

Happy Workers in New Workspaces? The Research Trends of Co-Working

Mina Akhavan ^{*°}, Ilaria Mariotti^{*}

^{*}Dipartimento di Architettura e Studi Urbani - Politecnico di Milano, mina.akhavan@polimi.it
([°]*corresponding author*), ilaria.mariotti@polimi.it

Within the context of rising globalization of the economy and the society, the ICT development, and the economic downturn, working is becoming less dependent on distance, location and time (Joroff, 2012); people can work outside regular working hours, often outside the traditional office, where new technologies are used extensively. Moreover, whilst ICTs favour a high flexibility and hybridization of workplaces – including unusual places like libraries, cafes, restaurants, hotel and airport lounges – self-employed and freelance workers still need social and professional interaction in order to reduce risks of isolation (particularly high in home working) and to increase meeting opportunities (Johns and Gratton, 2013; Moriset, 2014; Mariotti et al., 2017).

These are some of the reasons that have fostered the development and diffusion of new workspaces such as makers' spaces, fablab, and coworking spaces. Specifically, the late 2000s have witnessed a wide diffusion of the coworking spaces (hereinafter CSs), with the first CS, labeled “Hat Factory”, founded in 2005 in San Francisco by the computer engineer Brad Neuberg. CSs are regarded as potential “serendipity accelerators” designed to host creative people and entrepreneurs, who endeavour to break isolation and to find a convivial environment that may favour meeting and collaboration (Moriset, 2014). CSs offer geographical proximity and non-hierarchical relationships, which may generate socialization and, consequently, business opportunities (Spinuzzi, 2012). One diffused hypothesis is that sharing the same space may provide a collaborative community to those kinds of workers – such as self-employed professionals and freelancers – who otherwise would not enjoy the relational component associated with a traditional corporate office (Mariotti et al., 2017). CSs are mainly located in large urban areas where there is a concentration of skilled labour force, knowledge and innovation (Florida, 2005), while providing business infrastructure as well as the opportunity for social interaction. According to the Global Coworking Survey 2015/2016, by January 2016, there were 7,800 CSs with approximately 510,000 people co-working worldwide, with a growth rate of 36%. The largest CSs (measured by number of members) are in Asia.

Although the CS phenomenon is well advertised by the media, after a decade of its creation, it has still not received much attention by the academic literature. The disciplines exploring the CS phenomenon are: business/management (Nenonen, 2004; Fuzi et al., 2014; Fuzi, 2015; Barzotto et al., 2016), economics (Croce et al., 2016; Deijl, 2011; Mariotti et al., 2015), geography (Capdevila, 2014; Hesse et al., 2010; Moriset, 2014; Moriset et al., 2013), planning (Pacchi, 2015), and sociology (Gerdenitsch et al., 2016; Parrino, 2015; Spinuzzi, 2012). These studies have focused on several aspects of the CSs, which can be grouped in the following categories: (i) spatial characteristics (work place layout/ features and location factors); (ii) socio-economics patterns (proximity features – geographical, cognitive, institutional, organizational –, social interaction, business model and economic performance); (iii) effects on the urban context.

Nevertheless, so far, no detailed studies have focused on whether and how CSs contribute to improving the worker's quality of life, such as happiness and subjective well-being. The relationship between happiness

research and economics has been studied since the end of the '90s, mainly because of its important influence on economic policy, and because of the consistently large impact of non-financial variables (i.e. good governance and social capital) on the explanation of economic phenomena (Frey and Stutzer, 2002b; Helliwell and Huang, 2010). As discussed by Frey and Stutzer (2002b), the subjective well-being is a satisfactory empirical approximation of individual utility. Besides, the extent of happiness may affect many important economic aspects, such as the work behaviour: happier individuals may behave significantly different in their job. Several authors have investigated the correlation between job satisfaction and productivity (Iaffaldano and Muchinsky 1985; Warr, 1999; Frey and Stutzer, 2002) finding that more satisfied workers are also more productive.

Within this context, the present paper aims to explore the relationship between CSs and their feasible effects on the worker's quality of life. Hence, a literature review of all the studies (about 50 articles) on CSs has been developed, trying to find some (indirect) evidence on this relationship. The paper has utilised several channels to identify relevant literature. Academic databases (i.e. Science Direct Journal, Scopus, We of Science, Emerald Journals) were utilised to search for academic papers and reports, while google scholar was used to search for government and business reports, books and conference proceedings.

Key words: workplaces, coworking spaces, happiness, well-being

Jel codes: I31, R1

References

Barzotto, M., Furnari, S., & Frankort, H. T. W. (2016). Workplace Features and the Cognitive Activation of Social Ties. *Academy of Management Proceedings*, 2016(1), 13990

Capdevila, I. (2014). Coworkers, Makers, and Fabbers- Global, Local and Internal Dynamics of Innovation in Localized Communities in Barcelona. PhD Thesis: HEC MONTRÉAL École affiliée à l'Université de Montréal

Pacchi C. (2015) "Coworking e innovazione urbana a Milano", *Imprese & Città*, N.8, pp. 89-95

Croce, G., Porto, E. Di, Ghignoni, E., & Ricci, A. (2016). Agglomeration and workplace training: knowledge spillovers versus poaching. *Regional Studies*, 0(162), 1–17.

Deijl, Claudia M. (2011). Two Heads are Better than One A Case Study of the Coworking Community in the Netherlands, Thesis, Erasmus University Rotterdam.

Florida, R. (2005). *Cities and the creative class*. London: Routledge

Frey, B. S. and Stutzer, A. (2002a) *Happiness and Economics*. Princeton University Press.

Frey, B. S. and Stutzer, A. (2002b) 'What Can Economists Learn from Happiness Research?', *Journal of Economic Literature*, 40(2), pp. 402–435. doi: 10.1257/002205102320161320.

Fuzi, A. (2015) 'Co-working spaces for promoting entrepreneurship in sparse regions: the case of South Wales', *Regional Studies, Regional Science*, 2(1), pp. 462–469.

- Fuzi, A., Clifton, N. and Loudon, G. (2014) 'New in-house organizational spaces that support creativity and innovation: the co-working space', *R & D Management Conference*, pp. 3–6.
- Gerdenitsch, C., Scheel, T. E., Andorfer, J., & Korunka, C. (2016). Coworking spaces: A source of social support for independent professionals. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 7(APR), 1–12.
- Helliwell, J. F. and Huang, H. (2010) 'How's the job? Well-being and social capital in the workplace', *Industrial and Labor Relations Review*, 63(2), pp. 205–227.
- Hesse, M., & Lange, B. (2012). Paradoxes of the Creative City. Contested Territories and Creative Upgrading - the Case of Berlin, Germany. *ERDE*, 143(4), 351–371.
- Jaffaldano, M. T., & Muchinsky, P. M. (1985). Job Satisfaction and Job Performance. A Meta-Analysis. *Psychological Bulletin*, 97(2), 251-273.
- Johns, T and L. Gratton (2013) 'The third wave of virtual work', *Harvard Business Review*, January-February: 1-9.
- Joroff, M. L.(2002). Workplace Mind Shifts, *Journal of Corporate Real Estate*. 4(3), 266.
- Mariotti, I., Pacchi C., Di Vita, S. (2017), Coworking Spaces in Milan: Location Patterns and Urban Effects, *Journal of Urban Technology*, forthcoming.
- Mariotti, I., Di Vita, S., Limonta, G. (2015) Una geografia degli spazi di coworking a Milano. *Imprese & Città*, N.8, pp. 72-80
- Moriset, B. (2014). Building new places of the creative economy The rise of coworking spaces. 2nd Geography of Innovation International Conference 2014 Utrecht University, Utrecht, 23-25 January 2014, 24.
- Moriset, B., & Malecki, E. J. (2009). Organization versus space: The paradoxical geographies of the digital economy. *Geography Compass*, 3(1), 256–274.
- Nenonen, S. (2004) 'Analysing the intangible benefits of work space.', *Facilities*, 22(9/10), pp. 233–239.
- O'Brien, R. (1992). *Global financial integration: the end of geography*. London: Pinter.
- Parrino, L. (2015). Coworking: assessing the role of proximity in knowledge exchange. *Knowledge Management Research & Practice*, 13(3), 261–271.
- Salvador, E., Mariotti, I., & Conicella, F. (2013). Science park or innovation cluster? *International Journal of Entrepreneurial Behavior & Research*, 19(6), 656–674.
- Spinuzzi, C. (2012). Working Alone, Together: Coworking as Emergent Collaborative Activity. *Journal of Business and Technical Communication*, 26(4), 399–441.
- Warr, P. (1999) 'Well-being and the workplace.', *Well-being: The foundations of hedonic psychology*. Edited by D. Kahneman, E. Diener, and N. Schwarz. New York, NY, US: Russell Sage Foundation, pp. 392–412.