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Boundaries between work and non-work domains in a coworking space

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Abstract

Even though CWs are believed to promote work-life balance (Kojo & Nenonen, 2014) there is still little knowledge about exactly how this happens (Smékalovà et al., 2022). This paper is an attempt to overcome this gap, by observing how freelancers, who usually work from home (especially in the first steps of their career) or detached from traditional organizational workspaces, and employees who may work remotely manage the different boundaries (e.g., physical/spatial, temporal, social, mental) between work and non-wok domains through their experience in a CW space.

The paper is based on a case study conducted in a CW space that has been recently established in a community center located in a very distinctive neighborhood near the historic center of a medium-size city in North Italy.

Preliminary results suggest that both freelancers and employees leverage on the distinctive characteristics of the CW space to engage in a boundary work aimed at managing the boundaries between their work and non-work. However, while freelance manage their boundaries basically to find in the CW space a surrogate of a traditional organizational workspace but looking for an integration between the work and the non-work spheres of their life, remote workers manage a boundary work aimed to overcome the limits of working exclusively from the employer or from home but maintaining the separation between work and non-work domains. In this different boundary work the urban area in which the CW space is located and policies by local institutions play a crucial role.

Keywords: coworking spaces, remote work, work-life balance, boundaries between work and non-work domains, boundary work, public policies

1. Introduction

The Covid emergency has pushed many firms and workers toward remote working practices and workspaces alternative to traditional employer's premises (Bouncken et al., 2022), favoring the massive use of home working. One of the consequences of homeworking and the gradual abandonment of traditional workplaces is that many workers are experiencing significant difficulties in managing the boundaries between work and non-work domains. Accordingly, in the post-post pandemic context, among the innovative workplaces elected by workers as remote work sites we find undoubtedly coworking spaces, i.e., "shared workplaces utilised by different sorts of knowledge professionals" (Gandini, 2015), both freelancers and remote workers. Working from coworking spaces has spread so rapidly that "its implications are largely unstudied" (Howell, 2022). More specifically, even though coworking spaces are believed to promote work-life balance (Kojo & Nenonen, 2014) there is still scant knowledge about this topic and the mechanisms through which users of coworking can manage their work-life balance (Smékalovà et al., 2022).

This paper aims at addressing this issue. More specifically, we will present the results of an action research conducted in a coworking space that has been recently established in a public space located a medium-sized city in North Italy. From an empirical viewpoint, we conducted twenty semi-structured interviews with coworkers, and four focus groups involving different key-informants, such as coworking space's managers, public institutions' representatives, employers' and workers' associations, members of local community. Whereas data collection is still in progress, we will discuss our preliminary findings pertaining how freelancers and employees who work from remote manage the boundaries between work and non-wok domains through their experience in the analyzed coworking space. Preliminary results suggest us that both freelancers and employees leverage on the working experience in the coworking space to engage in a boundary work aimed at managing the boundaries between their work and non-work. However, while freelance manage their boundaries basically to find in the coworking space a surrogate of a traditional organizational workspace but looking for an integration between the work and the non-work spheres of their life, remote workers manage space, time, social relationships and mental boundaries basically to overcome the limits of working exclusively from the employer or from home but maintaining the separation between work and non-work domains. In this different boundary work also the urban area in which the coworking space is located plays a crucial role.

2. Theoretical background

For the purposes of this paper, we believe it is important to ground our analysis in theoretical terrain that encompasses two topics: coworking spaces and work/life boundaries management. As Smékalovà and colleagues (2022) stated "While there is abundant literature on both CSs and work-life balance, there is a gap when the topics are combined, which few authors have covered thus far" (p.242). Therefore, our study aims to bridge this gap by integrating these two interconnected domains and shedding light on their nuanced interplay.

2.1. Coworking spaces

Coworking spaces (CWs) have emerged as a significant phenomenon within the sharing economy context (Berbegal-Mirabent, 2021). There is currently no unambiguously accepted definition of this concept, although some authors have attempted to propose comprehensive definitions. For example, Yacoub and Haefliger (2022) suggest that a coworking space can be described as "*an open, shared, and diverse workspace with flexible structures gathering knowledge workers from different backgrounds and objectives*" (p.4). Spinuzzi (2012), on the other hand, stated that CWs can be described as "*collaborative environments that feed innovation and creativity under the slogan working alone together*" (p.2).

Going beyond the aspects that are more closely tied to the definition of the concept, there is a substantial agreement among scholars that CWs have brought about a redefinition of the conventional physical/spatial and temporal boundaries of work and non-work. In doing so, they have commanded the attention of workers and organizations alike, emerging as the emblematic embodiment of what is commonly referred to as the "third place" (Oldenburg, 1989).

Within the realm of academic literature, the exploration of the "third place" concept can be traced back to the 1980s. As noted by Mimoun and Gruen (2021), the term "third place" encapsulates "social spaces that provide users with social experiences and relationships outside of their homes (first places) and workspaces (second places)" (p.564). The prototype of this type of place is the bar or coffee shop (Lin 2012; De Luca & Pegan, 2014), other examples, however, include religious centers (Hickman, 2013), museums (Slater & Koo, 2010), pubs (Goode & Anderson, 2015), bookshops (Laing & Royle, 2013), and libraries (Montgomery & Miller, 2011). As Oldenburg (2001) reminds us, the value proposition of a "third place" is to be able to encourage people to come together. Indeed, third places foster a sense of community by offering a space for casual social interactions that go beyond the strict social norms and roles

found in the hospitality of one's home or the professionalism of the workplace (Holt and Thompson, 2004).

According to Brown (2017), CWs can be considered a real new "third place", whose rise can be attributed to several interconnected circumstances: the structural changes of work that becomes increasingly "knowledge-intensive", the acceleration of the "freelance economy", and the innovations generated by the Internet and digital technologies, which have radically altered the spatial distribution of work (Montanari, Mattarelli and Scapolan, 2021).

Traditionally, third places such as CWs were associated with creative professionals seeking a collaborative and inspiring environment. Indeed, these spaces provided a sense of community, networking opportunities, and access to resources that catered to the specific needs of creative individuals. However, with the rise of the gig economy and the increasing number of individuals opting for freelance work arrangements, third places have evolved to accommodate the changing workforce landscape. Freelancers from various industries now recognize the benefits of working in these shared spaces.

Furthermore, the popularity of CWs is steadily rising as people increasingly seek more sustainable approaches to both their living and working arrangements. The desire for environmentally conscious lifestyles and work practices has fueled the demand for alternative solutions that minimize ecological footprints and promote sustainable development. Consequently, individuals are actively exploring and embracing these innovative workspaces that align with their values and aspirations for a greener and more harmonious future and specifically a better work-life balance and increased well-being.

Abundant studies on CWs and work-life balance have flourished, for instance suggesting that working from these spaces rather than from home improves, beyond the individual productivity, also the work-life balance (Hu, 2020) and speeds up shifts from work and non-work spheres (Blagoev, Costas e Kärreman, 2019; Orel, 2020). Nevertheless, as Orel (2019) noted: "while the coworking industry is rapidly evolving and the academia is keener on investigating the field, the subcategory of work–life and family care within these collaborative environments is virtually unresearched" (p.549).

Thus, a call for more research on CWs and work-life boundaries management has been advanced (Smékalovà, 2022), and some exploratory research has been conducted to investigate how the balance between work and home is managed (Sturges, 2012), leveraging on both temporal and spatial flexibility of new forms of work (Gonsalves, 2020; Wessels et al., 2019). Regarding the temporal dimension of working in CWs, see for instance the study by Rinaldini and colleagues (2021) on time crafting in CWs.

As far as the spatial aspect is concern, it is worthwhile to note that CWs predominantly emerge within urban settings where the concentration of knowledge workers, diverse industries, and vibrant entrepreneurial ecosystems provide fertile ground for their growth and development (Bouncken & Reuschl, 2018; Waters-Lynch & Potts, 2017). This geographical distribution reflects the prevailing trend of CWs being established in bustling urban belts,. In contrast, the adoption of collaborative workspaces in rural regions has been slower, potentially due to factors such as limited infrastructure, lower population densities, and a reduced pool of users. Furthermore, when examining the relationship between CWs and the urban environment, a considerable number of researchers and practitioners hold the belief that these unique spaces possess the capacity to not only effectively stimulate entrepreneurship and innovation but also contribute significantly to the revitalization of cities (Mariotti et al., 2017; Jamal, 2018).

While our knowledge about the prevalence of CWs in major metropolitan areas is relatively extensive, there remains a notable scarcity of information regarding the intricacies of this phenomenon within smaller urban settings (Fuzi, 2015), where CSs, for instance in Italy, tend to be smaller and more embedded in the local community (Rodighiero, Montanari and Scapolan, 2022). Thus, we believe that analyzing the issue of how individuals manage the boundaries between work and non-work domains in CWs located in small and medium sized urban settings could enrich extant literature.

2.2 Work-non work boundaries

The literature on work-non work boundaries has been developing for several years. If, on the one hand, interest in this topic continues to grow more and more (Kossek et al., 2012; Matthews et al., 2010), on the other hand the enormous development of digital technologies is making increasingly evident what was already seen a decade ago as a reshaping of the boundaries work and life domains (Kossek & Distelberg, 2009). In addressing this matter, researchers commonly employ dichotomous frameworks, such as the concepts of integration vs. segmentation or integration vs. separation (Clark, 2000; Kossek et al., 1999).

These dichotomies were introduced by Ashforth and colleagues who, in their influential work (2000), also shed light on the dynamics involved in transitioning between different work and non-work/life domains. Specifically, they make a crucial differentiation between "macro" and "micro" transitions. The former, which falls outside the scope of their analysis, pertains to permanent changes in the life-work transition, such as retirement or a promotion. Conversely, the latter aligns with our current focus: the daily transitions that occur between the life sphere

and the work sphere. These transitions can be categorized into three types: (1) work-home transitions (e.g., commuting); (2) work-work transitions (e.g., switching between different roles within an organization); and (3) work-"third place" transitions (e.g., moving from work to any other social domain).

As mentioned above, in the current era of increased digital connectivity and remote work, the relevance of third places, not only as social places but increasingly as innovative workspaces, has become more pronounced. Indeed, as the boundaries between work and personal life continue to blur, individuals are actively seeking out third places, such as CWs, as a strategic approach to effectively manage the transition from one sphere to another. The flexibility and accessibility afforded by digital technologies have allowed work to permeate into our personal spaces, often blurring the lines between professional obligations and personal time. This constant connectivity and the potential for work to encroach upon our leisure and family time may have created a pressing need for intentional separation and balance or, on the opposite, may have contributed to favoring an easier and more beneficial integration of time and spaces related to the two spheres. Unfortunately, as we have already stated, only a few studies to date have addressed the link between CWs and work-life balance (for an exception, see the already mentioned valuable article by Orel, 2019). As a matter of fact, also the extant literature on the wider topic of work-life flexibility is still lacking. Indeed, in a recent work appearing in Journal of Management (Kossek and colleagues, 2023), after reviewing 338 contributions study work-life flexibility policies, the authors concluded that the literature most often deals with flexibility policies and what outcomes they generate at the individual level but under-assesses individual boundary control forms and their implementation. More specifically, according to Kossek and colleagues (2023), it should be recognized that there are different types of control that workers can implement; control, in fact, can be not only spatial or temporal, but also involve dimensions such as permeability and continuity.

Consistently, Bourdeau and colleagues (2019) define work-life flexibility policiesk as those which "give employees latitude over when, where, and how much they work" (p.173). In a way, this is precisely the hallmark of the experience that freelance and smart workers (i.e., employees who work remotely) can found in CWs.

Indeed, working from CWs asks to make decisions about when, where, and how much to work (Rinaldini, Scapolan, Rodighiero and Montanari, 2021). These decisions help individuals to precisely delineate the limits beyond which work gives way to the personal sphere. In delineating the breadth of work-life domains they are also creating constraints and opportunities regarding the possibility of crossing those boundaries. Thus, this boundary-setting process is

crucial not only to ensuring a balance between work and personal life, but to enable individuals to manage their work responsibilities and take care of personal and family needs. In other words, once the domains have been established, the question of implementing flexibility, i.e., managing the domains' boundaries, arises (Kossek, Ruderman, Braddy and Hannum, 2012).
Shedding light on these issues is the main purpose of our empirical research, basically driven by the following research questions:

How can individuals leverage on CWs to manage their work and non-work/life boundaries?

Is there any difference in the work-life boundaries management between freelancers and remote workers working from CWs?

Does the CWs' location play a role in the individual's work-life boundaries management?

3. The empirical research

3.1 Research design and methods

In terms of setting up the analysis, we were inspired by methods and tools peculiar to action-research.
Action research is an interactive process of inquiry that seeks to appropriately balance the problem-solving tendency typical of collaborative settings with a participatory, data-driven type of research (Reason & Bradbury, 2001; Rowell et al., 2015).
Orel & Mayerhoffer (2021) are convinced that qualitative research is the most promising, as it allows direct contact with what are the feelings and views of those who, in various ways, populate CWs. Consistently Ivaldi and colleagues (2020) employed action research methodologies to investigate a network of coworking spaces in northern Italy.
Specifically, our main objective was to provide support for the partial reconfiguration of a community center by transforming it also into a co-working space that could accommodate and meet the needs of both local smart workers (i.e., employees who work remotely) and freelancers. The community center where the action research was carried out is located in the urban belt of a medium-size city in North Italy (Reggio Emilia), very close to the city's historical center. More precisely, this community center is located at the heart of a historical working-class neighborhood that used to be home to small shops (bakeries, barbershops, grocery stores, etc.) and artisan laboratories. In the 1980s many shops and laboratories began to close, local population changed, and the neighborhood slowly degraded. To counteract this degradation process, the Municipality has recently pursued neighborhood regeneration policies

supporting the establishment of café, pubs, commercial activities, as well as fab labs and art laboratories. The community center - where a café, a billiard room, a "bocciodromo" and other multifunctional spaces are located - was supposed to have crucial role in the regeneration process of the neighborhood, but it was to be revitalized. Therefore, the Municipality decided to give the management of the community center to a social cooperative with the purpose to revitalize it and organize leisure activities and cultural events. The partial reconfiguration of the community center into a co-working space is part of this larger revitalization project.

The action-research path aimed to achieve the following objectives: 1) co-design; 2) study and monitoring; 3) proposal of a scaling model.

Operationally, however, the research was marked by precise steps, which can be summarized as follows: 1) two living labs; 2) two weeks of experimentation; 3) four focus groups.

To systematize and make the evidence that emerged easily analyzable, we decided to sort the information along two lines: 1) perceptions of freelancers; 2) perceptions of smart workers. These perceptions concerned both the CW space and the neighborhood in which the space turns out to be located. Through appropriate analytical tools (including, textual analysis of semi-structured interview responses and analysis of focus group transcripts), we sought to infer useful information to answer our research question: how does experience within CW spaces impact freelancers and smart workers in managing work-life boundaries?

The hypothesis that accompanied our work is that the relationship between CWs and boundaries management is influenced, to an extent not easily quantifiable, by the urban space in which the CW is located.

3.2. Research phases

As mentioned above, our research consisted of several phases sequentially related to each other: living labs, experimentation, and focus groups.

The living labs, through their participatory dynamics, provided valuable opportunities for discussion and interaction among actors interested in the creation and development of the coworking space. During these experiences, different stakeholders had the possibility to share ideas, perspectives, and expertise, thus contributing to the construction of a collaborative and inclusive conversation.

During the meetings, appropriately coordinated by the project's researchers and scientific director, entrepreneurs, civil servants, professionals, and citizens were given the opportunity to express their views not only on the project itself, but also on the significance of a CW space in

the relevant urban context. Among the themes that emerged with some clarity were: the vision of CW space as a tool for urban regeneration; the sharing of work spaces as an essential prerequisite for social inclusion; the need to create strong interactions between CW space and the neighborhood in which it is located; the importance of physical layout in CWs design; the crucial relationship between the way work is performed and its spatial dimension; the vision of CWs as decentralized work locations; and the need to balance the opportunity to have social exchanges, with the legitimate need for privacy.

At the end of the living labs, the actual experimentation began. At this stage, numerous workers (mainly, freelancers and remote workers) assiduously frequented the space, totally stepping into the role of coworking users. Each participant, at the end of their experience within the CW space, was invited to answer an open-ended questionnaire. The questionnaire was structured into six questions. Three questions were about the CW space and three others were about the neighborhood that hosts it. Participants were asked to comment on both contexts in terms of: positive aspects, negative aspects and suggestions for change. The textual evidence collected through the questionnaire was analyzed using ATLAS software. The results obtained were subsequently used as a starting point to set up the conduct of the next phase, namely that of focus groups.

In the last phase, within the focus groups, participants in the experiment had the opportunity to express themselves on the issues they considered most relevant. Specifically, the discussion focused mainly on the following topics: community center and neighborhood adequacy to host a coworking space; differences, in terms of work execution, between traditional work spaces, home work spaces, and shared work spaces; distinctive needs of freelancers and remote (smart) workers; possible ways of accessing the CW space; the possibility of creating a network of exchanges between the CW space and other business and social entities in the urban area; the need to resolve issues related to CW space governance.

Focus group conversations were transcribed and subjected to further textual analysis. Finally, the entire wealth of data that was collected during all phases of the research was sorted into appropriate summary documents.

4. Results

4.1 Overview and classification criteria

The results were sorted according to a twofold criterion. On the one hand, we collected the views of all participants (generic results); on the other hand, we delved into the views of freelancers and smart workers (specific results) by collecting them in separate prospectuses.
Participants' views, expressed in Italian, were taken from both the transcripts of the focus groups (FG) and the responses provided within the open-ended questionnaire (Q).
The quotes translated into English (which are presented here in quotation marks) are the result of careful verification inspired by the double translation method. Using this technique, we can ensure full correspondence between the expressions in English and the original statements, expressed in Italian.
To facilitate the reading and interpretation of the textual evidence, we will proceed to illustrate the results according to the criteria below.

1. Generic level: all participants

1.1 coworking space strengths

1.2 neighborhood strengths

1.3 coworking space weaknesses

1.4 neighborhood weaknesses

2. Specific level

2F Freelancers' views

2F.1 coworking space strengths according to freelancers

2F.2 neighborhood strengths according to freelancers

2F.3 coworking space weaknesses according to freelancers

2F.4 neighborhood weaknesses according to freelancers

2SW smart workers' views

2SW.1 coworking space strengths according to smart workers

2SW.2 neighborhood strengths according to smart workers

2SW.3 coworking space weaknesses according to smart workers

2SW.4 neighborhood weaknesses according to smart workers

As can be easily guessed, freelancers and smart workers views received a greater importance than other visions.

This type of data sorting not only permits us to understand how these specific categories of workers experience coworking, but also allows us to capture with some immediacy any points

of similarity and difference between them. Finally, this specific evidence classification allows us to identify some distinctive characteristics of freelancers and smart workers when, as users of CWs, they attempt to manage work/life boundaries.

4.2 Generic results

1.1: In general, coworking space is valued for its quietness and for being bright and welcoming. While many users appreciate the comfort and ergonomics of the workstation, there are also workers who perceive the presence of a "quiet room" as a real added value.

Additional strength is the presence of the café within the social center that houses the coworking space. In this case, users appreciate not only the possibility of being able to take breaks in an environment exclusively dedicated to refreshments, but also the fact that the bar allows for socialization. "*I also appreciate being able to take a coffee break directly at the café below and chat with other people*."[Q]

1.2: If we move from the coworking space to the neighborhood, we see that it is valued mainly for the availability of parking spaces and its proximity to the city center.

"[This neighborhood is] *easy to reach by all means of transport (private and/or public) and on foot. Large and free parking* [are available]" (Q).

Additional strength is the presence of important cultural venues that are well known throughout the city. Coworking users are attracted by the possibility of being able, once their work is done, to visit a pub or go to a concert.

"[I really appreciate] *the immediate proximity of 'decompression' possibilities"*[Q].

1.3: Among the weaknesses of the coworking space we can find some aspects that can be improved. As we said the space is comfortable, but there are some improvements that could be made. For example, the absence of furniture intended for the safekeeping of one's personal belongings, in the event of temporary absence is considered problematic.

"*It is a problem that you have to carry the equipment with you for safety reasons and of not being able to leave them in the room*"[Q].

1.4: There is no shortage of clear evidence regarding the neighborhood's weaknesses. Most prominent among these are the impression of general social degradation and poor security, which is a perception that is heightened especially during evening hours. From this point of view, what is a weakness for the neighborhood actually risks becoming a weakness for the coworking space. "*The area risks being perceived as unsafe*" [Q].

4.3 Specific results

2F.1: As for coworking space, freelancers, in addition to the tranquility of the environment, highly value being able to break the routine and work in an atmosphere rich in stimulation and opportunities for social contact. Inside the coworking space there are armchairs, which allow people to take breaks from work without going outside. In addition, there is a billiard room and a bowling alley in the adjacent spaces, which are seen not only as places for recreation and relaxation, but also as spaces where clients and coworkers can meet freelancers in an atmosphere of complete informality. "*There are various options for working without always sitting at the workstation. For example, I spent a couple of hours in the armchair* [...] *I believe that the billiard room is an excellent resource for informal situations (breaks from work, meetings with clients or collaborators)* [...] *I think the bowling alley could be an informal and suggestive space to break the routine*" [Q].

2F.2: Consistent with the perceptions expressed with respect to coworking space, freelancers value all those aspects of the neighborhood that foster full freedom to transition from the life domain to the work domain. This category of coworkers highly values the cultural vibrancy of the neighborhood and the availability within it of services essential for effective management of work/life boundaries. For example, a freelancer says: "*My son's daycare is exactly halfway between my house and the coworking space, which would make it a perfect logistical choice*" [Q].

2F.3: Freelancers almost totally appreciate coworking space, but they complain about the presence of different types of workers. For example, it is a point of weakness for them that they must share the space with students. These are types of users who have totally different needs and visions of coworking than a freelancer. Moreover, such a worker usually does not find potential clients among students. This makes us realize that this professional category would like a coworking space used mainly by potential clients and collaborators.

"*I don't find the presence of students entirely aligned with the mission of a coworking space. If one of the reasons why I choose to work in a coworking is also to develop relationships, the occupation of the spaces by students limits my possibilities*" [Q].

2F.4: As for negative perceptions about the neighborhood, freelancers like most other users also perceive the urban area around the coworking space as unsafe and run-down. This whole aura of insecurity thwarts the possibility of attracting new users. "*Negative prejudices about the neighborhood can discourage some potential users from attending coworking*" [Q].

2SW.1: As we have already reiterated, our smart workers are mostly remote workers, that is workers employed by public or private organizations who decide to work at a shared workspace.

What smart workers appreciate about coworking is mainly the fact that it is different from the traditional workplace. Smart workers, in particular, like to be surrounded by "colleagues" who do not do the same work as they do. Thus, an obvious strong point coincides with the peace of mind. In coworking - smart workers say - one can work without interruptions and has the opportunity to experience "freely" even coffee break time.

"*Working together, but in a very calm atmosphere, without constant interference from colleagues, as would happen in the office* [...] *even when I worked with a colleague from my organization, the break time was more 'free'. We were out of the working context, and we were more productive*" [Q].

2SW.2: As for the strengths of the neighborhood, smart workers appreciate the liveliness of the neighborhood and the logistical convenience. "*It is appreciable that the parking is located nearby, it is free, and, above all, there is space at any time of the day*"[Q].

For a worker seeking to replicate in coworking the experience he or she has in the office, it is important that there are no impediments from a practical standpoint. Just as he or she goes to the office and is assured of arriving on time and finding parking nearby, similarly, it is important that the coworking space offers similar serenity.

2SW.3: A major weakness regarding coworking space is related to the almost total absence of privacy, which also negatively impacts concentration. Smart workers would like partition walls between the various stations, since a totally "open" layout not only affects the perception of privacy, but also risks being too distracting. "*The absence of partitions and lack of privacy can be distracting as the workstations face each other*" [Q].

2SW.4: From the point of view of negative aspects referred to the neighborhood, the same argument elaborated above also applies to smart workers. The really negative feature is the perceived lack of safety and sense of decay.

5. Discussion

To make the critical analysis of the results just presented easy, we decided to divide this section into two parts. In the first, adopting the same classification criteria seen above, appropriate reflections will be presented for each type of generic result. In the second part, a summary of the specific views considered most relevant will be offered.

5.1 Generic results

1.1: This is a seemingly ambivalent result. On the one hand, all users seem to appreciate the opportunities for socializing and sharing; on the other hand, the presence of reserved spaces, such as the quiet room, is a strongly attractive feature. In general, this evidence, leads us to reflect on the idea of socialization that coworking space manages to inspire. Unlike the office, a CW does not force one to socialize with others, but rather offers only a potential opportunity to build relationships. Similarly, unlike what may occur, for example, in a domestic space, the silence and privacy of a quiet room are authentically so. At home, a worker may experience countless unintentional interruptions, whereas in CWs the interruptions are almost always intentional, in the sense that the user of the space can decide whether to isolate him/herself or, on the contrary, expose him/herself to the interference of others.

From the perspective of managing temporal boundaries, a CW space stands out as a highly flexible tool. Consider, for example, the fact that a quiet room need not be used for professional matters only. In fact, a coworking user might enter it to make a phone call home or to take a call from his or her child's school. In such situations, it is possible to easily cross two temporal dimensions (work and non-work) while remaining within the same spatial perimeter (coworking).

1.2: This evidence suggests that a CW space may not reach its full potential if it is in an urban environment that lacks stimuli or engaging features. The results indicate that users value mobility and leisure aspects, which can contribute to attracting younger workers with sustainable travel habits and diverse entertainment needs. By being situated in an urban context that offers a range of stimuli, a coworking space can provide an enhanced experience for its users. An urban environment with various amenities, such as restaurants, cafes, parks, cultural attractions, and recreational facilities, can create a vibrant and dynamic atmosphere around the CW space. This can help foster a sense of community and provide opportunities for social interaction and networking among the coworking members.

1.3: This evidence makes us realize that there is a crucial difference between traditional or home workspace and coworking space. Very often, in the latter, there is no possibility of leaving one's personal belongings on the desk or, at worst, being able to store documents and electronic devices in special lockers. Some people find it limiting to have to take documents and tools with them every time they leave. Apparently, from this point of view, it seems that the worker has no chance to get rid of the working instruments. In a broader sense, it seems that the work dimension becomes an impassable border, since it is impossible to get out of a coworking space without bringing along "pieces" of work.

1.4: The decision to use a coworking space is closely related to the decision to engage with the surrounding neighborhood. Even if the CW space itself boasts excellent features, it may go unnoticed by potential users if the neighborhood is disliked or perceived as unsafe. The relationship between the CW and its neighborhood is intertwined, as the perceptions of the collaborative space are inevitably influenced by the characteristics and atmosphere of the urban environment in which it is located. It is essential to recognize that perceptions of coworking spaces are, to a significant extent, perceptions of the neighborhood and the urban space they inhabit. The success and attractiveness of a CW space depend not only on its own merits but also on the overall appeal of the neighborhood. Workers must feel comfortable and secure in the surrounding area to fully embrace and experience what the coworking space has to offer.
Therefore, the growth and development of a coworking space and its neighborhood are interconnected. They should evolve with mutual consideration. Improving the attractiveness and safety of the neighborhood can enhance the desirability and accessibility of the CW space. Conversely, a thriving and vibrant coworking community can contribute to the revitalization and positive perception of the neighborhood. In summary, it is important to recognize that the decision to utilize a coworking space is heavily influenced by the neighborhood it is situated in. To maximize the potential of a CW space, it must be embedded in a neighborhood that is well-regarded, safe, and appealing. The relationship between the CW and its surroundings should be nurtured and developed simultaneously, as perceptions of the collaborative space are inherently tied to the urban context in which it resides.

5.5. Specific results

2F.1: Freelancers greatly appreciate being able to manage their work and non-work time independently. Within the coworking space, they can switch between work and relaxation instantly, even without physically leaving this collaborative place. Also, it is very interesting to note that even a place that is generally seen as purely recreational or playful (the ”bocciodromo”) can turn into a place to work for a freelancer. This detail once again underscores how freelancers appreciate the extreme permeability of life/work boundaries. Their attitude is to take work into spaces where other workers would not be able to lead it.
2F.2: The permeability of work/life boundaries and the ability to cross them easily also depends on what the neighborhood offers in terms of services and opportunities for managing daily life. The presence of a preschool, for example, can help the freelance parents work and be close to their child at the same time. In addition, the presence of recreation and refreshment options

make it possible to move from work to break with relative ease. All to the benefit of serenity and professional performance. This physical and emotional closeness is essential for parents who wish to do their work without worry while being present in their children's lives. The synergy between the services offered in the neighborhood and the work environment within the coworking space helps create a favorable condition for optimal work performance and balanced living.

2F.3: Freelancer is a worker who is paid for his/her services. Not being able to connect with potential clients is seen as a strong limitation of coworking. This is evidence entirely consistent with what was seen earlier. The freelancer uses the coworking space (or spaces that are nearby) as places to promote their skills and try to increase their client base. In a sense, it is as if the freelancer is always working, even when sipping coffee with another coworker. Here CW space becomes like a kind of office without walls, where freelancers receive potential clients and are constantly promoting themselves. The open and collaborative nature of coworking facilitates opportunities to present one's capabilities in an informal but effective way. These spontaneous exchanges, which can take place during a brief conversation in a common area or at events held in the coworking space, provide an ongoing showcase for freelancers, allowing them to be always visible.

2F.4: The ability to manage work/non-work boundaries effectively depends greatly on the neighborhood's ability to be attractive. A freelancer who really likes autonomy feels constrained if he or she is not free to experience the neighborhood to its full potential. Reaching out to the neighborhood and then staying locked in the coworking space is tantamount to perceiving a clear separation between life and work. Indeed, under this assumption, the neighborhood and coworking are likely to appear exclusively as places to "go to work". The work/non-work boundaries management, in such a configuration, is excessively rigid, and this may cause the freelancer to seek workplaces other than the coworking. Quite similarly, such a scenario may drive potential coworking users away from the neighborhood.

2SW.1: Smart workers appreciate the *otherness* of the coworking space compared to the office. In other words, this category of workers especially likes the different spatial dimension of coworking. Timewise, in fact, their working hours are almost unchanged and managed in the same way as in the office. Unlike the freelancer, the smart worker seems more interested in the spatial and social aspect of the collaborative workplace. In this case, being in a coworking setting means not so much appropriating "temporal" spaces of freedom, but rather getting in touch with a different "spatial routine". The office is considered, then, a place of involuntary "interruption," whereas the CW is a space in which smart workers can freely decide when to

interrupt their flow of activity. In a sense, coworking space restores a sense of sovereignty over time that in the office can never be fully experienced.

2SW.2: The smart worker is accustomed to a regular scanning of his or her work time. Not finding parking, for example, could be a "disruptive" element, since not finding parking means delaying the start of the work activity. While for a freelancer this aspect seems less important, for a smart worker it is a determining factor. Smart worker performance often depends on a precise planning of the working day, in which every minute is precious. The lack of available parking, as irrelevant as it may appear at first glance, can make it difficult to reach the workplace and may require a prolonged search for alternative solutions, such as paid parking or public transport. This implies additional management of time and resources.

2SW.3: Once again it seems clear that the smart worker wishes to replicate some of the characteristics of the office at the coworking. In a sense, this category of workers is telling us that working together with others is a good thing, but opportunities for socialization should not compromise confidentiality and peace of mind. We are always faced with the theme of efficiency, albeit reproposed in different terms. Little privacy and the risk of distraction are factors that undermine the efficient time performance of work. For a worker interested in replicating the same temporal dynamics in the coworking as in the office, this is absolutely deleterious.

2SW.4: The aspect of perceived low security shows us how, at a deep level, all workers desire the same thing when they go to a coworking space. This desire can be summed up in one word: safety. The negative aspects of the neighborhood make the distribution of critical issues somewhat "democratic." When devising neighborhood redevelopment policies, one should consider that safety is the real enabling factor for the attractiveness of a place and, consequently, of a coworking space.

6. Conclusion

The studied coworking space is perceived as a space full of strengths, but it is necessary to consider that many of these strengths depend on its location within a neighborhood that is all in all valued.

"*It is a place that, by the way, I didn't know, and I got to know on the occasion of our meeting. So, in my opinion the place can be a landmark*" [FG]. The critical points are linked to physical-spatial elements of the coworking, and to some negative characteristics of the neighborhood.

The differences in terms of preferences between smart workers and freelancers raise doubts about the possibility that these two categories of workers can coexist in the same coworking space. Smart workers see coworking as a space "other" than the office. Coworking, from their point of view, must be functional for the effective performance of work, provide a good degree of privacy, and be set in an easy-to-reach urban context. Opportunities for socialization, while not denied, are seen as marginal strengths. "*So, I immediately found a feeling of great calm and tranquility working in this context [...] In my office, people come in, they ask and maybe someone comes by and has to tell you something, so you are constantly interrupted*" [FG]. Freelancers, for their part, are very attentive to the functionality of the space in its entirety, which must really be a concrete alternative to working from home. This means that in a coworking space these workers are mainly looking for social stimulation, which can be transformed into professional opportunities if necessary. "*If I am a freelancer and I consider this space as an alternative to my home, it has to be a space where I can do all my activities. Because if I must pay, to have a space where I can only do some things and not others, it is better for me to stay at home*" [FG]. A coworking space and the neighborhood in which it is located can hardly be conceived as separate places. This appears to be especially true in smaller urban realities. Nowadays, both cities and workplaces are primarily "places of crossing", not only in a physical sense but especially in a metaphorical sense. In this second meaning, the people who act in these places are constantly crossing the boundaries between life and work. These boundaries can have temporal, spatial, psychological, and emotional connotations. In any case, the incessant crossing of the different spheres of one's existence gives rise to entirely new needs that organizations and cities must try to satisfy. In this scenario, a coworking space becomes a privileged observation point on the changes in the world of work, and the social transformations that accompany them. If it is true that the way in which professional performance is experienced is changing, it is undeniable that the perimeter in which this transformation takes place is much larger than we could think. What is changing is not only the way of working, therefore, but also the way life is lived. Taking care of one thing means inevitably taking care of the other.

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