

**Special session ERSA2019: New working spaces, digital transformations and peripheral areas**  
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The special session is the continuation of a previous one titled “New working spaces, innovation and inclusion”, organised by Ilaria Mariotti and Darja Reuschke within the 58<sup>th</sup> ERSA Congress in Cork (Ireland) in 2018. It focuses on new and emerging working spaces in core *vs.* peripheral areas of cities and regions, fostered by the digital transformation and the sharing and collaborative economy.

ICT favour a high flexibility, multi-functionality and hybridization of several new workplaces such as co-working spaces (CS), public libraries, cafes, restaurants, hotel and airport lounges (Brown, 2017; Bilandzic and Foth, 2013), but also maker spaces (MS) – including Fab Lab –open workshops/ open creative labs, Living Labs, etc., which facilitate the ‘making of things’ (Merkel, 2018). The literature on CS and MS shows that they are mainly located in large urban areas in most cases in or around the city centres with a concentration of skilled labour force, knowledge and innovation. CS may constitute an integral part of the entrepreneurial ecosystem of the city and contribute to its strengthening, especially due to the characteristics of the coworkers (Bouncken & Reuschl, 2016; Brown, 2017; Capdevila, 2017). Nevertheless, a minority of new working spaces are located outside the larger cities: on the one hand, because more and more highly knowledge workers tend to work from remote locations where work is cooperative/collaborative rather than co-located (Felton et al., 2010); on the other hand because, in some cases, these new working spaces are specialized in providing services to the traditional manufacturing system, that is mainly located outside cities. As Felton et al. (2010) stated, the dense proximity cluster networks of the inner city are not the only environment in which creative industries operate since the geography of creative industries is more complex than simple concentric circle models suppose. Indeed, the literature has underlined that the simple co-location itself may not necessarily lead to networking, interaction and collaboration and thereby to knowledge creation, while community facilitators, such as CS managers, may play an important role in enabling more synergies to stimulate encounters and collaborations inside the trust-based community-oriented environments (Fuzi, 2015).

Findings from the literature also reveal that there is little evidence about the socio-economic effects of CS and MS in urban regions – and specifically, in peripheral areas – while impacts on geography and spatial planning agenda are not fully explored yet.

Within this context, the Special Session aims at exploring: (i) new working spaces typologies (taxonomy), their spatial distribution, and location patterns; (ii) whether and how new working spaces have fostered – with or without the help of public subsidies and planning measures –: (a) regional competitiveness, economic performance and resilience; (b) entrepreneurial milieu; (c) knowledge creation within regional innovation system, retaining knowledge workers and the creative class; (d) social inclusion and spatial regeneration. Within the perspective of territorial cohesion, the focus is on peripheral areas and the main research questions are the following:

- Do new working spaces represent a critical urban practice that has developed to cope with the prevalent informality, uncertainty and risks of independent work?
- May new working spaces enhance the workers’ economic performance and wellbeing?
- May new working spaces favour social capital building and encourage return migration of knowledge workers to the periphery?
- May they provide inclusive spaces to women (i.e. mothers, and minority women) close to home thus, favouring gender equality?
- Can they maintain the liveability and economic viability of peripheries, and foster growth opportunities, thus enhancing a multiplier effect generating new knowledge communities?