—a hybrid strategy for in-person and online meetings, which both helps in sustainability and resilience for those participating.

Since the start of the war however, there have been millions of displaced people who have not been able to continue work. This has left a lot of the collaborative spaces within Ukraine vulnerable and unable to function, however there have been some efforts into bringing a sense of community in the safer cities by continuing the work. Still, the coworking community has made great efforts in supporting refugees from the war in various ways. The One Coworking network has launched the "Coworking for Ukraine" initiative, which aims to give Ukrainians free access to collaborative spaces where they are able to use the amenities and services free of charge. This partnership has made it possible for multiple hubs across Europe and the United States to offer these services. However, the community space in this regard flourishes, as some spaces also offer transportation information, guidance on using various housing platforms and suitable living spaces among other things.[10]

Known data from these services has provided for interesting statistics. Out of 94 collaborative spaces that have been affiliated with the network in various countries, a great deal of Ukrainians have been satisfied with the integration process into the countries through the network. (New

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[10] Coworking for Ukraine has been successfully organising these spaces for over two years now. For more information on the specifics, visit:
https://www.onecoworking.com/initiatives/coworking-for-ukraine

Working Spaces/COST ACTION CA18214 2023) This means that in the two-year period of its operation, there has been a great effort into facilitating communications and helping find assistance for Ukrainians. If anything, it has shown the positive impact that collaborative spaces can have in fostering connections between working individuals during a time of serious unrest and disruption of people's lives.

4. COWORKING IN RURAL AREAS

4.1. The background

'Rural' spaces are often defined in opposition to 'urban', characterised by lower population density, better evolved agricultural sector and limited infrastructure. For that reason, it is essential to consider the various terms used to describe CWCS that help develop the coworking community. Although inherently linked to 'rural' and 'rural areas,' this chapter examines these terms in connection to EU policies and European society. It's for that reason that this section focuses strongly on defining and understanding the term—as well as why these spaces are branching out of city areas.

The COVID-19 pandemic has been a catalyst for profound changes in the working environment, propelling a rapid transition to remote work and redefining traditional office environments. This chapter explores one significant aspect of this transformation: the rise of rural CWCS and their geographic distribution. With a focus on how the new working age has amplified the need for flexible, collaborative work environments beyond urban centres, this section explores the implications of including these spaces on both local and broader scales.

For that reason, this part of the report strongly focuses on showcasing examples where local policies aim to propel the collaborative community through funding and development. Additionally, the chapter will consider the post-pandemic landscape, where hybrid work models have increased the demand for CWCS, offering insights into how these spaces can contribute to regional growth, innovation, and social cohesion.

Since a great deal of this report is focused on migrant communities and integration, part of this report will focus on ongoing challenges when it comes to limited access to services, contribution from local actors and

remoteness and how that can affect everyone from digital nomads, temporary workers and long-term migrants within a rural community.

4.2 The beginnings of rural coworking

The expansion of high-speed internet and the progressive development of teleworking, even before Covid-19 pandemic, have induced many knowledge professionals (Gandini 2015), such as digital workers and creative freelancers, to locate outside the core areas, in a sense contributing to the dissemination of CWCS in appealing rural and peripheral areas (Capdevila 2021; Akhavan et al. 2021). Although innovation and creativity processes, such as the development of CWCS, have predominantly connoted urban phenomena (Gandini 2015; Capdevila 2021; Akhavan et al. 2021) and often in larger cities, in the last ten years they met a development also in the countryside potentially helping the areas that suffer from demographic and economic decline. The need for flexible arrangements and newer sources of collaboration have led to broaden perspectives and take into consideration different locations able to facilitate inspiration and socialisation, particularly within intensive knowledge-based sectors and creative environments.

The case of COWOCAT[11] project in Spain, a network of non-profit coworking spaces in rural areas, represents a pertinent and pioneering example of translation process of coworking practices (Capdevila 2021) from an urban advanced setting, like Barcelona's metropolitan area, into rural and peripheral areas of Catalonia through progressive adoption and

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[11] COWOCAT (COWOrking CATaluña) project was launched in 2014 with the financial contribution of the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development and brought village coworking spaces in some LEADER areas together to help stem the brain drain from rural areas by establishing a network to attract professionals and improve the digital skills of local entrepreneurs. Catalan government also supported the project with public funds. https://cowocat.cat

adaptation stages. Accordingly, the different aspects of coworking in terms of materiality[12] (sharing physical space and working tools), practices (working practice based on innovation through collaboration), and values (principles linked to the sharing economy, for instance) were able to be dis-embedded from the original urban context to be re-embedded in different rural environments (Capdevila 2021) through a process of reinterpretation[13]. In this sense, COWOCAT represents a case of diffusion of coworking in the rural areas on the basis of progressive understanding of the coworking concept through a collective process of translation requiring not only a geographical proximity, but also an openness to external knowledge and actors together with adaptation's abilities. In fact, some young rural entrepreneurs and freelancers were first invited to visit coworking spaces downtown and then decided to adopt and spread the coworking ideas in the villages since professional communities were already existing or at least developing.

Indeed, for COWOCAT, the stages for the successful diffusion of coworking from urban to rural areas took no less than three years during which the translation process, from a socio-spatial perspective (Capdevila 2021), passed-through not only the material creation of coworking spaces driven by stable community managers, but most importantly the engagement of people integrating values of innovative collaboration. Therefore, the comparison between urban and rural coworking highlights the importance of the existence of a community (Sánchez-Vergara et al. 2023), rather than the access to a physical workspace, in a sense retaining indigenous talents and representing an attractive alternative to external talents and digital nomads coming from other areas. Nevertheless, public administrations increasingly promote the location of CWCS in peripheral

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[12] The concept of so-called 'third place' between home and workplace (Oldenburg, 1989).

[13] Researchers in the tradition of Scandinavian institutionalism have referred to translation as a process of dis-embedding and re-embedding of an idea in a different time and space.

areas by hosting them in public premises, for instance in public libraries (Capdevila 2021; Akhavan et al. 2021), in a sense enhancing bottom-up initiatives and sustaining a coworking dissemination from a managerial point of view.

Likewise, other scholars (Gato et al. 2024) consider that CWCS in non-core areas require a consistent approach to a set of preconditions such as appropriate and affordable common workspace around which communities actively participate in decision-making with the support of funding opportunities by municipalities. Growing interest on rural coworking finds room in recent scientific literature (Sánchez-Vergara et al. 2023, Mariotti et al. 2023, Vogl et al. 2024), as well as in the current European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD), as it looks like a promising opportunity to create compelling new business strategies through space regeneration and revitalisation (Sánchez-Vergara et al. 2023). However, the wide range of expressions used in this research field (rural, inland, peripheral and shrinking, marginalised, remote, non-core, non-urban areas, etc.) deserves a supplementary consideration on the matter of terminology, as rural areas are certainly combined with the agricultural sector within EU policies and institutions, but peripheral non-urban areas possibly portray the socio-spatial environment in which new spaces of coworking launch their headquarters.

4.2.1 The meaning of 'rural' in rural coworking

Before diving deeper into coworking in rural areas, it is helpful to briefly consider the various denominators used with these types of coworking spaces. Still, they are inherently linked to the words 'rural' and 'rural areas'. The paragraph above mentions various terms used within the research of rural coworking research (peripheral, non-core and non-urban

come to mind), yet rather than describing such terms concerning coworking, the focus will be on individual terms, especially in connection to European society and EU policies. This subchapter will look into the descriptive meanings of the rural to explore the possible reasons why coworking spaces are rapidly branching out of the urban areas.

The definition of rural is namely used in opposition to urban. The first describes areas of low population density, highly evolved agricultural sector, and lack of extensive infrastructure. Contrastingly, the latter describes areas of high population and infrastructural (built-up) density. In essence, of the country and the city. However, the term rural remains vague and ambiguous. Various academic disciplines have sought to conceptualise such spaces better, giving rise to new sub-disciplines such as rural studies, rural geography and rural sociology. Understanding the existence of rural spaces has been further shaped by notions of demographic and agricultural policies. (Woods 2004) In 1973, Raymond Williams described associations with the word rural: peace, innocence, simple virtue, backwardness, ignorance and limitation. (Williams 1973) These associations give a powerfully positive and hostile understanding of most areas humans dominate and manage. The features of rural areas and spaces further developed in the 1920s and 1930s, when the countryside underwent significant societal and economic transformation, primarily due to rapid urbanisation and industrialisation. This also meant that rural society had to adopt new morals and values. (Mormont, 1990)

Rural areas also described as the outside, peripheral, non-urban, sub-centre, non-core areas, or even in-between zones, have often been economically and socially marginalised, giving rise to the judgmental perceptions of rural versus urban. Even in research, when it comes to analysing regional development, especially in Europe, far more attention was paid to the core, e.g. cities, city-regions, industrial areas, and border

regions. More so, the original dichotomy between the urban and the rural has shifted toward comparing the centre-periphery discourse, and various development and opportunity questions that arise with it. (De Souza 2018) Periphery, in particular, is often described as a primary handicap, an area with poor local accessibility and sparse population. (Gløersen, Dubois, Copus and Schürmann in De Souza 2018)

Even though the rural-urban dichotomy is rapidly vanishing in academia, many governmental policies around the globe keep distinguishing between the territories, publishing separate policies and keeping separate administrative and sectoral agencies for each of the spaces. On the other hand, people living in such areas also adopted an identity of rural people, which sparked many lifestyle and economic issues, such as unemployment, a decline of staple industry (agriculture), loss of local services and a generational gap. Understanding the concept of rural means understanding particular descriptive definitions, socio-cultural characterisations, the particulars of rural as a locality, and social representations of the rural space. (Woods 2004; Halfacree, 1993) Such concepts are indeed also found when describing rural coworking spaces. As De Souza (2018) points out, the conception of rural is integrated into the general societal change of globalisation and other ideological, political and similar features, representing a mixture of characteristics, not different from the urban in its elements, but differently categorised in its mixtures.

Much debate has focused on rural areas' growth or development in the past decade. In the European Union, specific policies and strategic guidelines, such as the European Network for Rural Development (ENRD) and The European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD), opened up funding to reinvigorate and revitalise the European rural territories by mainly promoting opportunities for local economic development in rural areas. (Sánchez-Vergara et al. 2023) Moreover, in 2021,

the European Union launched an EU Rural Pact Community Platform, a framework designed to improve the infrastructure and development opportunities of the EU rural territory. The Platform's goals envision CWCS in rural areas as an inclusion tool and promote migrant-oriented projects, such as "Welcoming spaces" (see more in subchapter 4.6, "Integration and inclusion of migrants in rural areas at the EU level").

However, Franziska Görmar (2021) argues that any questions of regional (e.g. rural) development "should be complemented by questions of sustainability as well as democracy, social justice and inequalities" (Görmar 2021, 9), meaning that there might exist a lack of understanding of the area that is intended for development. Pike et al. (2017) also stress that rather than understanding the rural, the focus in the past years shifted toward the development of the rural and that it is vital to understand what "kind of local and regional development is considered desirable, feasible or possible by actors in particular localities or regions." (Pike et al. 2017, 40) Coworking in rural areas is a new design and is strongly made up of new residents who recently arrived from larger urban areas. Although these newcomers are sometimes motivated to return to the regions where they initially grew up, the general desire to move into non-urban areas stems from lifestyle choices to achieve at least one of Williams' (1973) positive associations or to fulfil a "multidimensional life project" that encompasses professional, residential and educational strategies. (Flipo et al. 2022)

The promotion of outmigration from urban to rural and creative types of professionalism that rise from such mobilities might contribute to "multiple dimensions" of rural development, greater economic diversity, a vibrant job market, innovation, community building and social cohesion, societal cohesion, as well as ecological burdens. As a new phenomenon, coworking in rural areas breaches the understanding of the rural identity, which opens up questions about the sustainability of new business models,

interrelations between the newcomers and the locals, and the firmness of networks between the coworking initiatives, already established businesses and the local governments. (Görmar 2021)

4.3 Rural coworking and the post-COVID-19 situation

The COVID-19 pandemic has affected working typologies, office premises, and the geography of work (Akhavan et al. 2021), inducing a relevant global shift towards remote working and emphasising the multifaceted advantages of new and flexible working spaces for a wide range of teleworkers and commuters. Then, the rise of remote working has offered, on one side, an alternative potentially able to mitigate gentrification phenomena, traffic congestion and air pollution by reducing the demand for urban living, and on the other side, more attractive opportunities for location-independent work of freelancers and digital nomads benefiting the coworking space model (Orel et al. 2024) in peripheral areas. The concept of 'south working'[14] (Akhavan et al. 2021), especially pertinent and evocative in southern Italy, has precisely interpreted the working remotely revolution to improve the work-life balance within community hubs located in marginal areas on the morrow of the COVID-19 crisis.

CWCS have played a renewed role in peripheral and rural areas (Mariotti et al. 2022) for individuals, communities and broader urban-rural dynamics even as multifunctional and hybrid spaces, contributing to the revitalization and sustainability of the local landscape, as well as workers wellbeing. Therefore, CWCS became 'contagious' when flows of high-skilled professionals, remote workers and freelancers affected the local demand

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[14] Community hubs as coworking spaces, impact and rural hubs mainly located in the south of Italy and related marginal areas, in some case united by the condition of expat. https://www.southworking.org

for flexible working spaces in non-urban areas, in a sense generating possible environmental, social, and economic impacts. According to the literature review of location factors of coworking spaces in non-urban area (Vogl et al. 2024), COVID-19 crisis boosted the digitalization of work and technological development of rural areas, while technological advancements removed the necessity to commute to urban areas (Akhavan et al. 2021), particularly during the first waves of the pandemic. However, in a more extended period, hybrid mode of work combining remote, home, and office working arrangements created further opportunities for establishing coworking spaces in remote areas (Vogl et al. 2024), favouring suburban areas and increasing demand for new working spaces to promote 'near working' (Mariotti et al. 2022).

At a regional level, a growing role of public policies fostered entrepreneurship in support of the launch of CWCS (Akhavan et al. 2021), while tourism-related policies and programmes for regional rural regeneration enabled the emergence of new working spaces in marginalised regions. Meanwhile, at the municipal level, relevant location factors revealed the necessity of local communities, pre-existing practices together with the willingness to utilise a new model of CWCS in rural areas even as potential centres of training, knowledge exchange, real estate market, and not least the support of public institutions (Vogl et al. 2024) and local stakeholders. The latter factors found evidence also in the systematic literature review examined by Sánchez-Vergara et al. (2023) according to whom management perspectives generally prevail in the research field of rural coworking, in a sense "highlighting the role of public administrations, entrepreneurs and policymakers, and their capacities to build a business environment to enhance coworking activity".

A more recent narrative literature review on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic in CWCS (Orel et al. 2024) offered further insights into

the evolving coworking model due to the re-evaluation of collaborative work environments. As social distancing mandates isolated knowledge workers from peers, coworking spaces attempted to rearrange their business models with digital and organisational revamps introducing innovative services (e.g., extended hours, relaxed cancellation periods, webinars) in favour of newly established class of remote workers (Orel et al. 2024), as such creating new opportunities for more resilient rural coworking spaces (Tomaz et al. 2022) within a work-from-anywhere model (Mariotti et al. 2022). *De facto*, as urban areas took advantage of the pre-COVID-19 coworking model, in the post-pandemic era the integration of physical and digital capabilities together with working flexibilities and hybrid remote work practices boosted coworking expansion to peripheral and rural domains (Orel et al. 2024), generating a positive influence of knowledge workers on regional growth (Mariotti et al. 2022). A comparative study among France, Portugal and Belgium has shown (Tomaz et al. 2022), coworking spaces in certain rural areas[15] seized the opportunities from the specific conditions created by the pandemic, for instance, welcoming the wave of Parisians at the beginning of the crisis, but also diversified the spectrum of facilities for a variety of workers meeting the expectations of local authorities.

Given the low density of knowledge professionals (Gandini 2015) and digital firms in rural areas, the diversification and hybridisation of the coworking model (Orel et al. 2024) more suitably complied with the need for local economic and social development, in a sense explaining the recurrent involvement of local municipalities. Although the resilience of rural coworking spaces cannot be solely attributed to the umbrella of local support and public subsidies, either direct or indirect (Tomaz et al. 2022),

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[15] The choice of France (Nouvelle Aquitaine, Occitanie, Ardèche), Belgium (Wallonie) and Portugal results from the growing interest among scholars, policymakers, and stakeholders in understanding new labour trends in the multifaceted reality of rural territories within the EU.

low operating costs, hybrid character, natural and cultural heritage, and renewed attractiveness in terms of quality of life, have largely endorsed the growth of hubs of economic and social innovation. The 'home-working fatigue' and accessible distance from larger cities often appeared to be favourable factors for the development of rural coworking model, particularly in France (Tomaz et al. 2022), nevertheless innovative spaces even in spectacular mountain villages have found wide echo in the post-Covid19 (e.g., hybrid hub and coworking space in Ostana, Piedmont, Italy at 1.250 metres above sea level).

4.4 Rural Digital Nomadism

The term 'digital nomad' was introduced by Makimoto and Manners in 1997 to describe an outcome of mobile and portable technological advancement on people's lifestyle in which 'people are freed from constraints of time and location'. Digital nomadism can thus be defined as 'a novel mobility type that is a result of the incorporation of mobile technologies in everyday life and different types of work settings', in a sense describing professionals who perform their work remotely and independently by using digital technologies (Hannonen 2020).

This kind of mobility affects many aspects of the growing phenomenon such as travel destinations, capitals, information, knowledge and cultural practices (Hannonen 2020), although the physical environment of the digital nomad's habitat significantly concerns also people interactions and collaborative infrastructures as coworking spaces (Capdevila 2015) or co-living spaces. These spaces seem more suitable than others to create work communities where digital nomads can exchange knowledge and experience in line with considerable productivity and creativity without renouncing downshifting. It is in such context that

several countries establish even attractive taxation and visa-free stays (Hannonen 2020) to welcome temporary residents in spaces conceived and designed for digital nomadism where the narrative of a creative life, professional synergies, and new ties with peers are reinforced during their 'workation' (Sánchez-Vergara et al. 2023). CWCS, such as workation, coworking, and coliving spaces, may represent social environments able to facilitate networking and the exchange of knowledge through face-to-face interactions in rural areas. 'Workation' in particular indicates a working vacation conceived and practised by web entrepreneurs, creatives, freelancers, and anyone else mainly dealing with a reliable Wi-Fi connection and a laptop to work as digital nomad without giving up travelling and exploring different places. The added value of a workation is to carry out professional activities in a shared working environment which is also equipped for coworking and networking in a pleasant and relaxing place that only a vacation and friendly gatherings can offer.

In May 2017, the first Italian workation experience took place in Sicily for implementing the communication campaign of an INTERREG Med project[16] aimed at reducing the consumption of water, energy and the production of waste in tourist areas of the Mediterranean while raising awareness of tourists, local stakeholders and tourism service providers to more sustainable management. Among filmmakers, copywriters, storytellers, web designers and social media managers, a short list of digital nomads provided input for creating a professional communication social media campaign during sessions of coworking alternated to more typical holiday moments in a stunning and stimulating rural destination. At the same time, in May 2017, after two successful test runs, the Coconat[17]

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[16] Consume-Less Med (Consume Less Mediterranean Touristic Communities) is an INTERREG Med project and a tourism model co-financed by the European Regional Development Fund. https://www.consumelessmed.org

[17] The Coconat project, as 'Community and Concentrated work in nature', has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme, an

workation retreat opened permanently in the countryside of Berlin as an innovative model of tourism combining workation, coworking, coliving, and special projects focusing on rural development. Since its beginning, the Coconat project has strived to offer digital workers a better work-life balance, providing a wide variety of spaces to work as well as various outdoor activities in nature to spark creativity and productivity as rural coworking space. Over the time, this project has had a significant social impact, contributing to the local economic development in collaboration with public authorities, and creating an initiative that can be successfully replicated in other rural areas.

In Bulgaria, the small town of Bansko has been transformed from an Alpine ski resort to European hub of digital nomads, first opening a local coworking space[18] in 2016, then generating the Bansko Nomad Fest in 2020[19], and lastly transforming a huge old hotel from the 80s into a rural coliving[20] destination tailored for remote work in combination with mountain outdoor activities. Apart from natural landscapes and winter sports, Bansko offers fast Wi-Fi, affordable living costs and one of the lowest rates of taxation in Europe, in a sense featuring one of the 'most-consistently growing remote work hub' of the last years[21] with not less than nine coworking spaces in town.

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initial coaching session to develop the business plan as well as several grants and has even organized a public crowdfunding campaign. https://coconat-space.com

[18] Coworking Bansko was the first coworking space opened in town by the German entrepreneur Mattias Zeitler. https://www.coworkingbansko.com

[19] The week-long Bansko Nomad Fest brings together digital nomads, entrepreneurs and industry leaders to maximise connection, collaboration and interaction. https://www.banskonomadfest.com

[20] Coliving Semkovo is in progress project designed for digital nomads. https://colivingsemkovo.com

[21] Nomad list's reference. https://nomadlist.com

4.5 Integration and inclusion of migrants in rural areas at the EU level

The European Union's rural areas cover 83% of the EU territory, but only 30% of the EU population lives in those areas[22]. Migrants are more likely to live in cities rather than rural areas, although the shares can vary significantly among Member States. However, "Rural areas are the fabric of our society and the heartbeat of our economy. They are a core part of our identity and our economic potential. We will cherish and preserve our rural areas and invest in their future", according to the President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen. Therefore, in line with a Long-Term Vision for the EU's rural areas up to 2040, in 2021 the EU Commission launched a Rural Pact[23] as a framework for cooperation between national, regional and local governments, civil society organisations, businesses, academics and citizens to act towards some shared goals, as well as a Rural Action Plan to create new opportunities and attract innovative businesses. In March 2024, the European Commission adopted the first report on the implementation of its rural vision[24] providing a set of reflections on possible orientations for enhanced support action and financing for rural areas also in view of the preparation of the proposals for the post-2027 programming period.

Among the aspirations of rural neighbourhoods, multi-stakeholders and multilevel governance to achieve objectives of social innovation and

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[22] European Commission Atlas of Migration 2023.
https://knowledge4policy.ec.europa.eu/atlas-migration_en

[23] In 2021, the European Commission launched the Rural Pact, as part of its Long-Term Vision for EU's rural areas. The Rural Pact contributes to achieving the shared goals of the Long-Term Vision for Rural Areas by facilitating interaction on rural matters. It aims at fostering mutual inspiration between all levels of governance and mobilise public authorities and stakeholders to act on the needs and aspirations of rural residents. https://ruralpact.rural-vision.europa.eu/rural-pact_en

[24] The European Commission has adopted on 27 March 2024 its report on the Long-Term Vision for EU's rural areas. https://rural-vision.europa.eu/rural-vision/long-term-vision-eus-rural-areas-key-achievements-and-ways-forward_en

resilience, certainly there are the entrepreneurial inclusivity and openness regarding newcomers together with the digital enhancement included in the Rural Pact Community Platform[25]. As matter of the fact, the community group[26] chiefly focused on the migrants and refugees' inclusion in rural areas aims to place their specific needs, challenges, and opportunities on political agendas. The objective is to build on existing work and involve relevant actors, projects (e.g., Welcoming spaces) and networks, facilitating the exchange of experiences, actions, and joint planning.

Existing examples of 'Welcoming spaces'[27] are often citizen-based at local scale, although newer initiatives tend to introduce new types of government-citizen-migrant engagement, such as:

- Municipality of Camini (Calabria, Italy): a social cooperative, a migrant reception centre and numerous activities developed for the welfare of the whole community (handcraft workshops, renovation of old houses with local and recycled materials to host responsible tourists, etc.) highlight how in-migration (Moralli et al. 2023) can lead to local development and rural regeneration processes, not least shown through the reactivation of key public services such as the post office and school. The increase in population due to newcomers and Italian returnees also contributes to the economic and social reinforcement of the village,

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[25] The Rural Pact Community Platform is an online collaborative tool with information about the Rural Pact and rural revitalisation and interact. https://ruralpact.rural-vision.europa.eu/index_en

[26] The community group focuses on migrants and refugees who are increasingly conceiving European rural areas as places to develop temporarily or permanently their life projects. https://ruralpact.rural-vision.europa.eu/groups/migrants-and-refugees-integration-rural-areas_en

[27] 'Welcoming spaces' is a project funded by the Horizon 2020 which aims to search for new ways to merge two policy challenges: how to contribute to the revitalisation of shrinking areas in the EU while also offering a welcoming space for non-EU migrants to pursue their life projects. The project involves partners based in the Netherlands, Italy, Germany, Spain and Poland. https://www.welcomingspaces.eu

creating connections between different cultures and traditions that had almost disappeared (Lomonaco et al. 2023).

- Berkelland (The Netherlands) is a recently amalgamated municipality on the rural periphery in which the mayor - in collaboration with local educational institutions, NGOs, and housing corporation ProWonen - has set up several projects to stimulate the participation of assigned and recognised refugees and asylum seekers in the local environment aiming at long-term settlement through the formula 'education, employment or self-organisation'[28]. As such, the municipality invites citizens to become a maatje (a buddy) to help recognised refugees learn Dutch, understand administrative processes, etc. (Meijer et al. 2023).

As far as good practices are concerned, for example, Spain hosts an initiative for the socio-economic integration of migrants in Spanish rural areas with a project[29] that creates personalised itineraries on the basis of consultations with rural municipalities, migrants and families seeking fresh start in a rural environment. Such itineraries include on-the-ground support and continuous monitoring before and after relocation to rural municipalities as the initiative works to facilitate a smoother transition for participants by addressing the dual challenge of rural depopulation and migrants' social and employment struggles. As for previously mentioned examples, this project also actively engages with local authorities, communities and beneficiary families ensuring their participation and ownership under innovative formula of cooperation in rural areas.

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[28] In Berkelland, the focus on self-organisation and volunteering is explicitly related to the regional tradition of helping neighbours in times of need (*noaberschap*): active citizenship is framed as good *noaberschap*.

[29] Nuevos Senderos ('New Trails') is a Spanish project providing personalised itineraries for the socio-economic integration of migrants in rural areas and continuous on-the-ground support.
https://ruralpact.rural-vision.europa.eu/good-practice/socio-economic-integration-migrants-spanish-rural-areas_en#section--resources;tab_id=overview

Likewise, in Sweden, the Care OneGoal[30] project aims to promote the social and labour integration of migrant women in the province of Halland through an adaptation of the OneGoal[31] methodology and its dissemination in a way that further actors working for migrant integration and beneficiaries of different nationalities can benefit from it. The method consists of individualised coaching sessions as well as group dynamics to address social barriers, provide foreign women with networking opportunities, and give them the possibility to meet professionals within different sectors, in a sense mitigating the negative effects of long-term integration process. The added value of OneGoal methodology is to match all migrant women with native or well-established people in Sweden who in turn become their mentors and involve them in large and diverse networks of the local area.

In addition to 'Welcoming spaces' projects entitled to revitalise shrinking countryside areas by hosting non-EU migrants, other EU funded projects have recently addressed migration in rural areas in line with the implementation of the 'Action plan on integration and inclusion 2021-2027'[32]. For instance, 'Matilde'[33] project aimed to examine how

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[30] The 'Care OneGoal' project supports the integration of migrant women in Halland, Sweden. https://ruralpact.rural-vision.europa.eu/good-practice/care-onegoal-project-supports-integration-migrant-women-halland-sweden_en#section--resources;tab_id=overview

[31] The NGO Women on Wednesday (WOW) has implemented its OneGoal methodology mostly supporting migrant women in Sweden to gain employment.

[32] Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, 'Action plan on Integration and Inclusion 2021-2027'. The implementation of the Action Plan envisages synergies across different EU funding instruments such as the Asylum Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF), the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), and others. https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52020DC0758

[33] MATILDE was a 3-year project funded by EU Horizon 2020 facility, focusing on the impact of migration on the local development of rural and mountain regions. The project developed and tested a transdisciplinary conceptual and methodological framework for a multidimensional assessment of the economic and social impacts of Third Country Nationals. https://matilde-migration.eu

migration impacts on local development and territorial cohesion in European rural and mountain regions, to improve integration and local development in marginalised territories. Established in March 2012 by ICMC Europe[34], the 'Share' network offers training and capacity-building, as well as best practice exchange and research, to support regions, towns, smaller communities and rural territories interested in welcoming refugees and migrants, while providing evidence for integration at local level. Particularly, the Share project 'SIRA'[35] (2021-2023) used multi-stakeholder and participatory approaches together with piloted bottom-up actions in order to involve local communities and strengthen the social orientation and integration of migrants and refugees in some EU rural regions. As part of that project, some transnational visits on the field remarkably highlighted the nexus between migration and rural revitalisation, as well as the urban-rural synergies.

4.6 Challenges and opportunities

According to the 'Rural Coworking Guide' provided by a European cooperation project,[36] successful creation of rural coworking spaces entails several assessments before, during and after the foundation. First, once identified the real need to create a coworking space in a rural area offering

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[34] The International Catholic Migration Commission (ICMC) established in 2012 the Share network engaging with a variety of authorities, organisations and individuals working on or with interest in welcome and inclusion for migrants and refugees. https://www.share-network.eu

[35] The Share project 'SIRA' (Strengthening and Expanding Social Orientation & Integration for Newcomers in Rural Areas) was a two-year project co-funded by the European Union's Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF) and implemented in ten rural areas across France, Greece, Poland and Spain to facilitate regional multi-stakeholder cooperation platforms, pilot new approaches and exchange best practices on integration of migrants.

[36] CoLabora is a transnational LEADER cooperation project which released in 2021 the toolkit 'Rural Coworking Guide' providing tips for the successful creation of rural coworking spaces. https://ec.europa.eu/enrd/news-events/news/rural-coworking-guide-colabora_en.html

local resources and competitive prices, community builders are the main actors to flourish and sustain the plan identifying potential members and attracting people from other places who get interest in taking part in the project actively. In fact, generating a professional community of coworkers requires their effective participation and added value, networking abilities, aptitude for sharing common objectives and mutual benefits, as well as awareness raising among local/regional authorities and stakeholders to achieve the goals in practice. Second, suitable and appropriate type of coworking spaces have to fit with the rural area in question. In that sense, several options range from the standard concept, or coliving (housing either for rent or vacation), to the so called 'third place' (Oldenburg, 1989) or even pop-up coworking model. To sum up, major stages in the creation of coworking spaces in rural areas take into consideration:

- PESTEL analysis to assess external political, economic, socio-cultural, technological, environmental and legal factors (regional strategy, internet connection, etc.).

- Dialogue with stakeholders (institutions, associations, social enterprises, etc.).

- Identification and contact of coworking audiences.

- Building a coworking community (events, communication, etc.)

Nevertheless, many EU rural areas face structural challenges such as population ageing, depopulation, labour force shrinking, limited growth and connectivity. Particularly in these territories, the presence of migrants can present opportunities and contribute to reversing negative demographic trends, attract returnees (e.g., Municipality of Camini in the south of Italy), ensure the maintenance of service provision, contrast the lack of active labour force in specific sectors, foster local economic development and even create innovative bottom-up solutions.

On one hand, hosting rural communities are asked to welcome migrants and reinforce their capacity to respond to inflows, even if the speed of change in ethnic diversity may be particularly puzzling, on the other hand, third-country nationals located in rural areas may encounter difficulties because of remoteness, isolation, missing pre-existing networks, limited access to basic services (health, education, transport, etc.), and information availability. In this sense, the coordination of the migration multilevel governance among EU, national, regional, local public and private actors looks like crucial not only to integrate newcomers but also for the revitalisation of rural areas, for instance through the improvement of utilities.

According to a research report[37] comparing case studies in Belgium, Bulgaria, Germany, Italy and Sweden, some key findings of the migrants' integration in rural areas (Gauci 2020) highlight that:

- Migrants offer significant benefits to small towns by assisting in addressing depopulation and ensuring the viability of basic services.

- The short duration of stay by many migrants in small towns is a concern regarding their integration.

- Financial support for integration measures is often barely accessible in marginalised areas where ad hoc resources are missing, and reliance on volunteers negatively impacts the sustainability of activities.

- Common resources and services provision among local authorities and actors is an element of success in integration.

- Greater coordination is needed between different services at the municipal level as well as between different levels of government.

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[37] Gauci J.P. (2020), Integration of migrants in middle and small cities and in rural areas in Europe, European Committee of the Regions, Commission for Citizenship, Governance, Institutional and External Affairs.

Regarding sustainability, Gauci (2020) also underlines that funding is usually project-based, and there is no guarantee of further development after an initial period. The fact that many of the initiatives are undertaken at the local level means that they are indeed subject to the will of the people in power at that level (e.g., change of mayor).

5. COWORKING AND GENDER (IN)EQUALITY

5.1 The background

Gender (in)equality has been a topic of growing importance in the workplace. The typical constraints of traditional work relationships have been changing over the years, for both men and women. Women's right to work and their efforts to decrease gender inequality in working societies have been pivotal in other spaces, including CWCS. Krauss and Tremblay (2024) are of the opinion that the coworking model can provide a solution to women workers, mainly because they are largely still responsible for family tasks and planning. Moreover, CWCS could provide women with a possibility to design their own work as self-employed *teleworkers.*[38] (Mathieu and Tremblay 2022). This claim is supported by the research done in Quebec, that women are slightly more present in occupations (administrative, professional, managerial) that can be done outside of office. (Statistics Canada for 2021 in Krauss and Tremblay 2024).

Those who aim at achieving optimal work-life balance and, therefore, choose to work independently, usually tend to find themselves seeking "supportive environments" that can assist them in their intent. (Orel 2019b) The Eurofund report *Living and Working in Europe 2017* mentions that optimal work-life balance positively contributes to better quality of life and gender equality, meaning it has an implicit societal value. (Messenger et al. 2017) Coworking spaces, by their nature, have been regarded as community-oriented offices that promote values of flexibility, openness and

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[38] *Teleworker* is a term describing a person that works from home, while communicating with the office by phone, email or other internet services. In this sense it offers an alternative to traditional modes of work andwas enabled by the advancements in technological improvements and informational technology. (Baruch 2001) Davenport and Pearlson (1998) noted that teleworking grew due to the unconventional managerial approaches in 1990s, which shifted the perception of what and where is work: work is what you do, not a placewhere you go.

equality and represent a viable alternative to those individuals that seek to fulfil their social demands and work goals. (Orel 2019b) It is very telling that the first coworking space, The San Francisco Coworking Space, established by Brad Neuberg in 2005, was a pop-up situated in the feminist community centre *Spiral Muse*. (Neuberg n.d.; de Peuter, Cohen and Saraco 2017)

Later, it became a popular opinion that advances in digital entrepreneurship and coworking spaces hold much potential for female empowerment, even though Luo and Chan (2021) argue that it is not clear whether traditional work spaces and "socialised gender identity" actually pose threat to women empowerment, and whether work 'place' actually matters. Their study, based on the empirical research among female digital entrepreneurs in urban coworking spaces in China[39], shows that digital entrepreneurship remains a gendered field of work, due to under-representation of female leadership and continuing reproduction of feminine fields. Their research also shows that, despite the coworking ethos of openness, collaboration and community, businesses by female digital entrepreneurs don't have access to competitive working spaces, that their work is segregated and hampers knowledge spillover in CWCS, and finally that remaining gender differences in social interactions do not provide a sense of community for female entrepreneurs.

This chapter will focus on that topic: the CWCS ethos and the gender (in)equality issues such spaces face today. The chapter will specifically focus on female entrepreneurs and actual cases of the inclusion of the LGBTQ+ community in the CWCS. A part of this chapter will also be dedicated to migrant women and their strive for economic equality.

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[39] The research was conducted in the city of Shenzen, the third most populous city in China, with a population of 17.5 million people (as of 2020 census).

5.2 Gender representation and gender (in)equality in teleworking: Achieving the perfect work-life balance

The concept of a gender-equal workplace is one that practises an inclusive environment where professionals of all genders have equitable access to resources, facilities, and opportunities. Such settings prioritise equal representation and leadership roles for women and underrepresented genders. To foster a safe and inclusive atmosphere, these workplaces implement policies and practices to prevent harassment and discrimination while promoting respectful behaviour and inclusivity. Additionally, the concept of gender-equal workplaces also includes day-care options, breastfeeding accommodations, and gender-neutral restrooms to support optimal work-life balance for all members.

This however, is an ideal, or rather, a definition and movement brought upon by feminist entrepreneurs and advocates of gender-inclusivity who strive towards designing a safe and inclusive place of work. However, reality often diverges from this ideal. Significant issues in achieving gender equality stem from the limitations and challenges associated with work-life balance, particularly the reconciliation between employment and family responsibilities that parents face (Gambles, Lewis, and Rapoport 2006). Societal views of traditional gender roles and workplace constraints perpetuate a longstanding condition where women experience greater stress and conflict in managing work and family life. Consequently, women are more likely to scale back their working commitments and career aspirations to care for their families (Hays 1996; Shelton 1992; Hochschild 1997; Becker and Moen 1999). The concept of work-life balance is often perceived as gender-inclusive. However, Gambles et al. (2006) argue that it excludes paid work from people's everyday lives while undervaluing unpaid care work. The non-work aspect of the balance is commonly associated with family-related activities and obligations,

thereby overshadowing the individual. This perspective indicates a need for a more precise term, such as "work-family balance" (Smékalová et al. 2022). Additionally, the term "balance" implies that work and personal lives are mutually exclusive, a notion contradicted by most workers who maintain romantic or family ties. In reality, people's work and non-work engagements often intersect, extending the work environment into their private lives and vice versa (Moen and Sweet 2004).

Similar social justice movements have challenged traditional workplace gender roles, advocating for more equitable approaches to meeting the needs and desires of employees beyond the workplace, thus promoting greater effectiveness. However, societal assumptions regarding the roles of ideal mothers, parents, or carers have continued to hinder substantial equitable changes (Gambles et al. 2006). This issue is further highlighted in the 2021 EU Parliament report, 'The Impact of Teleworking and Digital Work on Workers and Society', which explicitly calls for fair and equitable strengthening of policy strategies concerning the societal implications of workplace practices, particularly in telework and ICT-based mobile work (TICTM). Among the recommendations, the report emphasises the creation of neighbourhood CWCS and (child)care services for home-based workers (Samek Lodovici et al. 2021).

Equitable, gender-neutral spaces are crucial for enhancing overall workflow within both traditional and non-traditional workspaces. A systematic literature review on gender equality and gender neutrality in the workspace by Migliore, Rossi-Lamastra, and Tagliaro (2022) explored the impact of workspace design and management on gender dynamics. Their research revealed that existing studies on this topic remain limited and fragmented. The findings indicated that workspaces influence men and women differently, underscoring the importance of space as a pivotal factor in promoting gender equality in the workplace (Migliore et al. 2022).

Similarly, in 2020, Sargent, Yavosky, and Sandoval conducted an extensive study involving more than 700 hours of observation across nine coworking spaces to better understand the organisational logistics that shape gender dynamics in these environments. Their research highlighted the lack of clarity on how gender and other social structures, such as race and class, influence the organisational logistics of coworking spaces (Sargent et al. 2020).

5.2.1 COVID-19 and the surge of female home-based workers

Among other aspects of life, the global COVID-19 pandemic greatly impacted how workspaces are viewed and utilised. Many female-dominated jobs in occupations such as accommodations and food services, hospitality, tourism, arts/entertainment, and retail were lost due to the need for social distancing (Carli 2020). Over two years of periodic lockdowns and restrictions, the pandemic created a significant shift towards working from home. This, coupled with school closures, placed a considerable burden on families. Although additional workload, such as housework, often fell on women during the pandemic, some research suggests that childcare activities remained or became relatively shared among parents (Akhavan, Fuzi and Calogero 2022).

In the post-pandemic era, the extensive use of various ICTs has led many companies and organisations to continue remote or teleworking, at least partially. This shift has coincided with an increase in the number of working women and single parents, offering them more flexible scheduling and location options (Akhavan et al. 2022; Guo and Zhu 2023). A study on work-life balance and job quality across 35 European countries revealed that family life or motherhood did not prompt women to start home-based businesses. However, a higher proportion of single mothers began their

businesses from home. During teleworking hours, home-based self-employed women performed more unpaid care and total work, earning the lowest average income. In contrast, home-based self-employed men had the highest average incomes (Rodríguez-Modroño 2021). These findings suggest that both office and home-based workplaces continue to reinforce traditional gender roles. Some scholars (e.g., Alfrey Twine 2017; Mickey 2019) have even suggested that traditional and new workplace structures alike disadvantage women regarding workplace opportunities and advancement, particularly hindering women of racial minorities.

According to the report on the impacts of teleworking and digital work on the EU population and society by Samek Lodovici et al. (2021), significant gender gaps exist in work-life balance, digital security, and social interaction among TICTM workers. The report references findings from Eurofund and International Labour Organisation (ILO) statistics from 2017, indicating that men are more likely to engage in TICTM than women due to their overrepresentation in the ICT sector. Conversely, women are more frequently involved in regular home-based telework. These statistics reveal a higher overall share of women among home-based workers in most EU countries. France, Croatia, Malta, Poland, Romania, and Slovenia show almost twice as many women home-based workers as men. The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic further amplified this trend, with women more likely to report having started working from home (Eurofund in Samek Lodovici et al. 2021).

The significant gender gap in teleworking suggests that despite perceived inhibitions and challenges women may face when working from home, they generally demonstrate good or even better adaptability to the digital world, sometimes outperforming men in specific tasks. Murtin (2019) also observed that compared to men, women make greater use of the Internet for job searching and social networking, and they derive larger

labour market benefits from their digital skills, particularly in jobs with high ICT task intensity (Murtin in Samek Lodovici et al. 2021). However, the continuation of teleworking post-pandemic raises questions about its impact on workplace gender equality. Research indicates that parents with flexible work schedules and the ability to work from home are better able to manage childcare responsibilities than those with less flexible jobs. Despite this, advancements in teleworking post-pandemic have not significantly closed gender gaps, largely due to the different motivations behind the decision to telework. Fathers working from home often report an increase in their involvement in childcare, driven by personal preference. In contrast, women frequently view telecommuting as necessary to balance work and family responsibilities (Carli 2020).

5.2.2 Reconciling work-life balance and gender-equality in the CWCS

It is in this particular framework that CWCS are essential. Coworking spaces are oriented towards collaboration thus, they have been developed to address and enhance work-life balance challenges. The ongoing evolution of these spaces aims to provide their users with a community environment where productivity can flourish, knowledge can be exchanged, and, crucially, support can be found. Orel (2019b) argues that coworking spaces offer substantial benefits for working parents, including a supportive environment and opportunities to connect with a collaborative community. This can significantly mitigate feelings of isolation and loneliness that are often associated with working from home (Bloom et al. 2015).

A recent study by Orel, Lukes, and Zouhar (2024) has underscored the benefits of CWCS specifically for women and micro-entrepreneurs, who often operate small business ventures while managing young children. The

study identifies several recommendations for CWCS to enhance accessibility and amenities for these groups, such as establishing branches in community-centric areas, reducing commute times with convenient office locations, offering affordable childcare services, and organising family-friendly events. However, the researchers acknowledge potential limitations associated with these initiatives. Creating communal and parent-oriented coworking spaces may appeal to a niche demographic, potentially limiting traditional coworking spaces' broader appeal and generalizability in attracting sufficient membership (Orel et al. 2024).

It comes as no surprise that young women entrepreneurs increasingly favor coworking spaces to establish and maintain better boundaries between work and personal life, while also leveraging established business networks. However, the high rental costs associated with these spaces necessitate coworking hubs and incubators to consider strategies for cost reduction in order to attract female entrepreneurs (Rodríguez-Modroño 2021), especially given the increasing purchasing power of the female economy (Guo and Zhu 2023). According to the 2019 Global Coworking Survey (Foertsch 2020), the proportion of women members in coworking spaces has risen significantly from 33% in 2012 to 51% in 2019, although women tended to utilize such spaces less frequently than men during weekdays. The survey also highlighted sector disparities, with men predominantly occupying IT professions, while women were more prevalent in PR & Marketing and Design fields within coworking spaces. A previous study (Foertsch 2017) suggested that women may encounter better career opportunities and more choices within coworking spaces compared to traditional sectors. However, as coworking spaces and companies expand, higher-level positions continue to be predominantly held by men.

It seems that entrepreneurship opportunities for women in CWCS heavily depend on networking and collaboration, while services addressing the work-family balance, such as childcare facilities, remain less common. In response to the specific needs of female users and recognition of the persistent gender gap, coworking spaces have begun to specialise in attracting primarily, though not exclusively, women workers, female entrepreneurs, and young mothers. Akhavan, Fuzi, and Calogero (2022) refer to these specialised spaces as female-oriented coworking spaces.

5.3 Women-led entrepreneurship and women-only coworking

Women-centric or female-oriented CWCS emerged as a response to criticisms of traditional CWCS that predominantly catered to men, where women often felt socially isolated, experienced sexual harassment, or encountered workplace sexism (Rodríguez-Modroño 2021). Following the establishment of the first coworking spaces, initiatives led by women sought to create their women-only workplaces, including all-women clubs and female-oriented CWCS. The first such initiative, In Good Company, launched in 2008, followed by Hera Hub, which started in 2011 and continues to operate today. Given that women workers—whether entrepreneurs, freelancers, self-employed, or in career transitions—still confront specific workplace challenges marked by sexism, women-only and female-led coworking spaces aim to provide a safe and equitable working environment. This movement signals a shift towards more open and inclusive workplaces globally (Poussier 2020).

In reality, there is a lack of literature examining women-centric and exclusively female-oriented CWCS, indicating a significant gap in understanding their importance for female workers, employees, and entrepreneurs. Akhavan et al. (2022) suggest that most female-oriented

CWCS in Europe do not exclude men, contrasting with common CWCS settings that, while supportive of female workers, still grapple with gender gaps and inequality issues. Many women-centric initiatives were initiated by mothers and aimed at providing facilities tailored to their needs, such as coworking spaces with childcare services. These facilities were often influenced by welfare policies—such as maternity leave, public support for families, and affordable childcare services—as well as cultural attitudes towards gender equality issues (Akhavan et al. 2022). These initiatives align closely with the Europe 2020 strategy (2010), which calls for national-level policies promoting new forms of work-life balance, active ageing policies, and increased gender equality (EU Commission 2010).

As of 2024, there are nearly 50 women-only coworking spaces across Europe, each designed to address women's challenges in achieving work-life balance. These spaces have emerged in response to ongoing issues documented in scholarly literature regarding women scaling back work commitments due to family and societal expectations (Hays, 1996; Gambles et al. 2006; Sweet and Moen 2004). According to Poussier (2020), European women-only coworking spaces vary widely in their approaches, falling into categories such as parent-friendly spaces that prioritise amenities for working parents, clubs centred around membership and social interaction, women-first spaces focusing on advancing women's careers, women-only spaces offering a gender-exclusive environment, work collectives fostering collaborative work environments, and diversity promoters encouraging inclusivity across gender and other dimensions. These spaces aim to provide a supportive and safe environment that promotes gender equality and professional empowerment for women.

WOMADE[40] stands out as a prominent women-focused community and coworking space located in Brussels, Belgium, dedicated to providing a safe and supportive environment for women entrepreneurs. Another one, *Tadah*[41], a Zurich-based coworking space offers a separate space within the hybrid office for daily childcare services, thus promoting a better work-family balance for working mothers. There are more, for example, a family-friendly coworking space in Germany called *CoWomen*[42], which operates from Heidelberg as a women-only community club and coworking space, and *Loffice*[43] which was created in Budapest, Hungary and pays special attention to new mothers, supporting their job re-entry after their maternity leave, or providing skills and competencies training to help them start a business.

5.3.1 The issues of women-centrism and discrimination in female-led CWCS

On April 2024, Chris Shaw (2024) wrote an article for the BBC, questioning the future of women-led coworking spaces. In the article, Shaw mentions two successful UK-based "women-only business networking" and women-led "co-working clubs", such as *Chief*[44] coworking space in London

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[40] WOMAD offers its members various membership options, among which are also monthly community events, podcast rooms, access to women-focused lending library, etc. https://www.womadebrussels.co

[41] Tadah was founded by four mothers, and distinguishes itself from most women-only CWCS by bridging a gap between the office space and flexible childcare, in a way that it is beneficial for families and children included. https://coworking.tadah.ch/

[42] Similarly to Tadah, CoWomen was founded with the encouragement of networking and welcoming children, and was one of Euope's first women-only CWCS. Previously they and office in Berlin, but now operate solely from Heidelberg. https://cowomen.com/

[43] Loffice was founded already in 2009, and now operates in two cities and two countries: Budapest and Vienna (Austria). They provide flexible office solutions, stylish spaces and a supportive climate to holistic growth, with key values of openness, diversity and equal treatment. https://loffice.hu/budapest/en/index.php

[44] As a branch of the New York founded women executives' club, the *Chief* in London opened its door in February 2023. This women-only private member's club was meant to operate as an alternative to a long standing concept of mens-only clubs, and promised to give their highly paing member an access to "the largest network of senior women

and *The Co-Working Club*[45] in Nottingham, that closed their doors after only a few years of operation. Establishing such spaces, most of which hailed out of the MeToo movement, brought mixed reviews. Some thought such private, female-only clubs were regressive, while others saw them as a potential to create equal opportunities for female entrepreneurs. What is interesting, though, is that event though these women-led business clubs tried to mirror men-only clubs, they more or less all incorporated the coworking model. (Shaw 2024)

The closure of The Wing, a prominent women-only coworking space and clubhouse in New York, raised questions about the viability and success of such spaces compared to those founded by men. Allegations of emotional taxation, including mistreatment, racism among staff, and accusations of social exclusivity by members, contributed to its closure (Agnihotri and Bhattacharya 2021; Shaw 2024). Initially positioned as a feminist model promoting growth opportunities for professional women, particularly freelancers and self-employed individuals, The Wing faced challenges exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, resulting in layoffs and legal scrutiny over gender discrimination. In response, membership rules were revised to include men supportive of women. Co-founder and CEO Audrey Gelman resigned in 2020, and by 2022, both the New York and London clubs were closed. Criticism of The Wing's model centered on accusations of commodifying feminism for profit, a path subsequent women-only coworking spaces and clubs sought to avoid. (Agnihotri and Bhattacharya 2021) While instances of toxicity in women-only workplaces and clubs are rare, exemplified prominently by The Wing, they do not

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executives". However, due to lack of interest, *Chief* in London closed its doors in March 2024. https://chief.com/

[45] *The Co-working Club* in Nottingham, UK, was the city's first and only all-female co-working space, focused entirely on female business owners, freelancers and remote workers. It was set-up as an online business in 2019, with a hub space opening shortly after. However, after the COVID-19 crisis and due to rising amenities costs, the *Club* closed it's doors in 2022. (Metcalf 2022)

represent the entirety of women-centric CWCS. However, many women-only or feminist-oriented CWCS face challenges regarding including people of color and individuals from working-class backgrounds. (Knappert et al. 2024; Poussier 2020)

5.4 Representation of race, gender and minority groups in CWCS: On inclusivity and safety

According to Orel (2019b), the CWCS movement emphasises openness, collaboration, and community. However, recent research on gender gaps in these workspaces indicates that CWCS often inadvertently perpetuate gendered policy practices. Nonetheless, the future of the movement appears promising. Earlier this year, Oyindamola Sanni (2024) published a blog on the Booking Ninjas website outlining possibilities for CWCS to create more inclusive spaces. Particularly, women-centric CWCS have begun integrating holistic well-being initiatives, personalised health apps, and wellness tracking devices to ensure the overall health of their members. Many have also adopted eco-friendly design elements, energy-efficient technologies, and sustainable solutions. Sanni asserts that these advancements will likely strengthen international networks, facilitate cross-cultural collaborations, and provide women professionals with access to diverse opportunities. (Sanni 2024)

The principles, goals, and aspirations espoused by CWCS sound promising, yet questions persist about whether the principle of "openness" translates into practice. Surman (2013) suggests that some CWCS can be selective about their membership profiles, curating an ideal social environment through member selection. Moreover, the notion of "creating diversity" can be ambiguous when it comes to promoting workplace diversity and inclusion. Some spaces recruit members exclusively from

specific sectors or professions, while others strive to foster diversity by embracing a wide range of professional skills. However, diversity in these contexts often does not encompass class, gender, race, or sexuality. Nevertheless, de Peuter et al. (2017), referencing the *Coworking Manifesto*, argue that coworking spaces not only embrace work but also have the potential to mitigate class disparities and address significant societal challenges (de Peuter et al. 2017: 694).

In his recent analysis of coworking spaces and their implications for entrepreneurship in the United States, Howell (2022) highlights significant obstacles, biases, and liabilities faced by racial minorities, women, and non-locals. Howell underscores the presence of "homophily" in business relationships within coworking spaces, indicating a preference for male-led companies and entrepreneurial ideas. Consequently, women often rely more heavily on community support when pursuing ventures. Additionally, Howell agrees with previous findings by Freeland and Keister (2016) that investors may harbour implicit or explicit biases against racial minorities, contributing to their underrepresentation in entrepreneurship. However, Howell raises questions about whether coworking spaces can effectively mitigate these biases.

Knappert et al. (2024) critique the phenomenon they term "gender- and race-based othering" within coworking spaces, which they argue legitimises segregation by justifying the underrepresentation of women and other minorities. They illustrate this through examples such as assertions that women lack interest in entrepreneurship compared to men and the relegation of women to roles like hosting and interning within coworking space management. Additionally, they note that entrepreneurial ventures by minority members are often identified by their ethnicities (e.g., referring to individuals as "the Turkish guys"). Knappert et al. (2024) also observe instances where racialised minorities may be acknowledged

through class-based lenses, such as their educational background or occupation, which can both positively highlight their achievements and perpetuate stereotypes.

The research on minorities within coworking spaces is notably limited. While this chapter has extensively covered the role of women in coworking, the inclusion of racial minorities and migrant workers in alternative work practices remains largely unexplored (see also *Chapter 3*). Traditional work environments historically restricted opportunities for disadvantaged groups, including women and migrant communities, due to entrenched social, cultural, and structural barriers such as the work/family dichotomy. Ross, Ressia, and Sander (2017) highlight that these challenges are exacerbated in segmented labor markets where discriminatory hiring practices are prevalent, particularly against skilled migrant professionals. Coworking spaces can potentially offer an alternative for these marginalized groups by providing networking opportunities and access to workspace that they might otherwise be unable to secure (Ross et al. 2017).

It is interesting to consider immigrant women workers as a potential new cohort of entrepreneurs who could benefit from the coworking movement. Over time, the perception of women arriving in a new country with their husbands has shifted from being viewed solely as "trailing spouses" to recognising them as equally skilled workers who can compete with their male counterparts (Cooke 2007; Ross et al. 2017). Often faced with barriers to traditional employment opportunities in new environments, many of these women are increasingly turning to self-employment and entrepreneurship. Ray and Karmokar (2022) highlight that female entrepreneurship is growing at a faster rate than male entrepreneurship, particularly among migrant women from non-English-speaking backgrounds (Collins and Low 2010). As supportive policies for entrepreneurship continue to advance, there is a growing

encouragement for women to start their own businesses, which can lead to economic benefits for entire migrant communities (Azmat and Fujimoto 2016; Azmat 2014). Ross et al. (2017) emphasise that immigrant entrepreneurship, especially among women, remains significantly under-researched, and this is even more pronounced in the context of CWCS, where such studies are virtually non-existent. A more thorough examination of how CWCS and supporting digital technologies empower disadvantaged groups could provide valuable insights for policymakers aiming to develop strategies that enhance economic opportunities for these groups.

5.4.1 Bridging the gap, creating a better place: Solutions for Creating Inclusive and Supportive Coworking Spaces for women and other gender or non-gender groups

The study by Sargent et al. (2020) explored the concept of "inequality regimes" within CWCS, building on Acker's framework (2006), to examine whether CWCS exacerbate or mitigate these inequalities. Their findings indicated that CWCS disrupt traditional barriers to entry, such as high costs, thereby promoting gender and racial diversity to some extent. By offering lower membership fees compared to traditional offices, CWCS challenge external class-based inequalities in the labour market, making them more accessible. The authors observed that CWCS often incorporate implicit diversity policies alongside their affordability measures, which can provide underrepresented groups, like women of colour, with opportunities to overcome feelings of tokenism and be recognised as valuable contributors. Moreover, CWCS are noted for their egalitarian workspace design, which fosters closer collaboration among individuals of various genders and racial backgrounds (Knappert et al. 2024). Furthermore, CWCS demonstrates inclusivity through offerings such as access to health insurance, mutual

funds for sickness or maternity leave (which are often unaffordable for freelancers), and childcare services for members, as highlighted in the examples (Pitts et al. 2023). These initiatives not only support members' work-life balance but also contribute to a more supportive and equitable work environment within CWCS.

Sargent et al. (2020) acknowledge the limitations of their study, mainly the exclusion of a broader population of women and minority workers, and how they might benefit or face obstacles within the collaborative space community. Despite the lower costs offered by CWCS, many women and minorities may still lack access to these spaces, especially those in low-wage jobs. These individuals often work in environments marked by segregation, sexual harassment, and other forms of discrimination that perpetuate inequality. Nevertheless, there is a growing trend of CWCS specifically catering to women and minorities, as highlighted in section 5.3 of this chapter. These spaces are frequently founded and led by women or ethnic and racial minorities, such as the Compound Cowork in Brooklyn, New York (Rachid 2018).

In the United States, notable attention has been given to Black-owned coworking spaces, as highlighted in articles by Medium and Forbes (Dorsey 2020; Garrett 2020). Garrett (2020) reported that 14% of coworking spaces in the U.S. are Black-owned, reflecting a trend where Black women are emerging as the fastest-growing group of entrepreneurs. Fiscus-Cannaday (2021) discusses Zora's House, a feminist coworking space in Ohio that is both Black-owned and women-owned, aimed at supporting women of colour and their allies. These inclusive coworking spaces are often described as "fourth places," community gathering spaces that prioritise the work, ideas, and identities of marginalised groups (Johnson in Fiscus-Cannaday 2021). The Riveter, another prominent women-founded and women-led coworking space in the U.S., is actively addressing issues of

representation and inclusivity. Fiscus-Cannaday's research at The Riveter highlighted efforts to create a safe and supportive environment for underrepresented groups, including people of colour, LGBT individuals, and gender-nonconforming persons. (Fiscus-Cannaday 2021)

In Europe, similar initiatives to create safe and inclusive CWCS for marginalised groups are emerging. One notable example is BIWOC Rising, an intersectional work and social club based in Berlin, Germany. Founded by Loubna Messaoudi, BIWOC Rising provides an intentional and intersectional safer space for BIW*oC (Black, Indigenous, Women of Color) and TIN*BIPoC (Trans, Intersex, Non-Binary, Black, Indigenous People of Color) in Germany, as well as for women, transgender, and non-binary individuals to work and connect safely. Central to their ethos is the establishment of a Code of Conduct aimed at co-creating a space free from harassment and violence. This Code explicitly prohibits all forms of abuse, including verbal, physical, sexual, and psychological harassment (BIWOC Rising, n.d.). BIWOC Rising also adopts a social justice approach to language use within their premises, aiming to prevent members from experiencing harm due to ignorant or discriminatory speech. They actively prohibit language that includes racism or ableism while encouraging members to learn from their mistakes and respectfully inquire about each other's preferred pronouns. Additionally, BIWOC Rising informs their members regularly that certain parts of their premises, such as toilets, may be used by different audiences during specific times or events, fostering a sense of inclusivity and awareness among all attendees. Recent studies highlight the evolving role of CWCS in providing shared and safe environments, particularly as shelters from challenging and exclusionary job markets and workspaces. Researchers Pacchi and Mariotti (2021) emphasise that CWCS have the potential to foster collective identity and empowerment, especially for gender and minority groups. However, while care-oriented CWCS like Zora's House and BIWOC Rising provide invaluable

support to their members, smaller CWCS often excel in creating a sense of familiarity and inclusion compared to larger spaces. Merkel et al. (2024) point out that managing such caring environments can also be emotionally and mentally taxing for coworking managers, such as hosts. By creating niche spaces that prioritise safety, understanding, inclusion, and intersectional community building, these CWCS offer valuable lessons for others in the coworking industry to learn from, broaden their practices, or adjust their policies. Looking ahead, the influence of these inclusive workspaces could potentially shape future policies, prompting policymakers to pay more attention to the rights and safety of diverse groups in the workplace.

6. CONCLUSION

This desk research report, titled "Collaborative and Coworking Spaces: A Perspective on Inclusivity?" is an initial output of the RES-MOVE project aimed at exploring the evolving landscape of CWCS. Throughout the report, we examined the role of these spaces amidst shifts in work organisation and lifestyles. We aimed to gain comprehensive insights into this phenomenon by reviewing scientific literature, articles, reports, and direct engagements with researchers, conceptual framers, CWCS founders, and managers. Something to note is that we facilitated two focused discussions: one on rural CWCS and another on gender (in)equality and CWCS, where experts discussed primary challenges and proposed actionable solutions to enhance coworking environments.

The report is structured into several chapters, each addressing key aspects of coworking spaces:

In *Chapter 1*, History of Collaborative Spaces, we traced the historical evolution of CWCS from Renaissance Florence to contemporary global hubs like Berlin, Vienna, Brussels, and San Francisco. Initially conceived as 'third spaces', these environments emphasise location independence and community-building. A great deal of literature is examined in this chapter to provide a better understanding on how to define collaborative spaces, as well as how their definition has developed over time. The chapter also discusses the impact of events like Jelly and SWAT in popularising coworking models globally.

In *Chapter 2,* Taxonomy and Typology of CWCS, we defined coworking by exploring its definitions and operational aspects. Coworking spaces are characterised as localised environments fostering openness, collaboration, and resource-sharing among professionals. We emphasised their role as hubs for social support among independent professionals, distinct from traditional offices or home-based setups, influenced by the

ethos of the open-source movement. In that regard, we also provide multiple definitions and categorisations of CWCS and how they differ.

Chapter 3, Collaborative Spaces, Minorities and Migration, is where we explored the integration of minorities and migrants in CWCS, drawing parallels with existing studies from business and entrepreneurship sectors. We highlighted the challenges of inclusion and assimilation faced by these groups, which were exacerbated by in-group/out-group dynamics mirrored in coworking environments. Additionally, a part of this chapter focused on the efforts the coworking community has gone through to help Ukrainian coworkers continue their work amid the Russian-Ukrainian conflict.

Chapter 4, Coworking in Rural Areas, expands on the dynamics of coworking in rural contexts. It aims to provide a deeper understanding of how coworking spaces function outside urban centres while addressing the unique challenges and opportunities encountered by rural communities. Emphasising the growing demand for flexible and collaborative work environments beyond urban settings, this section explores the implications of integrating such spaces at both local and broader scales. Key topics covered include the origins of rural coworking and its evolution, the definition and significance of "rural" within the context of coworking, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and post-pandemic scenarios on rural coworking dynamics, the emerging phenomenon of rural digital nomadism, and efforts towards integrating and including migrants in rural areas at the EU level.

Finally, in *Chapter 5, Coworking and Gender (In)equality*, we focused on gender representation within CWCS, particularly in relation to migrant economic integration initiatives in the EU. In addition, this chapter focuses on female entrepreneurs and cases of inclusion of the LGBTQ+ community among these hubs. Further exploration includes insights into women-led entrepreneurship, the emergence of women-only coworking spaces, and critical considerations of women-centrism and potential discrimination

within female-led CWCS. The representation of race, gender, and minority groups within CWCS is also addressed, emphasising the importance of bridging solutions to create inclusive and supportive coworking environments for all genders, including non-binary individuals.

In addition, our insights from the focus groups proved fruitful in our understanding of CWCS.

The focus group on CWCS in rural areas brought together distinguished experts in the field of rural coworking and social innovation, including Maria do Ceu Bastos from Rural Move, Portugal; Jose Antonio Morales from Aurora Coworking / Lincoln Island, Slovenia; Claire Carpenter, founder of The Melting Pot, Scotland, UK; Jordi Silvente and Laura Morte from COWOCAT, Catalonia, Spain; and Suzanne Murdock from The Hub Newry, Northern Ireland, UK. Many of these experts have been actively involved in the European Rural Coworking Project, an initiative by the ECA to promote and establish sustainable CWCS in rural European regions.

The focus group addressed the challenge of integrating migrants into rural CWCS, exploring coworking formats such as hubs, maker spaces, and collaborative third places. Despite the community integration benefits typically associated with CWCS, the experts highlighted specific obstacles in engaging local entrepreneurs and establishing partnerships with local authorities. They underscored the pivotal role of municipalities as key stakeholders in facilitating successful migrant integration initiatives within rural coworking environments. Moreover, the panel emphasised the importance of fostering collaborations between municipalities and existing CWCS or training municipal stakeholders to understand better the operational dynamics and potential for cooperation in migrant-led coworking initiatives. The discussion also showcased existing best practices, such as the Rural Move community of change-makers in Portugal,

demonstrating successful models for integrating migrants into rural coworking settings.

The focus group on the gender dimension in CWCS convened a panel of women experts and academics dedicated to migrant women's economic integration and advancing gender balance within safe coworking environments. Participants included Larisa Vidovič from Dress for Success Maribor, Slovenia; Loubna Messaoudi from BIWOC*Rising, Berlin, Germany; Negin Payam from ISI.Ev Berlin, Germany; Iuliia Lashchuk, PhD, Max Weber Fellow at the European University Institute, Florence, Italy; and Silvia Pinto from PIANO-C, Milan, Italy.

The panel explored inclusive CWCS initiatives tailored to support migrant women and refugees through targeted programs, safe spaces, and family-friendly accommodations. Among the discussion was the question of social initiatives and innovative CWCS models which enhance employment opportunities for migrant women, promoting childcare and family-friendly options as well as advocating for social justice, intersectionality, and empowerment across diverse gender identities, races, and ethnic minorities.

The panel identified several key areas for enhancing CWCS inclusivity. These included adapting programs and services to meet the specific needs of migrant women with families, understanding their challenges in entering the job market, and establishing safe and exclusive spaces within coworking environments. Creating such spaces was underscored as crucial for fostering feelings of safety, belonging, and shared experiences among women, refugees, and marginalised groups. The discussion also addressed the sustainability of these inclusive actions within CWCS by stressing the necessity of effectively promoting these spaces to target audiences facing barriers to accessing information and resources, ensuring equitable participation and support within coworking communities.

Coworking and collaborative spaces have firmly established themselves in various forms and structures. Originating from basic collaborative concepts exemplified by spaces like C-base, Schraubenfabrik, and Spiral Muse, and driven by movements such as Jelly, SWAT, and the ECA, they have expanded into a multi-billion-dollar industry with major players like WeWork, IWG plc (formerly Regus), and global networks such as Impact Hub. These spaces have also evolved into real-world innovation ecosystems like Living Labs. The growth of coworking and collaborative spaces can be attributed not only to the rise of the gig economy and challenges such as the COVID-19 pandemic but also to a broader societal trend towards fostering meaningful social interactions and expanding personal networks. They facilitate connections that transcend traditional work environments, promoting community, innovation, and a sense of belonging in today's interconnected global landscape.

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