

The COVID-19 Pandemic and the Future of Working Spaces (book review)



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During the COVID-19 pandemic, there has been a significant increase in flexible working (e.g., remote working, virtual coworking, working from third places such as coworking spaces and coffee shops) which has impacted our society from different perspectives (e.g., work-life balance, mobility, socio-economic effects, a new debate on regional and rural development). The analysis of these trends is

still rather complex considering the myriad factors that may characterise single countries and regions and people's work life. Thus, even the concept of the workplace and its understanding are subject to multiple interpretations by academics, policymakers, stakeholders, and people.

A theoretical and empirical understanding of New Working Spaces (**NeWSps**), such as coworking spaces, maker spaces, fab labs, public libraries, and coffee shops, including scenarios of flexible working, have been analysed and discussed in the edited volume "The COVID-19 Pandemic and the Future of Working Spaces" that is published in Routledge-RSA Regions & Cities Book Series - Regions, Cities and Covid-19. The book also frames a future vision of working spaces and practices.

The edited volume plays an important intellectual role in the field by providing cross-comparison and interdisciplinary analyses of the phenomenon, NeWSps, which encompasses a wide range of places, as mentioned above, and users, such as independent and self-employed workers, employees, and small businesses.

The book provides a collation of emerging and innovative studies on the growth of NeWSps, both formal and informal (e.g., coworking spaces, maker spaces, fab labs, public libraries, and coffee shops). The primary focus is on exploring the role that NeWSps have played within the COVID-19 pandemic in urban and regional development and planning. Readers will find original and interdisciplinary approaches to NeWSps. The contributors were asked to reflect upon the following aspects **(i)** the context of the COVID-19 pandemic that has transformed NeWSps business models and the work life of owners and users; **(ii)** the debate on NeWSps in the context of socioeconomics and planning pre and post-pandemic; and **(iii)** new directions for urban and regional development and resilience to the COVID-19 pandemic, in light of new people's habits.

The eighteen book chapters have been collected from the results of 55 researchers, 48 of whom are involved in the COST Action CA18214 network "The Geography of New Working Spaces and the Impact on the Periphery". The network consists of leading scholars in the field and young researchers from across Europe, North America, Lebanon, and Israel, from different disciplinary backgrounds (e.g., urban and regional economics, geography, sociology, business and management, urban planning, architecture, and real estate) (See, The geography of New Working Spaces and impact on the periphery CA18214)

Furthermore, the book contributes to the literature on urban and regional studies by focusing on the evolving concept of workplaces and their role in urban and regional development, policy and planning. So far, workspaces have been mainly studied by architects and real estate experts, business and management scholars, and sociologists. In addition, the book chapters contribute to theoretical and empirical studies on the links between NeWSps and cities, regions, and rural areas (the territory), which are rather limited. To summarise, the book provides a comprehensive understanding of the theoretical and practical implications of NeWSps for our society, economy, and urban/regional planning in conditions following the COVID-19 pandemic.

From theory to case studies worldwide

The book is structured around three parts.

In Part 1, “Socioeconomic Impacts of the COVID-19 Pandemic on NeWSps and New Development Scenarios”, the book chapters elaborate on knowledge of the social and economic impacts of lockdowns on NeWSps and possible scenarios for future development. The contributions present new strategies for collaboration, communication, and interaction (including ICT, Web 2.0 media, and hybrid spaces), new knowledge sharing and worker training for sustaining and increasing the economic performance and competitiveness of NeWSp despite the pandemic.

In Part 2: “The Role of NeWSps in Urban and Regional Development and the Policy and Planning Debate During the COVID-19 Pandemic”, the contributors outline various forms in which NeWSps are manifested in policies, urban and regional development and planning. Studies have been conducted in cities and regions, including dispersed urban and rural areas. The chapters show adaptations of NeWSps (including the various actors, stakeholders, communities, and users) to current and post-pandemic conditions. This part shows a further need for new planning practices, strategies, and policies for a more sustainable urban and regional development.

In Part 3: “NeWSps and the Work Lives of Coworkers and Remote Workers Under the COVID-19 Pandemic”, comprises chapters that address a wide variety of theoretical and analytical interpretations of concepts and development of NeWSp. The contributors focus on the role of NeWSps in satisfying the need for remote

workers (such as gender and family issues). This part explores i) the adjustments of people to remote working environments; ii) the strengths and challenges that users have encountered when socialising, meeting, and commuting; and (iii) the main consequences on the work-life balance.

The cited cases and/or contributions draw from Italy, France, Portugal, Germany, Switzerland, Poland, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Slovakia, the United Kingdom, Belgium, Malta, the Netherlands, Finland, Norway, Sweden, Estonia, the USA, Lebanon, and Canada. Unlike other publications, researchers, practitioners, policymakers, and stakeholders can find several cross-comparison analyses (from 2 to 5 countries). The studies from multiple perspectives and different countries can be relevant to the large audience of experts and non-experts seeking a varied view and understanding of the differences and similarities among Western and Eastern European countries and beyond Europe (USA, Lebanon and Korea).

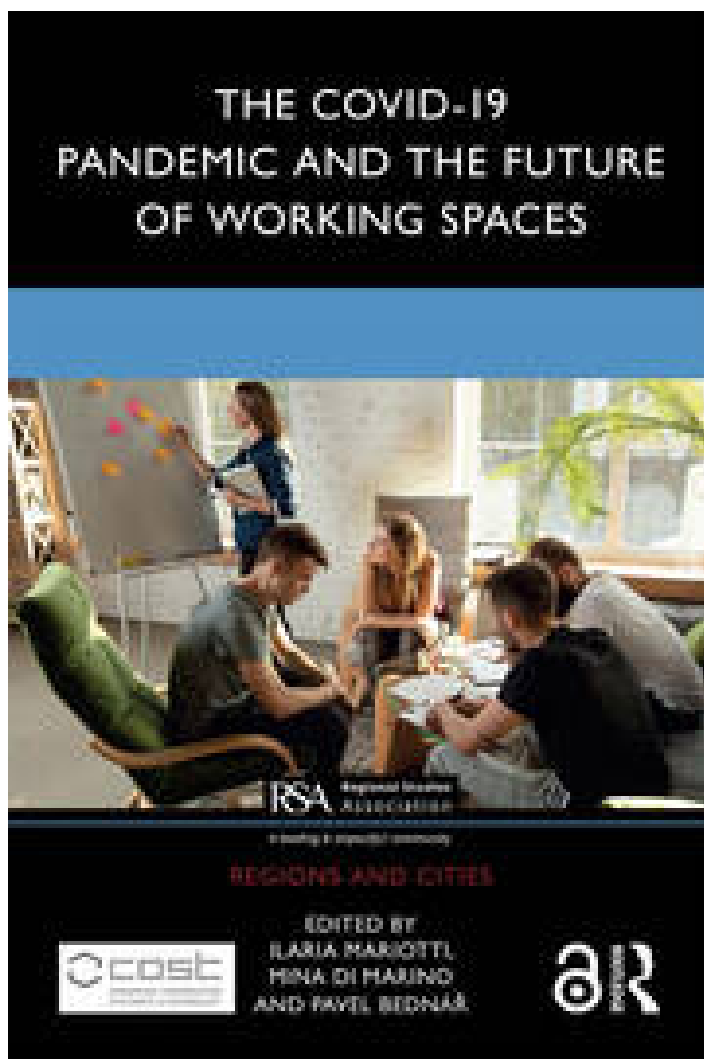
Referring to methods for analysing NeWSp, the contributions to 'The COVID-19 Pandemic and the Future of Working Spaces' provide a broader spectrum of qualitative analyses (e.g., observations, interviews, document analyses, and visual documentation), as well as spatial analyses that will be relevant to readers. In addition, some book chapters present quantitative analyses (such as surveys and statistics), while other studies have used mix-methods.

Thus, the edited volume provides new knowledge to academics and policymakers in urban and regional studies. The whole book or single chapters are recommended to undergraduate students entering the field and graduate and doctoral students. Readers will find some books on new collaborative spaces and workplaces published in the last decade. However, the edited volume provides a novel approach consisting of cross-comparison and interdisciplinary analyses.

To conclude, we believe that 'The COVID-19 Pandemic and the Future of Working Spaces' can do an essential job in offering new interpretations of NeWSpS that will be of interest to several disciplines (urban and regional economics, management, economic geography, human geography, urban and regional planning, architecture, and real estate), as well as stakeholders policy makers, planners and users.

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Acknowledgements

This publication is based on COST Action CA18214 ‘The Geography of New Working Spaces and the Impact on the Periphery’, supported by COST (European Cooperation in Science and Technology). COST (European Cooperation in Science and Technology) is a funding agency for research and innovation networks. Our actions help connect research initiatives across Europe and enable scientists to grow their ideas by sharing them with their peers. This boosts their research, career and innovation.



Funded by the Horizon 2020 Framework Programme of the European Union