

The rise of coworking spaces in peripheral and rural areas in Italy

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Coworking space is predominantly an urban phenomenon. Nevertheless, in the last few years, peripheral and rural areas are becoming attractive for this typology of new working spaces, but the literature on this topic is scant.

The current paper aims to fill this gap by reviewing the studies on this issue and discussing the renewed role of coworking spaces in peripheral and rural areas during the Covid-19 pandemic, focusing on Italy. Moreover, a detailed and updated picture of the increasing number of coworking spaces in 2018-2020 in the Italian Inner Areas and rural areas is provided. Finally, some case studies of peripheral and rural coworking spaces are presented, followed by conclusions and further research.

Keywords: coworking spaces; remote workers; peripheral, rural and inner areas

Lo sviluppo degli spazi di coworking nelle aree periferiche e rurali in Italia

La nascita e lo sviluppo degli spazi di coworking si sono rivelati un fenomeno prevalentemente urbano. Negli ultimi anni, tuttavia, le aree periferiche e rurali stanno diventando molto attrattive per questa tipologia di nuovi luoghi del lavoro, anche se la letteratura su questa tematica è limitata.

Questo articolo mira a colmare la lacuna, passando in rassegna gli studi sul tema, discutendo il rinnovato ruolo dei coworking nelle aree periferiche e rurali durante la pandemia Covid-19, e fornendo un quadro dettagliato e aggiornato del crescente numero di CSs nelle Aree Interne e nelle aree rurali italiane nel periodo 2018-2020. Infine, vengono presentati alcuni casi studio di coworking periferici e rurali, seguiti da alcune riflessioni conclusive e idee di ricerca per il futuro.

Parole chiave: spazi di coworking; lavoratori a distanza; aree periferiche, rurali e interne

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Introduction. Motivation and necessity to explore coworking spaces in urban vs. peripheral areas

Being one typology of new working spaces (nws), coworking spaces (hereinafter, css) are places of knowledge concentration, production, and exchange, firmly based on relational and collaborative dimensions, which have been diffusing worldwide in the last fifteen years (Micek *et al.*, 2020). css are innovative and collaborative workplaces where independent knowledge-based, creative, and digital workers – mainly self-employed professionals – share their workspaces: they have been interpreted as «shared workplaces utilized by different sorts of knowledge professionals, mostly freelancers, working in various degrees of specialization in the vast domain of the knowledge industry» (Gandini, 2015: 194).

The coworking phenomenon was officially born in San Francisco (us); the model was then exported overseas and increased rapidly in large cities, slowly followed by medium- and small-sized cities. Many studies have confirmed that css are mainly clustered in urban centers, where there is a concentration of knowledge workers and urban amenities, ranging from productive amenities (e.g., good access to clients, specialized labour, specialized firms, universities, transportation nodes, networks, etc.), to non-productive ones (e.g., good access to restaurants, cafes, shops, cultural and entertainment services, good environmental quality, etc.) (see Mariotti, Akhavan, Rossi, 2021). This explains why the literature on new working spaces, specifically css, is mainly concerned with large urban areas and metropolitan regions (see Akhavan, 2021). Nevertheless, there has been a growing awareness and interest in the potential of small cities, peripheral, peri-urban, and rural areas to attract css.

Even in Italy, the number of these workplaces in peripheral and rural areas is increasing. Specifically, the Covid-19 pandemic has brought the attention to more peripheral and rural working environments, where nws may host remote workers.¹ Indeed, the Covid-19 pandemic crisis has affected working typologies, office premises, and the geography of work, making suburban and peripheral areas more attractive than before. As stated by Manzini Ceinar, Pacchi, Mariotti (2021), the following recurring trends can be recognized: (i) the willingness of companies to downsize or ‘de-densify’ their offices by relocating employees in other locations (hubs) different from the main headquarter and promote remote working; (ii) the tendency by freelancers and digital nomads to move to suburban and peripheral areas to experience a higher quality of life, stimulating suburbs

economies and catalyze phenomena such as what has been defined in Italy 'south working' (Katz *et al.*, 2020; Southworking, 2020); (iii) new working spaces such as css are changing their business model to be more attractive for teleworkers (Mariotti, Manfredini, Giavarini, 2021; Pais, Manzo, Gerosa, 2021); (iv) local authorities are using public spaces public services, such as public schools and libraries, to relocate employees and students (such as the *Scuola Diffusa* diffused schooling experiment launched in Reggio Emilia in 2020).

Within this context, the present paper aims to fill the gap in the literature by reviewing the papers on css in peripheral and rural areas and their effects on the users' performance and the local context, if compared to css in urban areas. Recent studies, indeed, have found that knowledge workers working in css located in peripheral/inner areas in Italy are more satisfied than those in urban areas because they show higher economic performance and wellbeing (Akhavan, Mariotti, forthcoming; Mariotti, Di Matteo, 2020; Mariotti, Di Matteo, forthcoming). Moreover, css in peripheral areas better impact the local context than those in urban areas (Mariotti, Akhavan, Di Matteo, 2021). In addition, the location, growth and typologies of css in peripheral, rural and inner areas, as classified by the *Strategia Aree Interne*, in Italy in 2018 and 2020 are described and discussed, in the light of the new attractiveness of nws in peripheral areas to host teleworkers and remote workers.

The paper is organized into four sections. The Introduction is followed by a literature review on css in peripheral, and rural areas, and the direct effects on css' users and the indirect effects on the css' local context. The third section is dedicated to the presentation of the location and typologies of css in peripheral, rural and inner areas in Italy in 2018 and 2020. The fourth section discusses the renewed interest for css to host remote workers and teleworkers, which share has massively increased during the Covid-19 pandemic, and further research brings this article to a close.

Literature review: coworking spaces in peripheral and rural areas

The phenomenon of css is characterized by values related to flexibility, collaboration, sharing (knowledge and infrastructure) (Avdikos, Merkel, 2019), networking practices, social interactions (Fuzi, 2015), and community making (Spinuzzi *et al.*, 2019). Among the different typologies of nws (Micek *et al.*, 2021), also known as third places for work (Oldenburg, 1989), css are undoubtedly the most famous and applied model in different regions of the world (Akhavan, 2021). In the year 2020 (pre-Covid), approximately 2.6 million users (coworkers, hereafter cws) were working in more than 26,000 css worldwide;² with diverse professional profiles and competencies, being freelancers, employees, self-employed individuals, entrepreneurs, consultants, and small and micro enterprises (Garrett, Spreitzer, Bacevice, 2017), and recently also teleworkers. The cw's fields mainly range from the creative industry – such as architects, designers, journalists, etc. – to engineering and digital sectors – namely IT, software developers, consultants, etc. (Akhavan *et al.*, 2019).

As an alternative workplace model for those seeking a new way of working, or else 'working-alone-together' (Spinuzzi, 2012), and of course the values listed beforehand, privately owned and

managed css are shared offices that ensure access to physical and social infrastructures and service for a monthly/daily rent. Some scholars argue that coworking is more than just co-location, as the css promote creativity and innovation through collaboration (Capdevila, 2017). Designed to host the so-called creative class (Florida, 2002), the rise of css is also linked to creative hubs and creative industries, as they share location determinants (see Mariotti, Akhavan, Rossi, 2021). css may offer creative-based facilities that contribute to attracting and sustaining creative people, artists, prospective entrepreneurs, generating favorable conditions for the development of their practice (Institute of Entrepreneurship Development, 2017).

Emergence of collaborative spaces (such as css) in small and medium-sized cities can be used as tools for regeneration purposes, place marketing and attracting economically active individuals and their families. Fuzi (2015) provides empirical findings on css in South Wales about whether and how css can support entrepreneurship in sparse regions. She discusses spaces with a high share of start-ups and young entrepreneurs that may use the hard infrastructure to create the soft infrastructure necessary for entrepreneurship. Furthermore, small cities can combine the coworking concept with the existing informal third places such as art centres, bars, coffee shops, etc. towards a more sustainable and profitable structure. Other scholars also argue that collaborative spaces in rural and peripheral regions are recognised as drivers for social cohesion and economic development (Boutillier *et al.*, 2020).

A recent empirical study by Capdevila (2021) explores the process of diffusion of coworking to rural areas in Catalonia (Spain), which has not been a replication but an adaptation to a new context. Still, instead it entails a progressive comprehension of coworking through a collective process of translation. He discusses that technological and digital advancements in rural areas have allowed the relocation of workers from urban centres and remote workers' rise in more peripheral regions. The project *coworkme* (2018: 10, 30) findings show that shared workspaces in rural towns «act as nerve centers, revitalising rural communities and embedding new forms of innovation and development outside big cities». At the same time, they can also act as innovation catalysts, «where people can learn and progress through trial-and-error, in rural territories where experimentation is generally avoided». According to another European project 'Youth Re-Working Rural'³ «Sole proprietors and limited companies can be the perfect option for opening a co-working space in rural area, as these forms are more suitable for smaller businesses that won't have a large annual turnover or employ many staff» (Institute of Entrepreneurship Development, 2017: 45).

As highlighted by Jamal (2018: 785), having a physical cs in a mid-sized city downtown «promotes urban renewal and preserving affordable space for new enterprise in rapidly gentrifying [...] areas». Nevertheless, there is an urgent need to enlarge the (cs) toolkit for local development in smaller towns and rural areas. Without supporting the transformation to 'urban' lifestyles and offering new potentials for new economies, such as the potentials of collaborative spaces and hubs, there is an increasing risk of further polarisation and peripheralisation of non-urban areas in Europe.

The effects of collaborative and flexible working solutions are immense, both in terms of direct (on the individuals) and indirect

effects (on the local environment). The cws perception explains direct effects on cost savings (office rental, office energy consumption, employees' commute times) (Bentley *et al.*, 2015; Yu, Burke, Raad, 2019); reduces risks of isolation; increases meeting opportunities, boosts business collaboration and promote innovation (Capdevila, 2013; Jakonen *et al.*, 2017); fosters employee work productivity (Voordt, 2003), working efficiency, economic performance/earnings growth (Mariotti, Di Matteo, 2020); boosts coworkers' job satisfaction and well-being (Morrison, Macky, 2017; Akhavan, Mariotti, forthcoming) (for a review see Mariotti *et al.*, 2021; Manzini Ceinar, Mariotti, 2021). In particular, the study by Akhavan and Mariotti (forthcoming) aims to explore the factors that help explain the level of well-being of the Italian cws: the analysis of the size of cities hosting the cws shows that cws in smaller cities (with less than 100,000 population) tend to experience a higher level of well-being than the other cities, especially if compared to medium sized cities.

Looking at the economic performance, Mariotti and Di Matteo (forthcoming), by applying a counterfactual analysis (propensity-score matching) show that for a cw being located in a peripheral area may represent an opportunity to earn more than if he/she were working in an urban centre, mainly due to lower competition; the same holds for the organisation of the cw. Indirect effects can be associated with built space, environment, organizational/working practices, urban planning and policy design. From the policy makers' perspective, the emergence of coworking is considered an opportunity to foster socio-economic development and urban regeneration (Boutillier, 2018). Coworking is also a matter of concern for urban planning: this aspect has been investigated by Petch (2015) for Toronto (Canada), where he discusses the sharing nature of coworking as a key point for achieving sustainability, as it leads to less traffic congestions, promoting a collaborative culture and spreading workers towards regional areas, which then brings about opportunities for urban infrastructure planning (Yu, Burke, Raad, 2019).

The study of the indirect effects of cws on the local context, disentangling the cws located in Italian core and Inner Areas (see note 5) has been conducted by Mariotti, Akhavan and Di Matteo (2021). Their analysis showed that, on average, cws in non-pole municipalities, compared to those in pole cities: (i) perceived a higher positive impact of the cs in the urban context; (ii) have a lower educational level; (iii) tend to work in a creative sector; (iv) declared to be more satisfied; (v) live closer to the cs; (vi) experienced higher social and organizational proximity, and lower institutional proximity; (vii) have created new professional relationships, and had the chance to access new information channels and new training opportunities inside the cs. These results were corroborated by a counterfactual analysis, showing that non-pole areas experienced a higher and more positive impact on the local environment than those located in a pole municipality.

Diffusion of coworking spaces in peripheral areas during and beyond the Covid-19 pandemic

The Covid-19 outbreak in Europe has drastically changed citizens' lifestyle and ways of working. A recent paper by Florida, Rodríguez-Pose and Storper (2021) underlines that the Covid-19

pandemic has put in place the following forces affecting the geography and the way of work: (i) social scarring that influences residence choice, travel and commute patterns, and the economic viability of certain kinds of businesses and social gathering spaces; (ii) lockdown as a forced experiment for employment, shopping, workplace and residence choice; (iii) the need to secure the urban built environment against the current and future health and climate risks; (iv) changes in the urban form and systems (to maintain social distance).

Specifically, we have witnessed a change in the place of work: due to the travel restrictions, remote working (principally from home) has massively grown, as demonstrated by Sostero *et al.* (2020), who explored the remote working trends in European countries before and during the Covid-19 pandemic. This study shows that in 2019, employees working from home regularly, or at least sometimes, were above 15% in most Northern European countries, whereas this percentage was below 10% in Greece, Cyprus, and Italy. This trend drastically changed during the Covid-19 pandemic, when all countries experienced a growth in remote working. In Italy, for instance, the percentage increased up to 40%.⁴

An analysis of the prevalence of remote working by occupation in eu 27 before the Covid-19 pandemic (2018) shows a predominance of the sectors telecommunications, finance, and insurance (about 20% of the share of remote workers), while the percentage of teleworkers is relatively low in administrative and support services, as well as in manufacturing. Moreover, the remote working rates across knowledge- and ICT-intensive business services are higher than in other sectors (Sostero *et al.*, 2020). Looking at the employees' characteristics, the literature has underlined that those with third-level degrees or residing in cities and city suburbs were more likely to work remotely than others. Some recent studies found that remote working brought positive effects on workers' performance in terms of productivity, innovation, quality of life and well-being (for a review, see Manzini Ceinar, Mariotti, 2021). Those working from home are significantly more productive if their home-office provides suitable environment, with opportunities for restful breaks and minimal distractions. Nevertheless, other studies (e.g., the survey by the Osservatorio Smart working of the Politecnico di Milano 2020, on a sample of 572 workers in Italy) show that remote/home working is not always the best solution. Indeed, workers often complain about inadequate technology, risks of isolation, poor work-life balance, and the feeling of being constantly connected.

Empirical evidence about the acceleration of remote working during the pandemic emphasizes the renewed role of new working spaces, specifically cws, in the peripheral and rural areas (Mariotti, Di Marino, Akhavan, 2021). Knowledge workers have now experienced working from home and «from everywhere» (Ross, Ressa, 2015); companies are more willing to reduce their capacities and premises in central locations, while promoting remote working and hybrid-working. It is estimated that 1/5 of European employees will continue working remotely post-pandemic (Sostero *et al.*, 2020), and companies are investing in flexible and hybrid spaces to be closer to their employees.

Several studies discuss home-office not to be the best place to work; therefore, there are strong signs that, for many types of work, socialization and leisure, distanced interaction is not a

Table 1 – Number and percentage of CSS in Italy (2018 vs 2020) at municipality level by the SNAI classification (Aree Interne). Source: own elaboration

SNAI classification	n.CS_2018	%CS_2018	n.CS_2020	%CS_2020
A-Urban Poles	423	77,05	571	73,7
B- Intermunicipal Poles	24	4,37	33	4,3
C- Outlying areas	83	15,12	132	17,0
D- Intermediate areas	17	3,10	29	3,7
E - Peripheral areas	2	0,36	8	1,0
F - Ultra Peripheral areas	0	0	2	0,3

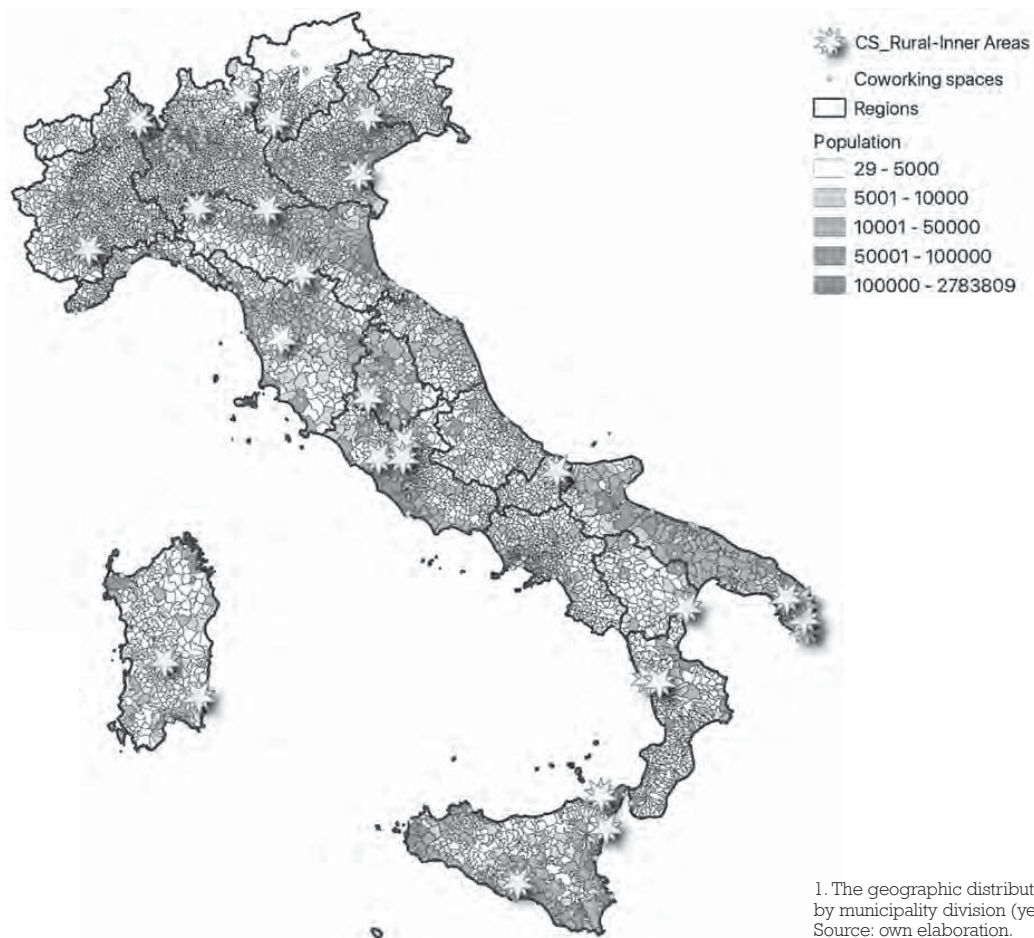
Table 2 – Number and percentage of CSS in Italy (2018 vs 2020) at municipality level by population size. Source: own elaboration

Population size	n.CS_2018	%CS_2018	n.CS_2020	%CS_2020
0 – 5000	8	1,5	25	3,2
5001 – 10000	26	4,7	34	4,4
10001 – 50000	107	19,5	181	23,4
50001 – 100000	85	15,5	117	15,1
100001 – 500000	132	24,0	175	22,6
500001 – 3000000	191	34,8	247	31,9

complete substitute and that workers are desperate to return to face-to-face interactions (Florida, Rodriguez-Pose, Storper, 2021). Within this context, new working spaces such as css are changing their business model to be more attractive for teleworkers (Manzini Ceinar, Mariotti, 2021; Mariotti, Akhavan, Di Matteo, 2021; Mariotti, Akhavan, Rossi, 2021; Pais, Manzo, Gerosa, 2021), and local authorities are using public spaces and public facilities, such as public schools and libraries, to relocate employees (Di Marino, Lapintie, 2018; Manzini Ceinar, Pacchi, Mariotti, 2021; Mariotti, Di Marino, Akhavan, 2021). css generate positive externalities such as ‘risk of isolation reduction’, foster work productivity and working efficiency, improve job satisfaction and well-being, and enhance work-life balance. Indeed, the soul of a cs is geographical proximity (*co-location*), favoring the development of social, institutional, cognitive, and organizational proximities (Boschma, 2005; Mariotti, Akhavan, 2020).

The case of Italy: empirical study on the coworking spaces in peripheral and rural areas

As stated by (Mariotti, Akhavan, Rossi, 2021: 14), although the coworking phenomenon is predominantly urban, «css tend to sprawl, and most of the times, not far from the main urban areas to exploit the advantages related to urbanization economies, market potential, innovation, creative industries and entrepreneurial vivacity, and dynamic environment». According to this study, in 2018, Italy hosted 549 css. They were mainly located in the North-Western part of Italy (42%) and in the Centre (23%); while South and Islands and North-east accounted for 19% and 16%. Furthermore, the Italian Metropolitan cities are more attractive for css. Among them, Milan with more than 100 active css⁵ has marked the highest national share, attributed to the concentration of high knowledge-intensive sectors, creative industry, design and fashion, and Milan’s important status in the global city network as



Alpha global city. Concerning the National Strategy for Inner Areas (Strategia Nazionale per le Aree Interne – SNAI, Barca, Casavola, Lucatelli, 2014),⁶ 76% of css are located in urban poles, 5% in inter-municipal poles, 16% in outlying areas, and 19 css (3.5%) in Inner Areas, including intermediate, peripheral an ultraperipheral areas.

A more recent data collection by Italiancoworking⁷ at municipality (*Comune* in Italian) level shows 779 css in Italy. Concerning some studies on urban-rural classification in Europe, Sørensen (2013: 1456) introduces a three-scale urbanization category based on the population size: (1) rural areas, defined as towns or places with fewer than 5001 inhabitants; (2) town areas, defined as towns with 5001 to 100,000 inhabitants; and (3) city areas, defined as cities with more than 100,000 inhabitants. Accordingly, here we have expanded this category into six scales, whereas rural areas are broken down into three smaller categories of those municipalities with (i) up to 5000,

(ii) 5001-10,000 and (iii) 10,001-50,000; this will allow us to understand the less populated rural areas better. Comparing data in the two years of 2018 and 2020, an overall 42% growth rate is calculated, compared to a much higher increase in inner areas with 105.3% and with 70.2% for rural areas. This alone is proof that css are developing fast in peripheral and rural areas.

Tables 1 and 2 show a more detailed picture of the increasing numbers in different categories of both Inner Areas and rural areas. Accordingly, in 2020 Inner Areas record a 5% total share. Here, css appear for the first time in Ultra Peripheral areas: two municipalities of Olbia (with 60,000 inhabitants) and San Vito (with 3,800 inhabitants) in the Sardinia Region. As for the rural areas, the latest data show 31% of the national share; the municipalities with 10,001 to 50,000 inhabitants show a much higher share; nevertheless, the growing number in even less populated areas is promising.

The geographic distribution of css in Italy by population size of 7,914 municipalities (*comuni*) is showed in figure 1. By overlapping the two layers of rural areas and Inner Areas, we have identified 29 cases that we call rural-inner areas. Although North-Western part of Italy hosts the highest number of css in general, other locations are evenly attractive when it comes to rural-inner css, for instance, southern regions such as Puglia. All spaces are privately owned and managed; only one case in the Lombardy Region is a municipal initiative: *Edolo Coworking – Coworking tecnologico della montagna e Digital Lab* (in 2017). In most cases, the core aim, as declared by the founders, is also available on their official websites to attract young talents (start-ups and entrepreneurs) to less populated and peripheral areas. These spaces are either developed preliminary based on the traditional coworking model (shared office space) or in an already existing company or consultancy (for example, social innovators, business incubators, etc.) a ‘coworking space’ is then included.

An example of a cs located in a small Italian city is *Warehouse Coworking Factory*. It has been founded in 2013, in the coastal town of Marotta (Marche Region) with a population of about 12,000. It occupies a former textile warehouse was transformed into a cs, with a dynamic community of freelancers, independent professionals, and creative people coming from nearby small cities and rural areas of the region. This two-story cs offers an open space, private offices and meeting rooms, with shared informal zones (living area and coffee corner), where «social and cultural entrepreneurs can learn, experiment and thrive, where traditional companies, institutions, profit and non-profit organizations, as well as schools and academic institutions, can find reliable partners and support for the design of innovative and social impactful project» (Institute of Entrepreneurship Development 2017: 90).

Conclusion and further research

Although creative, innovative, and knowledge workers are more willing to live in metropolitan areas (Florida, 2002), the previous studies described in the second and fourth sections underline that the development of css in the peripheral areas and suburbs can be beneficial for: (i) the environment, as they contribute to reducing traffic congestion and pollution, (ii) workers experiencing an increase of wellbeing because of commuting time reduction and work-life balance improvement, and (ii) for the local context as they might retain indigenous knowledge workers and attract new knowledge workers and digital nomads, thus contributing to enhancing the socio-economic development of the area also from making use of empty spaces.

The analysis of the css in Italy has shown an increase in 2018-2020, with a concentration in inner areas (+ 105.3%), and rural areas (+ 70.2%). Nevertheless, it cannot be denied that if, from one side, the *locus amoenus* patterns of remote areas improve the quality of life, the lack of infrastructures (i.e., broadband, low transport accessibility) can inhibit every type of work (Mariotti, Di Matteo, 2020). Besides, suppose policymakers promote the location of css in peripheral areas by hosting them, for instance, in public libraries or other public premises (Di Marino, Lapintie, 2018). In that case, it

is necessary to verify: (i) the potential demand of cw and cs managers and their willingness to pay for these services, also evaluating the sustainability of the project in the long run; (ii) the technical feasibility and start-up costs; (iii) the risk to denature the coworking concept, due to the loss of dynamism and involvement in sharing the space in favor of a more static and utilitarian use of it (Mariotti, Di Matteo, 2020).

Therefore, it is expected that tailored policies coupled with bottom-up initiatives will promote the spread of new workplaces also in peripheral and rural areas, to enhance entrepreneurship and collaborative culture of working while sustaining the spontaneous and flexible aspects of coworking (Fuzi, 2015), thus reducing the gap between core and periphery and specifically, the «places that don’t matter» (Rodríguez-Pose, 2018).

Further research might focus on the analysis of the location of css in 2021 to understand whether and how peripheral areas have been attractive for css, traditional coworkers, remote workers, and how many css have been closed down due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Moreover, it should be worth investigating the «south working»⁸ phenomenon, which has significantly increased in the last year in Italy (SouthWorking, 2020), measuring it and understanding whether and how south workers are css’ users. Finally, attention should be placed on exploring the impact of policy initiatives to retain and attract knowledge workers in peripheral areas.

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Notes

1. According to ILO (2020), remote working is a general umbrella term that includes other flexible ways of working, such as teleworking, smart and agile working, and working from home. Each relates to the spatial distribution of work and is interrelated with, inevitably, some degree of overlapping (Manzini Ceinar, Mariotti, 2021).
2. Source: Deskmag; Statista.
3. <https://youthreworking.eu/>
4. The differences in the propensity of working from remote are related to a multiplicity of firm-specific factors, such as the firm size, the sector specialisation, the workers’ and firms’ affinities with digital technologies; but also, to country-specific characteristics, such as the organisation and management culture, the occupational structure, the rate of self-employment, the regulatory framework and the infrastructure accessibility (see Sostero *et al.*, 2020).
5. At the beginning of 2021 Milan hosts 119 css (Mariotti *et al.*, 2021)
6. The National Strategy for Inner Areas (Strategia Nazionale per le Aree Interne – SNAI) classified the Italian municipality into five typologies (Pole-Single municipality service centre, Multi-municipality service centres, Intermediate, Remote and Ultra-remote areas) according to the following dimensions: 1) the school dimension, indicating the presence of at least an upper secondary school; 2) the health dimension, which

considers the presence of at least one hospital offering the first level DEA (department for urgencies and emergencies); 3) the mobility dimension, delineated by the minimum presence of a silver grade railway station. Specifically, 'Pole' municipalities simultaneously own the three above-mentioned dimensions. When two or more contiguous municipalities, that individually do not own all the three characteristics, but together are able to satisfy them, are classified as Multi-municipality service centre. 'Belt' municipalities are classified as such if access time to the Poles is below 20 minutes, 'Intermediate' municipalities are between 20 and 40 minutes from Poles, 'Peripheral' municipalities are between 40 and 75 minutes from Poles, and finally 'Ultra-peripheral' municipalities are over 75 minutes far from Poles (Evangelista, Di Matteo and Ferrari, 2018: 95-96). The SNAI strategy defines Intermediate, Remote and Ultra-remote areas as Inner Areas: «areas at some considerable distance from hubs providing essential services (education, health and mobility), with a wealth of key environmental and cultural resources of many different kinds, which have been subject to anthropisation for centuries» (Barca, Casavola, Lucatelli, 2014). For further specification, see Carlucci and Lucatelli (2013), Evangelista *et al.* (2018).

7. www.italiancoworking.it

8. The term *south working* has been coined by the Associazione di Promozione Sociale 'South Working – Lavorare dal Sud', that is composed by a group of young freelancers and researchers originally from southern Italy promoting the idea to be able to go back to the South through remote working or to the Italian inner areas.

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