

BOOK REVIEW

Ilaria Mariotti, Mina Di Marino, Pavel Bednář (Eds),
The COVID-19 Pandemic and the Future of Working Spaces, Routledge, 2022

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The world is still dealing with the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic and is uncertain about the future evolution of the virus. Now is a great time to collect, analyse and share the knowledge that science has gained about the impact of the coronavirus pandemic. The editors of the book, Ilaria Mariotti, Mina Di Marino, Pavel Bednář, have collected a plentiful amount of research from experienced scholars as well as promising young researchers of the COST-Action researcher network 'The Geography of New Working Spaces and the Impact on the Periphery (CA18214)' on the COVID-19 impact on new working spaces and related work-life issues. Both formal and informal (such as coworking spaces, maker spaces, fab labs, public libraries, and cafes) working spaces are addressed in the studies.

The radical shift to social distancing due to the COVID-19 pandemic made new workspaces (NeWSps) change their business model, and it has an immediate and long-term effect. The book investigates the ways how NeWSps dealt with challenges during the peak of the pandemic and discusses the developments of future workspaces. The book is divided into three parts. The first part is dedicated to the socioeconomic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on new working spaces and future development scenarios. The main focus of this part is on what happened during the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic in new working spaces. It provides diverse approaches to the topic, including a general overview of the topic as well as specific cases.

The second part is about the role of NeWSps in urban and regional development and the policy and planning debate during the COVID-19 pandemic. By looking at various urban, rural, and regional contexts, the authors consider the difficulties that NeWSps have experienced and may face in the future.

The book's third part looks at new working spaces and the work experiences of co-workers and remote workers during the COVID-19 pandemic. In particular, it is explored to what extent the NeWSp models, created during the pandemic, meet the needs of remote workers.

The book provides different perspectives on the topic. One of the strengths of the book is the geographical diversity of studies. Editors of the book have selected studies not only from metropolitan areas or most usual (i.e., bigger) countries but studies cover diverse areas of the world. For example, the study by Seong et al. investigates co-working spaces in South Korea, providing valuable insight into the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic in Asia. Governments in Asian countries mostly reacted rigorously to the pandemic, which was different from many Western societies. Additionally, remote working was not day-to-day practice in many Asian countries before the pandemic. Thus, the shift in ways of working was even more abrupt. A deeper understanding of NeWSps transformation due to the pandemic in Asia is pivotal for policymakers, employers, and other stakeholders.

El Sahli et al. explore Beirut's co-working scene and opens the window to the NeWSps' situation in the Middle East. The previous literature on the topic in this region is missing. Therefore, believably, readers of the book value this unique insight. In addition to the study, the article is an engaging reading because it describes the region's historical development and emphasizes the promising future of NeWSps in Lebanon.

Furthermore, the book includes research from different parts of Europe, rural and urban regions, and compares NeWSps and their users in different countries. It is worth highlighting the research that addresses the potential of NeWSps in rural areas. Several authors advocate the idea that NeWSps could be a tool to stimulate the attractiveness of the peripheral regions as a qualitative space for living and working. For example, Tomaz et al. compare coworking spaces (CS) in rural regions of France, Belgium, and Portugal based on interviews with CS managers. They discuss differences and similarities and point out that rural CSs should not try to mimic urban CSs, but rather create their own model based on their intrinsic qualities, such as their hybrid nature and role as a hub of economic and social innovation.

The second merit of the book is the diversity of research methods that allow for addressing topics in-depth and from different perspectives. In addition to quantitative and qualitative studies, the mixed method, digital ethnography, case study, policy analysis, GIS analysis, as well as primary and secondary data have been used for the research. In the first chapter of the book, Gerosa and Ceinar discuss the debate around CS in social media platform Twitter using digital ethnography research method. Researchers aim to understand whether the web perception overlaps with the real dynamics

occurring in CSs during 2020. They analysed topics and the most frequent hashtags and discussed interesting results in two pandemic phases.

The policy analysis by Pacchi et al. looks at policy interventions tested across European cities. Several examples of EU and local policies are discussed, and the authors envisage future scenarios and show how policymakers could foster local employment and long-term place sustainability.

Thirdly, from the book, readers can find several classifications and typologies related to the NeWSps, which makes it a beneficial resource for theoretical discussions in future studies. For example, Lange et al. provide readers with the typology of new working spaces, categories for analysing local sovereignty practices, and five socioeconomic implications of new working spaces in rural areas. Tagliaro et al. propose in their article four levels of the community in NeWSps, and La Fleur et al., introduce three categories of motives to work at a CS.

Finally, I praise the effort to provide useful insight to the practitioners: CS managers and NeWSps users. Studies about measures to survive and develop their services are undoubtedly an excellent resource for every entrepreneur in the field. For instance, Sinitsyna et al. argue that during the pandemic, the main aim of the CS managers was to keep the community alive by reaching their CS members online and communicating regularly with them. The study's authors call it virtual co-working, which presumably is the first study of this phenomenon.

In addition, important topics for NeWSps users – i.e. work-life balance, empowerment of women, etc. – are discussed. The study by Smékalová et al. investigates the factors that contribute to the work-life balance of CS users. They point out several ways to develop CS services to ensure a better balance between work and private life for their customers. However, several services were negatively impacted during the pandemic, and the long-term effect will be revealed in the future.

In their concluding remarks, the editors describe the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on NeWSps and summarize future avenues for the research. The NeWSps will have an essential role in post-pandemic work organization. Editors argue that new ways of working and the physical environment can significantly affect productivity, quality of life, worker well-being, and innovation activities. Therefore, it is necessary to continue the research in this field, and I look forward to the sequel to this book.

As the pandemic hit the world suddenly, it is understandable that researchers have tried to react fast and study the NeWSps in these circumstances as versatile as possible. For the next book it could be a good idea to map research questions according to the interests of different stakeholders and provide research results accordingly. For instance, entrepreneurs running CS may need more information about effective practices of service development, and policymakers could use the

research results on planning urban and rural regions, municipalities, collaboration with the private sector, etc. It could help even more leverage the benefit of the research in society.

In conclusion, the book *The COVID-19 Pandemic and the Future of Working Spaces* is an excellent resource for researchers, policymakers, employers, and a wider audience interested in in-depth knowledge on the situation of NeWSps during the COVID-19 pandemic and future trends. We live in the VUCA world, and workplaces must adapt to the fluctuating reality. The NeWSps can offer flexibility and geographical dispersion and better meet the needs of today's workers. The book is undoubtedly a vital milestone in the debate on NeWSps and future trends of work organization.

At the beginning of the book, the editors set the aim of this publication to explore, understand, and explain the specific consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic on new workspaces and discuss their role in urban and regional development and planning. These goals are fulfilled extensively.

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