Language in collaborative spaces: Advantages and barriers

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Introducing the notion of collaborative spaces

In the last decade, we have witnessed a proliferation of workspaces reflecting a culture of collaboration and openness. In line with the increasingly collaborative and sharing nature of the contemporary socio-economic context, both private and public actors invested relevant resources in designing and implementing physical spaces aimed at favoring the development of collaborative practices among individuals who hold different educational and professional backgrounds, but are co-located in the same physical premises (Bouncken & Reuschl, 2018; de Vaujany & Aroles, 2019). Such spaces are usually labelled as collaborative spaces because they are expected to facilitate collaboration relationships both within their premises (i.e., among their users) and across them (i.e., between their users and external actors). Collaborative spaces are built and designed following the assumption that face-to-face contact has a positive impact on the propensity of individuals with different backgrounds to interact and exchange ideas (Oksanen & Ståhle, 2013), thus favoring the development of a sense of creative community (Garrett, Spreitzer, & Bacevice, 2017).

The word collaborative space is an umbrella term that is related to a wide array of work settings such as coworking spaces, innovation hubs, fab labs, incubators, and science parks (Capdevila, 2019; Merkel, 2019). These spaces can be differentiated in terms of governance, property, and mission. For example, collaborative spaces can be founded and managed by public institutions
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(municipalities and other local public institutions, chambers of commerce, etc.), universities, private actors (individuals, associations, etc.), and mixed, public-private ventures. To this regard, it is interesting to note that also well established companies (often operating in rather traditional sectors) are increasingly interested in launching and running collaborative spaces, which might be open to external users or restricted to their employees only. Depending on their governance form, collaborative spaces can pursue more business or non-business, social goals. These latter include objectives such as favoring social inclusion, offering services at reduced fares to economically or socially disadvantaged target audiences, and organizing social and cultural events that could facilitate local community engagement.

In addition, collaborative spaces can be very different in terms of size of the facilities, target audience, and provided services and activities. For example, collaborative spaces can range from small layouts offering desks to few users who are selected on the basis of precise criteria (e.g., professional background, sector, job) to large buildings offering a varied set of work spaces (e.g., desks, meeting-rooms, offices), services (e.g., café, training, consultancy, access to industrial equipment such as 3D printers or laser cutter) and activities (networking events, social gatherings, etc.) to a large audience, which might also not be restricted to their users. Indeed, collaborative spaces often organize leisure and socio-cultural activities such as concerts, arts exhibitions, and performing arts festivals, which are open to the general public.

Table 1 provides examples of different types of collaborative spaces and summarizes their main characteristics. Whereas each type of collaborative space presents some particular characteristics, there are four common, defining features: variety, flexibility of use, autonomy, and collaborative ethos, which we discuss next.
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Variety relates to the fact that collaborative spaces host a diversified array of users from different fields and geographical contexts, and with different employment status. Users may include students, freelancers, entrepreneurs and remote (or telecommuter) workers who “do not necessarily work for the same company or on the same project”, but do work “alongside each other, sharing the working space and resources” (DeGuzman & Tang, 2011, p. 22).

Flexibility of use represents the second defining element and it relates to high levels of freedom granted to users in terms of both access and use of the infrastructure and services of a collaborative space. Indeed, collaborative spaces are typically open every day at all times (24/7), and users self-regulate their working hours, being also usually entitled to choose between permanent or temporary forms of membership.

Autonomy refers to users’ freedom of deciding when, with whom, and to which intensity and openness to interact with others as well as attend leisure and social events.

A final defining feature relates to the presence of an ethos of collaboration. Whereas users perform their work autonomously and are free to decide whether or not to collaborate with other members of a collaborative space, individuals usually decide to attend collaborative spaces because of their expectations of experiencing a dynamic, vibrant, and barrier-free working environment.

Regardless of the availability of resources and services, collaborative spaces are in fact deemed to provide their users with an inclusively sociable atmosphere. Such an environment is key to supporting face-to-face interactions, which in turn motivate individuals to exchange advice with others and share valuable information without fearing opportunistic behavior.
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A brief historical note on collaborative spaces

Collaborative spaces have been blossoming since the early 2000s and now represent a landmark of modern work relations and urban contexts. However, their tenets and principles are not completely new. Indeed, precursors of contemporary collaborative spaces can be traced back to several previous experiences of physical spaces hosting informal and occasional encounters between people from different geographical, work, and social contexts. Examples include the first cases of shared artist studios of the 1970s (Zukin, 1989) and small clubs and other informal gatherings that were crucial in the history of Silicon Valley (Furnari, 2014). Californian, small-scale venues (perhaps the most renown is the Homebrew Computer Club) represented “a hotbed of people and ideas” that played “a central role in the birth of the personal computer revolution” (Giuffre, 2013, p. 144).

Besides these specific examples, we can keep in mind that, in some societies, public venues such as squares, cafes, or street markets have always offered privileged spaces for meetings and discussion over centuries. In particular, it is noteworthy to remember the role played by European coffeehouses during the Enlightenment, for they were centers of free-thinking and discussion. Coffeehouses attracted a varied set of people, including not only scholars or the educated wealthy, but also members of the lower classes. Coffeehouses were considered as a sort of “home away from home” where regulars felt free to engage in intriguing discussions, and sometimes even forbidden matters. The sociologist Ray Oldenburg (1989) theorized on the role of coffeehouses introducing the concept of “third place”. With this term he referred to those spaces lying in between home and the productive workplace, where “spontaneity and accidental encounters may spark new ideas or provide an occasion for the extension of networks” (Wittel, 2001, p. 68).
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These examples suggest that collaborative spaces have permeated the social and work life of people for a long time. However, these early experiences were mostly informal and unstructured. More deliberate and structured spaces have proliferated only in the last decade, eventually becoming a landmark of modern work relations and urban contexts.

To this regard, the evolution of coworking spaces is paradigmatic. The coworking concept originated in 2005 in San Francisco where Brad Neuberg, an IT professional and member of an open-source movement, had the idea to offer “a spatial and social infrastructure for a community of practice relevant to people like himself— to freelancers, entrepreneurs and other individual knowledge workers” (Spinuzzi, Bodrožić, Scaratti, & Ivaldi, 2019, p. 4). Thus, a hybrid workspace was created to offer the possibility of benefiting from technologies, office spaces and networking opportunities, which matched the needs of the majority of professionals working and living in San Francisco and the larger Bay Area at the time (Pratt, 2002). As a result, the coworking idea rapidly spread first within the Bay Area, then in the rest of the US, and later worldwide. Today, studies report the presence of more than 22,000 coworking spaces worldwide with more than two million users (e.g., Deskmag, 2017; Johns & Gratton, 2013). It is noteworthy to highlight that coworking spaces, like other collaborative spaces, have proliferated in large metropolitan areas such as Berlin, Paris, Milan, or Barcelona as well as in small and medium-sized cities. Therefore, they have become a diffused feature of any contemporary urban agglomeration, not only large, global and talent-attractive innovation hubs, but also more peripheral and remote areas.

Why are collaborative spaces so important and diffused?

The proliferation of collaborative spaces can be understood in the light of the developments that have characterized the broader socio-economic context since the end of the last century and have
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led to major changes in the ways people work, socialize, and make consumption decisions. Although factors explaining the diffusion and importance of collaborative spaces are variegated and strongly interlinked with each other, three main factors should be highlighted: (i) the emergence of a socio-cognitive model of capitalism, (ii) the need for urban regeneration, and (iii) changes in the nature of work.

A socio-cognitive model of capitalism

The first factor relates to the culturalization (or “symbolicization”) of the economy, which is epitomized by the emergence of the “non-utilitarian aesthetic and semiotic” features of goods and services as catalysts for consumer attraction (Scott, 2010, p. 116). Such a change in the competitive dynamics has been paralleled by a significant shift in the skills that workers need to have in order to perform “tasks requiring discernment, creativity, judgment and initiative” (Leclercq-Vandelannoitte & Isaac, 2016, p. 5). In particular, individual knowledge and creativity have become key resources for navigating in the contemporary competitive scenario, where companies achieve competitive advantage only by continuously innovating products, services, and internal processes. Creativity and innovation have become relevant issues also in the political debate, which has sustained the idea that cities and regions should stimulate economic growth and improve the quality of life of their inhabitants by implementing public policies aimed at creating local ecosystems that promote creativity and innovation. Thus, it is not surprising that the issue of creativity has attracted the attention of scholars from different disciplines, who have particularly devoted time and efforts in investigating the factors that facilitate the generation of new and useful outcomes (e.g., Amabile, 1988; Drake, 2003; Florida, 2004; Scott, 2010).
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Whereas research has traditionally focused on the personal attributes (psychological traits, cognitive styles, etc.) that make some individuals more creative than others, the interest has recently shifted to the analysis of contextual determinants. Departing from the idea of the lone genius, the investigation of individual creativity has sought to identify creativity’s wellsprings related to organizational and social factors. In particular, within the organizational field, scholars have advanced a relational view of creativity, according to which creativity is conceptualized “as a facet of the social world” (Koppman, 2016, p. 292). In other words, they suggested that a deeper understanding of creativity demands delving into the analysis of interpersonal relationships. Networks provide the fabric through which individuals may tap the key ingredients (information, knowledge, or perspectives) for creative problem solving as well as conduits for obtaining help and support necessary to implement them (for a review, see Perry-Smith & Mannucci, 2017).

Such a surge of interest in the relationships in which an individual is embedded is consistent with considerations coming from other academic fields. For example, studies in economic geography and urban sociology emphasize the importance of spatial proximity for facilitating face-to-face interaction (e.g., Grabher, 2001; Storper & Venables, 2004). Frequent and intense contacts among individuals living in the same geographical area sustain the development of a sense of community and a collaborative atmosphere. In line with the Marshallian view that “the secrets of industry are in the air”, the presence of a supportive environment is key to favoring information exchange, enhancing people networking, and promoting collaboration.

The importance of informal relationships reliant on trust and reciprocity is also echoed by the more recent models of innovation, which move away from the traditional closed view of research and development carried out in bounded organizational units, and sustains the adoption of an open approach. Such approach highlights “the use of purposive inflows and outflows of knowledge to
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accelerate internal innovation, and expand the markets for external use of innovation, respectively” (Chesbrough, Vanhaverbeke, & West, 2006, p. 149). In other words, this view conceives innovation as an open, iterative process that may originate from almost anywhere inside as well outside an organization. The open innovation logic also implies that innovation processes involve multiple actors such as universities, suppliers, consumers, and final users who play an important role in providing feedback and information. Thus, different actors are expected to actively participate in the innovation process, each sharing their skills, knowledge, and ideas. In this sense, the increasingly open and distributed nature of innovation brings to the fore the key role of relationships, particularly those between all actors operating in a given social, political and economic realm, which is usually defined as an ecosystem.

In light of these considerations, it is easier to understand the key role played by collaborative spaces, which represent an important “soft” infrastructure that could trigger the social processes required for sustaining innovation and creativity. Collaborative spaces, in fact, are deemed to provide unique atmospheres reliant on trust and openness, which sustain serendipitous encounters among their members. The defining features of collaborative spaces (i.e., variety, flexibility of use, autonomy, and collaborative ethos) offer unique opportunities for information exchange and cross-fertilization of ideas, providing the breeding ground for innovation and creativity (Bouncken, Laudien, Fredrich, & Görmar, 2018; Spinuzzi, 2012). Moreover, collaborative spaces usually organize events open to external actors, which allow a collaborative space’s users to interact with local and distant actors (individuals, groups, and organizations) showcasing their products and services as well as discussing about potential collaborations (Brown, 2017; Capdevila, 2013). Thus, collaborative spaces play a key role in fostering the linkages between their users and external
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actors operating either in the local ecosystem or in other contexts (Clayton, Feldman, & Lowe, 2018), eventually reducing the risk of over-embeddedness (Uzzi, 1997).

*The Need for Urban Regeneration*

The emergence of the afore-discussed cultural-cognitive economy has also generated several disadvantages (e.g., Garcia, 2004; Pratt, 2009). Among these, it is noteworthy to mention the “heritage” of former industrial plants and buildings that have been left in cities because of de-industrialization and outsourcing trends. Since the 1980s, several former industrial cities such as Liverpool, Bilbao, Glasgow, or Leicester have been subject to processes of abandonment and decay because of the reduction of economic activities and the closing down of factories. Such changes have posed several challenges to policy makers, urging urban policies aimed at contrasting unemployment and economic stagnation as well as renewing social structures and sense of community. Accordingly, public authorities have tried to envision new uses and opportunities for abandoned industrial areas often located in the central areas of the urban fabric. In this vein, culture and creativity have played a central role in cities’ strategies of social and economic re-development. Local authorities have invested substantial funding for implementing creative-led policies aimed at using culture and creativity as tools for regenerating buildings, neighborhoods, and cities (Garcia, 2004; Grodach, Foster, & Murdoch, 2014). Since the exemplary case of Glasgow European Capital of Culture in 1990, these policies have been asserted as contributing to sustaining economic growth and life quality, thus limiting the negative consequences of a decline in the city’s industrial activities and supporting the renewal of city image and attractiveness.

Besides the opening and expansion of creative districts and flagship cultural institutions such as museums, theatres or performing arts centers (Cameron & Coafée, 2005; Grodach & Silver, 2013),
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collaborative spaces have been proposed as a tool for sustaining the implementation of the aforementioned policies. Thus, the wide proliferation of collaborative spaces can be interpreted in the light of broader interventions of place-making and neighborhood renewal in urban contexts (Merkel, 2019; Oakley & O’Connor, 2015). Indeed, whether the result of private or public-like initiatives, the creation of a collaborative space provides a local community with the opportunity for regenerating abandoned buildings and decayed neighborhoods.

To better understand this point, we can take into consideration the case of BASE, a collaborative space operating in Milan and representing a paradigmatic case of urban regeneration (Leone, Scapolen & Montanari, 2020). In 1989, the Municipality of Milan acquired 70,000 square meters previously occupied by the industrial plant of Ansaldo, an Italian leading company in the design and manufacturing of railway and mass transit vehicles. Formerly a working-class neighborhood, the area surrounding the plant, since the early 2000s, went through a gentrification process that transformed it into a vibrant, creative, and extremely expensive neighborhood. Nowadays, the area represents the heart of the design district, and hosts the headquarters of internationally renowned companies (e.g., Armani) as well as the premises of important cultural institutions (e.g., MUDEC Museum of Cultures, the warehouse and scenography manufacturing unit of Teatro La Scala). To strengthen the cultural vocation of the neighborhood and counteract potential negative social outcomes of the still ongoing gentrification, in 2014 the Municipality of Milan decided to dedicate a large portion of the former industrial plant (12,000 m²) to the creation of BASE. As stated in its mission, the primary purpose of BASE is to be “a place for cultural progress”. Accordingly, it hosts a coworking venue with 120 seats dedicated to both professionals and companies operating in creative industries or in the field of social innovation, a bar and restaurant, and an art residency. BASE is run by a not-for-profit social enterprise, which organizes a wide array of activities (e.g.,
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exhibitions, concerts, workshops) aimed at fostering new forms of social innovation that can generate great value to the city and local neighborhood.

The case of BASE exemplifies how collaborative spaces could relate to wider urban transformation processes representing a policy tool for local government to ameliorate disadvantaged urban areas and reduce inequalities associated with creative-led strategies. Accordingly, collaborative spaces show in many cases a strong engagement with the local community, “acting as semi-public and providing services such as cafes and community gathering space to help connect and integrate local (resident) and professional communities” (Brown, 2017, p. 3). In this sense, the creation of a collaborative space can be interpreted as a form of re-appropriation of urban spaces similarly to other bottom-up, participatory phenomena such as community gardens and community councils.

Changes in the Nature of Work

De-materialization and de-spatialization of work represent the third and final factor that contributes to explaining the proliferation of collaborative spaces. In the last decade, globalization, advances in information and communication technologies (ICTs), and the emergence of new business models related to the digital and sharing economy have deeply changed the ways people perform work (McRobbie, 2016; OECD, 2018). In particular, there has been a significant growth in the segment of the workforce represented by people “loosely connected to organizations or selling directly to the market” (Petriglieri, Ashford, & Wrzesniewski, 2019, p. 125). Statistics show that in Western countries almost one third of the employed workforce is self-employed (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2016; Eurofound & ILO, 2017). In some sectors such as creative industries and information technology, the proportion of self-employment, and particularly freelance workers, represents the vast majority of the workforce (Merkel, 2019).
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In addition to this trend toward autonomous, self-employed work, organizations have experienced the replacement of the traditional work timetable (i.e., the “9 to 5” office world with silent Sundays) with new patterns of work characterized by both flextime and flexplace (Thompson, Payne, & Taylor, 2015). Whereas some firms have tried to resist this paradigm shift, most of them have progressively started to rethink their organizational models and practices or have been forced to do so in response to global crises, such as the Covid-19 outbreak. More specifically, companies have introduced new organizational and HRM practices inspired by principles related to work autonomy, talent enhancement, and collaboration within and across the organizational boundaries (e.g., Hamel, 2007; Leonardi, 2011). Such new practices and principles are usually referred to by the term “Smart Working” (SW), which include all practices aimed at favoring higher flexibility and autonomy in the choice of working spaces, time and tools. Whereas smart work practices are aimed at providing individuals with the best working conditions to accomplish their tasks, improve performance, and develop new ideas, they challenge the customary ways of working. Indeed, many organizational employees have started performing their jobs outside the “traditional” workplaces, e.g., offices, manufacturing plants, and laboratories, and have chosen (or have been offered) to work in collaborative spaces.

All in all, the diffusion of self-employment and SW practices have confronted individuals with the need to find new workplaces. In the absence of a traditional workplace, individuals tend to use their home as the easiest and most convenient option. However, research shows that working from home engenders feelings of isolation and various distractions related to blurring work and domestic life (Crosbie & Moore, 2004; Gold & Mustafa, 2013). This applies to remote workers, who usually have one or more days per week working away from their organization and especially to self-employed workers who might experience a great lack of sociality and relations with other
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professionals.9 To counteract such disadvantages, individuals use public venues such as cafés, bars, or restaurants to perform their jobs and hold work meetings (Wittel, 2001). For example, Elizabeth Currid showed how creative workers socialize in bars, clubs, and restaurants in New York City for networking purposes. Similarly, other scholars highlighted the role of coffee shops for artists operating in Chicago’s Wicker Park neighborhood (Lloyd, 2006) or pubs among media workers in London (Hesmondhalgh & Baker, 2011). Attending these venues offers opportunities for the extension of professional networks as well as discussion of ideas and information exchange, but at the same time includes disadvantages because of noise, lack of privacy, and distractions from work.

For these reasons, collaborative spaces represent a solution that could match the new workspace-related needs of workers. For example, they provide individuals with the opportunity to rent desks and meeting rooms at more affordable prices in comparison to the traditional solution of renting their own office. This is particularly the case in metropolitan cities such as London, Paris, or Milan, where the financialization of rental housing (Fields & Uffer, 2016) makes it more difficult, especially in early career stages, to sustain a flat and an office, production space or showroom. Similarly, workers attending collaborative spaces could benefit from having access to technological (Wi-Fi, printing machines, etc.) and administrative (secretary, security permits, etc.) services at reduced costs. Beyond these economic advantages, collaborative spaces offer social benefits as they give individuals the opportunity to interact with other professionals working in the same (or related) sectors. Thus, these spaces can act as an antidote to the sense of loneliness, which sometimes affects independent and remote workers, eventually opening up opportunities to develop new professional networks. The very nature of collaborative spaces, which are conceived as informal and open, underpins a “normative cultural model that promotes a set of values such as
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community, collaboration, openness, diversity, and sustainability” (Merkel, 2015, p. 124). In this vein, they foster a sense of community (Garret et al, 2017), where individuals engage in face-to-face relations with other residents, being open to give help and share information and advice. Together with the social and educational activities usually organized in a collaborative space (e.g., workshops, events, member convivial gatherings), such daily interactions offer opportunities for experiencing peer support, receiving feedback on projects or ideas, and getting access to industry-specific know-how.

For these reasons, collaborative spaces are asserted as offering social encounters and opportunities that are meaningful to contemporary workers, thus sustaining self-motivation, professional development, and feelings of belonging. This latter element is particularly important in times of less attachment to organizations such as we see at the present time. Indeed, whereas individuals usually value non-routine work and flexibility in schedules, they also struggle with a sense of precariousness and face the challenge of continuously reinventing themselves (Sennett, 2006). In this sense, collaborative spaces could replace traditional organizations as a sort of holding environment (Petriglieri et al., 2019), which sustains professional recognition and identity formation.

The aim of this book

In the last few years, there has been a bourgeoning number of studies addressing the issue of collaborative spaces from different angles. These studies have adopted varied perspectives and theoretical lenses coming from different disciplines such as organization studies, management, sociology, and geography. The majority of these studies has addressed mainly the effects of collaborative spaces on individual work (e.g., Garrett et al., 2017; Merkel, 2015; Spreitzer,
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Bacevice, & Garrett, 2015), leaving other issues almost untouched. For instance, the way in which collaborative spaces relate to wider urban transformation processes has been largely under-investigated. Similarly, little is known about how collaborative dynamics actually take place in collaborative spaces, eventually generating positive outcomes in terms of creativity and innovation.

So far, studies have contributed to a partial understanding of how people in these spaces develop a mutually beneficial collaborative practice. Thus, it is important to go beyond the celebratory framework surrounding collaborative spaces and delve into comprehending what organizational conditions actually lead to forms of positive social interaction, knowledge sharing, and information exchange. Indeed, collaboration in such spaces is not always easy.

For example, the “open” offices and shared or “hot desks” that often characterize collaborative spaces do not always support information exchange and face-to-face interactions; on the contrary, they can produce negative outcomes such as noise, difficult interactions, and increased coordination costs (Fayard & Weeks 2007, 2011; Pearce & Hinds, 2018). Similarly, bringing together different actors with diverse backgrounds is not enough to sustain collaboration (Skelcher, Mathur, & Smith, 2005). Indeed, collaborative space members need to find a common ground in order to interact effectively with each other. When people do not come to a mutual understanding, their interactions could be reduced and less effective, de facto hampering the potential benefits provided by these spaces in terms of collaboration (Cramton, 2000). In addition, there is mixed evidence that collaborative spaces increase creativity and innovation (Moultrie et al., 2007; Vignoli, Mattarelli, & Mäkinen, 2018). Exemplar collaborative spaces, such as science parks, face difficulties in actually bringing together different parties and creating breakthrough innovations (Skelcher et al., 2005; Ungureanu, Bertolotti, Matterelli, & Bellesia., 2019).
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On top of this limited understanding of processes within collaborative spaces, amidst the variety of collaborative spaces, scholars have mainly focused on coworking spaces as the most diffused form. However, other collaborative spaces are largely spread, thus requiring more attention from scholars in order to better understand under which organizational conditions the opportunities heralded by such new layouts for businesses, individuals and urban development could effectively take place.

Therefore, this book addresses the complex, multi-faced phenomenon of collaborative spaces. The primary goal is to provide more nuances to the understanding of the main characteristics and functioning mechanisms of collaborative spaces. In so doing, we will present a set of varied empirical insights and conceptual reflections on collaborative spaces.

Book content: Sections and chapters

This book is composed of 16 chapters, each presenting the results of an original research conducted on different types of collaborative spaces by leading scholars in the field. The chapters are organized in three sections corresponding to three different viewpoints to cover the complex and multifaceted theme of collaborative spaces: (1) How collaborative spaces work: Goals, internal dynamics and (un)expected results in context; (2) Collaborative spaces and creativity; and (3) Collaborative spaces in other contexts.

The first section introduces readers to the key elements regarding the functioning of collaborative spaces (hereafter, CSs): goals, internal dynamics, relationships with external actors, and (un)expected results on collaboration and creativity.

We begin this section with a chapter by Ludovica Leone, Anna Chiara Scapolan, Fabrizio Montanari, and Pier Vittorio Mannucci, which investigates the relational activities through which
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workers can take advantage of their experience in CSs. By presenting the case study of an Italian creative hub, the authors highlight two types of relational activities that sustain collaboration in CSs. The first one includes all the instrumental actions which are aimed at activating the relationships for professional goals such as getting access to resources or exchange information. The other type of relational activity pertains to the expressive activities, which individuals deploy to develop and maintain emotional ties with other users of a CS. In line with the extant view of collaboration as a social process, the authors suggest that CSs support collaborative efforts eventually leading to new ideas and projects when their members activate both instrumental and expressive relational activities.

The next chapter in this section is authored by Fiza Brakel-Ahmed, Boukje Cnossen, and Julia Schlegelmilch. Through an ethnographic fieldwork conducted mostly in Amsterdam, they explore how independent workers make use of new workspaces such as creative hubs and hotel lobbies. Drawing on the notion of “scapes”, the authors put forward the term “workscapes” to provide a more nuanced understanding of the practices that workers deploy when attending collaborative spaces. The authors highlight how such practices are strictly interwoven with each other and show consistencies across different experiences on an urban as well as on a global level. Thus, a global culture of nomadic work seems to emerge, and it presents work practices and unwritten rules sustaining a common ethos based on values such as freedom and mutual respect.

In Chapter 3, Filomena Buonocore, Davide de Gennaro, and Mauro Romanelli explore the challenges faced by managers and members of a CS, which is part of an urban regeneration project in a city characterized by social issues such as high unemployment and perceived high rates of criminality. Building on the literatures of collaborative spaces, collaborative innovation, and hybrid partnerships, the authors show how challenges are mainly related to the multi-party hybrid
collaboration behind the collaborative space. More specifically, the chapter underscores how negative perceptions of local government bodies – in relation to their limited engagement and lack of collaborative leadership – might hamper the functioning of CSs.

In Chapter 4, Damiano Razzoli, Matteo Rinaldini, Stefano Rodighiero, and Federico Montanari use sociomateriality theory to delve into the relationship between the space-time dimension and the material assemblage unfolding within collaborative spaces. Through a field study of three CSs in Northern Italy, the authors detail how material artefacts allow CSs’ users to organize their working space and time. In so doing, they propose a typology of space-time regulation artifacts: immanent, infrastructural, and practical artefacts.

The following chapter, authored by Monica Irimia, Cristina Guardiano, Ludovica Leone, Elisa Mattarelli, and Fabrizio Montanari, explores the linguistic interactions among members of CSs. The authors adopt a multi-disciplinary approach which combines the organizational literature on communication with the analysis tools of linguistic studies. The sociolinguistic analysis of two coworking spaces shows how collaborative spaces are characterized by language diversity, the use of different formal and informal linguistic registers as well as the employment of various media and communication modalities. Such variety can foster information exchange, knowledge sharing and ultimately collaboration. However, it might also act as a barrier to communication, suggesting the need for collaborative spaces to create a common linguistic ground as the basis for promoting collaboration.

The final chapter of this first section is authored by Alina Grenier-Arellano and Yuval Engel who discuss some unexpected results related to collaboration dynamics in collaborative spaces. Specifically, they present a qualitative study of seven shared fabrication spaces (i.e., makerspaces and fab labs) located in different European countries, revealing the ambivalent nature of the
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economic (e.g., access to technology, location) and community forces (e.g., community ethos, education) behind these spaces. The authors go beyond the enthusiastic view of shared fabrication spaces as enabling places for entrepreneurship and discuss relevant trade-offs among the dynamics typical of these spaces that may foster or impede entrepreneurship.

The second section in this book collects studies investigating whether and how collaborative spaces promote and increase creativity at different levels, from the individual to the industry level. We begin this section with a chapter written by Tuukka Toivonen, Onya Idoko, and Carsten Sørensen who explore how ideas are created and evolve across CSs. The authors adopt the perspective of “networked creativity” and propose a new methodology to trace the development of ideas through multiple spaces and interactions. To illustrate the relevance of their approach, they present the case study of one entrepreneur’s journey through East London’s collaborative spaces during a day’s work.

In Chapter 8, Peter Bacevice and Gretchen Spreitzer address how CSs construct a culture oriented toward supporting creativity. By applying the lenses of organizational aesthetics, materiality, and spatiality, the authors explore how spatial, material, and aesthetic representations of work communicate a legitimizing creative narrative, which nurtures creativity as a normative virtue among CSs’ users.

In a related chapter, Federica De Molli and Donatella De Paoli adopt a similar theoretical perspective to delve into how individuals’ perception of workplace design sustains their creative processes. By presenting the aesthetic experiences that the members of a cultural network have in the social spaces where they meet and work, the authors suggest three aspects of the aesthetic experience – namely the feeling of emotional proximity, the feeling of being at home, and the feeling of being in a bubble – that favor creative processes.
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The next chapter, by Pierre Poinsignon and Thomas Paris, explores how different kinds of collaborations experienced by individuals in CSs might sustain their creativity. Drawing on the study of a workshop that hosts French comics artists, the authors show that creativity requires continuous collaboration, which begins when artists attend the workshop, but more importantly are continued when they no longer attend it. Thus, the authors suggest that the effect of CSs on creativity should be examined over time and beyond the physical boundaries of CSs.

The final chapter in this section, authored by Tobias Bürger and Marilena Vecco, offers a systematic review of cultural entrepreneurship incubation. More specifically, the authors review the extant literature addressing a particular case of collaborative space (i.e., cultural incubators) and highlighting the more effective design for supporting cultural entrepreneurship.

The third section in this book has five interesting chapters that extend the scope of collaborative spaces to include other contexts. Specifically, these chapters explore how traditional organizations, such as companies, libraries, schools, and festivals, are reinventing themselves according to the logics of CSs in an attempt to promote collaboration and foster creativity and innovation.

We begin this section with a chapter by Silviya Svejenova, Eva Boxenbaum, and Renate Meyer, who examine the transformation of public libraries from knowledge spaces for information access and learning to collaborative spaces for civil creativity and innovation. The authors present a documentary study of Danish public libraries and adopt the analytical lens of “imaginaries”. In particular, they identify three multimodal imaginaries (i.e., through verbal, visual and material modes of communication) that support the transformation of pre-existing spaces, even institutionalized ones, into collaborative spaces.

In Chapter 13, Paula Ungureanu, Carlotta Cochis, Fabiola Bertolotti, Anna Chiara Scapolan, and Matteo Vignoli present a qualitative study of a corporate collaborative space set up to promote
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cross-functional collaboration and open innovation. Using the lens of boundary work, the authors study the impact of the CS on employees’ ability to generate new ideas by crossing internal and external organizational boundaries. When employees compare their individual goals about the collaborative space with their implementation experiences, they generate path dependencies. Path dependencies create unexpected constraints in how a space is used, engendering an unexpected trade-off between internal and external boundary work.

The following chapter, authored by Birke Otto, Elke Schüßler, and Katharina Zangerle, addresses how experimental spaces set up in organizations sustain idea generation. By studying two experimental spaces for creativity in front-end pharmaceutical research, the authors claim that boundary and distancing work are necessary to avoid pressure to conform to organizational routines and institutional norms as well as to the social dynamics unfolding within experimental spaces. Indeed, pressure to perform and excessive isolation perceive by their users can undermine the potential advantages of this particular case of CSs.

In Chapter 15, Dania Marzo, Yeşim Tonga Uriarte, and Maria Luisa Catoni investigate the case of a temporary, ephemeral CS, namely a comic festival. The authors combine a longitudinal study on the evolution of comic conventions with an in-depth analysis of Lucca Comics & Games to investigate festivals as spaces able to foster collaborative practices. Results show how a festival could be conceived as multilayered space, in which both the city landscape and the festival’s events are intertwined and stimulate collaboration and cross-fertilization among different actors. As a result, festivals provide opportunities for social interaction in physical spaces to specialized communities, which otherwise would only interact at a distance.

The final chapter, by Roberta Comunian and Silvie Jacobi, brings together two theoretical perspectives on CSs. On the one side, it draws on collaboration theories analyzing the role of CSs
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as platforms for collaboration. On the other side, the chapter draws on the communities of practice perspective exploring the role of CSs in offering formal and informal learning opportunities. Through the in-depth case study of London School of Mosaic, the authors reflect on how creative collaboration overlaps and flourishes in spaces where both co-working and co-learning take place.

Areas for Future Research

As stated earlier, we hope that the chapters presented in this book, together with the scholarly research reviewed, will set the stage for future studies aimed at deepening the understanding of the multiplex relationship between collaborative spaces and the contemporary socio-economic context. To this regard, the chapters included in this book show how studying the organizing mechanisms of collaborative spaces offers several insights to companies and professionals that aim at stimulating collaboration and knowledge exchange in order to thrive in the contemporary socio-economic environment. Similarly, understanding how collaborative spaces create, nurture and activate collaborative relations within their boundaries and with external actors (citizens, companies, etc.) could provide policy makers with insights about how to sustain collaboration in local ecosystems, eventually creating a breeding ground for creativity and socio-economic development.

Besides providing an effective review of cutting-edge research on collaborative spaces, each of the presented chapters points to avenues for future research. Indeed, more research would be beneficial for deepening the understanding of how collaborative spaces contribute to shaping the future of work in continuously evolving social and economic scenarios. We want to add to this and conclude this introduction by highlighting four general areas that warrant future research.
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First, we argue that there is a need to stimulate more research on how the relationship between collaborative spaces and their urban context could be mutually beneficial. Whereas the results achieved by collaborative spaces are influenced by the characteristics of the urban context in which they are based, they also generate important outcomes for the local ecosystem in terms of innovation, start-up of new entrepreneurial activities, social inclusion, and urban regeneration. However, it is still debated what is the best way to design and manage these types of spaces to perform their role of pillar of a local ecosystem, eventually supporting creative and innovation processes. Thus, more research is needed to understand the mechanisms through which collaborative spaces could sustain the cohesion of local networks and/or play a brokerage role by providing local actors with access to resources (economic, human, etc.) available in other ecosystems. Similarly, it would be interesting to delve into the processes through which local authorities could sustain the development and functioning of collaborative spaces. Whereas the extant literature agrees on the fact that collaborative spaces resulting from top-down decision making and implementation are less able to engage local communities and relevant stakeholders, it is still limited in the knowledge of which mechanisms could make public policies more effective. To this regard, it could be interesting to draw on studies in different fields that conceive cities as complex cultural, social, and identity systems (e.g., Jones & Svejenova, 2018; Molotch, Freudenburg, & Paulsen, 2000). In line with this perspective, we can think of the urban landscape as a set of spaces (squares, buildings, etc.) that have acquired over time cultural and symbolic meanings, which contribute to defining the identity of a city as shared by local and external audiences. Thus, future research should take into consideration how such immaterial elements, strongly intertwined with local history and traditions, shape the sense of place characterizing a collaborative space. In this way, it could be possible to understand how potential stakeholders
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make sense of what a collaborative space means and how such shared meanings could be related to different social and economic outcomes generated by the collaborative space.

Second, future research should address how collaborative spaces may contribute to smart work solutions, by promoting flexibility in both work times and spaces. For instance, future studies could investigate how collaborative spaces may help freelancers and remote workers to pursue their work-life balance (an attempt in this direction is represented by the work of Cochis et al., 2019).

More specifically, it could be interesting to understand whether collaborative spaces contribute at pursuing a strict separation between spaces and times related to work and those related to personal life or whether they favor a work-life integration, for instance offering time flexibility in a space where people may both perform work activities and enjoy leisure time. Future studies could explore also how such dynamics of work-life balance may depend on both the features of collaborative spaces and on the personal (e.g., age, personality) and professional characteristics (e.g., job, career stage) of workers. Similarly, it could be promising to investigate more deeply the role of layout and interior design of collaborative spaces. Indeed, although attention has been paid so far to the open office plan usually adopted by collaborative spaces to support spontaneous face-to-face interactions, promote collaboration and favour creativity, remote workers (specifically workers from home and mobile workers) know very well how essential are their own, closed spaces that enable tranquility, concentration, and privacy. Thus, drawing on those studies that have already highlighted the drawbacks of open offices in traditional organizational settings (Pearce & Hinds, 2018), it would be promising to investigate how the design of interior layout to affect individual outcomes such as satisfaction, productivity, intention to share information, and creativity.
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A third avenue for future research pertains to the relationship between collaborative spaces and collaborative technology. Research on collaborative spaces tends to focus on the collaboration practices happening *in situ*, i.e., the face-to-face interactions that co-location is expected to engender. However, as shown by Tovoinen and colleagues in Chapter 7, individuals and groups use collaborative spaces on a temporary, part-time or irregular basis. For instance, inhabitants of co-workings spaces do not typically spend their full working time within the space and move around multiple workspaces, even in a single working day (see also Spinuzzi, 2012). In other words, individuals work in and out of collaborative spaces and typically make an intensive use of collaborative technology (e.g., email, videoconference, instant messaging, online platforms) to perform their work and keep in touch with the different groups and individuals they work with. However, we still know little about how the individual experiences of physical and “virtual” spaces interact and influence creative processes. Future research should investigate how the complex interplay between face-to-face and technology-mediated collaboration processes impact the experiences of individuals and teams who participate in collaborative spaces and, as a consequence, on individual, team, and organizational innovation capabilities.

Finally, all the above-mentioned areas for future research appear particularly affected by the unprecedented times we are living in today, as we are writing this introduction. The onset of Covid-19 has suddenly moved millions of workers around the world into remote work *from home*. Moreover, the current pandemic is causing major drawbacks for collaborative spaces as they have been forced to lock down their premises. To give one among many examples, Convene, a US coworking provider, closed their 28 locations nationwide and laid off 150 employees in the wake of the coronavirus pandemic. The question that is now arising is how collaborative spaces will face new challenges when the lockdown will progressively be removed, given the new health
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procedures to be followed in public spaces. This is a not trivial issue, as it seems plausible to expect that there will be a renewed need for spaces that allow to perform flexible, smart working, while also counteracting the above-mentioned potential drawbacks of remote work. In this sense, collaborative spaces could play a crucial role in supporting a new segment of workers who are strongly affected by the economic consequences of Covid-19. Specifically, it might become a determinant of the capacity of collaborative spaces to sustain those who are excluded from traditional (private or public) welfare systems and professional communities, offering them resources, professional opportunities and, perhaps most importantly, support to their resilience. Despite what will happen is still unclear, we predict that collaborate spaces will experience changes in their configuration, the services offered, and the technologies used. We hope that the knowledge that this book provides on the processes and interactions happening in collaborative spaces can be the starting point to open a new, exciting, research agenda for the next generation of collaborative spaces.

Notes

1 In this book, we follow the suggestion of Alessandro Gandini and use the term “coworking” without the hyphen “to indicate the practice of working individually in a shared environment”, thus differentiating it from co-working (with hyphen), “which indicates working closely together on a piece of work” (Gandini, 2015, p. 195).

2 Some examples include TUI Modul57 in Hanover, Nike Kitchen in Beaverton (Oregon, US), and IKEA Space 10 in Delhi and Copenhagen. This latter space operates in the premises of the former Copenhagen’s Meatpacking District, which now represents an example of a regenerated area hosting diverse facilities such as offices, restaurants, clubs, and art galleries.
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3 Some scholars acknowledge a prevalence of professionals operating in the creative industries (publishing, film, photography, design, music, etc.) or performing digital activities (e.g., Clifton, Füzi, & Loudon, 2019; Merkel, 2019). The research presented in this book, however, shows that collaborative spaces can be populated by professionals from more “traditional” fields, including architects, consultants, and accountants.

4 In this book, by remote worker we intend individuals employed by an (usually large) organization, who work partly away from the premises of the employer.

5 Yet, limited opening times are possible.

6 A notable exception is represented by the Invention Factory, an open floor laboratory designed in the nineteenth century by Thomas Edison and dedicated to the development of creative ideas (Israel, 1998).

7 For example, in a recent study that we conducted in Emilia-Romagna, one of the wealthiest and most industrialized Italian regions, we identified 151 collaborative spaces, of which 26% are hosted in towns with less than 60,000 inhabitants (Montanari, Rinaldini, Scapolan, Leone, & Razzoli, 2020).

8 Creative-led policies and the related gentrification processes are also deemed to generate unintended negative effects in terms of displacement processes (of long-term residents and businesses), social exclusion, and inequality (for a review, see Hutton, 2017).

9 As noted by Spinuzzi (2012, p. 401), the irony in having the possibility to work anytime, anywhere is that such a freedom “often means isolation, inability to build trust and relationships with others, and sharply restricted opportunities for collaboration and networking.”

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SECTION 1 – How collaborative spaces work: Goals, internal dynamics and (un)expected results in context
The relational foundation of collaboration in a cultural and social hub. The case of Le Serre dei Giardini Margherita, Bologna

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Abstract

Coworking offices, creative spaces, and cultural hubs are defined as collaborative spaces because their users' collaboration is expected to be a fundamental dynamic. The chapter aims at deepening our understanding of this dynamic by adopting a relational view of collaboration. More specifically, the study explores the relational actions that collaborative spaces’ users may activate to initiate and sustain collaboration through a qualitative research conducted in a cultural and social innovation hub located in Bologna, Italy. Findings suggest that the hubbers engage in two main types of relational activities: “instrumental” and “expressive.” Whereas the first type includes those actions primarily driven by professional purposes, the second evokes the relational activities aimed at building and strengthening relationships moving from the similarity in terms of values and interests. Our results suggest that these types of relational activities are not mutually exclusive and are both necessary to ignite different types of collaborations, advancing our theoretical knowledge on collaboration in coworking and creative spaces, providing some managerial implications.
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Introduction

Effective collaboration has become a fundamental requirement of success in disparate fields, from scientific research to medical surgery and moviemaking (Biscaro & Comacchio, 2018; Delmestri, Montanari, & Usai, 2005; Mannucci, 2017; Nicolini, Mengis & Swan, 2012). At the heart of collaboration efforts are the social networks between the collaborating individuals (Reagans, Zuckerman, & McEvily, 2007; Singh, 2005). However, while research has traditionally focused on the benefits and advantages that can be accrued from collaboration networks (see Burt, Kilduff, & Tasselli, 2013; Perry-Smith & Mannucci, 2017; and Phelps, Heidl, & Whadwa, 2012, for recent reviews), only recently scholars have started to thoroughly investigate how people form different type of collaborative ties, driven by different reasons and objectives. This perspective can provide more clarity on those elements leading to more or less successful collaborations and can suggest how different relational activities lead to specific types of collaboration.

In line with these premises, this chapter aims at delving into the process of collaboration, exploring through which relational activities it unfolds. More specifically, the chapter presents the results of a qualitative research conducted in “Le Serre dei Giardini Margherita” (the greenhouses of Margherita Gardens), a collaborative space established in 2012 in a regenerated urban area of Bologna, Italy and run by Kilowatt, a cooperative organization that carries out multiple activities in the realms of culture and social innovation, offering also a coworking space.

Our study highlights the potential role of collaborative spaces in catalyzing the emergence and realization of collaborative projects as well as the elements that might foster (or inhibit) these processes. Specifically, we shed light on the relational activities that a collaborative space’s users may deploy to initiate and sustain different kinds of collaboration. The chapter is structured as follows. The first section presents the theoretical background, the second illustrates the research
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methods, and the third one shows the main findings. The last section discusses the results, also proposing some managerial implications and ideas for future research.

Theoretical background

Collaboration is the development of shared projects based on trust and relationships and it is crucial in organizations (Irving, Ayoko, & Ashkanasy, 2019). Collaboration could be conceived as a social process based on the joint effort of two or more individuals. Accordingly, the relationships among the involved individuals constitute the fabric on which collaboration is built (Hargadon & Sutton, 1997; Lingo & O’Mahony, 2010). Existing research has traditionally studied the individual attributes and traits facilitating collaboration or leading to successful collaborations (e.g., Perry-Smith & Mannucci, 2015; Phelps, Heidl, & Whadwa, 2012). More recently, scholars have started to investigate in-depth what elements help people form, maintain, and utilize a tie, thus shedding light on the different phases through which collaboration unfolds. In line with such a dynamic and processual view of collaboration, scholars highlighted the activity of networking behind collaboration (e.g., Casciaro, Gino & Kouchaki, 2014; Elfring & Hulsink, 2007).

Focusing on the practices of networking allows us to understand better how individuals have an active role in shaping the way collaboration evolves. When facing the decision of whether to collaborate or not with another individual, people first assess a tie’s potential value, both instrumental and emotional (Casciaro & Lobo, 2015). Then, based on this assessment, they decide whether to form the tie or not, basing their decision on factors such as similarity, competences, and interpersonal liking (Dahlander & McFarland, 2013). The way individuals form a tie impacts on how collaboration unfolds. For example, if the tie has been initiated for physical proximity, removing this factor could end the collaboration, regardless of its actual effectiveness. Similarly,
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if a shared third party has introduced two people, the effectiveness of the relationship could also be influenced by the third party (Dahlander & McFarland, 2013; Lingo & O’Mahony, 2010). Collaboration is realized when the collaborative tie is activated and mobilized, but the ties need first to be maintained and nurtured if people want to activate them to collaborate. Tie maintenance itself is a time-consuming activity as individuals need to devote time and effort nurturing the tie (Dahlander & McFarland, 2013; Perry-Smith & Shalley, 2003). All in all, it is clear that networking behaviors constitute the pillars of collaboration. However, we still need to understand how collaborative ties are created, nurtured, and managed, in particular providing more clarity on the relational activities at the base of these behaviors.

In this sense, it is interesting to study the relational foundation of collaboration in the so-called collaborative spaces, which are deemed to sustain collaboration practices and facilitate shared projects. This topic is recently attracting the attention of several scholars. For example, Bouncken and Reuschl (2018) investigated how coworking spaces sustain entrepreneurship and networking. In particular, they highlighted how these spaces allow “flexibility and social interaction that can stimulate their members’ inspiration, the exchange and development of ideas among coworking-users, the development of teams and projects” (2018, p. 330). On the same line, Capdevila (2019) underlined the role of collaborative spaces in sustaining relations within a local ecosystem as they host startups and young professionals who are strongly motivated to develop new networks as means to support their entrepreneurial and professional projects.

Despite the burgeoning number of studies addressing the phenomenon of collaborative spaces, we still have a fragmented understanding of how they sustain actual collaboration. Thus, our chapter aims at providing a deeper understanding of the relational activities that may lead to collaboration, also revealing more insights on the internal dynamics of collaborative spaces.
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Methodology

We conducted a qualitative study of “Le Serre dei Giardini Margherita”, a cultural and social innovation hub established in 2012 in Bologna, Italy. The hub is located in the main park of the city, the Giardini Margherita, where the managing organization (namely the cooperative Kilowatt) regenerated, an abandoned public place – the former municipal greenhouse – granted by the municipality of Bologna, in order to give it back to the local community. Over the years, “Le Serre” has played a pivotal role in the cultural and social life of Bologna by organizing free cultural events (e.g., movie screenings, concerts, festivals) and launching social projects such as urban gardening that have involved the local community. Besides the organization of activities in the realms of culture and social innovation, Kilowatt, the managing organization, provides consulting, incubation, and education services. “Le Serre” host a kindergarten and a vegetarian restaurant, which is open to the public and supplied by local organic producers. Overall, the hub employs 25 people, including founders and partners and it also offers a coworking space that hosts 16 professionals with heterogeneous backgrounds, predominantly active in media, communication, and creative industries. The coworkers are mainly freelancer workers, except four telecommuters of companies located in different towns or other countries.

Data collection and analysis

We conducted 22 semi-structured interviews with managers, employees, and coworkers between May and June 2018. In addition, we used direct observations and documental data to familiarize ourselves with the research context. In the interviews, we asked information about the aims and core values (mission, vision, and culture) of the hub, its activities, and services. We also asked interviewees about their perception of the physical characteristics of the hub’s spaces (e.g.,
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coworking area, restaurant, external spaces), and the collaborations that they have started being in “Le Serre”. In doing so, we sought to understand how the collaborations emerged and the key relational activities that they had deployed to start and maintain such collaborations.
We analyzed data following the interpretive method suggested by the grounded-theory approach, thus adopting interview transcripts as the primary source of evidence (Gioia, Corley, & Hamilton 2013; Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

Main findings
Since the first time we entered the field, we observed the “actual” collaborative nature of “Le Serre”. Indeed, interviewees recurrently narrated cases of collaborations that had emerged in the space with other users. Such collaborations went from one spot consultation on specific tasks (e.g., a professional interpreter who is often consulted by other coworkers for quick language references) to more continuous collaborations (for example, two architects who started to collaborate on common projects after they met there). In some cases, interviewees also referred to entrepreneurial projects that some users of the space had developed together (for example, a new venture dedicated to the production and distribution of traditional foreign vegetables in the urban garden).
Our analysis shows that in “Le Serre”, people engage in two main groups of relational activities aimed at sustaining different kinds of collaboration (see Table 1). Whereas the first includes relational activities that we label as “instrumental”, the second one pertains to relational activities that can be defined as “expressive.” We discuss them in detail in the next two paragraphs.

<TABLE 1.1 HERE>
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*Instrumental relational activities*

Users of the hub engage daily in several *relational activities that have an instrumental goal* – i.e. “are based on cognitive judgments such as whether a contact is pertinent to the task at hand” (Shea, Menon, Smith, & Emich, 2015, p. 92). For example, individuals deploy *actions aimed at gaining access to the resources* that are available in the hub. Such resources could range from material assets (e.g., free Internet access and desks, office equipment provided in the coworking areas) to intangible resources such as services (e.g., consultancy, training) and events offered by “Le Serre”, as well as knowledge and competences favored by the co-location of heterogeneous high-skilled coworkers. More specifically, interviewees appreciate both the training activities organized at “Le Serre” (workshops, guest lectures, etc.) and the social activities such as yoga classes or happy hours.

To illustrate, a coworker reported to us: “They [the managers of Kilowatt] organize workshops for the coworkers, but also events for people in the neighborhood. Le Serre are a hub for the local community. Even if the events are not intended to be for us, we can join them” (interviewee #22).

In the interviewees’ opinion, such activities represent an excellent opportunity to develop professional competences as well as to build relationships. Thus, interviewees admit they attend such events also with the goal of encountering for professional purposes other users of Kilowatt and external professionals. Interviewees perceive the co-location of other professionals in the hub as an important opportunity for gaining access to diverse competences, information, viewpoints, and relationships. Indeed, users of “Le Serre” affirm that they rely on the interpersonal contacts that are at hand in the hub to easily get access to professional opportunities that they would not have been able to reach if they worked from home. To illustrate, one interviewee noted: “It is very immediate and spontaneous, and surely better than browsing LinkedIn... they are not
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recommendations of course but pure network activation. LinkedIn is a network itself, but this is more spontaneous and personalized as the connection comes from a colleague” (interviewee #14). Moreover, users of “Le Serre” take advantage of the co-location of professionals with different backgrounds by engaging in activities aimed at cross-pollinating knowledge and ideas. In this context, the physical characteristics of the hub work as a facilitator, offering a “collaborative architecture”, which is designed to providing open meeting points (for example the relax areas and the restaurant) and favoring sharing. For instance, it is noteworthy to highlight how the office tables have a triangular design aimed at “sharing without invading the others’ space” (interviewee #19). Thus, “Le Serre” are perceived by its users as a working environment that sustains social interactions, which eventually lead to exchange of information and ideas. Interviewees appreciated such a feeling and state that almost all the users behave accordingly, being open sharing information, exchanging advice, and providing feedback on the ideas that someone is developing.

Expressive relational activities

The second group of relational activities relates to emotional ties – i.e., “ties that primarily provide friendship and social support” (Casciaro et al., 2014). Indeed, analysis shows that interviewees engage in some activities that are intentionally guided at building and maintaining ties based on affect, emotions, or shared personal interests.

For example, interviewees reveal to be keen on approaching other users because they perceive to share common values as well as many common interests. As a matter of fact, the majority of the interviewees decided to join the hub for the strong alignment with the values of the cooperative Kilowatt: “People who work here were actually chosen! You start to work here because of the similarity of your ideas or your job. This is why it is easy to interact” (interviewee # 19). Given the high diversity in the professional background of the users, the presence of a common ground
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is essential “to positively live the workspace together” (interviewee #5). In this regard, one interviewee states:

“Together with an association to which I belong, we organized a yoga festival here. We actually worked with Kilowatt to build this festival… these interactions are more related to my activist role. Indeed, I chose this place because I was interested in the themes and activities that are pursued. I found professionalism and flexibility [while realizing the festival] and being here every day, taking a coffee together made everything easier to solve (interviewee #16).”

The presence of a robust set of values supports individual engagement in the social and cultural activities that are carried out in the hub and provide the perfect ground to build emotional ties. In some cases, individuals were so involved with the social activities initiated by Kilowatt that they gained more responsibilities, eventually joining the cooperative. The cooperative organization itself is very keen on stating and openly communicating its values to different users since their first encounter with the hub. Among these values, there is the desire of pursuing a better quality of life: users experience “Le Serre” not only as a space where to rent a desk, but as a “family” where to spend both work and leisure time. Interviewees appreciate spending time there because of the pleasant design of the layout and exterior architecture, the presence of a green area, the shared kitchen, and an alternative restaurant. The physical layout of the space sustains coworkers’ satisfaction and their emotional attachment to the hub, favoring the generation of expressive ties in the hub:

“It is crucial to have a beautiful, cozy, stimulating space. It is essential for the quality of the work, also considering that the times are often not
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binding, so if you have a deadline you can stay and work three days in a row, you have the cats, so you can have some pet therapy, then you can go downstairs to have a drink with the coworkers, attend a concert together, then you get back to work and maybe there is someone else there so that you don't feel lonely, well this influences (interviewee #1).

Finally, another example of expressive relational activity relates to joining shared routines. For example, having a common lunch ritual – from the grocery shopping to the preparation – emerged as one of the key elements that allow individuals to get to know each other better and to develop affective ties:

“I think that there is a huge sense of community and it would be great to have this in every coworking space, because in the end we all have different jobs and when we gather we do not talk about work at lunch, it is more like being with friends than colleagues (interviewee #11).”

Discussion

This chapter proposes an account of the relational activities that individuals can deploy to initiate and sustain collaboration in collaborative spaces. Findings reveal two main groups of relational activities: instrumental and expressive. Whereas the first group includes those actions primarily driven by professional purposes, the second evokes the relational activities aimed at building and strengthening relationships based on similarity in terms of shared values and personal interests. The first group of activities (i.e. gaining access to the resources and cross-pollinating) reflects the instrumental “work” that individuals enact in order to leverage both on the material resources and the competences (e.g. knowledge, ideas) that are available in a collaborative space. In line with the
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idea that networks represent important conduits to get access to relevant resources, individuals engage proactively in activities specifically aimed at creating instrumental ties with other users of a collaborative space (see also Casciaro et al., 2014). However, a collaborative space can also be characterized by a strong culture, supporting a sense of community, which in turn sustains collaboration (Garrett, Spreitzer, & Bacevice, 2017). Accordingly, individuals may engage in activities aimed at creating and maintaining instrumental ties (e.g., engaging in the social and cultural activities of the space and sharing common routines), which cannot be explicitly related to professional purposes but can contribute to increasing their motivation to collaborate and expectations of reciprocity in collaborative projects. Our study suggests that these two types of relational activities are not mutually exclusive and are actually both necessary to ignite different types of collaborations. We find that collaborative spaces support collaborative efforts, eventually leading to new ideas and new projects, when users activate both instrumental and expressive relational actions. Whereas some collaborations can be ignited only through instrumental ties, such as in the case of a co-worker reaching out other users of the space to accomplish a task or developing a product or a service, other collaborations are initiated and sustained through both emotional and instrumental ties, as in the case of a new entrepreneurial venture founded by two or more coworkers of the space.

Whereas collaborations can be initiated through instrumental ties, these collaborations tend to be short-term and revolve around delimited tasks. When instead collaborations are initiated through expressive ties, they tend to last for a longer period of time, show more frequent interactions among the involved actors, and revolve around more creative tasks. Indeed, expressive ties allow for the creation of a common ground (e.g., common values, shared routines) among individuals, which
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facilitate the instrumental interaction and the exchange of knowledge and ideas during the development of new projects.

Results provide some managerial implications. For example, our study suggests that managers of collaborative spaces should spend efforts to communicate and promote distinctive values and identity, thus favoring the (self) selection of users, and organize different types of services, events and rituals as moments for interaction, exchange and sharing among their users. In addition, a sense of community could be supported by both professional and social activities, which represent important occasions for creating ties among users as well as reinforcing a common ground in terms values and identity.

Our findings also suggest potential avenues for future research. In particular, our study provides insights into the relational activities individuals deploy to ignite collaborations. Still, we did not offer either an account of how the process of collaboration unfolds dynamically or whether different relational activities are deployed by collaborative spaces’ users depending on the phase of the collaboration process. In this regard, we suggest that future research might explore how collaborations emerge and evolve dynamically over time, from the formation of collaborative ties to their maintenance/nurturing and effective activation, also examining how different relational actions come into play in these different phases of collaboration.

References

The Relational Foundation of Collaboration


The Relational Foundation of Collaboration


The Relational Foundation of Collaboration


Discovering workscapes: An investigation of collective workspaces

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Abstract
Due to the development of digital technology and different perspectives on ways of working, workers have adopted a variety of work practices. Space and time are less relevant, as with the right technical devices and digital accessibility, any place could become a working space. Moreover, workers desire more flexibility and freedom in shaping their work, and embedding the latter into their lifestyle. In this chapter, we build upon the notion of “scapes” (Appadurai, 1990, 1996), in order to put forward the term “workscapes”. Focusing on how creative hubs, digital nomads, and hospitality businesses cater to mobile workers and how the latter make use of these workspaces, we believe the term workscapes to be a productive notion through which to explore and question the intersecting practices that shape the new ways of working our research investigates.

Keywords: workscapes, creative hubs, hotel lobbies, digital nomads, coworking spaces, new ways of working
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Introduction

Whether it is the lack of job opportunities, or the strong desire for freedom, it cannot be denied that the number of self-employed workers is growing tremendously in many countries, such as the United States\(^1\), the Netherlands\(^2\), and the United Kingdom\(^3\). The need for flexible coworking spaces and hot desks has created a booming business in many cosmopolitan cities in the world. In coworking spaces, self-employed workers rent a hot desk or an office for a daily or monthly fee, which incurs costs whether they use the workspace or not. Desks, Wi-Fi and electric sockets are offered. Refreshments and food are usually also available for free or for a small fee. For many of the self-employed workers, it is the community aspect that makes coworking space so attractive and supportive for work (Garrett, Spreitzer, & Bacevice, 2017).

Coworking spaces are rapidly spreading in numbers and locations worldwide, from 75 coworking spaces in 2007 to 15,500 in 2017 (Blagoev, Costas, & Kärreman, 2019).

The traditional work environment where work can be performed has moved away from “images of permanent and fixed locations such as offices, homes” (Hislop & Axtell, 2009, p. 60). The increasingly available data infrastructure (Colbert, Yee, & George, 2016; Johns & Gratton, 2013) and capabilities of digital technologies enable workers to work independent of designated locations (Barley, Bechky, & Milliken, 2017). Thereby, these developments have played a pivotal role in pushing the spatial boundaries of work in the last decade (Azad, Salamoun, Greenhill & Wood-Harper, 2016; Mazmanian, Orlikowski, & Yates, 2013). Especially, self-employed workers are able to autonomously choose the workspaces that divert from traditional locations such as the home or an office. For self-employed and project-based workers, the establishment and maintenance of networks, socially and spatially, becomes of vital importance. Such networks are often conceptualized as professional (“communities of practice”) but their spatial expressions – the places they reside in – are often conceptualized in
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social terms. Around the world, studio buildings, artistic residencies, coworking spaces, business incubators and accelerators, and creative hubs are set up in order to revitalize neighborhoods (Markusen, Nicodemus, & Barbour, 2013). They are believed to contribute to lively neighborhoods, establish ties between existing residents and/or attract new ones, in other words: build communities (Elwood, 2006; Garrett et al.; Warren, 2014; Wen, 2012). Being part of a collaborative space is reported to help combat feelings of loneliness and help workers create a rhythm of working and socializing that would be difficult to maintain alone (Blagoev et al., 2019).

Even though a large part of our fieldwork was done in Amsterdam, the Netherlands, we discovered that the fields we studied are part of a larger whole, which is not bound to borders of specific cities, countries, or continents. Appadurai’s (1990, 1996) notion of five different scapes describes how different cultural flows are globally connected and this resonated with our observation. His main premise is that due to travel and digital technology, the world is more interconnected and cultures influence each other more and faster in certain aspects, which he called scapes. The scapes he proposes are ethnoscapes (flows of people travelling), technoscapes (technical knowledge and devices), financescapes (movement of money) mediascapes (spreading of news), ideoscapes (ideologies). The development of (digital) technology has speeded up the flows immensely. With an internet connection and digital technology, one can participate in international finance markets, read and view media from all over the world, have access to different ideologies, or profit from technical knowhow.

Drawing on the concept of scapes (Appadurai, 1990, 1996), we want to put forward the concept of workscapes, in order to offer an understanding of how different collaborative spaces are interwoven to form larger networks of work practices on an urban as well as on a global level. As workers are no longer dependent on time, fixed workspaces and jobs become more project-
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based, workers can travel and work from anywhere in the world, creating their own virtual office in any location using digital technology. We call for a more nuanced understanding of the different types of collaborative workspaces, their material and spatial constitution, the spaces’ users as well as their interwoven co-existence. In this explorative study, we have compared ethnographic data from our respective fieldwork settings, i.e., creative hubs, hotel lobbies and digital nomads. Looking at the practices of the actors and the spaces that the actors worked in, allowed us to focus on the commonalities and differences across these three settings.

Setting and methodology

Our main data collection consisted of ethnographic fieldwork, such as participant observation of daily practices, auto-ethnographic fieldwork, semi-structured interviews and casual conversations (Anderson, 2006; Gobo, 2008; Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007). In line with ethnographic traditions (Geertz, 1973), we aimed for an inductive approach to understand our settings. By observing the work practices, rather than relying on interview data only, we were able to generate an understanding of how working without a permanent job, or workplace is done.

Most of our research settings were located in Amsterdam. We conducted fieldwork at four creative hubs (Q-lab, ABS, PeoplePlace, and Rabbit’s Hole), and at the hotel lobby of Hotel Brixton (all pseudonyms). In Amsterdam, creative hubs are often former warehouses, hospitals or schools which are temporarily turned into studio buildings for artists and other creative workers. Fieldwork was also conducted in ten coworking spaces, which were located in Amsterdam, Berlin, Canggu and Ubud (the last two on Bali). Here, the notion of a workscape already showed its productiveness, as a “typical” mobile worker may very well have a semi-permanent residence in a creative hub in Amsterdam, whilst spending several weeks per year
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working remotely from Bali to escape the cold winter season. In Amsterdam, (s)he might spend parts of his or her time working on her laptop from hotel lobbies and coworking spaces, whilst certain projects and social networks bring the worker to organizations that have a more permanent base— at least for several years - in creative hubs. All of these practices – global and local – scale up to his or her personal workscape, and the accumulated work practices of larger (and ever growing!) groups of mobile workers can be seen as accumulating into workscapes spanning various global cities, without denying the everyday, material environments in which these practices are embedded.

The duration of the fieldwork in all fields studied varied from two weeks (digital nomads) to three months (hotel lobbies) to 1.5 years (creative hubs). The fieldwork and interviews were done between 2013 and 2017. The people we studied tend to be between 20 and 40 years old. They adapt easily to new technology and have the freedom to choose the way they allocate their time, choose their work, and space(s) to perform the latter. The traditional way of working does not fit their lifestyle, in which flexibility is important. In total, 76 interviews were held: 51 digital nomads, 20 creative hub workers, and five lobby workers. It is important to understand that as organizational ethnographers, our “thickest” description came from extensive hours of (participant) observation and field notes. However, the study of digital nomads had a stronger focus on interview data, as it was carried out worldwide, and by conducting interviews (both via Skype and face-to-face), a larger variety of digital nomads could be targeted.

When we met, we discovered commonalities in the fields we were studying, and the ethnographic methods we were using This resulted in a discussion over several months, during which we tried to understand our empirical material relationally and the notion of workscape presented itself. A workscape implies a multi-layered way of working where time, space,
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practices of work and leisure, seem to blend into one scape on a local as well as global level. A worker could choose to work in a creative hub for a while, alternate it with hotel lobbies, and then travel to other countries performing his or her work practices in a coworking space anywhere in the world. Besides the physical space where workers are performing their work practices in for that moment, they also take part in a global community of workspaces. Thus, we did not depart from a theoretical framework, but rather from an interest in the unseen connections between our settings, as exemplified by workers travelling between Berlin, Bali, and Amsterdam, a practice that is more common than perhaps expected. Thus, how we present our observations and findings, both theory and findings are closely and inseparably linked.

Empirical findings and theoretical contributions

In the following, we lay out our empirical findings and link what we found in the field to theory. The aim of our study is to discover links between our different settings and show how they could constitute different workscapes. To do so, we relied on the empirical settings in which we conducted fieldwork: Amsterdam, Berlin, and Bali. In what follows, we will first present different types of collaborative spaces, focusing on the day-to-day practices they afford. Finally, our analysis will lead us to argue that in the context of a medium sized, cosmopolitan city such as Amsterdam, and places popular with digital nomads such as Berlin and Indonesia, different (types of) collaborative spaces are facilitating each other, and are even constituted through each other’s practices. As stated before, this is a highly explorative study, in which we set out to explore rather than answer very specific research questions. For want of a better term, our “research mission” is to ask whether the different settings can be understood as workscapes, and what theoretical traction this term might give future research.
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Next, we will discuss and our settings separately, without neglecting the commonalities and differences between them.

Creative hubs: Where culture grows

“I wasn’t planning on staying in Amsterdam, I wanted to go back to Poland and the film studio I had been working at, but I fell in love with the city. I don’t know why, it is just my place on the globe I think, even when I am alone here and my entire family is in Poland.” (Julia, visual artist living and working in the creative hub ABS)

In this section, we will start by sharing a few observations based on long-term qualitative fieldwork conducted at four creative hubs in Amsterdam between 2012 and 2015 (Cnossen & Bencherki, 2019; Cnossen & Olma, 2014; Sihvonen & Cnossen, 2015). We use these observations to argue how research on creative, collaborative, or third spaces should leave the confines of spatiality or locality only, and instead look at the different ways of intersecting of such places, through the practices of the (often hyper-mobile and international) independent workforces that dwell there.

Creative hubs provide an affordable solution and offer international creatives the possibility of having a studio and sometimes even a living space in Amsterdam. At the same time, the research conducted at creative hubs, in particular at ABS, also revealed the extent to which creative hubs are just one part of an intricate tapestry of mobile (and global) ways of working and living, often infused with precarity. One artist had to leave the creative hub and go back to her home country because her mother was a refugee and needed caring. Sometimes cultural and material differences play out in a subtler manner, for instance in the case of a Greek designer who, for years, struggled to escape casual and underpaid work in the local diaspora
of his home country, in spite of his high level of education. Both these examples exceed the situation of economic precarity that each creative worker is bound to end up in. The possibility of moving around globally in order to work, by choice or out of necessity, show how creative hubs are part of a workscape that encompasses the whole world. This does not mean that we should think of these global and local work practices of creative migrants, as effortless. Whereas it might be true that the international and mobile creatives in these hubs increasingly work and live around the world, and that the cultural industries have taken on the aesthetics of a global “cosmopolitan tribe” (Kuipers, 2012), this does not make everyone equal.

What has emerged most strongly from the interviews and observations conducted with these international creative workers, is that the most powerful effect of being part of a creative hub is actually the space itself (see also Cnossen & Bencherki, 2019). Having a larger space than what usually would be within reach – because it is so inexpensive – gives people a sense of legitimacy. An art student who was interviewed, stated the breeding place was a “physical reminder that I am an artist, and that there is room for that” as opposed to working at home. Another interviewee mentions how he “never thought of myself as a studio artist, but now that I have one it makes a huge difference.”

Those who have not been in Amsterdam longer than five years see creative hubs as one of the many nodes in the cultural network they try to enter and navigate. They work at art spaces such as the independent W139 gallery, volunteer for art fairs and documentary film festivals, and religiously attend openings and performances. In fact, many see it as a benefit that creative hubs are not as institutionalized as some of the initiatives they work at. Because creative hubs are typically less strict about the content they house than museums, art galleries, or prestigious festivals and fairs, creative hubs can escape the particular codes that come with these places, or resist the habitus of the cultural world (Bourdieu, 2000).
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The strength of creative hubs when it comes to enabling international migrants to connect with the city, seems to be not so much in the curation of culture and art, but in the exact opposite: the escape from existing and sometimes restrictive norms and the challenging, or cleverly avoiding, of existing frameworks of requirements and expectations. This becomes visible once we draw our attention to migration as a practice, to be performed by many, and creative hubs as part of this practice. Hence, we believe that we need to understand how the different places where international and/or creative workers live and work, fit together.

Digital nomads: Workscapes as a way of organizing

“You can just open your laptop whenever you want to and say: Okay, now I’m going to work. You can also just close it and say: […] it’s time to be off work and do something fun because I’m in this awesome location.” (Edith, working as a business blogger from Bali)

Mobile workers are constantly on the move, use technology to communicate and are “accustomed to working in an assortment of locales” (Kurland & Bailey, 1999, p. 55). A particular group of professionals use digital technologies to achieve location-independence by working online and, to varying extents, combine working and traveling: digital nomads (Reichenberger, 2017). The combination of being location-independent and hypermobile creates a particular opportunity to look at the different ways our respective fieldwork settings are intersecting through the practices of the independent workforces that dwell there. To do so, we will introduce this specific part of the digital workforce, before turning to their workscape and their organizing practice.

For digital nomads, spatial mobility is akin to traveling with the purpose to seek out new locations that provide variety (places and people), rather than traveling out of necessity like
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mobile workers (Müller, 2016; Reichenberger, 2017). Many of our respondents believed that digital nomadism offers them a unique setting to develop as a person away from the norms of society. Digital nomads – more than workers in creative hubs and “lobby-workers”, who both have permanent homes to commute to – aim to break with the perceived expectations of others and general society. Digital nomadism means to design one’s life according to one’s own ideas, such as pursuing personal fulfilment beyond (traditional) success and material achievements. Working and living in this way, digital nomads do not “fit” the known categories of mobile worker, expatriate, or tourist. Whereas they have some characteristics of the afore-mentioned categories, none of the traditional categories adequately describe the digital nomads. This is also reflected in the observation that they are met with a lack of understanding from both their personal and professional connections until they build ties with other nomadic workers. This lack of understanding is even more pronounced concerning institutions, such as basic civic administration (lack of a permanent address), banking (permanent addresses often needed for bank accounts) or politics (voter registration). To cope with these challenges, digital nomads came up with workarounds, such as using a service to digitize all their paper mail or becoming e-citizens in Estonia. Altogether, a different way of organizing for work has emerged from the digital savviness and a work and life setup characterized by a high degree autonomy. Two aspects of the digital nomads’ setup were most notable: the variety of locations constituting the digital nomads’ workscape and how digital nomads engaged with the materiality of each of the locations to create localized workspaces.

First, the digital nomads’ workscape ranged across a broad spectrum of locations. Urban digital nomads working in lobbies or coffee shops worked “on-the-go”, yet had a permanent home to go to, and were embedded in or near the city they choose to work in. Digital nomads, travelling the world without a permanent home, took working with tempo-spatial freedom a step further.
Coworking spaces were an important part of the digital nomads’ workscape. They provided basic facilities (e.g., Wi-Fi, desk) and were available in almost all locations where our respondents travelled. Some digital nomads even changed locations throughout the day. Working in such a variety of locations, the digital nomads’ workscape became apparent.

Second, within the digital nomads’ workscape, we found that the digital nomads engaged in organizing practices, specifically engaging with the locations’ material and social aspects to conduct work ‘anywhere and anytime’. This is in line with the earlier argument that space is performed through bodies, actions, and non-human actors (Beyes & Steyaert, 2011). Engaging in Malleability - the possibility to temporarily order space for nomadic work - is crucial to the digital nomads’ organizing. Digital nomads did not view a location as is but rather how locations enable and constrain work to create temporary, situated workspaces. Specifically, within the overarching practice of Malleability, the digital nomads engaged in two practices that aimed at enabling focused workspaces and socially embedded workspace.

Conducting productive and focused work, such as writing proposals for clients, represented an especially challenging situation for the nomadic workers. For example, cafés and lobbies were described as providing necessary inspiration to the digital nomads but they tended to be rather noisy. In order to cope with the noise and other incoming interruptions to their workspace, our respondents enacted Privacy, which refers to the possibility to control the boundaries of one’s workspace. They did so by distancing themselves from others physically or building barriers (headphones, view-obstructing items).

Another challenge in the hypermobile setting of digital nomads was that not only spaces but also people changed continuously. Digital nomads enacted Sociality, the possibility to become socially embedded for the duration of staying in a location. They did so by reaching out to strangers with whom they shared a location, e.g., through social media as well as the coworking
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spaces. One of the digital nomads explained, “If I’m able to go somewhere, let’s say from now to a month, I map all the people on Instagram who are in that location and I’m just writing a message and say like, ‘Hey, I’m coming. I would love to meet you for coffee.’” In addition, they shared an understanding of the short-lived nature of the relationships, of which the duration was coupled with the stay at a specific location. One of the digital nomads described it as, “[Relationships] very easy to rekindle or to reignite once you’re back in the area. We live in such fast-paced times that most people don’t stay in touch.” Thus, digital nomads engaged with the material and social aspects of the locations that comprise their workscapes in order to organize for “working anywhere and anytime”. It could be said that digital nomads take it one step further and belong to a workscape.

Lounging and working in the lobby

“The beating heart of the Lobby – relaxed settings in which to meet your colleagues & friends. With a bar, a library and a terrace overlooking the hotel garden, it is a perfect example of a ‘living lobby’, which welcomes you all day or night. Please feel free to stay for a while and enjoy a healthy snack, a fresh drink or high-quality coffee.”

(Website Apple Inn Hotel, Amsterdam)

Parallel to workers paying a fee and working in a coworking place, there is a large group of self-employed who create their own workspace in (semi-)public places that are not, at least not initially or primarily, designed as a coworking space. Interestingly, the designers of such spaces respond to this phenomenon by facilitating the “transition” into a coworking space by providing fast Wi-Fi, electric power and beverages. In the lobby, we limited ourselves to the self-employed workers who do not rent a coworking space or an occasional hot desk. Our focus
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was on the process and the practices of how office space is created in (semi)public places such as coffee shops and hotel lobbies through the agency of self-employed and how eventually designers and managers of these places respond to this. In this study, we shed light on how self-employed workers create office space in hotel lobbies in order to make sense of their position as self-employed, fulfill their needs, and act out “work practices”. Moreover, the influence of the physical space, the omnipresence of Wi-Fi and technical devices were considered carefully.

Hotel lobbies have started to attract a particular kind of urbanites: students, urban professionals, and cool creative types who are continuously online and connected to the rest of the world (Rath & Gelmers, 2017). Our observations showed that hotel lobby-dwellers are generally young (20-40 years old) with an above average budget. The latter was deduced from the fact that their clothing, even though casual, was expensive yet not designer brands. Their laptop and gadgets were high-end brands, such as Apple, and they could afford drinking relatively expensive coffee all day. This is a different crowd than the people working in art-factories. The residents and artists in the creative hubs we investigated did not seem as “polished” and affluent as the lobby dwellers. The digital nomads, however, did tend to have more similarities in social strata, financial means, and attitude. What all three had in common is that they did not want to be constrained by society’s rules, the constraints of being employed. They wanted to craft their lives in full (perceived) freedom.

Hotel managers have started to realize the importance of the comfortable “living room” where good quality coffee is served with a smile. Some hotel websites explicitly advertise their coffee as an attractive feature of the lobby, and boast free, fast Wi-Fi and multiple electric sockets. The Brixton hotel chain designs each hotel lobby as a coworking space and aims for workers to use their hotels to stay and work when travelling.

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The lobbies we visited were furnished like a living room with comfortable sofas and chairs with fluffy pillows. Lighting was mellow, and pictures and low-key art were hanging on the walls. Soothing colors, organic materials, such as wooden floors and wool carpets, enhanced the feeling of comfort and being in a living room. Yet, there were long tables that served as working desks, and the technology that a (mobile) workplace requires. Going into “their office” regularly, gave the workers a sense of purpose, and a space in which they can perform and “legitimize” their self-employed urban nomad worker identity. These practices are similar to the practices of workers in creative hubs, and digital nomads in coworking spaces all over the world.

We can speak of a sense of community, yet there did not seem to a lot of face-to-face interaction. When observing the practices of self-employed in a coffee shop there was a tacit culture of “civil inattention”, where workers chose to ignore each other, without being impolite. As we engaged in conversations, at various occasions during our field work, with self-employed in hotel lobbies, these were cut off within a few minutes. We discovered this by accidentally breaching tacit rules. The semi-structured (planned) interviews we had with self-employed from our network, confirmed the existence of the tacit rule of “civil inattention” (Goffman, 1963, 1967), where people are aware of the fact that they are around others, yet respect the privacy of others and claim their own. By displaying this behavior of “civil inattention”, privacy is made possible in a public place through “self-distancing” (Goffman, 1963, 1967). Moreover, there was an implicit norm of silence (de Vaujany & Aroles, 2019). In all spaces investigated, self-distancing and civil inattention occur. In creative hubs, all workers spent most of their time in their own studio, whereas digital nomads were focused on their laptop. Although the self-employed may seem anti-social in the physical space, they are more social and communicative than ever in virtual space. Being connected to the World Wide Web
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seems to enlarge one’s social space virtually, whilst at the same time causing a decrease in social interaction in physical space. It could be said that workspaces have become “liquid” as people flow in and out of their private- and work-lives, the physical world, and the online world.

Our findings show that space influences the practices of the people in the lobby as much as their practices in turn, influence the space. Non-human actors, such as the furnishing, Wi-Fi, electric sockets, create an environment people want to come to in order to work, and feel as though they were at home. As we observed the space, and even observed ourselves as being present and working in the lobby, we felt at home. All of our interviewees were asked why they chose the lobby, and without exception, without being prompted to do so by the interviewer, they commented on the “living room-ambiance”, the comfortable furniture, the Wi-Fi, electric sockets, and coffee. Simultaneously, the human actors created the space by their practices in the lobby, creative hub, or coworking space in a temporary “home” in the world. These findings show that there is a performative approach to space, as space is “performed” through bodies, actions, and non-human actors (Beyes & Steyaert, 2011). As the self-employed practice “work”, as if they were at home away from home, hotels started providing the amenities needed for comfort and working remotely.

As we compared the influence of space on the practices of the actors within that space, and vice versa, we found that this occurred, albeit in an own particular way, not only in hotel lobbies but also in creative hubs and the spaces digital nomads use. The work practices were not only performed within the different settings, but also between the settings worldwide. As mentioned before, workers who are not bound to a specific workspace, are part of a global arena of temporary workspaces. By travelling and working in different global workspaces, we propose that these global work practices form a workscape.
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Concluding thoughts: Towards an understanding of workscapes

In our research we looked at creative hubs, hotel lobbies and digital nomads. We found that work practices and unwritten rules within them were similar, such as not making too much noise, and not disturbing others and/or try to engage in (long) conversations. There is a tacit culture of civil inattention, where workers acknowledge each other politely, yet do not engage in contact (Goffman, 1963, 1967) and silence (de Vaujany, & Aroles, 2019). The perception of freedom, without being constrained by societal rules and regulations seems to be an important factor in all settings. However, the lack of institutional support can be problematic in each setting and the sense of freedom is not absolute.

Encompassing the different kinds of workplaces we investigated, and the commonalities that we found in the work practices, we came to realize that there is a larger, global notion that connects the practices and different workplaces. Globally performed work practices are part of a flow of (work) culture, which inspired us to look at the phenomena we studied as an Appaduraian “scape”.

Scape theory (Appadurai, 1990, 1996) was developed to understand the movement of cultural flows in a rapidly globalizing world. As we entered an academic discussion, re-analyzing our different studies, and looking at our datasets, we discovered that the work practices we studied separately, intersect. People who rent a studio space at a creative hub may work from coworking spaces sometimes. People who live in Amsterdam may spend a few years in Berlin, or a few weeks on Bali. Comparing this to Appadurai’s notion of scapes, we propose that such global flows of work practices can be said to scale up into what we have come to think of as “workscapes”.
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Future research could focus on different types of workscapes, and investigate how work practices enter spaces of leisure, or the home, making such areas part of workscapes as well. We also critically note that there are parts of the world that cannot offer the right infrastructure and therefore, at present, are hardly part of the workscapes we propose.

Notes

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Collaborative spaces for urban regeneration:
The case of Complesso di Santa Caterina a Formiello in Naples

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Abstract
Urban regeneration represents a relevant challenge for modern public administrations aiming at developing policies for requalifying urban environments and promoting social and economic growth. They increasingly embrace the idea of involving citizens and civil society organizations in a collaborative effort to find innovative solutions to the complex problems of urban areas requalification, such as social marginalization, poverty, or unemployment. Building on the literatures of collaborative spaces, collaborative innovation, and hybrid partnerships, this chapter aims at investigating the perceived role of the public actor in a social innovation initiative from the bottom aimed at revitalizing the social and economic environment of a given urban area. An in-progress Italian case of urban regeneration has been chosen in the city of Naples. Our results show that collaborative spaces, promoted in a bottom-up logic through social innovation initiatives, represent an important way to further collaborative innovation aimed at urban regeneration. Key aspects concern the themes of engagement, the need for new skills and competencies, and collaborative leadership. Implications for theory and practice are discussed.

Keywords: urban regeneration; collaborative spaces; co-creation; public innovation; hybrid partnerships
Collaborative spaces for urban regeneration

Introduction

Within post-industrial and services economies, rethinking urban development is becoming a new frontier for cities that develop their future by defining policies and planning strategies relying on sustaining continuous processes of urban regeneration (Griffiths, 1995; Yau & Ling Chan, 2008). Urban regeneration helps support community engagement by promoting social, cultural, and economic growth of urban spaces and communities (Montanari & Mizzau, 2015) and today represents a relevant challenge for modern public administration that aims at developing policies for requalifying the urban environment. It implies to re-develop and re-engineer existing industrial buildings and barracks for production in order to revitalize urban infrastructures and redesign a sustainable growth that better supports the quality of life for people and communities living within a territory (Richards & Wilson, 2007).

Politicians and government officials at all levels agree on the role of the public actor to improve public services and to find new solutions to unmet social needs. Moreover, they increasingly embrace the idea of involving citizens and civil society organizations in a collaborative effort to find innovative solutions to the complex problems of requalification of urban areas (Ansell & Torfing, 2014; Sørensen & Torfing, 2018; Tait & Lester, 2005). Recent research suggests that regeneration is the result of collaborative and social innovations and hybrid partnerships, where public and private stakeholders – politicians, civil servants, experts, private firms, user groups, community-based associations, and social cooperatives – cooperate mobilizing different resources, competencies, and ideas (Bryson, Crosby, & Stone, 2006; Hartley, 2005; Hodge & Greve, 2007; Sørensen & Torfing, 2011). The unique contributions of all these different actors are likely to produce a better understanding of the problem at hand, promoting a process of mutual learning through which the different stakeholders can develop and test new and bold solutions while building a joint sense of ownership for the project (Huxham & Vangen, 2013; Sørensen & Torfing, 2018; Ungureanu, Bertolotti, Mattarelli, & Bellesia, 2018).
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Public leaders and managers generally play a key role in this collaboration process: they support and enhance the inter-organizational interdependences, build a trust climate, and resolve conflicts by aligning interests, constructing common frameworks, and removing barriers to collaboration (Crosby & Brison, 2010; Hartley, Sørensen & Torfing, 2013; Straus, 2002). Public managers therefore have the opportunity to generate fertile ground for co-creation initiatives to take hold (Torfing, Sørensen, & Røiseland, 2019). Relevant examples of this trend are: in Berlin, where Betahaus represents a space of 3000 m², that is now converted into a hub for creative start-ups; in Detroit, where a derelict building, named Ponyride, after a renovation process has now became a business incubator and a collaborative workplace; in Verona, where a space of 2000 m², located on a formerly industrial land close to the city, has been reconverted to a collaborative space.

Building on the literatures on collaborative spaces, collaborative innovation, and hybrid partnerships, this chapter aims at investigating the perceived role of public actors in enhancing the interaction and dialogue among different stakeholders in the case of a social innovation initiative from the bottom aimed at revitalizing the social and economic environment of a given urban area. An in-progress Italian case of urban regeneration has been chosen in the city of Naples to investigate the ways abandoned areas and vacant or underused buildings are valorised through the presence of a collaborative spaces. Our results show that collaborative spaces, promoted in a bottom-up logic through social innovation initiatives, represent an important way to further collaborative innovation aimed at urban regeneration. Key aspects concern the themes of engagement – by public actors – regarding collaboration, the need for new skills and competencies, and collaborative leadership (Crosby & Bryson, 2005; Rosenthal, 1998). Implications are discussed.

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Urban regeneration is becoming a new frontier for cities that have shown symptoms of marginalization and aim at developing policies for requalifying the urban environment and promoting social and economic growth.

Over the last years, several collaborative spaces appeared, such as Fab Labs, coworking spaces, Living Labs and hackerspaces (Capdevila, 2017), revealing their potential in promoting urban regeneration processes. People working in these spaces are usually involved in collaborative innovation processes and can be considered as new communities of practice for novelty generation inside and across companies, without the costs and risks related to hiring knowledge workers (Bodrožić & Adler, 2018). Capdevila (2015) provides a theoretical framework of collaborative spaces, which are defined as micro-clusters, where actors coexist and collaborate entertaining networks with the purpose of building trust relations and work as independent professionals sharing resources and knowledge.

Only recently the key role of collaborative spaces in stimulating urban regeneration processes has been deepened. In particular, the job creation (e.g., Fisher, 2014), the reuse of former industrial buildings turned into vacant spaces (e.g., Durante & Turvani, 2018), the development of creative districts (e.g., Mommaas, 2009), the transformation and revitalization of public spaces (Muneerudeen, Al Khani, & Furlan, 2016), and the restoration and recovery of historical monuments (Rossi, 2004) represent some of the relevant urban effects resulting from coworking in collaborative spaces. According to Durante and Turvani (2018), collaborative spaces are an urban phenomenon with a relevant impact on the regeneration and revitalization of urban environments.

Collaborative spaces are considered as potential “serendipity accelerators” designed to host creative people and entrepreneurs, who endeavor to break isolation in order to find a convivial environment that may favor meetings and collaboration (Moriset, 2014). They provide the conditions to develop a collaborative innovation, because actors with different experiences and
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forms of knowledge are brought together, enhancing the generation of new and creative solutions (Hartley et al., 2013). One diffused hypothesis is that relational and geographic proximity within collaborative spaces may foster information exchange and a close and frequent interaction between individuals. The transfer of tacit knowledge that results from such informal and social interaction leads to the creation of new knowledge and support innovation initiatives, with potential effects for the local community and the surrounding urban area (Leonard & Sensiper, 1998).

Many collaborative spaces have been derived from the reuse of vacant or underused buildings, that contributes to recycling idle urban assets giving them new life and minimizing energy and material waste (Myers & Wyatt, 2004). Such realities contribute to the improvement of the quality of the surrounding neighborhood, increasing the attractiveness of public spaces and generating positive socio-economic effects (Murzyn-Kupisz, 2013).

Scholars identify different collaborative spaces depending on the activated innovation dynamics. Among them, “coworking spaces centered on social innovation” are identified as deeply embedded in their local social environment for the central role of citizens in promoting innovative activities and services with the aim of meeting social needs (e.g., Mulgan, 2006).

According to some scholars (e.g., Arundel, Casali, & Hollanders, 2015; Saari, Lehtonen, & Toivonen, 2015), collaborative spaces centered on social innovation initiatives often have a bottom-up governance model, since they are promoted and created by citizens, motivated by a desire to share and develop a community of interest. Citizens are self-organized and autonomous and take the initiatives to address a problem; only subsequently the public actor is involved and plays a role of facilitator of processes and activities and of enabler of urban development (Skelcher, Mathur, & Smith, 2005). According to Torfing, Sørensen, and Røiseland (2016), the active participation of citizens in urban governance and the intense cooperation among public and private actors activate co-creation processes, where more actors
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bring together different resources, competences, and ideas in the joint creation of the values for public services (Bryson, Sancino, Benington, & Sørensen, 2017).

Other scholars, in a similar way, identify the possibility of creating hybrid partnerships between different private actors (e.g., Massari, 2018; Van Bortel, Gruis, Nieuwenhuijzen, & Pluijmers, 2018). Despite the different nature of the actors involved, it often happens that the commitment and the involvement – not always present or effective – on the part of the public administration to reconcile conflicting and competing objectives is not enough: on the contrary, it is essential that actors find mutual interests in the activities to be implemented in order to be more involved in them (Arora & Romijn, 2011).

Due to different pressures and objectives, private individuals generally try to undertake profitable projects, whereas public actors tend to altruistic goals, so it is important to find a common ground on which to build something together by self-synchronizing the own expectations (Cooperrider & Fry, 2012). Through hybrid partnerships it is then possible to formalize social innovation practices and make them legal and recognized by the public actor (i.e., Selsky & Parker, 2005), thus creating a virtuous circuit of growth with a view to collaboration.

The case of Complesso di Santa Caterina a Formiello in Naples

Located in southern Italy, in the Campania region, Naples is the third largest municipality in Italy and it is among the most populous and densely populated metropolitan areas in the European Union. The city of sun, sea, and pizza actually hides two main threats to social cohesion: lack of work and lack of security (Vicari, 2001). Indeed, although few signs of past industrial development (Baculo, 1997), Naples remains in an emergency situation that local public administrations often cannot cope.
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The main factor leading to social exclusion in the Neapolitan area is the extremely high unemployment rate resulting from a process of deindustrialization; over the years, local administrations have not been able to manage the economic and social change and, consequently, they have not produced policies conducive to local development (Vicari, 2001). Furthermore, the presence of organized crime impacts on economic activities both directly, for example through extortion, and indirectly, adding uncertainty to the business environment. As a result, the area is characterized by a high poverty rate: for example, GDP per capita in the south of Italy, 18,200 Euros, is 44.2% lower than in the centre-North, whereas the unemployment rate (19.4%) is about three times higher than in the north (6.9%) (ISTAT, 2018). Finally, some peripheral areas are completely marginalized compared to the city centre and have received very little public investment with few and weak projects of urban renewal.

In this complex and articulated context, some relevant initiatives take root from the bottom to create value. Antonio Martiniello, in particular, founder of the Officina Keller, started in 2012 an urban regeneration initiative, which is still in progress. A crowdfunding campaign, hosted on Kickstarter and with Lou Reed as testimonial, has helped to find the necessary funds for a project with three main objectives: (i) recovery and reconversion of the artistic heritage for a development coherent with the vocation of the territory, (ii) relaunch of the handicraft through the interaction between master artisans and international artists and designers, and (iii) urban regeneration through the social impact of this cultural project. The final goal of the project was therefore to preserve the artisan tradition by activating a network in which artisans and creative experts experience the most innovative ways to train new workforce through social inclusion.

Officina Keller, together with other (local, national, and international) subjects, promoted the reconversion of the Complesso di Santa Caterina a Formiello in Naples. It is a sixteenth-century cloister created for the treatment of medicinal plants, transformed in the nineteenth century into a factory for the production of wool and military uniforms, and then abandoned to decay. The
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cloister rises in Porta Capuana, an urban area characterized by richness of history and an artistic and cultural heritage, which represents the most important and ancient gateway to the city. At the same time Porta Capuana is a bit degraded area from an urban and social point of view with high delinquency and low levels of education and employment; furthermore, it is now a gateway for foreigners and people with social integration difficulties.

Method

The reality of Naples shows very peculiar characteristics and for this reason it has been chosen for this research. Particularly, the attempt at urban regeneration focused on the reconversion of a large disused site in a degraded area that on the contrary could have a very high social and economic potential. Indeed, the autonomous and exclusionary strategy of the Naples council (see for example Cento Bull & Jones, 2006) has not brought the desired results and the social and economic condition of the area is still dramatic. This situation could then provide interesting insights in identifying strengths and weaknesses in urban regeneration and new governance paradigms.

In this chapter, we adopt the methodology of the case study (Eisenhardt, 1989; Feagin, Orum, & Sjoberg, 1991; Stake, 1978). Fieldwork consisted of multiple sources of case evidence (Eisenhardt, 1989) in order to collect primary and secondary data. Primary data have been collected through a series of semi-structured interviews carried out with actors involved in social work in 2019 from April to June: the use of semi-structured interviews was suggested given the desire to fully explore the experience of public and private actors with substantial flexibility and, at the same time, to ensure that we focused on our research goals. Semi-structured interviews, which lasted an average of 45 minutes, were audio-recorded and then transcribed for the qualitative analysis. We followed the Gioia method (Gioia, Corley, & Hamilton, 2013), which is a systematic approach based on a generic research question, i.e.,
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“we wished to explore the perceived role of public actors in enhancing the interaction and dialogue among different stakeholders, with the aim of revitalizing the social and economic environment of a given urban area.” The interviews were administered without a structure of questions but rather as if they were informal conversations so as not to limit the flow of the discussion and treat all the potential dynamics related to the topic of our interest. Interviews were later analyzed using Dedoose, an online software package for qualitative data analysis. Altogether, a total of 15 interviews and two workshops have been carried out. The workshops have been organized by the authors with all the actors mainly involved in the area to share impressions on the initiatives taken and ideas for the future. A measure of triangulation was sought by comparing the opinion and experiences of the most significant actors of this process, namely representatives of community and voluntary associations. The analysis focused on them because the aim was to understand the original intentions and motivations leading actors to open a coworking space and to investigate the relationships they have with the local context and administrations. The resulting information was analyzed using standard qualitative data techniques and it was integrated with secondary data, namely a range of official and public documents covering press articles published in local and national newspapers, site plans, policy statements, and consultation papers, that was also collected at the time at regular intervals since then. Finally, informed on-site visits have been made to the relevant sites object of the research. This Italian example of good practices of cultural and social regeneration, realized in an extremely stimulating urban context, provide the preliminary insights of this study (Yin, 2017). Furthermore, it represents an important example of hybridization of urban cultural heritage with creativity and strategies toward a process of cultural regeneration in a bottom-up approach (Della Lucia & Trunfio, 2018).

Results
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The objective of this study was to deepen a case of collaborative spaces centred on a social innovation initiative, aimed at regenerating an urban degraded area of Naples.

Martiniello’s idea is to make The Complesso di Santa Caterina a Formiello a collaborative space with the aim of assigning it to the revival of craft traditions through the collaborative effort among more actors, international artists and designers, architects and local artisans. The project also involves disadvantaged people, with difficulties in social integration, such as immigrants. Dedalus, a social cooperative based within the cloister, aimed both at improving the well-being of local communities and at building job opportunities for its members, participates in the project by providing support in hiring people to train and to involve in the different activities of the collaborative space aimed to enhance the local craftsman and promote it in an international perspective. Also, the local administrators are involved with the main purpose of providing support in fundraising, in giving publicity, and in creating the institutional conditions to participate in international contests.

By integrating artisan tradition and innovation, local and international designers, the Officina Keller regeneration project represents a multifunctional model of creative and cultural centre, where to meet, experiment, and produce new ideas. Indeed, here artists and designers can reside and work with Neapolitan master artisans and craftsmen. The same Officina Keller has been collaborating for some time with a group of shops specialized in carving and bookbinding, in the manufacturing of porcelain and wrought iron, in the restoration of dolls, and in the creation and recovery of musical instruments. This unique location has also turned into a market for a day, welcoming producers and consumers.

The combination of all these elements and being open to exchange with other realities of creative production in national and international contexts give to The Complesso di Santa Caterina a Formiello the possibility to become a pole of rebirth of the neighbourhood through
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creativity and knowledge sharing. Consequently, it produces a positive impact on local culture and the employment rate promoting the birth of new enterprises and business activities. Relevant insights concerning the key role of citizens in promoting collaborative space emerge. Interviews show the key role of citizens of the area of Porta Capuana in the drive for change. “Over the years we have promoted numerous initiatives in order to bring young people closer to culture,” claimed the priest of the parish, “and we have not found resistance from people, but a great desire to be involved.” Similarly, many actors active in the social sphere perceive the need to create new jobs and employment opportunities, especially in an area that has a strong vocation for craft activities. In order to undertake innovative ideas for the development of the area it is important “to live the area, to integrate oneself in the neighbourhood, to interact with people, to understand what the malaise of the area is and consequently to do something to solve it,” as stated by the Officina Keller founder. In a similar way they also behave Jimmie Durham and Maria Thereza Alves, two world-famous artists and sculptors, who have chosen to renovate an abandoned leather factory inside The Complesso di Santa Caterina a Formiello and to make it a hub able to welcome artists from all over the world.

In addition to this bottom-up perspective, that is the interventions by citizens, a very interesting topic emerged from the interviews concerns the perceived role of the public actor in urban regeneration processes. More specifically, the insights into the drivers of collaborative innovation and the perception of the key role of public actor in the urban regeneration process were the principal results obtained in the case and mainly concerned two issues. First of all, the public actor in the Neapolitan context seems to show a great deal of mistrust of citizens’ initiatives. “We organize initiatives, we want to build a welcoming and supportive community, able to give a voice to those who have been deprived of it, but public administration does not find time to meet us,” claimed the President of the Dedalus social cooperative, aimed at promoting and supporting citizenship and career guidance paths in the
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Porta Capuana area. Interviewed social actors perceive the public administration to be not willing to support these initiatives because civil servants are skeptical or simply because they are busy performing other and different activities. Apparently, the public administration mistrusts such initiatives, and this generates a great difficulty in implementing them, since the road is not smoothed out but hampered by constraints and bureaucracies that limit the functionality and the possibility of success. “I often organize free dance performances, but when I go to the municipality to ask for moral patronage they look at me with suspicion because they believe that I want to earn something from this activity and they don’t offer me support,” claimed a performer artist who founded a dance school in the cloister.

A second theme, which is actually linked to the previous one, is the perception that the lack of experience and appropriate skills limits the possibility for public workers to analyze the individual initiatives with knowledge of the facts. As the president of the Officina Keller stated: “It is not always their fault! Public workers have difficulty in understanding so many of our projects because they have never had any experience in this sense, they do not have the appropriate skills to face these initiatives,” and this lack of skills and competencies seems to be a crucial aspect, since seemingly the civil servants cannot speak the same language of the entrepreneurs who want to invest in social initiatives. “When I go to a public administration nobody knows who to talk to, because mine are not requests with which public employees interface every day here in Naples. There is no culture of social entrepreneurship, of urban regeneration, of sociality. No one knows what we are talking about,” as stated by a craftsman engaged in welcoming migrants in his small shop. Therefore, the perception of cognitive distortions and of lack of specific skills on the part of the public actor represent significant problems for the implementation of initiatives aimed at urban regeneration.

Based on the respondents’ answers, some considerations and implications emerge and are discussed in the next paragraph.
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Discussion and conclusion

The urban regeneration process occurring in the degraded area of Porta Capuana in Naples is still in its infancy stage. The collaborative space obtained from the restoration of the ancient cloister of The Complesso of Santa Caterina in Formiello provides an opportunity for co-creating public value that relies on cooperation and collaboration among different actors. The innovative ideas resulting from the knowledge and experiences sharing within the collaborative space produce a positive impact on the urban regeneration process of Porta Capuana. The case study reveals an increasing involvement of people and communities living there, who undertake initiatives and projects aimed at enhancing local resources, such as handcraft, and at promoting social integration of immigrants and socially weak people.

The active role of community and citizens is relevant in the initiation phase of the project, but it doesn’t ensure the success of an initiative of collaborative innovation, that requires a key role from public actor especially in the design and implementation stage of innovative public solutions, in order to guarantee the institutional conditions for collaborative innovation in terms of legitimacy, access to resources, centrality, and organizational backup (Huxham, Vangen, Huxham, & Eden, 2000; Lindsay et al., 2018).

Interviews reveal that it is challenging to bring together relevant different actors due to constraints on own time and energy, negative past experience, or a demotivating uncertainty about the purpose and outcome to reach. And once the actors are brought together, it can be difficult to get them to collaborate with each other due to the existence of potential barriers, which hamper the processes of collaborative innovation (Metze & Levelt, 2012; Sørensen & Torfing, 2011). Such barriers can be divided into the following: cultural barriers, due to the lack of focus on innovation for many public actors and incompatible worldviews, and organizational barriers, due to the predominance of bureaucratic silos and the consequent
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difficulty for public employees to bridge structural holes in the communication network with other actors (Sørensen & Torfing, 2011).

Overcoming these barriers and the success of the urban regeneration processes rely on building collaborative leadership for public actor or what Crosby and Bryson (2005) called “leading in a shared-power world,” as necessary means to developing new ideas and practices that enable private and public actors to cooperate following common and shared vision (Sørensen & Torfing, 2011). Such leadership will have to support the self-organization of the active citizens and help them to link up with relevant municipal actors who can provide funding, permissions, and other kind of support and encouragement (Kort & Klijn, 2011).

Specifically, the public actor can play the role of a collaborative leader if it has the skills and the competencies to do so. McGuire (2006) considers collaborative management skills as unique to a collaborative context and identifies four types of behaviour characterizing the collaborative management skills: activation (the identification of the human and instrumental resources necessary to carry out a project), framing (helping establish pleasant and collaborative relationships between the actors), mobilizing (inducing commitment and building support), and synthesizing (playing the role of mediator and facilitator within interactions).

According to Goldsmith and Eggers (2004) and Williams (2002), a collaborative leader must build sustainable relationships, to motivate, negotiate, to manage complexity and interdependence, to build trust and to resolve conflicts. Scholars also highlight the importance of personal competences, such as reflexivity, imagination and vision, flexibility, openness-mindedness, and boundary-spanning skills (Agranoff & McGuire, 2001; Hartley, 2013).

In addition to collaborative management skills, we also highlight the importance of a high engagement for a collaborative leader (Tang, 2016; Wajid, Khurshid, & Malik, 2019), revealing the motivation and the commitment of public actor in relation to certain activities. We conceptualize the notion of actor engagement at individual level and consider three relevant
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dimensions for engagement: cognitive, emotional, and behavioural (Frow, Nenonen, Payne, & Storbacka, 2015). Cognitive engagement refers to an actor who cognitively acknowledges and provides his/her resources to the main actor/sponsor. Emotional engagement refers to commitment and extra effort in engaging with the other actors in the co-creation network. Behavioural engagement refers to specific changes in an actor’s behaviour, because of the main actor/sponsor. A high actor engagement, combined with the capacity to work and interact in a network context, guarantees the overcoming of barriers that hamper the interaction among more actors and a high participation by the public actor in the success of the initiative of collaborative innovation.

This chapter, in its consideration of the perceived role of the public actor in urban regeneration, examines this relevant but under-investigated topic from an original perspective, and experiments with the integration of critical issues in urban regeneration, collaborative spaces, and hybrid partnerships research, which have never been explored together before. These preliminary insights can be graphically summarized as follows (Figure 3.1):

<FIGURE 3.1 HERE>

Although exploratory, this case study allows for some preliminary theoretical and managerial implications. From a theoretical perspective, it provides new insights based on collaborative innovation. More specifically, public actor is perceived to be the main engine of this process, relying on a solid base of unique competencies and high engagement which deserve constant improvement. Most previous work has focused on general aspects of co-creation, and a comprehensive approach to identifying co-creation dimensions and categories within them is lacking (Frow et al., 2015), therefore future research could further investigate these issues following the perspective offered by this study.
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From managerial perspectives, some preliminary implications emerge from our research with regard to the topic of skills and competencies. The public actor is perceived to play a critical role in promoting or preventing actions aimed at innovation, but probably sometimes there are no suitable skills to be able to interface with these citizens. Therefore, as part of the new training plans for public sector employees and managers – in light of the constant changes in the social, cultural, and technological scenario – it is important to put a strong emphasis on new types of knowledge and skills on the subject of co-creation and collaborative spaces. Indeed, it is not possible to generate a dialogue between the different actors if they do not speak the same language, if there is no common background of competences. Also in this case, future research could deepen the aspects of training and updating of civil servants around the competency profile required for the work task to be performed (Wu, 2013) in order to improve the efficiency of the administrative apparatus and to provide adequate support to the citizens and consequently an incentive to take co-creation actions.

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Collaborative Spaces in the Material World: Towards a Typology of Space-time Regulation Artifacts

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Abstract
Collaborative spaces (CSs) have emerged as settings conceivable as spatial and temporal re-organization devices. The aim of this chapter is to highlight the relationship between the space-time dimension and the material assemblages unfolding within collaborative spaces. Through direct observations and semi-structured interviews conducted in three CSs in Northern Italy, we explore how material artifacts allow CSs’ users to organize their working space and time. Indeed, CS’s users process, shape and use material artifacts according to their space-time needs. Specifically, we draw a typology of space-time regulation artifacts that comprises three different categories of material artifacts that contribute to the enactment of space-time coordination practices by those who attend CSs.

Keywords: collaborative spaces, sociomateriality, space, time, artifacts, coworking
Towards a typology of space-time regulation artifacts

Introduction

In the last decades, globalization and digitalization have coincided with (and enhanced) changes in the labor market that have impacted on the spaces and times in which work activities are carried out – i.e., the where and when of people’s work. These changes have resulted in an increasingly project-based and independent workforce, short-term contracts, and high levels of mobility (Boltanski & Chiapello, 2005; Cappelli & Keller, 2013). In these new working conditions, the disconnection between work activities and traditional work environments has contributed to changing the spatial distribution of work towards a distributed mode of production, in which work tasks can be performed from different settings and with a flexible temporality (e.g., Merkel, 2019).

Within this framework, collaborative spaces (CSs) have been referred to as so-called “third places” (e.g., Brown, 2017) that combine a flexible organization working spaces and times with services and infrastructures of traditional workplaces. In doing so, CSs foster opportunities for serendipitous encounters, knowledge exchange and cross-fertilization among otherwise dispersed professionals, thus potentially favoring a collaborative emergence of creative and innovative outcomes (Capdevila, 2019; Oksanen and Ståhle, 2013). Moreover, studies concerning the managing of CSs – in terms of their physical, socio-organizational, or relational design – have also focused on the emergence of spontaneous practices thanks to the co-localization and proximity of heterogeneous actors (e.g., Parrino, 2015). Accordingly, the ever-growing importance accorded to CSs by both practitioners and scholars has led to the investigation of how their physical and material features, as well as their aesthetic dimension, can sustain professionals in better organizing their workflows (Blagoev, Costas, & Kärreman, 2019; Cnossen & Bencherki, 2019). These contributions have suggested the importance of a sociomaterial perspective in order to understand how professionals interact with space and
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materiality (e.g., Dale & Burrell, 2008), despite the common interpretation of work within the gig and platform economy as being dematerialized.

Moreover, the mostly part-time and temporary attendance of CSs by different professionals and the co-localization of different physical spaces and artifacts suggest interesting research avenues, as their intertwining might shape professionals’ practices in different ways. The present chapter attempts to provide a first exploration of such avenues by defining a typology of material artifacts that allow for professionals’ space-time coordination practices within CSs by exerting a regulatory function on the actions, interactions and collaborations that they carry out and take part to while performing their work activities. Specifically, space-time coordination pertains to all those constraints that are created in a CSs thanks to the use of material objects, technologies, and relationships between actors, with the function of maintaining a sense of coherence and identity in these spaces (see also Schwanen & Kwan, 2007). We deem CSs as a particularly interesting setting for exploring the enactment of space-time coordination practices, as such spaces entail both physical and organizational settings that enable professionals to address their need for managing (and organizing) increasingly flexible and mobile work activities. Moreover, we acknowledge approaches that highlight the reciprocal influence of space, material artifacts and social interactions, under both sociological (e.g., Fuller & Löw 2017) and organizational lenses (e.g., Boxenbaum, Jones, Meyer, & Svejenova, 2018). We also attempt to integrate sociomateriality within “individuals’ interdependent work patterns and the larger social and temporal context” (Perlow, 1999, p. 57).

Coherently, our exploratory work underlines three different categories of material artifacts that contribute to the enactment of space-time coordination practices by the different individuals attending CSs: i.e., “immanent artifacts of space-time regulation”, “infrastructural artifacts of space-time regulation”, “practical artifacts of space-time regulation”.


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Sociomateriality, space and time at play in workspaces

Since the seminal works on situated and distributed cognition (e.g., Hutchins, 1995; Suchman, 2007), which underlined the relevance of physical, social, and cultural contexts in defining what is knowledge, the role of material artifacts has been scrutinized by different studies, ranging from technology-related ones to those relating to actor network theory. Within this framework, a relevant focus is drawn on the fact that human practices can be conceived not only as constellations of intersubjectivity but also as constellations of interobjectivity (Latour, 1996), contributing to the so-called “objectualization” of the social (Knorr-Cetina, 1997, p. 1). Such a focus has stressed the dependence of human beings on objects as “relationship partners and embedding environments” (Knorr-Cetina, 1997, p. 1), providing an important stepping stone for the renewed attention on the role of workplaces for those who attend them (e.g., Luff, Hindmarsh, & Heath, 2000).

In this vein, an increasing number of scholars from sociology, organizational studies, and management have raised the attention on both the spatial and material elements of workspaces and their impact in organizations and organizing (e.g., Boxenbaum et al. 2018; van Marrewijk & Yanow 2010). This growing interest on object-centered environments that situate selves – and set their reciprocal links with artifacts – has led to a new attention on the role of space in providing a material (physical) and immaterial (e.g., value- or identity-based) arrangement where the “things” facilitate the diverse activities, relationships, and outcomes of professionals (Carlile, Nicolini, & Langley, 2013; Leonardi, Nardi, & Kalinikos, 2012).

Indeed, based on the idea that space is the product of multiple interrelations always under construction (Massey, 2005) and that “social relations […] have no real existence save in and through space” (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 404), studies on workplaces and organizations conceptualized space as a sociomaterial performative process. To illustrate, the conceptualization of sociomateriality encompasses considerations about the relationship
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between the “social” and the “material”: on the one side, the term sociomateriality underlines how all materiality is created through social processes and how it is interpreted, enacted, and more generally used in social contexts; on the other side, the term showcases how all social actions are possible because of some materiality (Leonardi, 2013). Hence, the sociomaterial perspective considers worth to be explored not only the “objective” characteristics of workspaces or the associated social processes, but also the way in which individuals relate to artifacts in a mutual constitutive process (e.g., Orlikowski & Scott, 2008). Materiality shapes processes through its tight connection to the social realm, whereas space constitutes the physical setting where objects and subjects relate. At this regard, scholars define this bond as a constitutive entanglement: “The social and the material are considered to be inextricably related – there is no social that is not also material, and no material that is not also social” (Orlikowski, 2007, p. 1437). Accordingly, some scholars refer to workplaces as generative rather than “passive container” for actions that influence organizations’ capacities (Kornberger & Clegg, 2004), whereas others refer to the trope of affiliation object to describe the role of objects to establish fraught relational associations (Suchman, 2005).

In this line, the interrelation between human and non-human actors has been studied by focusing on performative and mutual constitution processes relating to the organizational space and work practices (e.g., Beyes & Steyaert, 2011). Studies have focused on organizations’ and workers’ use of sociomaterial features of work environments as tools for achieving different goals – i.e., tools for narrating and shaping their own image and identity (Quattrone, Puyou, McLean, & Thrift, 2012); tools for defining meaning and boundaries of novel managerial ideas (Höllerer, Jancsary, Meyer, & Vettori, 2013); tools for occupational legitimacy (Rafaeli & Pratt, 2006); tools for fostering interaction, information exchange, and collaboration in work practices (Nicolini, Mengis, & Swan, 2012). Moreover, studies embracing this perspective have pointed out the multiple sets of artifacts found to be essential for processes of organizing:
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forms, images, visualizations and assemblages (Bell, Warren, & Schroeder, 2014), buildings and architectural features (Gieryn, 2002), infrastructures for daily work activities (Orlikowski 2007), and the design of internal physical layouts (Kingma, 2019; Kornberger & Clegg, 2004). In this vein, artifacts are acknowledged as critical elements that shape the organizational experiences of individuals: on the one side, they regulate the way individuals relate with the physical setting where they enact their everyday working practices; on the other side, they can favor – as boundary objects – collective action, coordination and collaboration among different professionals, due to their “capacity to serve as bridges between intersecting social and cultural worlds” (Nicolini et al., 2012: 614).

Within this framework, the social and the material domains are mutually constitutive and, thus, they should be investigated jointly. In this direction, we believe that the attention on this entanglement between the social and the material should put under scrutiny also the role played by artifacts in regulating and shaping not only the workplace, but also the work time (e.g., Orlikowski & Yates, 2002; Perlow, 1999). Indeed, extant literature on time in organizations has mainly focused on individuals’ use of time, identifying the existence of common patterns in the ways people use their time alone and in coordination with others (e.g., Perlow 1999 for a review). In this context, some studies have already underlined how human and non-human artifacts like calendars, clocks, or event-based cycles are involved in the social construction of temporal rhythms (Clark, 1985; Zerubavel, 1981). Hence, as temporality is produced in situated practices (Orlikowski & Yates, 2002), and practices are enacted also in a spatial environment, it would be useful to delve deeper into this interrelation. Accordingly, studying how spatiality and materiality influence work patterns would allow to better understand “how work actually gets done and what effects the work process has on individuals’ work, their team’s work” (Perlow, 1999, p. 79).
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CSs represent an increasingly important empirical setting for this purpose. CSs refer to settings that aim to gather together people from different sectors and contexts “who do not necessarily work for the same company or on the same project, […] but who work] alongside each other, sharing the same working space and resources” (DeGuzman & Tang, 2011, p. 22). One of the core objectives of CSs is to provide a physical and social atmosphere able to support face-to-face interactions, an overall ethos of exchange, and a sense of community, which in turn can sustain cross-fertilization processes and collaborations that are potentially conducive to outcomes such as innovation and entrepreneurship (e.g., Garrett, Spreitzer, & Bacevice, 2017; Schmidt & Brinks, 2017). The importance of CSs as an empirical setting is further amplified by current transformations of work, which entail the erosion of traditional organizational, spatial, and temporal boundaries. Within this framework, CSs are conceived as providing professionals with new forms of support and coordination (Krause, 2019).

Indeed, CSs have been often intertwined with distributed modes of production favored by technological improvements and based on individuals’ autonomy, mobility, and flexibility in organizing their own tasks. In this direction, they seem to be fraught of relevant implications on how sociomaterial aspects underlying them might impact on the way people relate and organize their workspace and work time. Extant literature has overlooked such aspects. However, some interesting contributions are emerging linking sociomateriality to CSs. For instance, sociomateriality can be linked to the provision of behavioral and relational slacks that help CSs’ users pursue novel entrepreneurial ideas (Aslam & Goermar, 2018). Moreover, CSs’ spatial setting is conceived as a material assemblage that enable practices and is shaped by practices simultaneously, thus contributing to the constitution and the endurance of organizations (Cnossen & Bencherki, 2019). Space, artifacts, and their aesthetics are also considered central to collective processes that favor the emergence of a shared meaning in terms of personal and professional identities and attachment to a job, an environment, or a
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community (van Dijk, 2019). The spatial and material organization of CSs has also been found to enable temporal patterns such as rituals, which provide templates for making sense of social reality, and routines, which do “not pattern the ‘what’ or ‘how’, but rather the ‘where’ and ‘when’ of work” (Blagoev et al., 2019, p. 14). Accordingly, our study aims at offering a contribution to this debate.

Setting and methodology

Consistently with our exploratory aim, we adopted a multiple case study approach (Yin, 2009). We investigated three CSs located in Northern Italy: i.e., BASE (Milan); Impact Hub (Reggio Emilia); Kilowatt (Bologna). First, the three CSs host a wide array of knowledge workers and so-called IPROs (Rapelli, 2012) – from now on, we will call them coworkers – from different realms (ICT, social innovation, creative industries, etc.), who mostly work as freelancers and smart workers, or either within start-ups or established companies. Second, whereas BASE and Impact Hub are situated in former industrial buildings, Kilowatt is in a historical one. Third, all three CSs offer a wide array of services (shared desks, private offices, networking and acceleration programs, events, workshops, lunch areas, etc.). All three aspects result in different spatial settings and material artifacts encompassed within all three CSs, further differentiating space-time coordination practices of coworkers.

We conducted fieldwork from March 2018 to April 2019 and gathered data from multiple sources: direct observations, semi-structured interviews, and archival sources. Direct observations represented the primary source: this is consistent with an interpretative approach within studies adopting a sociomaterial perspective that aims to “engage the meanings … [physical] spaces and other objects hold for those passing through and/or using them” (van Marrewijk & Yanow, 2010, p. 7). We distributed observations uniformly throughout opening hours and on various days of the week. We took field notes and pictures. Field notes reported
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both facts and researchers’ impressions, including physical sensations, thoughts, and questions emerging from observations and interactions (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 2011). We then transcribed them into files that were analyzed by all four authors. We paralleled direct observations with 68 semi-structured interviews with coworkers and hosts of the three CSs. Interviews ranged from 30 to 50 minutes and were recorded and transcribed. Questions focused on: background information about CSs and informants; design of physical spaces and artifacts and informants’ behaviors, attitudes, uses, and meanings relating to them (as well as perceptions of those of other users); informants’ organization of work and non-work time; interactions and collaborations developed within the CSs, and emerging outcomes.

Finally, we collected data from the following archival sources: official websites of CSs, documents produced by CSs, and floorplans. The use of multiple sources allowed us to triangulate data, thus supporting us in substantiating the emerging categories of artifacts (Eisenhardt, 1989). Each author read the collected data independently in order to develop personal impressions, which we then shared and discussed until we reached a common interpretation. Moreover, throughout the data collection process, we used an inductive approach and went back and forth between data and literature. This allowed us to uncover three different categories of artifacts that support the emergence of space-time coordination practices of coworkers. This was a recursive rather than a linear process: we moved iteratively between our data and the emerging patterns, while also looking for relevant “breakdowns” that could challenge our interpretations of what was occurring on the field (Alvesson & Kärremann, 2011). We stopped when adequate categories emerged for our typology of space-time regulation artifacts.

Findings
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Material artifacts can contribute to the construction and enactment of space-time coordination practices by individuals. Given CSs’ respective features, goals, and missions, this consideration opens relevant questions concerning such settings. Drawing on our qualitative analysis, we try to address these questions by exploring which artifacts perform a space-time regulation function within CSs and how they perform it. Within this framework, artifacts placed within CSs define both constraints and opportunities for coworkers while they carry out their own work tasks or interact with others, thus potentially affecting modes of working, design and use of workspaces, and worktimes. Through their material and symbolic dimensions, these artifacts can support the segmentation of internal areas, as well as attributing identities and functions, regulating modes of uses, rules of access, and ways of interactions. In doing so, artifacts can influence space-time coordination. Accordingly, we can label them as “space-time regulation artifacts”. The triangulation of multiple sources allowed us to explore both the inter-subjective and inter-objective relational dimensions unfolding within our case studies, thus enabling the emergence of those specific artifacts that regulate space-time coordination. We identified three different categories of “space-time regulation artifacts”: i.e., “immanent artifacts of space-time regulation”; “infrastructural artifacts of space-time regulation”; “practical artifacts of space-time regulation”. These three categories of artifacts (and their functions) are summarized in Table 4.1 along with some examples.

<TABLE 4.1 HERE>

**Immanent artifacts of space-time regulation**

The first category includes artifacts such as: calendars, agendas, and boards illustrating the activities planned for the various internal spaces; ICT platforms supporting the scheduling of workshops and events; badges at the entrance of the various internal spaces outlining their...
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functions; notations relating to opening and closing hours of CSs. All these artifacts are designed and used entailing an immanent space-time regulation function: coherently, artifacts illustrating planned activities cannot be separated from the act of planning itself, whereas artifacts supporting the scheduling of workshops and events cannot be separated from the act of scheduling itself. CSs can rely on immanent artifacts to both set formal functions for specific areas and set those areas apart from other “un-functionalized” ones. Moreover, immanent artifacts can help outline intended functions of distinctive areas. Within Impact Hub, a plastic badge labelling a previously un-functionalized room as “Meeting Room” formalized its functionalization as a room for private work meetings, with coworkers relying on that single artifact in reinforcing such a function over time. As a result, coworkers have increasingly arranged private work meetings based on the room’s availability (which, in turn, is signaled by the above-mentioned badge), while arranging (and sometimes rearranging) other activities such as training courses, pitches, and events in other areas. For instance, one interviewee who helps manage the CS reports as follows: “We decided to give a clear function to a small room as coworkers needed a meeting room. However, no one reserved it until we placed a plastic badge to label its new function. Now, people organize their work tasks and daily timelines according to its availability.”

Moreover, we observed that Impact Hub relied on a calendar to outline its main planned activities (e.g., workshops, talks, events). Hosts purposefully located the calendar within an open-plan area at the very entrance of the CS, thus making it potentially visible to all coworkers. In turn, coworkers used the calendar to get a first glance at the upcoming activities within the CS, and then engaged in conversations with other coworkers to coordinate their own activities with those reported on the calendar. At this regard, one interviewee said: “Hosts set up a chalkboard for us to write down what we need and when. In doing so, we do not only book
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the meeting room or the open space, but we also share and socialize our schedules with other coworkers.” (see Figure 1)

< FIG. 1 HERE>

We also observed that BASE largely relied on immanent artifacts, in most cases similarly to Impact Hub. One example relates to a badge labelling a room as “Burò” (which recalls the French word bureau – i.e., “private office”). The badge outlined (and contributed to) the functionalization of that room as one with strict access rules, being accessible to hosts and few authorized coworkers only. As a result, this artifact encapsulated different space-time regulation functions for those who could access the room and those who were not granted access, thus affecting their space-time coordination practices differently. For instance, one coworker who could access the “Burò” said: “I come to work here at any time of the day, week and year; my badge allows me to be part of the community of the second floor and this helps me routinize my work and, at the same time, be more flexible when I’m closer to projects’ deadlines”. By contrast, one interviewee who mostly works from BASE’s café said: “Most people like the café more than other areas because of its free access and sociality, as it is easier to meet people either at public events or while working. However, I always need to fit my agenda to the café’s daily time flows: for instance, it gets too noisy at lunch times, thus I have to change work environment in order to stay focused.”

Infrastructural artifacts of space-time regulation

Not all artifacts contributing to regulating space and time entail an immanent regulatory function, thus still managing to define constraints and opportunities for coworkers. Our second category of artifacts – i.e., “infrastructural artifacts of space-time regulation” – well
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exemplifies these considerations. These artifacts comprise doors, windows, walls, partitions, and other infrastructural components of CSs. Their mere presence and assemblage can suggest premises, functions, and access rules of internal areas. However, the setting of these artifacts is not enough, as their own physical characteristics affect how their regulatory action unfolds, in turn contributing to defining different constraints: i.e., a permanent brick wall encapsulates very different space-time constraints compared to a wooden partition that can be easily moved and reassembled. For instance, our case studies widely relied on movable wooden partitions to allow coworkers to shape their workspaces in order to meet their own needs for either privacy or socialization alternating across different times of the day. To illustrate, one interviewee working at Impact Hub said: “This CS adopts modular structures and dividers that can be moved to adapt to the different needs of those who work here. The environment has changed many times since I’ve got a desk here.” Another interviewee said: “Flexibility is Impact Hub’s strength; hosts accommodate our demands easily. Whenever a room no longer serves its function, it becomes something else.”

Moreover, transparent and soundproof glass doors and partitions are widely used by CSs to both set spatial divisions and segment different areas whilst preserving visual continuity across these segmented areas. Indeed, these artifacts can enable a filtering of the many, sometimes conflicting, stimuli linked to shared workplaces. They can expose coworkers to visual stimuli coming from other internal and external areas of a CS whilst reducing auditory ones to a minimum, thus aiming to support both a sense of community (and sometimes collaboration) and a need for privacy and focusing. In this sense, one example stems from the segmentation of employees of a small ICT company located within Impact Hub. The company engaged in negotiations with Impact Hub’s hosts in order to balance two potentially conflicting needs it was facing: a need for spatial proximity of its employees, on the one side, and a need for spatial division between those performing programming tasks and those delivering phone consultancy.
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on the other side. Thus, all employees were located within one single area of the CS (in turn, also resulting in a functionalization of a previously un-functionalized area), with a glass partition segmenting that area in two further ones (and two further functions): one sub-area for programmers and another one for consultants. By being soundproof, the partition enabled programmers to keep focusing on their own tasks whilst their colleagues delivered phone consultancy. Simultaneously, the partition’s transparency allowed consultants to engage in real-time, non-verbal interactions and coordinate with programmers while still taking calls and performing their own tasks. Thus, the physical characteristics of such an artifact enhanced the productivity of both groups of employees, while also partially nurturing the collaborative benefits of spatial proximity. They allowed one single (segmented) area to encompass both the synchronous development of potentially conflicting work activities and continuous real-time, non-verbal interactions between the two groups of employees, thus fostering different forms of space-time coordination. As a result, the two groups are segmented by the glass partition, but do not end up being secluded. To illustrate, one interviewee said: “At first, we all had temporary shared desks. However, the company grew and expressed the need to move in a separate environment because of a growing fragmentation into different project teams. We started working ever-more separately, with distinct tasks and schedules depending on each project.” Another example of an infrastructural artifact relates to a small area fully bordered by glass walls located at the center of a larger open-plan area in BASE. This glass-bordered area (informally labelled by coworkers as “Aquarium”) was both transparent and partially soundproof, while also being usable by booking it for short times only. These characteristics supported the creation of an “enclaved” workspace with its own functions and stricter – yet, on a temporary basis – access rules that still maintained some relevant links with the outside world. As a result, the setting of such an artifact enabled to address coworkers’ temporary needs for privacy and isolation either for private work meetings or for individual work, while also
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keeping them embedded within the broader context of the CS. The artifact’s physical characteristics allowed both the leveraging of some of the benefits of spatial proximity and the synchronous development of potentially conflicting work activities similarly to the example of Impact Hub. However, differently from Impact Hub, both these aspects were further reinforced by the location of such an area within an open-plan one with more flexible access rules (e.g., all coworkers can access the open-plan area at any time) and modes of use (e.g., a mix both formal and informal modes of use). This was also compounded by the informal labelling (“Aquarium”) performed by coworkers. Such a labelling symbolically reinforced the emergence of a different “space-time dimension” within the boundaries of the enclaved area that still traced links, and triggered coworkers’ coordination, with the other dimensions unfolding in the bordering open-plan area. To illustrate, one interviewee said: “I always see lots of people in that glass room. It’s interesting to sneaky peek and see what they’re doing; they’re like fish in a bowl, that is why we call it ‘Aquarium’. Apart from being useful, these rooms make me think of the boundary between interaction and isolation that underlies coworking, making me more eager to get to know other coworkers.” (see Figure A2).

Practical artifacts of space-time regulation

Finally, our qualitative analysis allowed us to uncover a third category of artifacts exerting a space-time regulation role: i.e., “practical artifacts of space-time regulation”. This category includes tables, desks, chairs, wardrobes, cupboards, cabinets, shelves, and other furnishings. Physical characteristics, arrangements, and locations of such furnishings can play an important role in defining identities, functions, and access rules of CSs’ areas. For instance, Kilowatt’s hosts relied on tables and desks of different sizes and shapes in segmenting the internal areas.

<FIG. 2 HERE>
Towards a typology of space-time regulation artifacts

of the CS and suggesting their distinct functions and access rules to coworkers. One coworker referred that “the way desks, cabinets and shelves are placed enable people to be aware of others. Personally, I feel that their arrangement supports a sense of co-presence.” Hosts furnished an internal area as an open-plan one dotted with small desks: this prompted coworkers to focus work tasks to be carried out individually mostly in that area and organize their workflows accordingly. Another internal area was furnished with large desks and round tables, thus prompting coworkers to use it for brainstorming sessions, group work, and meetings. Thus, coworkers both selected and changed areas depending on their work activities, while also regulating their own work times depending on the availability of such areas. Moreover, these artifacts contributed to defining specific access rules for both areas to be followed by coworkers, despite both being flexibly accessible from a formal point of view. These considerations underline how the physical characteristics of practical artifacts can contribute to their regulatory action, in turn affecting space-time coordination practices. Coherently, one interviewee said: “I needed a small open space to work in, where I could see people working with bulimic patterns like me, while also feeling the comfort of being in a CS with a wide array of settings: I can reach the café whenever I need a break; I can arrange business meetings in one of the private rooms or, more informally, in the garden. […] The way this CS is furnished and partitioned makes me feel free”.

Practical artifacts also include all those tools and devices contributing to defining functions and access rules of CSs’ areas. Some examples relate to coffee machines, refrigerators, and microwaves, which usually functionalize relax or lunch areas within CSs. For instance, within Impact Hub, the placing of a coffee machine and a microwave within a previously un-functionalized area hinted to coworkers the possibility to carry out leisure activities, engage in informal conversations, and perform more informal work meetings. Such a functionalization occurred despite no immanent artifact was put in place (e.g., no badges or notations defined
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the functions of that area). Moreover, coworkers accessed that area more loosely and flexibly than all other internal areas of the CS: they accessed it at any time of the day, with no much coordination needed with other coworkers. One interviewee referred that “[…] the furnishing of an area with a coffee machine, tables, and a microwave in the basement helped us manage breaks or lunch times more efficiently, with no need to exit the CS. Sometimes, when we need it, the hosts help us set a projector in that area: in this way, we can set up meetings during coffee breaks” (see Figure 3).

<FIG. 3 HERE>

Another example relates to a piano located at the center of an open-plan area within BASE. Coworkers could use the piano at any time of the day: thus, both its central location and its loose mode of use set great constraints in the use of the open-plan area in which it is located. In fact, despite some desks being scattered around the area, the use of the piano discouraged many coworkers from using it for work activities for most of the day, in turn using it for leisure ones. For example, one interviewee said: “I started going to work earlier in the morning as soon as I found out that there were very few people at that time of the day and that those people were used to play the piano before starting working. […] It has become a routine of mine, and other people have started coming earlier and enjoying it as well”. Therefore, potential space-time coordination conflicts among coworkers were limited by the informal functionalization of that area mostly as one for “playful” activities rather than work-related ones. Moreover, some coworkers also limited potential conflicts by using the piano either earlier in the morning or later in the evening. This also allowed extending coworkers’ presence in BASE outside traditional worktimes, thus contributing to reinforcing the space-time regulation function of the piano (see Figure 4).
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Conclusions

The categories emerging from the present study allowed us to uncover the space-time regulation functions of the different artifacts included within CSs under a sociomaterial perspective. Moreover, such categories of artifacts can help set the basis for better understanding both their features and contributions, as well as informing both socio-organizational and physical design interventions within CSs. All three categories contribute to coworkers’ space-time coordination differently. One notable difference relates to the “immanent” nature of all those artifacts pertaining to the first category. By entailing a regulatory function, these artifacts contribute to coworkers’ space-time coordination more explicitly than those of the other two categories. Immanent artifacts explicitly convey such a function, whereas the regulatory function of both infrastructural and practical artifacts is mediated by a shared interpretation to be developed among coworkers. In turn, it takes time to foster such a shared interpretation related to infrastructural and practical artifacts, as well as requiring an active role of both coworkers and hosts in both shaping and sharing meanings and uses of those artifacts.

Our exploratory work traces some important connections with existing empirical and theoretical contributions pertaining to Science and Technology Studies, Actor Network Theory, and the anthropology of techniques and objects (e.g., Knorr-Cetina, 1997; Latour, 1996). These complex and varied areas of research draw a greater focus on relationships and tensions rather than on individual elements and objects, on reticulations of actors (both human and non-human actors, such as artifacts and technologies) rather than on individual subjects. Drawing on these contributions, we can argue that space-time relationships are not given as a
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*priori*, but they are produced dynamically within a sociomaterial network. Moreover, material artifacts are not merely *there* within a work environment to be just taken for granted, but they are the *conditio sine qua non* for coordinating work activities and fostering collaboration. Coherently, we offer an explorative contribution to the literature on objects and sociomateriality (e.g., Carlile et al., 2013; Nicolini et al., 2012; Orlikowski, 2007; Orlikowski & Yates, 2002), highlighting the malleable and emergent nature of material artifacts. Whenever they perform a space-time regulation function, material artifacts are neither “black-boxed” nor characterized by completeness, but they are mediated by and transformed in reciprocal relationships with humans.

These considerations suggest how different artifacts can encompass different degrees of explicitness in exerting their regulatory function, thus hinting potentially interesting avenues for future research. For instance, it could be relevant to analyze how space-time regulation artifacts influence collaborative practices (see Caccamo, 2020 for a recent contribution on CSs and collaboration). Accordingly, a deeper investigation might compare our typology of space-time regulation artifacts with objects affecting cross-disciplinary collaboration (e.g., with “material infrastructures” or “boundary”, “epistemic”, and “activity objects” as categorized by Nicolini and colleagues - Nicolini et al., 2012, pp. 624–625). Indeed, besides the basic “mundane” infrastructural support to collaboration (*material infrastructures*), space-time regulation artifacts can be conceived as features of the organizational and sociomaterial base that can lead, on the one side, to the activation of objects that “facilitate work across different types of boundaries” (*boundary objects*) and, on the other side, to the activation of objects that trigger/sustain/motivate cross-disciplinary collaboration (*epistemic and activity objects*).

Moreover, the development of a shared interpretation might be more difficult to achieve in CSs with a high degree of turnover of coworkers, thus making it more likely for coworkers to rely on immanent artifacts in shaping their space-time coordination practices. Thus, these
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differences call for cross-sectional comparisons on the potential roles of different artifacts within CSs with different degrees of turnover. Longitudinal comparisons could also provide compelling results. Coherently, scholars could explore how the preponderance of one category of artifacts over the others might change over time, while also investigating whether both infrastructural and practical artifacts could exert different types of regulatory functions depending on different stages of development of coworkers’ shared interpretations. Future research could also scrutinize how artifacts enable space-time coordination practices that lead to different outcomes in terms of emotions, individual and team behaviors, and interactions at play within CSs.

We should also note that the greater degree of explicitness embodied by immanent artifacts does not inherently underpin a stronger regulatory function as compared to the other two categories of artifacts. Our direct observations uncovered how both infrastructural and practical artifacts are usually more pervasive than immanent ones. For instance, whereas coffee machines might set strong constraints to coworkers’ modes of encounter, interaction, and coordination with one another, calendars could be avoided by coworkers more easily (both intentionally and unintentionally). Immanent artifacts might set constraints that are more susceptible to coworkers’ own dispositions and daily moments of “inattention”: thus, explicitness might be important, but it should rely on triggers at the individual level in order to express itself fully. This underlines the constitutive relationship between individuals (e.g., coworkers, hosts) and artifacts, in which two types of agents (human and non-human, respectively) both influence and leverage on the actions of one another. Coherently, future research could uncover the effects of this relationship at different levels: e.g., at a micro- (i.e., that of individuals) and meso-level (i.e., that of CSs as organizational and physical settings).

At a micro-level, the present study could set the basis for a more thorough focus on the space-time coordination practices of coworkers, as well as calling for a deeper understanding of the
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potential strategies performed by coworkers with respect to the different categories of artifacts. In this chapter, we have centered our attention on the side of artifacts, while also delivering results that are still at an exploratory stage. Thus, further attention is needed on the side of coworkers: in this sense, it could be relevant to intertwine the regulatory functions of immanent, infrastructural, and practical artifacts with the strategies that coworkers might perform when relying on such functions when trying to reach specific outcomes. In this sense, it could be relevant to integrate our typology of artifacts with potential boundary management strategies of coworkers when juggling across increasingly eroded temporal and/or spatial boundaries between work and non-work domains. At a meso level, it could be relevant to explore how the intertwining of the actions of both artifacts and coworkers helps establish CSs as organizational entities with their own rules, meanings, interdependencies, and roles, and not only as mere repositories of disconnected forms of organizing times and spaces performed by coworkers at a strictly individual level (see also Blagoev et al., 2019). However, this focus calls for a more thorough longitudinal effort.

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Language in Collaborative Spaces: Advantages and Barriers

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Abstract
An indispensable desideratum in collaborative spaces is to foster dynamic, barrier-free environments where professionals from different backgrounds can find common ground for collaborative projects. However, although such goals cannot be met without proficient and effective communication, research on the use of language as the most important means of information exchange in collaborative spaces is still needed. Our contribution in this paper consists of an exploration of the linguistic interactions among coworkers of such spaces. We propose a multi-disciplinary approach integrating insights from the organizational literature on communication and research methods in theoretical linguistics. The sociolinguistic analysis of two coworking spaces reveals essential traits such as language diversity, the use of different formal and informal linguistic registers, as well as the appeal to various media and communication modalities. This type of versatility can foster information exchange, knowledge sharing, and, ultimately, effective collaboration. However, it might also act as a barrier to communication, suggesting the need for collaborative spaces to establish common linguistic ground as the basis for promoting collaboration.
Language in collaborative spaces: Advantages and barriers

Introduction

Collaborative Spaces (CSs) are a landmark of contemporary work relations and contexts. CSs are intended to provide individuals with dynamic, barrier-free environments where professionals with different backgrounds can find a common ground for collaborative projects. Indeed, these spaces are characterized by a culture of openness and an ethos of exchange, which is aimed at supporting face-to-face interactions and communication (Capdevila 2015; Oksanen & Ståhle 2013; Schmidt & Brinks, 2017). However, because individuals attending a CS usually show different professional, educational, and geographic backgrounds, they need to find a common ground in order to interact effectively with each other. Indeed, if members of a CS do not come to a mutual understanding, their interactions could be reduced and less effective, de facto hampering the potential benefits provided by these spaces in terms of collaboration.

As recognized by organizational research, proficient and effective communication plays an important role in fostering collaboration and sustaining information exchange in contexts characterized by high degree of diversity (e.g., Neeley, 2013; Neely & Dumas, 2016). Within this stream of research, scholars have highlighted the importance of language as a crucial mediating mechanism, which helps individuals communicate effectively, eventually overcoming potential conflicts and increasing reciprocal understanding (Clarke & Cornelissen, 2011; Hinds, Neeley, & Cramton, 2014). In this chapter we explore the use of language as a part of the communication mechanisms at play in CSs. In doing so, we use tools provided by language science. The adoption of this perspective allows us to enlighten the dual nature of language both as an enhancing mechanism and a barrier. This approach also allows us to harmoniously integrate two different perspectives on the study of language, namely, language as an individual biological property and language as a formal system ("un système où tout se tient", Meillet 1903).
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We delve into the analysis of language in CSs by presenting two case studies: a co-working space and a hybrid space dedicated to a design collaborative community. We believe that the study of how language is enacted in CSs can provide a more comprehensive understanding of communication dynamics in CSs. More specifically, our study reveals that members of a CS are aware of the role of language as the most important communication tool in a CS. However, language also creates non-trivial barriers among individuals, thus potentially weakening the collaborative, open nature of CSs.

The structure of the chapter is as follows. The first section presents the theoretical background, whereas the second and third illustrate the research methodology and the main findings. The last section discusses the results, also offering some managerial implications and potential future research avenues.

Theoretical background

The role of language in organization studies

In organizational research, studies on how language use affects organizational outcomes can be grouped in three main streams of research. A first group focuses on global organizations and how the use of different native languages vs. the adoption of English as lingua franca impacts on the work of individuals and interactions in groups. These studies tend to focus on i) negative experiences of individuals and groups, such as status loss for non-native speakers of English (Neely, 2013) and “unearned” status gain for native speakers (Neely & Dumas, 2016), ii) feelings of exclusion and marginalization (Tietze & Dick, 2013), iii) “us versus them” dynamics triggered by different levels of fluency (Hinds et al., 2014). In line with this stream of research are those contributions considering a difference in language in teams, as well as in backgrounds, beliefs, and values a potential obstacle to integration (Lovelace, Shapiro, & Weingart, 2001;
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Wiersema & Bantel, 1992) in organizations. In particular, teams composed of narrow functional specialists, who master sectorial varieties of languages, as opposed to generalists with a broad functional experience, may struggle with communication and coordination (Bunderson & Sutcliffe, 2002). Similarly, different functional proveniences in a team and organizations might explain the reluctance to communicate openly (Huang, 2009). A second group of studies focuses on the use of language in times of major organizational changes. These studies focus on the use of rhetoric and storytelling that leaders use to promote change or that employees share in organizations as a response to a threatening event (e.g., Boyce, 1996; Fiol, 2002; Gabriel, 2000). This second stream of research takes into account different types of organizations, and focuses mainly on major, discrete, events, i.e., it does not investigate what happens in the day-to-day organizational life. Finally, a third body of studies takes a broader perspective and looks at how organizations are constituted through language interactions (e.g., Boje, Oswick, & Ford 2004) and; “can be understood as collaborative and contending discourses” (Clarke & Cornellissen, 2011). These studies focus on conversations as the unit of analysis in order to understand how organizational dynamics unfold.

To summarize, current research shows interest in how language is used in organizational settings; yet, none of the perspectives mentioned above address the day-to-day dynamics associated with language use. Indeed, already adopted frameworks do not extend to specifying technical tools for analyzing the actual linguistic settings represented by the organizations under investigation. Thus, adopting perspectives and tools from linguistics could offer a fine-grained understanding of how language use impacts on communication and collaboration dynamics in organizations.

*Investigating language in organizations*
Language in collaborative spaces: Advantages and barriers

In this paper, we investigate CSs as linguistic environments, thus delving into the nature of language interactions. In so doing, we aim at providing a fine-grained understanding of how language use affects communication dynamics.

From the point of view of a linguist, three perspectives could be considered with respect to our topic. One has been proposed by the so-called functionalist approaches, which place language at the core of proficient communication as the most adequate tool for effective linguistic exchanges (e.g., Everett 2012). A second perspective, the so-called formal approach, sustains that the core nature of language does not directly depend on (successful) communication; on the contrary, language could hinder proficient transmission of information because of phenomena such as lexical and structural ambiguity, and homophony, etc. (see Chomsky & Berwick, 2015 for recent discussion). Finally, several approaches proposed by sociolinguistics and pragmatics, i.e., the domains that investigate the connection between language and the extra-linguistic context (social and physical environment, personal involvement in the topic, the purpose(s) of the interaction, the relationship between participants, etc.), have shown that communication is not just a matter of intrinsic language structure. On the contrary, successful exchange of ideas is regulated by extra-linguistic factors and more general principles that underline communication outside human language and which also hold in the larger animal domain (see especially the Relevance Theory by Sperber and Wilson, 1995; or Grice, 1968).

In this study we combine the two latter approaches, analyzing the nature of linguistic interactions in the social context of CSs. Such a sociolinguistic perspective will single out two types of scenarios: cases where language facilitates communication and cases where, instead, it acts as a barrier to successful interactions.

Methodology
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Our qualitative research is focused on two CSs based in two different urban contexts. Impact Hub is a co-working space based in Reggio Emilia (a medium-size city) and offers office space to individual professionals (software developers, designers, accountants, etc.) and companies. Paco Collaborative is a hybrid CS located in Milan (the second largest city in Italy) and offers a co-working space and an online platform supporting designers interested in social projects. In these two CSs, we conducted 29 semi-structured interviews (16 at Impact Hub and 13 at Paco Collaborative) on broader aspects related to work life in CSs. In these interviews, we explicitly collected only limited general explicit information about language (we asked what language(s) each member uses, what part of Italy they come from, whether they were born outside of Italy, and whether they preferred oral or written communication). For the purposes of the present chapter, the interviews were used to explore how CS members perceive language within their CS and what kind of relevance they assign to language use in the complex network of communication dynamics taking place in a CS. Such information, however, was collected from the passages where the informants, without being asked explicitly, addressed various aspects concerning communicative interactions for professional purposes within the CS and from the CS to the outside.

Collaborative spaces: the sociolinguistic structure

In order to gather preliminary basic information about the sociolinguistic structure of CSs in general, we designed a questionnaire aimed at collecting data about the “classic” sociolinguistic dimensions (e.g., Chambers, 2003; Labov, 1972, 2001), of which we provide a short definition in the first two columns of Table 5.1. We distributed the questionnaire in five CSs, including the two under investigation in this chapter. Their broad sociolinguistic structure (as emerged
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from 43 questionnaires: participants were equally distributed in terms of gender, and their age ranging from 20 to 60) is briefly summarized in the fourth column of Table 5.1.

A sociolinguistic analysis of two Collaborative Spaces

Explicit and implicit opinions about language use

The analysis of the semi-structured interviews reveals that language is perceived as the crucial link that holds together members of a CS under their numerous perspectives and professional backgrounds. Indeed, CSs are described as extremely versatile, dynamic and efficient environments, in which language is a key tool for communication. Several interviewees stress the role of language in sustaining communication dynamics in such a versatile environment; there is also the awareness of the fact that this aspect needs constant improvement and strengthening: as everybody needs to be on the same page, everybody should be able to fittingly interact at the right moment. As one of our informants puts it, correct and efficient use of language facilitates “synchronization across all the members”.

Because interactions within a CS mostly happen between peers (diaphasic dimension), interviewees are also aware of the relevance of establishing fruitful relationships within other CS members in order to obtain useful feedback, advice, and relevant information. To this regard, a computer scientist from Impact Hub told us: “You always need to communicate to convey the feedback; everyone ‘metabolizes’ it… all these steps one makes to update, synchronize, analyze the feedback need continuous communication.”

Participants also know that efficient communication requires different communication modalities (e.g., face to face vs. mediated communication, digital vs. spoken vs. written, etc.),
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depending on the purposes and the type of interaction. For instance, most of participants prefer oral communication for providing last-minute answers to unexpected problems that arise in a CS. As the manager of Impact Hub explicitly said, no online platform will ever be able to replace interpersonal interaction and direct communication in this respect. “In my opinion, interaction between people will continue to be a fundamental factor. No platform will substitute interaction between people, mainly because I believe that people need interaction.” In this regard, another informant from Paco Collaborative told us: “It is difficult to maintain concentration when you talk online. Of course, if we work together face-to-face, we work better and we obtain higher quality results, more quickly.”

Finally, interviews indicate strong openness towards language diversity, particularly the use of foreign languages. For instance, participants recognize the need to use English in order to communicate with clients and colleagues if the latter are not native speakers of Italian; several CS members seem to be at ease with such a necessity.

Language as a barrier

Our analysis also reveals that there are at least five important domains where language emerges as a barrier: i) sharing specialized knowledge to specialists from a different field (diaphasic dimension); ii) communicating the results to a general, non-specialized public (diaphasic dimension); iii) combining different types of communication, especially oral and online interactions (diamesic dimension); iv) managing a multilingual context (diatopic dimension); v) mediating between group communication and the need for isolation (diastratic dimension). These aspects are summarized in Table 5.2 and are discussed in detail in the following paragraphs.
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The question of how to share specialized knowledge to specialists from a different field (point 1 above) is mainly related to the diaphasic dimension. CSs are usually described as open environments, best suited for interdisciplinary work. However, it is exactly the openness and the multipurpose nature of such spaces that interferes with communication. Indeed, in CSs specialists from completely different fields get together and interact for collaborative purposes. As a consequence, specialists with different backgrounds need to find a common language so that adequate communication ensues even at the terminological and technical level. However, as the interviews reveal, CS members think that transmitting specialized knowledge to colleagues from other fields is a true challenge; it is truly difficult for a specialist to master the terminology of a completely different field. Such impediments have a variety of sources: the lack of adequate time for explaining the relevant terminological aspects, the feeling that explaining these aspects at a deep level does not meet the interest of the collocutors, the inability to do so as the person in charge does not have the right knowledge and methods to transmit the relevant information. The consequence is that specialists from a given field prefer to avoid interaction with their colleagues from other fields. Interviewees note that CSs try to address this problem, for example through the organization of meetings and workshops where members can talk to each other to clarify problematic points.

As far as point 2 (i.e., communication with the larger public) is concerned, the major barrier that has emerged from the interviews, in particular from discussions with the managers of the CSs, is the tension between the inner nature of CSs as primary sources of innovation and the need to disseminate to the general public the specialized knowledge produced in such environments. Managers show their awareness of such a barrier and try to overcome it via
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personal mediation between the CS and the public, despite the lack of dedicated interfaces and professional profiles.

In relation to point 3 (i.e., combining and negotiating between oral and online aspects of communication), the interviews reveal the need for balancing between oral and written communication, and between face-to-face and online communication, the latter made possible through a variety of platforms (email, WhatsApp, etc.). Many participants explicitly mention that online, remote, non-face-to-face interaction is often ineffective. For example, emails take a considerably long time to produce a reply, thus causing delays; on the contrary, instant channels (such as SMS and instant messaging) are faster, but their efficiency might be undermined by other factors, such as lack of proficiency in digital varieties of language, technical issues or imprecision. Moreover, when online communication involves more than one person, impairments are often due to the fact that it is very difficult for a large number of people to stay focused in online contexts, be able to manage various communication styles, listen to diverging sets of problems, and obtain a coherent and cohesive output. Face-to-face communication is preferred for discussing important matters as it enhances collaboration and reduces the risk of distraction. Yet, it is also prone to ambiguity (especially when the members of a CS come from different fields), confusion and interruptions, thus ending up in creating a true barrier.

Another barrier in CSs is constituted by multilingualism (point 4 above). Given the interdisciplinary, open, and transnational character of such working environments, it is not unusual for more than one language to be present in the same working space. For example, Paco has a representative office in Spain. As the Paco manager mentioned, communication with this office happens mostly in English. However, there are contexts where either Italian or Spanish must be used. At the Milan office, the members use both English and Italian: even if all
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members feel at ease with using the two languages, the need to switch between them might act as an inconvenience. Most of Impact Hub members are native speakers of Italian and thus there is a preference for communicating just in Italian. Yet, they are able to use English, if needed. For most members, the use of English is implicitly seen as a type of barrier, as communication seems to “proceed in a better way” when performed in Italian. In particular, not all members feel at ease using English on a daily basis, especially when it comes to oral communication. This is not surprising: research on second language acquisition and use has shown that non-native abilities with respect to the use of a second language are a serious impediment to optimal communication, especially when the speaker does not feel at ease (e.g., Brown, 1973; Canale & Swain, 1980; Krashen, 1982/2009).

Finally, some participants raised a further issue, namely the tension between their personal need for time and isolation (in order to perform their own tasks) and the requirement for systematic group interactions which is intrinsic to CSs (point 5 above). One member of Impact Hub, for instance, explicitly states that she tends to avoid interacting with more than one colleague at the same time, because this delays her work; in fact, she has taken measures to separate her office from the rest of the open space, by building a wall made of cardboard. Although other colleagues are not as drastic as this, they also express the clear conclusion that relevant and useful work is done independently, for instance adapting their own working schedule to the potential crowding of the space. This suggests that the somehow counterintuitive conclusion that continuous interactions, which is actually one of the pillars of CSs, might eventually represent a non-trivial barrier: the moral seems to be that the use of language as an explicit tool to interact with other speakers does not by itself guarantee efficient communication within CSs.

Discussion and conclusions
Language in collaborative spaces: Advantages and barriers

Our study shows that CSs represent complex sociolinguistic settings, which affect language and communication in non-trivial ways.

One notable factor that comes into play is the diaphasic structure of the communicative contexts which characterize CSs. These, in turn, depend on the interaction between members of a CS and on the type of specialized knowledge that each member has. To this regard, our analysis shows the need to define a “common linguistic ground” through which individuals could share knowledge and information, in order to facilitate communication and, eventually, collaboration.

The second factor regards the medium of communication (diamesic dimension). The study reveals how oral, face-to-face communication is the best modality to interact freely in the open contexts presupposed by the very nature of CSs. Nonetheless, such a modality of communication also has its own shortcomings, sometimes acting as a barrier. Similarly, digital devices provided by contemporary communication technologies, which allow proficient non-face-to-face communication with multiple speakers and through multiple tools, might seem, in principle, to be the perfect match to the innovative, creative and experimental nature of CSs. But, in practice, they are also seen as a barrier to proficient communication. A final remark about the diamesic dimension is that traditional written varieties are almost completely neglected in CSs. One interesting exception is the message board used in Impact Hub, where members leave small paper messages (on post-it) for informal communication.

As far as the diatopic dimension is concerned, the great majority of the members of the two explored CSs are native speakers of (regional varieties of) Italian (mostly from the North), and they rarely use their local dialect when interacting with other members of the CS. The use of English is, on the other hand, expectedly limited to interactions with non-native speakers of Italian, and it is preferred in written communication.
Language in collaborative spaces: Advantages and barriers

Our main result concerns the role of language as a potential barrier to communication in CSs. As we have mentioned several times, CSs are meant to be barrier-free and to enhance collaboration among their members through communication and interactions. Our study paradoxically remarks that communication is de facto a critical process that might hinder work efficiency and the potential of the space. This issue is both related to the diversity among individuals, mainly in terms of professional backgrounds and corresponding specialized language, and the need to find the right tools to communicate. Indeed, even when individuals are aware of the presence of different linguistic varieties in their work setting, they are not easily able to find the appropriate communication modalities and tools. Actually, when people with different (educational and professional) backgrounds use technical language, each word (sentence, idiom) has one specific technical meaning. Thus, if individuals do not find a common linguistic ground that helps them sharing the “technical” content of their own professional discipline, misinterpretations and misunderstandings are very likely to happen, eventually leading to communication failures. Managers of CSs need to support a deeper awareness, among their members, of how to make language choices more appropriate to the goals and the setting of the communicative situation. In particular, it seems relevant to create a common linguistic ground for sharing specialized terminology. However, this is a complex and extensive process, it requires different communication modalities (face-to-face vs. mediated by a device, digital vs. spoken vs. written, etc.) and tools (events and seminars that favor face-to-face interactions, social media and instant messaging, board written messaging, etc.).

Interestingly, it emerges from the interviews that silence is a necessary counterpart of the overt exchange of information happening through language in such contexts. If great ideas and collaboration come from talking with others, it is also true that individuals, or small groups, often need some privacy to focus and concentrate. In line with recent contributions that
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highlight the power of silence and isolation in new work environments (e.g., Congdon, Flynn, & Redman, 2014; de Vaujany & Aroles, 2018), managers of CSs need to design the right space – and possibly the time – for alternating verbal interactions, where the use of language appears as a necessary tool, with moments for individual work, where silence prevails.\(^3\)

Clearly, the proper mix between different communication modalities should be evaluated depending on the sociolinguistic setting (i.e., the characteristics of the space and the users). Thus, the analysis of the sociolinguistic setting becomes crucial in CSs, in order to intervene and support interactions and communication among members and to exploit all the potential advantages of a collaborative space.

As a first step in the direction of bridging linguistic and organizational studies, our work is not without limitations. First, our data come from a restricted number of CSs. Second, specific contextual conditions may have affected our results, such as the location of the space in specific regions of Italy and their nature (e.g., coworking vs. other types of CSs). However, we believe that our analysis of language in CSs can open new directions for the study of language in organizations. Whereas in fact few scholars in management and organizations have started to investigate the use of language (e.g., Neely, 2013; Clark & Cornellissen, 2011), to our knowledge, specific tools and approaches developed by linguistics have never been adopted in these studies. Thus, future work could pursue this path by exploring how the contextual variables impact upon the sociolinguistic settings of the CSs. Similarly, it would be interesting to study whether more proficient communication (especially regarding exchanges among people with different backgrounds) is related to the presence of cohesive relational patterns or to the presence of a shared identity that supports a sense of belonging to the CS.

Notes
**Language in collaborative spaces: Advantages and barriers**

Because our data collection is part of a larger project that has been quite extensive, we focused on CSs that granted us full access to their facilities and their members. The investigated CSs are all located in a highly industrialized area in Northern Italy and have more than two years of experience. They are one co-working, three hybrid spaces, and one cultural hub.

Please note that all the quotes in this chapter have been translated by the Authors from Italian.

It must be remarked here that “silence” does not necessarily imply non-use of language: as it has been mentioned above (see 2.2), communication and/or interactions with other speakers is by no means the core function of language. In other words, speakers fully exploit their language capacity even when they do not interact with other speakers, i.e., in “silent” moments. We will not discuss this aspect further because it goes beyond the purposes of the present investigation.

**References**


Language in collaborative spaces: Advantages and barriers


Language in collaborative spaces: Advantages and barriers


Makers or Breakers? Shared Fabrication Spaces as a Double-edged Sword for Entrepreneurship

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Abstract
The “Maker-Movement” represents a growing community of creative innovators aiming to democratize the means of production through open access to Shared Fabrication Spaces (SFS). Maker activity in SFS is often praised in its potential to promote entrepreneurial creativity. However, very little is known about whether and how SFS relate to entrepreneurship. Herein, we offer an empirical exploration of these questions by conducting a qualitative-inductive study of seven SFS and 23 makers. Our findings point to an intriguing contradiction; whereas some SFS elements promote nascent entrepreneurial activity, others erect barriers that repress it. Consistent with expectations in the literature, SFS do provide cheap access to prototyping facilities, specialized knowledge, and valuable contact with early adopters. Nevertheless, SFS also require conformity to community values, including open sharing of ideas and a dominant ethos of resistance to commercialization and profit. Seen in light of the general enthusiasm for the promise of the maker movement as an entrepreneurial catalyst, our study provides a sobering perspective and much-needed detail about how community-based innovation may also impede entrepreneurial commercialization.

Keywords: Maker Movement, Entrepreneurship, Community, Makerspace, FabLab
Shared Fabrication Spaces as a Double-Edged Sword for Entrepreneurship

Introduction

Both theory and conventional wisdom promote the idea that lower barriers to entrepreneurial entry (e.g., access to knowledge, resources, technology, and markets) can trigger creative entrepreneurial activity (Eesley, 2016; Perry-Smith & Coff, 2011). Thus, the emergence of the “Maker-Movement” – a growing community of creative innovators democratizing the means of production through open access to Shared Fabrication Spaces (SFS) – is credited with ushering a new industrial revolution and as a powerful enabler of entrepreneurial creativity (Browder, Aldrich, & Bradley, 2019).

SFS – physical community workshops such as Makerspaces and Fab Labs – boost user-led innovation networks that employ private governance structures allowing individuals to access and share information (Halbinger, 2018). Indeed, makers at SFS often produce solutions valuable not only for themselves but also for others. In the notable Fairphone case, for example, two Dutch makers working in an SFS created an entrepreneurial success story by introducing a conflict-mineral free smartphone, even though they lacked specialized knowledge and did not envisage any commercial path for their project (Akemu, Whiteman, & Kennedy, 2016). Such examples parallel the process of user entrepreneurship, whereby entrepreneurs are “accidentally” borne out of users’ proactive response to daily needs by creating and sharing solutions (Shah & Tripsas, 2007). From that perspective, SFS promise to support the crucial identity shift from makers to entrepreneurs (cf. Mollick, 2016). This suggests a tight link between makers’ innovative and open ideology, their SFS facilities offering unprecedented access to prototyping technology, and a thriving entrepreneurial community. However, despite such anecdotal cases and the logical allure of the idea that makers are high-potential entrepreneurs in-the-making, we know very little about whether and how do SFS enable entrepreneurial activity?
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In this chapter, we empirically examine this question by conducting a qualitative study at seven different SFS, where we interviewed 23 individuals who collectively identify themselves as “makers” and who are either users and/or owners of Makerspaces and Fab Labs. The objective of this analysis is to acquire a deeper understanding of how SFS relate to entrepreneurship.

Our primary finding is that, although SFS do indeed lower barriers to nascent entrepreneurial activity (e.g. via cheap access to prototyping facilities, availability of specialized knowledge and learning opportunities, as well as valuable contact with early adopters), they also erect other barriers due to normative and cognitive institutional forces (e.g., requiring conformity to community values, including open sharing of ideas and a community ethos resisting commercialization and profit). We build on these findings to offer several contributions to the literature about makers, entrepreneurship, and community-based innovation.

Theoretical background

Emergent entrepreneurial activity

This study examines how entrepreneurial activities emerge within the context of SFS. To do so, we draw on a growing consensus that entrepreneurship refers to “the process through which new economic activities and organizations come into existence” (Davidsson, 2015, p. 675). This definition of entrepreneurship is sufficiently broad to capture both commercial as well as social entrepreneurship (Saebi, Foss, & Linder, 2019). It is also restrictive enough because, for makers, just like user entrepreneurs (Shah & Tripsas, 2007), there is a key difference between creating products and services to fulfill their own needs as opposed to creating and marketing these products and services for others. Finally, our understanding of what constitutes entrepreneurial activity aligns well with Browder et al.’s (2019) view of maker-entrepreneurs as those makers who
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commercialize a select subset of projects with market potential. When we discuss enabling and inhibiting forces, we thus refer to factors that affect makers’ ability to fulfill such entrepreneurial activities.

The maker movement

Makers include an array of product creators, innovators, tinkerers, and hobbyists that largely focus on Do-It-Yourself/Together activities through experimentation with the resources housed in SFS (Browder et al., 2019). Collaborative work by makers entails individual level creation with complete awareness of how to bring an idea or digital file to life without depending on closed processes employed by large corporates or other industrial production facilities. By extension, the maker movement promotes production systems that typically stand in opposition to capitalist processes. Indeed, the rhetoric of “Do-It-Yourself” has strong anti-capitalistic connotations. Further, elements of openness and sharing are at the core of the maker movement. The preeminent statement “if you can’t open it, you don’t own it” demonstrates the maker’s reverence for ownership, defining ownership as a state that can be achieved only when a person “opens up” the product and knows all ins and outs of its creation (Anderson, 2012).

Nevertheless, recent work has also emphasized the maker movement’s potential for “resource combinations” and entrepreneurial experimentation (e.g., Browder et al., 2019; Halbinger, 2018). As seen in Browder et al.’s (2019) model, educational experimentation space, technical adeptness, and the community network of valuable contacts afforded to makers via SFS are expected to set makers up for entrepreneurship.

Shared Fabrication Spaces: One Community, Different Shades
Shared Fabrication Spaces as a Double-Edged Sword for Entrepreneurship

SFS are the functional emblems of the maker movement. Bubbling up on the outskirts of traditional corporate ideation and production workspaces, SFS eradicate tangible and economic barriers to digital product manufacturing. In doing so, SFS are a direct manifestation of the maker movement’s call for democratization of access to production processes, knowledge-sharing, and technical skills education. These general-use spaces open for a wide variety of projects, are mostly independently owned but supported by their maker communities via membership fees and donations (Halbinger, 2018). SFS hold machinery for digital production as well as traditional labor such as table saws, soldering stations, and hand tools, and are differentiated in that they represent the distinct voice of their local communities as well as the unique character defined by their business model and operating ideologies.

In this study, we refer more specifically to two common models of SFS: Fab Labs and Makerspaces. Fab Labs are distinct in that they often are hosted by society, school, or another parent organization. They also abide by a Charter of Values written for the Fab Lab network, born at the MIT Centre for Bits and Atoms and now comprising more than 1200 Fab Labs (Browder et al., 2019). Fab Labs have the mission to “combine entrepreneurial innovation, research, and education under a single roof” (Browder et al., 2019, p. 465).

Makerspaces, on the other hand, are more independent and can exist as non-profits living off of volunteers or as for-profits collecting fees for membership access and classes (Browder et al., 2019). As such, these types of spaces may manifest with various differences, but still “cultivate a culture of open exchange of information and experimentation” (Halbinger, 2018, p. 2). Table 6.1 provides an overview of the differences between the Fab Labs and Makerspaces.

<TABLE 6.1 HERE>
Empirical setting and methods

SFS have not been given sufficient research attention to date and we therefore utilize an exploratory-qualitative research design (Edmondson & McManus, 2007).

Research setting and data sources

Our research was set in SFS located in Amsterdam, Rotterdam, Utrecht, and London as we collected data in and around seven SFS (see Table 6.2). Although each SFS is distinct, they all share the basic function of SFS (e.g., providing tools, machines, and education programs to their members and the public). In addition, all spaces were explicitly self-defined by their owners and members to belong to the maker movement, essentially linking their identity to the global community of makers. At the same time, the communities within these SFS were typically novel and constantly changing. In this specific context, our study was aimed at collecting rich, detailed, and thick interview data, shedding light on the experience of making as it unfolds within SFS and as part of the entrepreneurial journey.

Sampling and data collection

Our interest was to first identify SFS makers in order to detect the activities performed in their SFS and to uncover the link between such activities within SFS and entrepreneurial action. Therefore, the first step of data collection was to enter a variety of SFS and determine which spaces are most appropriate to observe the phenomenon of interest. Importantly, we did not try to establish
Shared Fabrication Spaces as a Double-Edged Sword for Entrepreneurship

the entrepreneurial potential of makers at this stage and remained open to looking at both commercialized and non-commercialized maker activities.

We selected our interviewees amongst users and visitors of SFS during regular and open days, workshops, public events, and trainings. Interviewees were selected based on their experience with the SFS in question and their role within the community. This was done to ensure that the data collected was sourced from individuals with nuanced rich knowledge about SFS activities and the associated maker community, which would not be available if sourced from one-time visitors or makers who had not spent sufficient time learning technical skills and community norms. In addition, individuals with different roles within an SFS and its maker community were targeted so that the research would not show solely a one-sided view of SFS culture and activities, but rather offer a holistic understanding.

With our first site visits, we commenced on two rounds of semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions that gradually became more specific. The first round of interviews included spontaneous encounters with individuals “on the spot” (15 to 30 minutes). This stage also included data generation from online sources about the space, such as websites, online video tutorials or presentations provided and created by SFS maker communities, and member recruitment processes gleaned from online promotional material and sign up pages. Additionally, social events were attended to both meet the makers and those in charge of the spaces as well as observe important interactions between makers and managers concerning their projects.

Meanwhile, the second round of interviews was scheduled and included more extensive questioning (30 to 90 minutes). These interviews were conducted through snowball sampling where first-round interviewees referred to valuable individuals from their maker community who could best speak to the reality of maker activities and their potential for enabling entrepreneurship.
Shared Fabrication Spaces as a Double-Edged Sword for Entrepreneurship

Our final sample consisted of 23 individuals who represent SFS users, managers, or founders (see Table 6.3).

The issues addressed in the interviews expanded to include the following themes: (1) experience and relationship with respective SFS as well as selection or recruitment processes; (2) decision-making motivations for joining a space and staying (or not), as well as the ultimate mission of each Makerspace and Fab Lab; (3) selection procedures and educational efforts; (4) understanding community practices and values around key themes such as openness, sharing of information, and collaboration; (5) the accrued benefits and associated costs for joining Makerspaces and Fab Labs; and (6) the experience of and attitude towards entrepreneurship and project commercialization.

Data analysis

Our data analysis followed a three-step procedure aiming to inductively explore patterns that emerge from the data through systematic and iterative comparison and contrasting (Gioia, Corley, & Hamilton, 2013; Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

Each interview transcript was first reviewed by employing extensive open coding leading us to a large variety of codes that were then reviewed again to determine the similarities between each data segment and how they fit together. These first-round codes were also triangulated with data collected from online sources and physical documentation of services provided by SFS.

The second layer of coding followed whereby similar comments and themes were categorized together. Second-order codes that had emerged from this data analysis were used to identify related
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themes found from the first layer of statements, categories, and evidence. At this stage, data and word frequencies were mapped through NVivo software, utilizing visualization tools such as word maps and keyword frequency tables that allowed a deeper and more granular understanding of the phenomena. The coded data was reviewed in and out of context to ensure that the code's meaning corresponded to the meaning of the passages it captured.

Finally, this coding process led us to overarching aggregate dimensions that defined the scope of the inductive framework developed in this study (Gioia et al., 2013). At this stage, reviewing relevant literature served to enrich the meaning of our identified themes and linked them more closely to the research question we aimed to answer. For instance, theory about normative and cognitive barriers to entrepreneurial entry, (e.g., Lounsbury, Gehman, & Glynn, 2019) informed our analysis of statements about community values and the sharing culture of SFS. All the while contrasting them with theory about economic barriers to entrepreneurship (e.g., lack of capital to purchase materials and opportunity costs of making; Foss, Klein, & Bjørnskov, 2019), which informed our understanding about productivity, technological resources, and space. Figure 6.1 presents the data structure.

<FIGURE 6.1 HERE>

Findings

The emergent structure presented in Figure 6.1 defines two central elements that link SFS and entrepreneurial activity. First, Economic Forces that encompass themes such as access to technology and physical machinery. Second, Community Forces that include themes dealing with
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community ethos, educational activities, and co-creation. Below, we elaborate on each of these elements in turn.

SFS economic forces and makers’ entrepreneurial activities

The Economic Forces identified in our data refer to barriers and opportunities to gain necessary resources. Nascent entrepreneurs face a social context where heterogeneous resources must be assembled, reassembled, and experimented under uncertainty. Foss et al. (2019, p. 1208) state that “good” institutions provide contexts with “low transaction costs when they search for resources, bargain over terms at which they can acquire or contract for these, monitor resources, etc.” Through this perspective, we analyze our findings to demonstrate that much like entrepreneurs facing institutional contexts when starting ventures, makers operate by collecting, bargaining, and monitoring resources within SFS as their primary context.

Access to technological and physical machinery

The most visible motivation for joining an SFS is access to high-tech equipment including CNC machines, laser cutters, 3D printers, and other production tools to experiment and create. The industrial quality equipment cannot be procured, maintained, nor physically hosted by just one person. The majority of our respondents expressed that projects could only succeed with the use of the free or affordable equipment accessed in SFS. As a longboard maker and entrepreneur explained: “I use all the machines whenever I want. This machine here is 30,000 Euros, the other is 100,000 so if I didn’t have this place, I would have never been able to make these skateboard molds or cut these decks up” [R13]. These tools enable entrepreneurship because they entail large cost reductions in bringing ideas to life, allowing makers to create impressive prototypes and reach
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low production levels for affordable sums. As one maker joked, “where do you put a laser cutter? Mom, can I use the kitchen? No! You need this” [R21].

Location and physical space

The physical layout, location, and designated personal space, if provided, proved to be an impactful economic force with the potential to aid and inhibit entry into entrepreneurship among makers in our sample. Thus, notions of proximity and reputable location played into makers’ reasoning when choosing a certain SFS. For example, one member described, “the venue is quite important to get clients here easily” [R3]. Others explained that location reputations transferred over to their personal reputation so that they were able to demonstrate legitimacy in new relationships outside the Makerspace, “being able to use [the name and place] in describing what I do and say ‘I have a desk space at [a reputable location]’, gets people to respond ‘Oh ok, you’re serious.’” [R5]. Thus, makers took location considerations very seriously as these aspects of the space seem to feed into their legitimation work.

Physical space also refers to the available workspace within an SFS dedicated to one sole maker or team. Interviewees explained that because the thinking processes are done in private areas like home, their Fab Lab work tends to concentrate on the execution of an already formed idea. Fab Labs are then often only helpful for the execution of a short-term or limited part of a project, as one interviewee stated: “At the fab lab, you don’t have that much space. You come for a certain activity, and then you pick up your stuff and leave again. It’s more of a visit, not a dedicated desk or space and you can’t leave your stuff so your products can’t be too big. It’s kind of more for learning how to use the machine, or testing” [R15]. This is less of an issue in Makerspaces as makers pay fees for private space within a collaborative area.
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In sum, makers coordinate resources for their projects while SFS provide some of these resources (e.g., access to machinery and space to work) and limit others (e.g., providing no storage space). SFS Economic forces are therefore providing mixed support for makers’ entrepreneurial ambitions.

SFS community forces and makers’ entrepreneurial activities

SFS community forces are inductively derived from themes discussing Community Ethos, Community-Driven Education, and Community Co-Creation. Taken together, these emergent themes capture the intangible elements that shape makers’ projects and their potential for entrepreneurial activity. In other words, these are cognitive and normative dimensions of culture that “structure and animate social practices among categories of actors with common goals, orientations, and stakeholders” (Lounsbury et al., 2019, p. 1220).

Community ethos

Community Ethos was quite homogeneous within and among the SFS studied. Although variety was found in the interpretation and manifestation of maker values across different SFS, the essence remained consistent; openness and sharing are used as a primary methodology for innovative creation and as a radical way of producing and educating new independent makers. One entrepreneurial maker acknowledges, “Everyone here is the same like me. They think the same way about certain things like me and they also know that you come a lot further when you help each other out” [R13].

Making is an empowering act to “break open” technology and products, shift away from buying from corporations, proactively and independently create, share the knowledge gathered from the
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making process, and be part of a community contributing to something larger than itself – the Maker Movement. This is echoed in MakerShare’s “Community Guidelines”, which provide maker “Dos and Don’ts”, “by sharing your project(s), you become a member who contributes to the maker community […] What makes community possible is our shared values: openness, resourcefulness, ingenuity, generosity, creativity, resilience and self-directedness.”

In our sample, accepting this ethos becomes a precursor for gaining access to desired resources of machinery and knowledge. Makers are even selected for their ability and desire to uptake the community ethos, as an SFS manager explains, “I think attitude as a member for sure is a big deal, you have to feel comfortable with this thought [of openness and sharing], you have to like or get the idea that this co-working thing is something that you have to be ok with [R2]. SFS formally grant access to resources through membership requirements, but selection processes also informally classify if a maker “fits in” [R1] with objectives and values. One Makerspace founder explains that the following thought process affects how makers are allowed into the Makerspace: “Do you come in and work from the space quite a bit? It’s not essential but it’s kind of a good sign if you’re there a lot of the time. Are you up for talking to people? Do you come for the Friday breakfasts and do you come into the pub? […] People who say yes to all of [those questions] are generally who we want to have in the space” [R1].

In sum, SFS communities tend to harbor like-minded people that hold values of openness and sharing, but these values are paradoxically protected to an extent that they become quite sterilized and may even reverse from stated openness to practiced exclusivity. As our respondents reported: those who do not believe in the community ethos “smell that this is not for them, so they leave” [R20]. Evidently, across all SFS studied, makers often acknowledged that entrepreneurial projects were strategically distanced from the community as a response. In Fab Labs, makers with clear
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entrepreneurial ambitions paid full price for machine use and did not document online, whereas in Makerspaces, entrepreneurial makers would use their SFS “early in the morning or late in the day [when projects are] confidential and they don’t want to have them on their screens” [R3] for others to see.

Community-driven education
SFS maker communities are providers of formal and informal education. Both Fab Labs and Makerspaces host paid and free formal education programs, events, and workshops for community members and the external public. The educational segments vary in themes and structure but always aim to teach useful and relevant skills while staying in line with the mission of the SFS and community ethos.

Makers describe the SFS as not solely a space to make, which is what first comes to mind, but as a primary location to learn, thereby establishing the SFS as a “new school” [R18]. One commercial Makerspace emphasizes this specific educational aspect even in their name, “Makerversity” and their website that states “Makerversity: campuses for creative businesses”. In this way, Makerversity specifically aims to teach and facilitate learning among creative and maker ventures. The formal educational initiatives can thus effectively encourage entrepreneurship by making available not only education that will support the success of projects but steer those projects towards venture creation. Still, formal education workshops are also vessels that transfer knowledge of community ethos to community members. One Makerspace facilitator explained: “I’m very clear about open source and the whole maker culture. […] I want them to contribute. So if they use a file made by someone else, they have to reference it and share their own files” [R14].
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In this way, community norms and values are taught hand-in-hand with technical skills and production processes.

SFS are also sites of informal community-driven education through social interactions between makers. Unsurprisingly, community attitudes towards entrepreneurship are present throughout these informal interactions as well. As a Fab Lab facilitator explained while showing others how to use a machine: “[this] should be a place to experiment and share. It’s not experiment and sell” [R20].

Community co-creation

Co-creation is the practice of passionately creating collectively within and with a community of makers. The maker community motivates makers to co-create and disapprove of fellow community members that do not co-create. One maker expressed annoyance in others who did not “understand” the core of making because “you cannot expect instructions or just repeat experiments, you got to get your hands dirty and experiment towards finding solutions. The point is to create and explore, not repeat and publish” [R23]. The potentiality to discover co-creation opportunities and partnerships enables entrepreneurship in that makers lacking certain skills can find teammates with those necessary talents to bring projects to fruition. Finding complementary talents was helpful, for example, in the case of “Linked Locked”, a venture started in iFabrica that creates bicycle parking solutions. This venture formed by two fellow makers who decided to work together during a Cycle Hack event after having known each other through regular interactions at iFabrica.

However, co-creation within SFS can also inhibit entrepreneurship by acting as an additional conduit transmitting values that push makers away from entrepreneurship. When makers team up
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to co-create, their values and ambitions can often clash. For instance, one maker spoke about working with another maker who wondered about commercializing their product, he said: “can I make money from [making]? This feels like a dirty question” [R1]. A couple of other makers expressed their experience with a third member saying: “We had some trouble with [Z who is] a true hacker in that they’re very paranoid about people starting a business. There’s this feeling that if you do so, you’re like a sell-out” [R21 and R22]. Overall then, to the extent that co-creation is a meeting point between makers with different knowledge and skills, it seems to support entrepreneurial activity. Nevertheless, to the extent that community co-creation is also a meeting point of different value systems and ambitions, it serves to promote the prevailing ethos within which entrepreneurial activity is often frowned upon.

Differences and similarities across Makerspaces and Fab Labs

Several additional insights emerged as we compared and contrasted Makerspaces and Fab Labs along the dimensions of our findings. Very clearly, both Makerspaces and Fab Labs source a set of core values as well as functional practices from the maker movement, thereby constructing a powerful economic and cultural context that simultaneously promotes and restricts makers’ entrepreneurial activities. Where these SFS differ is mainly in the degree to which they enforce community values and ideals upon their members. For instance, whereas Fab Labs require total openness and sharing as a condition for accessing tools and technology, Makerspaces are more lenient towards deviant members and often promote sharing and openness as means to support an entrepreneurial project (e.g., eliciting feedback) rather than enforce community values. Indeed, while still frowned upon, Makerspace members do find creative ways to protect proprietary product and company information without necessarily feeling or being labeled as a “sell-out”.
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Similarly, unlike Fab Labs, Makerspaces offer private space, which allows for storage and enables longer-term projects. Thus, the general pattern of our findings points to Makerspaces as a slightly more flexible context than Fab Labs, affording relatively more potential for entrepreneurship in return to higher membership costs.

Discussion and conclusions

Delving into the world of makers, this study addresses the question of whether and how SFS enable entrepreneurial activity among makers? We find contradictory forces that both enable and inhibit emergent entrepreneurial action in SFS. Like previous studies, our findings show how SFS provide arenas of collaborative creation, lowering economic barriers by virtue of their accessibility, affordability, and resource-rich environments (Browder et al., 2019; Eesley, 2016; Perry-Smith & Coff, 2011). Indeed, SFS can enable makers to create a solid foundation for impressive social and commercial ventures (e.g., Akemu, Whiteman, & Kennedy, 2016; Halbinger, 2018).

However, the process by which entrepreneurship emerges from SFS is not as straightforward as previous studies seem to suggest. Several features of SFS in our sample and the maker movement more generally are negatively affecting makers’ view of entrepreneurship. Openness and sharing, anti-capitalist sentiments, and negative perceptions of profit-seeking activities are deeply embedded within the SFS community ethos, transmitted through community-driven education, and promoted alongside opportunities for co-creation, all of which eventually coalesce to dampen entrepreneurial ambitions. Consequently, in the context of SFS communities, entrepreneurship is often seen as a “dirty” activity associated with “selling-out”.

This core finding – that SFS represent a double-edged sword for entrepreneurship – links our study to a growing stream of literature documenting how, despite favorable economic starting positions,
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the emergence of entrepreneurs from within innovative communities meets formidable challenges (Jain, George, & Maltarich, 2009; Mollick, 2016). Much like scientists (Jain et al., 2009) or open-source software community members (Mollick, 2016), makers often operate within an environment that is socially incompatible with entrepreneurship.

SFS afford makers unprecedented access to advanced production facilities but they also ask to share designs and discoveries with the community. SFS provide much-needed space for tinkering and co-creating with other community members but at the same time limit maker’s capacity to create for others outside this community. SFS enrich makers’ experience through formal and informal educational activities but next to skill acquisition they also transmit a powerful anti-commercial ethos.

It is not that being a maker necessarily implies wholesale adoption of the maker ideology or that all SFS necessarily inhibit entrepreneurship without distinction (e.g., see differences between Makerspaces and Fab Labs). Instead, what our findings suggest is that the process by which makers become entrepreneurs is more challenging than initially anticipated and presents multiple tensions between economic and community forces. Indeed, makers must juggle and work with and around these tensions to overcome the paradoxical interplay of entrepreneurial making in SFS. For instance, we found that some makers use SFS facilities covertly (e.g., early in the morning or late in the day) to avoid resistance to their entrepreneurial projects. This suggests a fascinating direction for future research but also a clear practical implication for makers and SFS managers who can become more attuned to the complex interactions between community needs and goals.

Overall, our study provides a sobering perspective that urges future research to look beyond the initial resemblance of maker and user entrepreneurs (Shah & Tripsas, 2007), move past the initial enthusiasm around making in SFS (e.g., Browder et al., 2019), and further explore alternative
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models that recognize the unique tensions of community-based entrepreneurship (e.g., Mollick, 2016). To paraphrase one of our interviewees: To the extent that makers wish to become entrepreneurs, SFS should first become places to experiment and sell and not just experiment and share.

References


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SECTION 2 – Collaborative spaces and creativity
An invitation to the unseen world of networked creativity:
Tracing idea journeys through the new infrastructures of work

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Abstract
Due to the itinerant, mobile nature of entrepreneurial work conducted by individuals, teams, and organizations, focusing on any single location has serious limits in terms of understanding how collaborative spaces can support the creative process. We respond to these limitations by proposing an enlarged perspective embedded in the concept of “networked creativity” and by advocating a methodology that allows us to trace the development of ideas through multiple spaces and interactions. To illustrate the relevance of our approach, we recount one entrepreneur’s journey through East London’s collaborative infrastructures over the course of a single day, followed by a detailed account of our longitudinal methodology and its theoretical rationale. We then discuss why tracing idea journeys through the new infrastructures of work is both a necessary and productive endeavor from a practical perspective, too. In closing, we consider the implications of the networked creativity approach to collaborative spaces research. We argue throughout the chapter that scholarship must transcend or at least ameliorate the single-space focus that still dominates this field. The Appendix forms an important supplement to our chapter, offering a walk-through of our approach to data collection while highlighting recent challenges, including how we secured research subjects for our ESRC-funded study of the idea journeys of 12 early-stage entrepreneurs over 12 months in London.
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Introduction

This chapter argues that collaborative spaces research must transcend the single-space focus that continues to strongly characterize our field and the way in which empirical data is collected. We propose that, by tracing and analyzing patterns of networked creativity – essentially, sequences of interactions and changes to an emerging idea or project that unfold across a range of offline and online locations – scholars will be able to render visible how mobile individuals and teams actually utilize (and potentially benefit from) diverse work infrastructures (Toivonen & Sørensen, 2018).

The chapter begins with a brief review of pertinent gaps in the collaborative spaces literature, after which we explore one entrepreneur’s “mad dash” through several collaborative spaces in the course of a single day. Our chapter then defines and explains the notion of networked creativity in more detail (as a concept and methodology). We next consider why it is so important, also from a practical policy perspective, to carefully trace real-world journeys through the new hybrid – digital, material and social – infrastructures of work. In conclusion, the chapter distils key implications for researchers as well as practitioners in the collaborative spaces field.

The overarching objective of our chapter is to present a new methodology for collecting data about the creative process in and around collaborative spaces while arguing throughout that the field needs to transcend its single-space focus so as to better understand the value and dynamics of new collaborative organizations.

Blind spots in the collaborative spaces literature

Notwithstanding many recent advances, research on collaborative spaces and infrastructures continues to be marked by certain blind spots that limit our understanding of the roles such spaces can play. Most scholarship in this (multi-disciplinary) area still focuses either on defining, describing and categorizing different types of collaborative spaces – innovation labs, coworking
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hubs, corporate coworking spaces, makerspaces and the like (e.g., Bouncken, Laudien, Fredrich, & Görmar, 2018; Toivonen & Friederici, 2015) – or on exploring the organizational dynamics of emerging collaborative intermediaries (e.g., Barley & Kunda, 2004; Capdevila, 2015; Garrett, Spreitzer, & Bacevice, 2017). Attention has also been paid to the relationship of collaborative spaces and flexible, precarious types of work as well as labor markets (Butcher, 2018), and to larger clusters and ecosystems co-constituted by such spaces (e.g., Goswami, Mitchell, & Bhagavatula, 2018). Whereas some relevant work has explored mobile working, this work tends to focus on single-organization case studies emphasizing organizational efficiency rather than creativity (Felstead, 2007; Sørensen, 2020). The upshot is that scholars have overwhelmingly adopted a single-space focus when it comes to understanding how collaborative spaces catalyze social interactions that have the potential to shape creative and innovative processes. This bounded single-space focus is seen even in studies that examine multiple cases (e.g., Jakonen, Kivinen, Salovaara, & Hirkman, 2017), for such studies rarely observe how an innovative process may flow across several locations or communities (in other words, they examine each space as a bounded entity without much attention to wider patterns of mobility, idea development or interactions). However, the complex interactions between humans moving across spaces, engaging in meetings, coordinating through a variety of services and technologies, can be characterized as an infrastructure of work (Dourish & Bell, 2007) that much wider and more distributed than the literature presumes.

As a result of this orientation, scholars and other analysts have largely missed how actual creative workers move through multiple spaces and engage in a variety of interactions in the course of their day-to-day activities, in contexts where an abundance of collaborative spaces exists and innovators can relatively freely choose which communities or spaces they wish to access. In the era of
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networked individualism (Rainie & Wellman, 2012) and new technology-enabled urban mobilities (Bassoli, Brewer, Martin, Dourish, & Mainwaring 2007; Kakhara & Sørensen, 2002; Sheller & Urry, 2006; Yoo, 2010), it is the rule rather than the exception that individuals – as well as teams – belong to multiple networks, participate in multiple communities, interact with multiple diverse peers and mentors across multiple online and offline spaces, and move frequently between multiple physical locations locally and globally. Without accounting for such myriad affiliations, mobilities, spaces and the interactions that span them, how can we ever hope to adequately and holistically grasp the role that collaborative spaces do or can play within the real lives of users and members?

This lack of attention to potentially mobile patterns of use in the context of personal (or team-led) idea journeys and wider infrastructures has arguably narrowed and constrained our understanding of collaborative spaces. Once again, the field has maintained a single-space, single-location focus based on the assumption that each collaborative space is a relatively bounded entity, presuming that it is more important to give analytical primacy to such entities rather than to how they (may) feature along the actual – far more expansive and mobile – lives and creative journeys of their users. This may have produced detrimental consequences by nudging collaborative space founders, designers and managers towards myopic thinking, making it hard to set their own spaces in a realistic context. Also, limitations in research may have made it harder for policy-makers to grasp the full potential of how the collaborative spaces sector can create value for cities and how it could be best supported and regulated. It is one thing to assess and evaluate, say, how a sense of community (e.g., Garrett et al., 2017) emerges within the boundaries of a single collaborative space (as important and informative as such research can be). It is another thing entirely to follow how actual creative, innovative workers flow through and interact at multiple locations both offline and
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online, in the course of their daily lives, while generating, elaborating, championing, and implementing new ideas (Perry-Smith & Mannucci, 2017).

Only by transcending the single-space focus can we begin to comprehend how the myriad interactions that creatives (a category in which we include all entrepreneurs, designers and others engaged in developing new ideas and projects) engage in *come together* to shape the nature of their generative work. We must be open to the possibility that the single collaborative space, unit or community may in fact matter far less for the average participant than scholars in the field might have previously assumed. Or, each space may matter *differently* to the creative journeys they seek to support, contesting established expectations. Without enlarging our analytical approach while embracing certain methodological innovations, we simply will not be able to shed light on these questions.

There are of course other theoretical biases in research on collaborative spaces – as well as in organizational science and the social sciences more generally – that have obscured the way in which creativity itself operates within modern worksapes that comprise collaborative, place-based communities as well as complex (and constantly evolving) digital infrastructures, with mobile individuals at the center. Most pertinently, we simply do not have a shared theoretical lens or vocabulary that could adequately capture the way in which creativity unfolds, as a mobile social process, in the fluid context surrounding collaborative spaces. Should we predominantly seek for instances of “collective”, “individual” or perhaps “group” creativity here, or should we lump all of what goes on under the (rather blurry) umbrella terms of “collaboration” or “co-creation”? Would we be better off focusing perhaps on untethered “encounters” and related situations on their own (Jakonen et al., 2017)? None of these terms seem sufficient or accurate in light of the individualized-yet-social realities just described, either because they propose artificial boundaries
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between individual and collective varieties of creativity, or because they are too imprecise analytically and unfruitful in terms of theory generation.

This chapter takes a step towards resolving the above challenges – namely, the myopic single-space focus that has blinded us to actual (boundary-crossing) patterns of use, and the lack of a suitable conceptual framework for interaction-driven creativity amid high levels of mobility – by building on our recent research. We have been pursuing this empirical work since 2016, seeking to capture the creative interactions and journeys of early-stage entrepreneurs in London so as to uncover hidden patterns and phenomena, including what happens when creators unexpectedly receive existentially threatening feedback from authoritative experts and mentors (Toivonen, Idoko, Jha, & Harvey, 2019). The original ambition of this research was to observe, in unprecedented detail and over a period of one year, the development of our research subjects’ business models (i.e., their focal creative ideas) and how their journeys come to be shaped by the interactions they engaged in along the way, with mentors, peers, experts and many others. At the outset of this endeavor, we accepted that creative interactions could come in myriad forms and have multiple dimensions as well as consequences, which is why we adopted an open-ended approach that could capture such variety, making use of semi-structured interview. By choosing participants who were members at a coworking space at the start of the study, we sought to ensure that our empirical results could shed light on how they benefitted – or failed to benefit – from such spaces in the broader context of their specific activities (as opposed to cataloguing the ways in which a particular space benefits all of its members in a general or typical sense. Our methodology and the data collection methods it incorporates (outlined below and described in more detailed and plain-language terms in the Appendix) draws inspiration from connective ethnography, economic geography, organizational creativity research and Actor-Network Theory.
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While at the time of writing this chapter we were still engaged deeply in distilling our findings (analyzing 85 in-depth interviews, in addition to hundreds of mobile innovation diary entries and short telephone interview transcripts), in this short chapter we share key examples from our research, showing how mobile creative work patterns play out across collaborative spaces while also outlining our methodology in a way that will be useful to other researchers and analysts currently designing their own inquiries. We start with a particularly dynamic episode where one entrepreneur we followed embarked on a “mad dash” through East London’s collaborative workspaces as he scrambled to survive immediate challenges to his emerging business.

We then unpack our methodological approach and explain how the notion of networked creativity can help us conceptualize – and empirically trace – the way in which creativity operates within the new hybrid infrastructures of work. We then take a step back and consider why it is important, from practical and policy perspectives, that we follow the journeys of actual creative workers through such complex and multi-layered infrastructures. In conclusion, we summarize the implications of this chapter for collaborative space researchers, leaders, and practitioners. We hope that readers engaged in similar research also note the Appendix where we explain in plain terms how we followed 12 entrepreneurial journeys over a period of approximately one year, including how we successfully committed the participants to a demanding longitudinal data collection process.

A theoretical note on our approach to creativity and creative interactions

The present chapter builds on organizational creativity research where “creativity” is generally defined as the generation of ideas, products, services, models, or processes that are novel and useful (Amabile, 1983). However, because novelty and usefulness are not necessarily apparent from the
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outset in each instance, for us creativity also refers to the process of how ideas are recombined into meaningful new forms (Stark, 2009) that may subsequently come to be recognized or judged as novel and useful. The crafting of new recombination is driven by both social and psychological dynamics, often through interactions and focused moments of collective problem-solving (Hargadon & Bechky, 2006) at the dyadic or group levels. This is why we frequently speak of “creative interactions” in the present chapter. Furthermore, seen from a distance, the work of generating new combinations and turning them into innovations that are recognized as novel as well as useful unfolds within a long-winded process called the idea journey (Perry-Smith & Mannucci, 2017). Broadly put, such journeys – that typically span months and even several years – encompass the stages of idea generation, elaboration, championing, and implementation. When we speak of “tracing creative journeys” through the hybrid infrastructures of work, we refer first to this general notion of the idea journey (as opposed to, say, “the user journey” as commonly heard in some commercial coworking contexts, or some more evocative notion of a personal journey of discovery). We outline an original methodology for collecting data on and analyzing such journeys. We use “creative journey” and “idea journey” interchangeably.

The organizational creativity literature shows how interactions permeate every step of the creative journey, although in many respects the role and influence of interactions still remain only partially understood. What we do know is that interactions can move ideas forward, for instance through providing resources, such as time and new information, that provoke divergent thinking and enlarge cognitive schema (Perry-Smith & Shalley, 2014). Through interactions, creators can also receive feedback on more developed ideas, driving revision activity (George, 2007; Harrison & Rouse, 2015). Such evaluative feedback interactions can suggest whether and how an idea will work (Grimes, 2018), while also being generative in terms of sparking new thinking (Harvey &
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Kou, 2013). Financial and material resources, furthermore, are accessed through interactions, within various networks. Multiple strong reasons exist therefore for more centrally focusing on the nature, contents and sequential patterns of human interactions – a significant share of which are now digitally mediated in one way or another – when researching creativity, collaboration, and related organizational settings or types.

One entrepreneur’s mad dash through East London’s collaborative infrastructures

Before setting out our methodological thinking and the concept of networked creativity in detail, we wish to illustrate its relevance through a short case narrative extracted from our longitudinal research. This brief narrative captures an important moment along Edward’s (a pseudonym) early-stage entrepreneurial journey. Although most of our field research in 2017 was conducted through regular face-to-face and phone interviews as well as a mobile phone app, we had the opportunity to shadow some of our research participants on particular days, with the goal of broadening our understanding of their work, interactions and patterns of movement. In this specific case, we caught Edward on a day that would take him whirling through East London’s landscape of coworking hubs at a critical moment in the life of his emerging startup. At the time, he was parting ways with his co-founder and scrambling to address fundamental flaws that had been highlighted in his business model. The following vignette summarizes his activities and interactions on 11 May 2017, after which we discuss what this case teaches us about networked creativity.

When I [Idoko] first met him, Edward – an emerging entrepreneur in his 20s based at Runway East, a coworking space in East London – was working on a new online platform. The point of the platform was that it would allow users to create bucket lists (i.e., significant things they wanted
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to experience in their lifetimes), connect with others with similar interests, exchange ideas on how to achieve particular goals, share resources among themselves and access relevant vendors (that could help deliver the users’ desired experiences, for instance in relation to travel). The business model Edward was proposing allowed users to also be vendors and the revenue model was to take a commission from every transaction between users and vendors.

On 11 May 2017 (two days after our second interview at a WeWork in Old Street), I caught up with Edward at 10:30 AM at Work.Life, a medium-sized coworking space in London Fields, East London, for a day of shadowing. He was there to meet a close peer-mentor he respected to discuss some particularly challenging feedback he had received shortly beforehand from an affiliate marketing expert. Prior to arriving at Work.Life, Edward had already held a morning meeting with his closest mentor in Tower Bridge to discuss his decision to separate from his co-founder. We sat in the kitchen area of the Work.Life space as we waited for the peer-mentor to arrive. I inquired about the nature of the earlier conversation with his mentor and he explained that the main point of the meeting had been to receive emotional support and validation (for important choices at hand).

As the peer-mentor finally arrived the three of us walked to a nearby cafe, where Edward and the peer-mentor conversed for two hours. Edward
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recounted the critical feedback discussion he had had with the affiliate marketing expert. As he spoke, I saw he was also anxious about two upcoming meetings planned for later that afternoon—one with his co-founder to sign the documents that would officially end their partnership and another with his investor-partners. Edward was particularly anxious about the second event and feared the possibility of the investor-partners ending their business relationship due to financial viability concerns and Edward’s fresh separation from his co-founder. He asked his peer-mentor for advice on what to do and the peer-mentor made several suggestions, one of which included “killing the business”.

After this peer-mentoring meeting, we rushed over to a nearby stop to catch a bus to WeWork for his next two meetings. As we waited for the bus Edward remarked in a rather sad tone that “it looks like the idea wasn’t really a great idea after all.” I asked about the meeting we had just had with the peer-mentor and he highlighted the difference between the two meetings he had had. He described that the first meeting with his mentor had been uplifting, whereas the meeting we just had with the peer-mentor had brought him back to reality. I noted down my concerns about the business: “I worry that the business may end because Edward can’t see how it will make money.” (fieldnotes, 11 May 2017)
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Following a slightly awkward (but successful) meeting to formally separate with his co-founder, Edward convened with the investor-partners for about two hours to discuss the current challenges with the business, including the parting of ways with Edward’s co-founder. After the meeting concluded, he immediately collapsed in the chair in front of me. Edward reported that, whereas it had indeed been a tough meeting, the investors had agreed to continue to work with him as a solo founder. We sat quietly for a few moments, whereas Edward rested. He looked worn out and exhausted.

Still, Edward’s day did not end there. He proceeded to join an evening event at Google Campus – a well-known coworking site in Old Street – through which he found a solution to the flaws in his business model (essentially, an online lottery format) that subsequently became a stable and central element in his startup.

This breath-taking day that unfolded across three main locations (a Tower Bridge coffee shop, a Work.Life space in London Fields and a WeWork in Old Street), although unusually intense, illustrates perfectly the mobility of entrepreneurial workers and creators in large cities such as London. An interactive journey through East London’s urban landscape, this episode recasts collaborative communities as an interlinked infrastructure that offers conducive spaces for interaction as well as movement (although in this case we did not focus on how new interactions are catalyzed at the local spatial and community levels). What becomes apparent is that it would
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make little sense to try to trace Edward’s creative journey within the bounds of his home hub (a WeWork in Old Street)—doing so would impose artificial boundaries on a process that spanned a long sequence of important interactions across multiple locations. What makes entirely more sense is investigating how particular coworking communities and other collaborative spaces co-shaped Edward’s idea journey, revealing how they facilitated or generated interactions that in turn influenced the progress of his central idea. Offering one case in point, the critical feedback from the affiliate marketing expert mentioned in the above vignette was received (through a spontaneous request) after an event Edward had attended at his previous coworking base – Runway East. As we unpacked Edward’s journey in detail, we came to understand that this single interaction had in fact served as a trigger to many other meetings he subsequently engaged in, having highlighted a potentially fatal flaw in his B2C (business-to-consumer) business model. Later on, we observed Edward’s efforts to first try to invalidate the critical feedback and then solve the problems it highlighted, through adding a new twist he had learned about from a colleague at an event nearby. It would have been all but impossible to understand and unpack how Edward was influenced by collaborative spaces had we adopted a conventional single-space focus.

Taking a further step back, Edward’s case helps us see very tangibly how entrepreneurs and other creators are fundamentally mobile. The interactions that shape the creative evolution of their core idea unfold, sometimes in surprising ways, across different locations and considerable distances. Yet the influence of such successive conversations, gatherings, and events – that sometimes trigger strong emotional responses – become embedded in the core idea, in a process that we refer to as networked creativity. This process is driven by a form of creativity that is collective, boundary-spanning, and typically marked by dyadic interactions (as opposed to interactions in group settings, although these do happen as well). Furthermore, this process is “networked” in the sense that it is
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best understood through focusing on a focal creator’s emergent ego-network and interactions across multiple networks, as opposed to a single group or organization he/she might formally be part of (mirroring the more general patterns of networked individualism, as set out by Rainie and Wellman, 2012). Having illustrated the general relevance of our approach, we now turn to setting out our methodology of tracing networked creativity in some detail.

A new way of seeing: A methodology for tracing networked creativity across multiple spaces

In the early 1980s, the well-known psychologist-philosopher Mihalyi Csikszentmihalyi pioneered an empirical data collection approach called the Experience Sampling Method. It is a method that seeks to generate reliable data on what individuals feel, think and do at a particular moment on a given day or a sequence of days, when prompted by a device at random intervals (Larson & Csikszentmihalyi, 2014). In developing our own approach to tracing creative interactions and revisions among our sample of 12 early-stage entrepreneurs in London, we were inspired by the Experience Sampling Method to try to transcend some of the limitations of retrospective interviews. In our assessment, interviews conducted several months after significant interactions or transformations had occurred had little chance of capturing adequate, fine-grained data, due to obvious limitations of memory and the (potentially very high) number of events that might prove significant (in retrospect). Therefore, we decided to combine several data collection methods that would allow us to identify diverse interactions and creative revisions at a higher degree of granularity, while inquiring into the connections that led to important interactions in the first place. Figure 7.1 visualizes this approach that is based on a combination of regular in-depth interviews – an opportunity to interrogate into interactions and revisions in detail, capturing a “snapshot” of the emerging idea at a given point in time – and other data collection activities covering the periods in
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between regular interviews. Our original aspiration was to conduct in-depth interviews at monthly intervals, phone interviews on a weekly basis, and (very brief) online surveys each day during the study period, based on the belief that this would give us unprecedented access to an entrepreneur’s creative journey, including small and large revisions and any substantial interactions that might shape his/her idea development process. We contended that, apart from continuous direct observation or (intrusive) digital tracking through motion sensors and audio, this was the most ideal way to get “up close” with the long-term trajectories of several creators. (It was plainly not possible, in the context of limited funding, to observe our 12 research participants directly on a daily basis over 12 months!).

Although drawn as a straight arrow or timeline, the above framework does not at all imply that the creative processes it gets applied to proceed in a linear way—the framework is merely a guide to collecting detailed data on an emerging idea and the process through which it is generated, assessed and revised. Due to its open-ended, adaptable nature, the framework is ideally suited to the study of what we have labelled “networked creativity”, that (in a technical, superficial sense) consists of sequences of interactions and changes to an emerging idea which unfold across a range of offline and online locations.

We have used the term “networked creativity” in a dual sense in our research and in this chapter, referring both to a new empirical approach to tracing interactions and idea transformations, as well as to a particular variety of collective creativity that is becoming more common as individuals and teams frequently transcend the boundaries of organizations and fluidly work across myriad
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networks. Compared to most other organizational creativity researchers, we have chosen to “flatten” our approach to researching creative journeys: instead of labelling certain interactions internal and others external (or formal vs informal, work-related vs private), we decided at the outset that all interactions and prospective sources of insight – whatever their location or relational context – have the potential to subtly or dramatically shape the course of an idea or creative path. Indeed, we found in the process of carrying out our interviews that insistent mothers could sometimes wield just as much influence on their adult entrepreneurial offspring as expert mentors! We continue to believe that the above distinctions are thus increasingly artificial and potentially pose obstacles to comprehensively understanding the flow of real-world creative processes that pay no heed to conceptual or academic demarcations.

Due to its potentially unbounded reach, tracing networked creativity in line with the approach just described presents “a new way of seeing” for both organizational creativity researchers as well as collaborative space scholars. It is a new empirical orientation that, while owing a debt to Actor-Network Theory (Latour, 2005) and ANT-inspired innovation scholars (e.g., Doganova & Eyquem-Renault, 2009) as well as others who have raised the individual into the central unit of analysis within digitally powered collaborative networks (Nardi, Whittaker, & Schwarz, 2002) and social life (Rainie & Wellman, 2012), is in some respect novel. It amounts to an approach ideally suited to the study of extended and mobile creative processes that require weeks or months to be grasped in a meaningful sense, in knowledge-driven areas where interactions with a wide range of others tend to be beneficial (as opposed to artistic and craft-based work where such interactions may be less relevant). As a methodology, networked creativity elevates dyadic, mindful interactions into a primary catalyst of idea journeys (while also remaining open to a great variety of different types of creative interactions, and appreciating the fact that our understanding on such
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interactions remains spotty at best). This orientation is in line with the lived realities of organizations and entrepreneurship in digital societies where technology has made it possible for a large portion of knowledge work tasks to be performed in an *asynchronous* fashion, reducing the need for worker co-location (Kakihara & Sørensen, 2002; Sørensen, 2020). In such contexts, highly focused, value-generating *synchronous* face-to-face (or digitally mediated) conversations – that now are more easily orchestrated in a place-independent fashion – may be growing comparatively more central and salient due to their power to stimulate creative revision and in-the-moment insights (Hargadon & Bechky, 2006). From a practitioner-perspective, networked creativity is of growing relevance as a method, as it can pinpoint the interactive moments through which collaborative communities and various companies substantially shape and add value to the creative projects of members.

Admittedly, as a concept that denotes a particular kind of collective creativity – one that is distinct from group creativity, team creativity and organization- or network-level creativity – the notion of networked creativity remains undeveloped and poorly elaborated. It can helpfully be situated in the context of broader idea journeys (Perry-Smith & Mannucci, 2017) as depicted in Figure 7.2, to make clear the fact that networked creativity is indeed a longitudinal process where the further development and advancement of a focal idea is driving goal (even if in most cases, the focal idea never proceeds beyond the first two stages).

*FIGURE 7.2 HERE*

By the same token, networked creativity can be applied as a tool for investigating real-world idea journeys to test key assumptions associated with this concept, based on extensive empirical data.
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For instance, more needs to be known about the interactions, experiences, and idea features that mark the transition of an idea – a business model, a design prototype, a book proposal – from the idea generation stage to the elaboration stage.

Whereas the temporally extended nature of networked creativity leads to an increase in complexity – making it a more difficult process to observe and analyze compared to short instances of group co-creation, for instance – complexity is also reduced by virtue of the fact that there is either an individual or a small team at the center of the process. For this reason, tracing networked creativity empirically is entirely feasible, if often labor intensive (As mentioned above, we have decided to shy away from relying on continued direct observation, due to resource limitations and general infeasibility).

On balance, networked creativity remains a method as well as a provisional concept more than a full-blown theory. We remain hopeful, however, that a body of more theoretical work will grow around it as relevant studies increase in number, perhaps building partly on our recent findings on the interplay of feedback, creative revision and affect over extended periods (Toivonen et al., 2019).

Why is it a good idea to trace idea journeys through the hybrid infrastructures of work?

Some practical implications

Having elaborated on our methodological approach to tracing networked creativity and some of its theoretical implications, we now consider why tracing creative idea journeys through the hybrid infrastructures of work is an important endeavor also from more practical and policy-focused perspectives.
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Viewed generally, the “new hybrid infrastructures of work” referred to in this chapter include the myriad collaborative spaces found in large cities as well as the digital services and platforms that mediate creative, entrepreneurial work. Collaborative spaces, many would add, comprise both physical office infrastructures as well as social infrastructures, with the latter being pronounced when active community hosting practices and various other interaction strategies are in place. In a more expansive definition, one might also include all manner of urban transport, other vital services such as the provision of food and drink, labor markets and laws, as well as institutions related to knowledge provision (public libraries, universities). Without doubt, every one of these interlinked domains entails immense complexity and is associated with enormous bodies of domain-specific knowledge, covering everything from the fast-evolving characteristics of digital platforms and algorithms to new organizational blueprints and meeting methods. These domain-specific complexities are beyond the scope of this chapter.

So why is it a good idea to bring focus to how creative journeys flow through hybrid infrastructures and how creative experiences are had within such infrastructures (Dourish & Bell, 2007), as opposed to fixing one’s gaze on a particular infrastructural domain, element or system, or creative behavior within one such entity? Essentially for the same reason that we have argued in favor of the study of networked creativity—to overcome related myopias so as to reach a more accurate, realistic understanding of how mobile creative work is actually performed in urban settings. Although digital technologies have certainly not made geography or organizational boundaries irrelevant or unleashed complete freedom over space, a larger-than-before subset of workers now have a high level of flexibility when it comes to working across numerous locations and switching their primary locations (if they have one) more frequently. As such, it is becoming fitting to view entire cities as integrated campuses, networked incubators or “hubscapes” (Toivonen, 2019) in
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which emerging creative ideas and projects are nurtured and developed through interactions that
unfold across numerous conventional and unexpected locations and situations, from offices and
coffee shops to museums and meetups as well as online communities (but with curated commercial
and public collaborative spaces and the larger sector they form playing a central role).

Furthermore, the digital architectures and functionalities of apps such as Google Maps, City
Mapper, LinkedIn, and various workspace finders are merging into personal digital ecologies that
make entire cities far more (rapidly) navigable when it comes to identifying places of work as well
as initiating interactions with relevant peers or experts. Several new digital startups are envisioning
“universal” coworking and workspace platforms that offer flexible access to hundreds or even
thousands of spaces across different brands and locations. As such, possibilities for finding paths
to generative interactions through myriad online and offline interaction spaces (not limited to
formal places of work) are exploding and merit further research.

We are unaware of any existing research (apart from more general studies of mobility patterns and
networks) that approaches the city through tracing and mapping value-adding interactions as they
unfold in the course of creative journeys. Carrying out such research – at a scale that is much larger
than we could achieve in our study of networked creativity among 12 entrepreneurs in London –
would amount to an indirect way to “user-test” the innovative city. In increasingly knowledge-
driven city economies, it makes more and more sense to recast and re-examine the city as an
integrated creative landscape that should nourish idea generation and development processes
through a beneficial (and individually customizable) mix of different types of support and
stimulus, through a range of spaces, relationships and interactions. While we are aware that such
an approach would, for a moment, relegate wider political, economic, and environmental issues to
the background, the data generated could powerfully inform new policies and initiatives to enhance
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the ability of the city environment to support innovative activities while also directing them towards certain directions (e.g., transformative sustainability initiatives) and radically reducing CO2 emissions from long commutes (e.g., through making local collaborative spaces more available or through using AI to optimize the times and locations of important team meetings). Indeed, from a practical perspective, researching the hybrid work infrastructures of large cities by tracing actual creative journeys, experiences, and interactions could lead to far more intelligent, seamless forms of support and navigational tools – that overcome siloed thinking as well as misplaced slogans about how digital services can or should enable unconstrained mobility – that can transform the experience of pursuing innovative work within a given city’s workscape. For the first time, we could build policies and infrastructural innovations around a solid understanding of how different infrastructural elements intertwine – seamlessly or not – in the context of actual work trajectories and how troubling bottlenecks could be resolved, producing benefits for everyone involved.

Conclusions

This chapter has sought to offer a fresh answer to the question of how collaborative spaces support creativity. In short, they do so along the creative journeys of individuals and teams that typically move across a multiplicity of locations and interaction spaces in the course of their daily and weekly lives. Accordingly, collaborative spaces do not support creativity, co-creation, or innovation in some isolated, self-contained sense, or in some separate (imagined) world of their own – although they can (and arguably should) seek to benefit their members in ways that are unique and complementary within broader personal and urban contexts. It should be noted that
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analyzing and comparing specific place-based community strategies and interaction patterns, despite being also an important task, has been beyond the scope of this chapter.

When we adapt this essentially inverted perspective to tracing the creative journeys by applying the networked creativity methodology, we move from “observing users or members inside a collaborative space” to “investigating collaborative spaces inside the user”. In other words, we are invited to look more carefully at how a given space features within the daily activities, routines and creative advances of a given person or team. Through this perspective shift, scholars are likely to gain a far more realistic understanding of the role and relative importance of the average (or any particular) collaborative space. In fact, out of the 12 participants in our own study, only three or four reported that the coworking spaces they belonged to helped them access useful types of support (beyond workspace provision) and significant interactions. Their lives and idea development efforts encompassed sequences of interactions at multiple locations (as shown by the case of Edward), emotionally loaded calls with family members, social media connections that led to much learning and the adaptation of new ideas, and encounters with customers that shaped how founders viewed their products. Overseas trips formed a key part of many creative journeys, as did periods or rest spent away from the city.

As we have admitted, much further work is required for networked creativity to be fully developed as a concept and theory that helps us understand how collective (sequential, interactive) creativity operates in the mobile era of networked individualism. Also, on the practical and policy fronts, much needs to be done before the city and networks of collaborative spaces genuinely become “integrated” into a more seamless infrastructure that intelligently supports the fluid creative process across all its (cognitive, emotional, social) dimensions over the long term. What we do hope is that this chapter has successfully, if briefly and somewhat superficially, put forward an
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alternative perspective that can, in the years ahead, challenge and expand our understanding of how collaborative spaces – in their infinitely varied manifestations – shape and nurture the creative projects and ideas their members care so deeply about.

References


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Appendix: how we followed 12 entrepreneurial idea journeys for a year: data collection strategies and reflections

Entering the field: Initial challenges and committing 12 entrepreneurs to our longitudinal study

We started the process of finding early-stage entrepreneurs to join our study by putting together a list of coworking spaces in London. We then narrowed the list down to spaces that seemed to have diverse members as opposed to members from a specific field where everyone had a more homogenous background (e.g., tech space dominated by computer engineers). Once we had a narrowed down list, we ran an introductory workshop at University College London, invited community managers from each space, presented our research proposal and asked if they would be interested in participating in our research. For those that showed interest, we followed up by sending them our technical criteria for early-stage entrepreneurs (“those working dedicatedly for a minimum of one month and a maximum of 12 months to turn an idea they have themselves produced into an actual business”) and asked that they identify suitable members. A short summary of the research and its purposes was included in the email. This short summary was then forwarded...
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by the community managers to the members of their respective spaces and the latter were asked to contact us directly if they were interested in taking part. Those entrepreneurs that were interested then got in touch with us. We further conducted initial scoping interviews with each entrepreneur to ensure that they met our criteria. Whereas we had the opportunity to meet with a larger than expected number of very interesting entrepreneurs, some met our criteria and agreed to partake in the study, but many did not.

We faced two basic challenges during this process. The first had to do with getting access to coworking spaces to begin recruiting participants. In the London context, it proved considerably difficult to get four spaces to agree to partake in our study by allowing us access to their members. We visited several spaces in person to request access to their members but several spaces declined, often for reasons that were not clearly stated (potentially due to their wariness towards allowing external researchers to assess aspects of their community, even though this was not our main objective).

The second problem was that, when we did gain access to coworking spaces, not many founders responded to our call for participants. We opted to begin the data collection process while continuing to recruit further participants as we went along, so that we would not fall too much behind in terms of our project timeline. This “multi-track” approach proved beneficial in that as we conducted monthly interviews at the three coworking spaces we initially had access to (and as we generally spent time more time speaking to people at these spaces) we were able to identify and recruit further participants, sometimes with assistance from existing research subjects.

Another reason why recruiting participants proved extremely challenging was the combination of our (specific) criteria for early-stage entrepreneurs, the requirement to commit for the duration of the project (up to 12 months) as well as our request that participants make daily entries via a mobile
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device app. This meant that we had to cast a wider net by visiting a significant number of coworking spaces in order to get a good number of participants. On the positive side, having overcome all of the above challenges, we were able to amass a very strong and unique longitudinal data set that stands out in the areas of organizational science, entrepreneurship studies and the field of collaborative spaces.

Our methods toolbox and monthly data collection cycle: The mobile innovation diary app, frequent telephone check-ins and monthly in-depth interviews

Due to the aims of the project – tracing the idea journeys of entrepreneurs – we needed to adopt new approaches to data collection that would allow us to track idea revisions and interactions in a continuous, highly detailed fashion. We combined conventional semi-structured interviewing (posing questions about recent activities, interactions, different business model dimensions, and other significant occurrences) with more innovative approaches such as collecting data via a mobile innovation diary app. The decision to use an app was inspired partly by the Experience Sampling Method (Larson & Csikszentmihalyi, 2014) and the diary-based longitudinal “creativity and affect at work” study of Amabile, Barsade, Mueller, & Staw (2005). We began the search for an appropriate app by engaging with colleagues at computer science departments. We spoke specifically with several colleagues researching human-computer interaction at UCL who had applied relevant apps in their studies.

Our research design dictated that we should be able to capture data on any significant conversations (or interactions) study participants have within and beyond their coworking spaces, as soon as possible after the occurrence of such conversations. In-depth interviews were held with participants on a monthly basis to discuss significant conversations they had had during the month,
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but even here we felt we ran the risk of memory loss affecting the quality of data. In order to overcome this, we supplemented the monthly interviews with the use of the mobile device app and telephone calls made at the end of the week (where possible).

Mobile innovation diary app: We designed a bespoke questionnaire to capture data on social interactions the participants had had each day (including questions on with whom an interaction took place and whether it taught the respondents something novel and/or challenged their ideas). The questionnaire was administered via the mobile device app. From a practical standpoint, the app was configured and made compatible for the two main operating systems iOS and Android. The app was installed on each participant’s mobile device and the participants were given an orientation on how the app works. Any problems encountered were to be reported to one of the researchers as soon as possible. A push notification was set up to deliver the questionnaire at 6 PM each day. One of the researchers monitored the data collected via an online website created by the IT collaborator, to access the growing database. Importantly, information recorded in recent entries would then be used to probe more deeply into the activities and thoughts of the participant when we met for monthly interviews afterwards. In this respect, diary entries served as effective memory triggers when revisited during in-person interviews.

Monthly interviews: Each month the main field researcher (Idoko) met with the participants for an hour or more. Again, the monthly interviews allowed us to probe deeper into entries made in the app. The interviews also allowed us to track in detail any changes to the business model, discuss any conversations that the participants had had during the month and that had been recorded in the app, to further identify what was discussed and who the conversant was. We also traced changes to the business model (i.e., each entrepreneur’s focal idea) to identify whether or not the changes
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unfolding may have been linked to the conversations or interactions that participants had recently had.

*Telephone interviews:* We telephoned the participants from time to time, aiming to place calls at the end of each week (although we did not always reach this standard). This was included as an extra measure to overcome issues related to memory loss. Several participants agreed to regular calls and engaged willingly whenever they were able to, whereas others did not respond favorably to the calls. In hindsight, this may have been asking too much of the participants—or we should have invested more in orientating them from the outset.

*Observations:* In addition to the above, we also collected some observational data, which provided additional richness to the data collected via other means (as reported in this chapter through the case of Edward). The researcher was able to engage in several participant observation engagements with two of the 12 participants.

*Digital data collection struggles and what we would do differently next time*

Frankly put, we struggled considerably to enact our digital data collection strategy. We had difficulties with identifying and setting up a smartphone app that met the data protection requirements of the funding body, ensuring that no data would be sent to or routed via foreign countries. This requirement automatically led us to exclude apps by all dominant digital corporations and services, as most of them are US-based and potentially move data outside the UK. In the end, we decided we had to rely on an app based on the AWARE platform that remained (to some extent) undeveloped and had to be painstakingly reconfigured specifically for our use. We also encountered technical challenges when operating our app. As with many other apps used on mobile devices and tablets, there is the risk of the app crashing or needing to be updated. To
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overcome this challenge, we recruited an external IT collaborator who helped configure the app and built a secure database where the data was collected and could only be accessed by the researchers (sufficiently flexible, responsive IT assistance was not forthcoming at the main university the research project was based at). We retained the collaborator throughout the duration of the project to troubleshoot and solve technical problems related to the app. Issues arose in relation to as compatibility with mobile phone operating systems, the app crashing after users responded to the initial question and with ensuring that the app would actually send the questionnaire data to our server. Having the IT collaborator on board was critically important, as there were frequent technical issues that required rapid expert support.

As technological advancements continue to occur, more user-friendly and reliable apps are being developed specifically for research purposes. What we would do differently next time in order to save time is have an IT collaborator engage with the participants at the initial stages of the research process. This would remove the problem of the (non-IT-specialist) researchers trying to act as middlemen in communicating technical issues between two parties (i.e., research participants and the IT expert). It might also be useful to factor in the cost of a more developed and user-friendly app into the budget. However, at the time of the research most research apps that met our funder’s (Economic and Social Research Council of the UK) data protection criteria were very expensive indeed. This might not be the case now.

We learned further lessons about setting the timing of daily data collection points. We initially sent out push notifications via the app to participants at 6 PM each day but later found that many found this timing inconvenient. Several requested for a much later time such as 11 PM. This was one of the reasons why some participants in the initial stages of the data collection process did not engage actively with the app. They saw the notifications at times when they were too busy and
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would close it and plan to do an entry later in the day, only to forget to return to the app by the end of the evening. One solution would be to monitor the data as it comes in to swiftly identify who is engaging and who is not—and to respond quickly by making data entry more convenient and motivating for participants.
How we look is how we work: Workplace design and the rhetoric of creative work

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Abstract
The aesthetics and design of workplaces can signal creativity as an organizational value. Unlike organizational mission or vision statements that explicitly communicate the virtues of creativity, workplace design implicitly communicates the importance of creativity as a legitimate organizational goal through spatial, material, and aesthetic representations of work. We apply the lenses of organizational aesthetics, materiality, and spatiality to the development of our arguments. We further draw from our research on coworking spaces to demonstrate how their designs are used to signal and market a certain culture of normative behavior. In this case coworking spaces illustrate an example of how workplace design help users and organizations communicate a legitimizing creative work narrative.

Keywords: workplace design; coworking; organizational aesthetics; materiality; spatiality; rhetoric
How we look is how we work

Introduction

A casual image search on Google of the term “creative workplace” returns hundreds of images of bright, open, and inspiring office spaces and work settings. The initial images in the search depict youthful-looking occupants in mostly open plan settings. One would be hard pressed to find a drab cubicle or a exclusive private office in any of these images. A common assemblage found in these images is a mix of energetic workers on laptops in casual work areas collaborating with one another in settings that resemble an archetypal tech or creative company office or maybe a space in a cutting edge academic commons on a university campus. The auspicious scenes depicted in these images suggest that occupants are thriving and doing important creative work. The images returned in this search portray normative virtues and values about what the pursuit of creative work looks like in an organizational setting. The quantity of different images suggests widespread conformity to a creative office archetype across industries. Visual imagery helps communicate and reproduce normative workplace virtues (Greenwood, Jack, & Haylock, 2019). In introducing our work, we use this simple exercise to illustrate the widespread visual reproduction of what we argue is a rhetoric of creative work often represented through the physical environment.

Contemporary organizations nurture creativity as a normative virtue that helps prioritize and structure everyday work activities in pursuit of novel forms of value (Amabile & Khaire, 2008; Brown, 2016; O’Reilly, 1989; Oldham, 2003). Messages and everyday actions among employees and their peers can communicate and reinforce the virtues of creativity while constructing a culture oriented toward its pursuit (Zhou & Ren, 2012). The physical environment of work is a nonverbal means of communicating these same messages. Kristensen (2004) has linked the material and spatial (i.e., physical) environment of work (Ashkanasy, Ayoko, & Jehn, 2014; Davis, Leach, & Clegg, 2011) with organizational creativity through the ways in which space affects cognitive and
**How we look is how we work**

social experiences. Additionally, the material and spatial elements of physical work environments hold symbolic value for organizations and transmit cultural messages (Berg & Kreiner, 1990; Elsbach & Bechky, 2007). They serve as sensegiving mechanisms for reducing ambiguity in the interpretation of organizational purpose and values (Cappetta & Gioia, 2006; Maitlis & Lawrence, 2007; Näsänen & Vanharanta, 2017; Vischer, 2011). Finally, they constitute part of an organization’s identity narrative (Hancock & Spicer, 2011; Hatch & Schultz, 2000; Johnston, 2014). In practice, many organizations are constructing identity narratives around creativity and innovation, and they are designing workplaces that symbolize this orientation.

We argue that workplace design underlies a material and visual rhetoric that communicates strategic messages. Workplace design can signal to both internal (employees) and external (job seekers, investors, competitors, business media) audiences that creative work is a legitimate undertaking in the organization, and it can communicate corresponding norms around what it means to be creative and how to act accordingly. We argue that for organizations, *looking creative* in the eyes of stakeholders is a strategic intent, which is distinct from actually *being creative*. Workplace design is the medium that connects the strategic intent of appearing creative and the messages that legitimate it within organizations (Huang, Baptista, & Galliers, 2013).

In developing these arguments, we will trace various conceptual antecedents. First, we explore the role that aesthetics, materiality, and space play in helping organizations construct and communicate identity and cultural narratives that reinforce normative, legitimate behavior. Second, we trace the origins of creativity as a rhetorical component of organizational identity narratives and how material and aesthetic aspects of workplace design supplement this rhetoric. We will further expound our arguments by drawing from various findings of our recent and
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ongoing studies of coworking spaces (Bacevice, Spreitzer, Hendricks, & Davis, 2019; Garrett, Spreitzer, & Bacevice, 2017; Spreitzer, Bacevice, & Garrett, 2015).

Theoretical background

Workplace design as a source of legitimacy and distinctiveness

Workplace design and the physical environment of work are tangible strategic resources for organizations that can transmit information about cultural values and norms in order to ensure ongoing acceptance among internal and external stakeholders (Becker & Steele, 2005; Hatch, 1990; Hatch & Schultz, 2000; Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978). They serve to both legitimize certain accepted cultural values and norms while concurrently communicating attributes of strategic distinctiveness (de Vaujany & Vaast, 2013; Zamparini & Lurati, 2017). For example, a technology company may adhere to cultural norms of its industry by adopting a casual workplace environment with open plan seating, social areas, and an array of employee amenities. Such designs, for example, are also used to reassure prospective employees about accepted workplace norms that may influence one’s decision about where to work and to signal a more creative workplace culture. Organizations use spatial, material, and aesthetic features of their work environments to shape an identity about who they are (Berg & Kreiner, 1990; Grubbauer, 2014; Hatch & Schultz, 2000; Manning, 1991), and the identity narrative can support its claims of legitimacy (Christensen & Cheney, 2000; Doxtater, 1990). Workplace design is an assemblage of spatial, material, and aesthetic choices made by organizational leaders and the designers they employ, and these choices give what Strati (1996) describes as “complex features [that] give a distinctive identity to a particular organization” (p. 210). From this integrated spatial, material, and aesthetic perspective, we consider the composition of workplace design and the ways in which it collectively impacts
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social relationships, social structures, inter-personal behavior, and communication (Allen & Henn, 2007; Gieryn, 2002; Kornberger & Clegg, 2004; Peponis et al., 2007; Wineman, Kabo, & Davis, 2009). The integration of spatial, material, and aesthetic lenses for understanding organizations and meaning conveyed within them has been the subject of recent scholarly efforts (Beyes & Steyaert, 2011; Boxenbaum, Jones, Meyer, & Svejenova, 2018; Dameron, Lê, & LeBaron, 2015; Taylor & Hansen, 2005), which influence our current work.

Workplace design is a nonverbal means of communication (Pratt & Rafaelli, 2001), and people can experience the messages of an organization’s workplace design by being physically present in a space and interacting among others within it (Grubbauer, 2014) or by experiencing visual representations of it. The growth of mass visual and digital culture (Hand, 2012) increases the ubiquity of images of workplace design, and imagery. Organizations strategically use visual imagery for rhetorical purposes (Greenwood, Jack, & Haylock, 2019) that communicate values and ideals. Design industry publications and online business media regularly use professionally staged images of office interiors to reinforce messages about workplace cultural norms and ideal worker norms (Wasserman & Frenkel, 2015). Such strategies are consistent with the use of architectural imagery in mass media for communicating organization alignment to neoliberal market norms of creativity and risk-taking (Cunningham 2013; Grubbauer, 2014; Sklair, 2010).

*Creativity rhetoric in organizations*

Workplace design can reinforce normative behaviors, and it can function as a platform for changing, deviating from, or subverting normative behaviors (Pratt & Rafaelli, 2001). Workplace design can frame creativity as a normative behavior and transmit messages about the weight an organization gives to creative work (Andrews, 2017). It can help reframe mundane work practices
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in a more creative light. Organizations construct cultural narratives that are meant to attract workers and their commitment of time and energy to a stated, shared purpose. Giving employees a chance to be creative factors into these narratives and are visually communicated in material ways through workplace design and representations of it. People who self-identify as creative and buy into creativity narratives communicated by organizations may even experience what some scholars describe as “place identity” (Hauge, 2007; Proshansky, 1978) if they associate a certain kind of intentionally designed physical environment that is designed to evoke creative work with their own self-identity.

The virtues of creativity and its pursuit are firmly rooted in business lexicon, and Western business rhetoric frames creative work as strategically normative behavior in a broad range of industries (Bilton, 2012; Frank, 2001; Leary, 2018; Prichard, 2002; Taylor & Littleton, 2012). Becker (1982) argues that creativity is also a social label that depends in part on how others define it. Business leaders in industries not traditionally associated with the arts may increasingly label their own organizations as “creative” as part of a repositioning strategy for attracting different types of workers and to reset expectations around what constitutes legitimate work in those industries in order to expand their market reach.

Some of creativity’s rhetorical counterparts include collaboration, community, and playfulness. Various scholars have explored each of these terms through aesthetic and spatial lenses that link creativity rhetoric. Collaboration, playfulness, and community-oriented behavior are antecedents of Bilton’s (2012) structural creativity in organizations by the way in which they foster a social system supportive of creative processes such as ideation, brainstorming, and risk-taking.

Andrews (2017) describes the “cult of collaboration” that is represented by a significant body of corporate publications, media, and studies commissioned by firms within the design industry to
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communicate the benefits of collaborative work environments and how such settings can help promote collaborative, creative behavior. Organizational leaders often justify the design of open-plan work office environments because of the heightened communication, shared awareness, and overall “creative spark” that such settings have been shown to catalyze (Leonard & Swap, 1999). In addition, Andrews argues that leaders want their organizations to look creative in order to attract talent, so they adopt an open plan concept in a way that mimics leading technology companies and the cultural symbols of Silicon Valley companies. Workers in Silicon Valley companies even emotionally associate such open, amenity-rich, “laid back” office designs as a symbol of what a privileged and idealized working environment should look like and accept it as one of the many success symbols associated with what Cockayne (2016) argues is an otherwise high-risk and economically precarious working condition. In this, Cockayne describes a form of place identity (Hauge, 2007; Proshansky, 1978), but one that is linked to the creative norms of an industry rather than to those of any one particular organization. Andrews argues that the use of the open plan office as an antecedent to robust creative activity is, in many ways, more of a rhetorical trope that organizational leaders adopt rather than a substantive strategy. The reasoning is that the open plan office draws an equally weighted level of skepticism backed by user dissatisfaction as well as empirical evidence pointing to several drawbacks (Jahncke, Hygge, Halin, Green, & Dimberg, 2011; Kim & de Dear, 2013).

The term community is a second rhetorical counterpart of creativity with an aesthetic and spatial component. Dale and Burrell (2010) critique the way in which organizations appropriate the term community as managerial rhetoric. “The idea in itself provokes almost Garden of Eden images of harmony, belonging and cohesion. In this way, the use of ‘community’ in the reshaping of organizations has much to do with cultural and emotional management” (Dale & Burrell, 2010, p.
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23). They interrogate the spatiality of community and argue that organizations foster a sense of collectivism and identity with shared goals that is increasingly reflected in spatial design that nurtures harmony and sociability.

Alexandersson and Kaloniaityte (2018) similarly critique the concept organizational *play*. In their critique, they highlight the tension between the imaginative nature of play that is free of material utility and the managerial rhetorical nature of play that is pursued as a means to economic ends in an entrepreneurial economy where individuals face culturally imposed limits on how they express themselves through play at work. They study images of playful workplace design and treat them as cultural artifacts that reflect organizational values. In coding top hits from their online image search, they argue that images of playfully designed offices invite viewers of those images to interpret the organizations they depict as aestheticized and where the actual work performed is obscured from any interpretation of the image itself. In other words, one may view similarly staged workplace images of a tech start-up, a bank, or a product design company and not be able to differentiate the organizations or their sectors from one another.

Ashton and Giddings (2018) also explore the intersection of play and workplace design in their study of Google and LEGO office design. The authors note how workplace features, workplace design, and images of employees at play are part of the companies’ rhetorical strategy for communicating a culture of creativity and entrepreneurialism. They argue that this narrative of play, symbolized through spatial and aesthetic features in the workplace, is part of a broader organizational strategy of blurring work and play, normalizing play by positioning it as part of the creative process, and thereby encouraging employees to stay focused on work – lest they go home.

**Insights from the study of coworking**
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Our recent work on the study of coworking spaces (Bacevice, Spreitzer, Hendricks, & Davis, 2019; Garrett, Spreitzer, & Bacevice, 2017; Spreitzer, Bacevice, & Garrett, 2015) offers some interesting accounts of how the arguments we present thus far manifest in the physical environment of work. Coworking is a relatively new way of working and setting for it, which traces its roots to 2005 when spaces emerged in the Silicon Valley region to support independent programmers, writers, and creative types who wanted the community feeling that they didn’t get while working from home and for whom coffee shops were not providing a sufficiently professional atmosphere (Jones, Sundsted, & Bacigalupo, 2009; Spinuzzi, 2012). Since 2005, coworking has grown in scale from small independent work communities into larger real estate enterprises. Today, some of the largest operators of coworking and shared workspace platforms include WeWork, Industrious, and Knotel. These platforms market creative office settings at scale in major real estate markets to individuals and businesses on flexible terms that do not require the signing of a long term office lease. In addition, earlier entrants in the serviced-office industry like Regus, which provided individual rental offices and virtual concierge services to independent professionals have pivoted toward coworking offerings. The websites of each of these example coworking platforms prominently integrate workplace design in their messaging, and professional photos of their spaces are easily searchable through Google image search.

Our work has found that creativity is an attribute often associated with coworking spaces, which is represented through spatial, material and aesthetic forms and fundamental to their value proposition. When we looked at a sample of 104 websites from different coworking spaces throughout the United States (Spreitzer & Bacevice, 2016), we categorized a number of the various keywords used to describe and market those spaces. In organizing the data from these coworking space websites, we coded the mission statements, statements describing the spaces and
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services offered, and narratives describing the founding of the space. From the coding, we identified 20 different commonly used keywords. We created a cross-tabulation of keywords (Table 8.1) to determine which ones appeared together. The five most common keywords or derivatives of them used in coworking space websites were collaboration, creative, productivity, community, and innovation. On websites where creativity or a derivative was used as a keyword, the word collaboration concurrently appeared 77% of the time; innovation appeared 65% of the time; community appeared 44% of the time; and productivity appeared 42% of the time.

In addition to our website coding efforts, a cursory analysis of the websites of three major U.S. coworking platforms – WeWork, Knotel, and Industrious – reveal similar uses of creativity in their messaging. At WeWork, the word create features prominently in its mission statement, “Create a world where people work to make a life, not just a living”¹ and in the naming of its “Creator Awards” platform for awarding funding to start-ups. Knotel, directly connects the design of its spaces to creativity and productivity through its blog entries and location descriptions². Similar examples are found on the website pages of Industrious. They describe their Minneapolis North Loop location as “a creative workspace made for the North Loop,”³ and they describe their Downtown Washington DC location as one that “exudes creativity — offering elegant, light-filled interiors and breathtaking city views.”⁴

Our work shows how coworking is marketed as a cultural product in which creativity is central to its rhetorical message about what a work environment should reflect and cultivate among its user base. Coupled with the growing trend of coworking as an enterprise business service that markets
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workspace to entire organizations, we wanted to understand how these factors impacted users’ professional identity. In our most recent and ongoing study of coworking (Bacevice, Spreitzer, Hendricks, & Davis, 2019; Hendricks, Spreitzer, & Bacevice, 2019), we investigated members of larger enterprise scale coworking communities. Our longitudinal and cross-sectional dataset is comprised of over 1,000 unique respondents from various locations of the same chain of coworking spaces around the United States. Data were collected in three rounds between January and July 2018. As in the smaller coworking spaces of our earlier study, some of the respondents to this study were small business owners, freelancers, and remote workers. But we also captured data from people who work in these spaces as part of larger teams that works together among other teams in the same space.

In our third survey round, we asked respondents (n=332) to reflect upon how the coworking community factors into their professional identity. We did not explicitly ask about the physical environment of work, but several respondent comments suggested ways in which they internalized an identity associated with a sense of creativity evoked by the space. By extension, we also found that certain members found that their presence in this type of creative work setting played a legitimizing role to themselves and their businesses. One respondent wrote, “It highlights the young spirit of our company and our schedules, which are ever changing and need to be flexible for the type of work we do. It [the space] is also located in the heart of DC which we believe represents who we are as a company as well. The ability to be creative and flexible are key components of my professional identity, we build amazing things here for people in need.” Another respondent wrote, “I suppose it contributes to our organization's brand/image of being youthful, energetic, creative, nimble, etc., which indirectly filters into my own professional identity.” Similarly, another respondent wrote, “It makes me feel that my company values me that
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we [get to work here], the atmosphere and buzz gives my work a sense of importance and being part of a vibrant workforce.” One respondent spoke of the space and its “level of professionalism and level of freedom to work creatively.” Finally, in comparing the coworking space to alternatives, one respondent wrote, “It makes me feel professional and confident. I'm not slumming it in some sketchy work place.” The responses from this study did not shed light on how people work creatively. Instead, they suggest that creativity is a label that members ascribe to the physical work environment and the experience of working there, which they subsequently internalize and express as part of their professional identity. Because these responses emerged as a theme within a broader study professional identity, we feel that future research could further interrogate the relationship among one’s professional identity, organizational space in a shared setting, and creative messaging.

Our ongoing work on coworking spaces and the individuals and organizations that use them have deepened our understanding of the ways in which workplace design and the structuring of people in these spaces legitimizes certain categories of work practices and narratives about the nature of work. To this end, our work addresses Boxenbaum et al.’s (2018) call to action for “how the social realm and the material realm become intertwined, and what effects these processes have on organizational practice” (p. 601). Coworking is an example of how the physical environment of work supports a rhetorical strategy of anchoring creative work as a legitimate organizational value. The growth of enterprise scale coworking, both in the size of providers and users, illustrates the ubiquity of creativity’s strategic message.

Conclusion
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As we conclude our chapter, we reconsider our opening thought exercise. In your Google image search, enter the words “coworking space” to see what the results yield. You will see spaces that resemble those that Google returned under the “creative workplace” image search. Collectively, the findings of these quick exercises underscore the point that creativity is embedded within an aestheticized perspective of modern day office work. The physical environment of work helps reinforce creativity narratives embraced by organizations. The findings from our ongoing studies of coworking spaces suggest that individual workers and entire organizations use coworking, in part, to further reinforce a creative professional identity. Yet coworking by itself does not constitute a separate aesthetic archetype. The similarities in images returned under searches of coworking spaces and creative offices suggests a convergence of norms around 21st century upper middle class office work – norms that the coworking business model promotes through images of boundless optimism.

Whereas our chapter does not address the actual links between workplace design and creative outcomes, we have positioned creative identity as part of a possible framework that can offer a path to future research. One direction that scholars could undertake would be to study how workers perceive spaces and the aesthetics within them, which designers and their organizational clients market as creative, and whether this perception aligns with such creativity narratives. In other words, how much do people really buy into the creative office rhetoric? If so, what relationship does it have on their professional identity, and to what extent does one’s self-perception as a creative worker actually coincide with creative output? This angle would also respond to Warren’s (2008) call to approach organizational aesthetics research from the user’s perspective with empirical data. We see this as an exciting line of inquiry to further integrate spatial, material, and aesthetic epistemologies in organizational research.
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Notes

1 WeWork’s mission page: https://www.wework.com/mission


4 https://www.industriousoffice.com/washington-dc/downtown

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From co-workers to friends: How does the aesthetic experience of third places affect the creative process

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Abstract
Despite growing academic interest in third places, there is a lack of literature exploring the relationship between the way users perceive them and the creative processes that take place there. This paper addresses that gap. It explores the aesthetic experiences that participants of a network of creatives funded by the Nordic Cultural Point have in the third places where they meet and work for the project. Findings show that three aspects of the aesthetic experience – namely the feeling of emotional proximity, the feeling of being at home and the feeling of being in a bubble – help participants to overcome the fear of being judged, favor ideas and knowledge sharing and increase focus and concentration, all factors which have been recognized as essential in any creative process.

Keywords: third places, creative process, aesthetic experience, workspace, spatial turn, co-workers
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Introduction

It was a July afternoon, I was at the Tallinn airport, in Estonia, where I came to attend a conference. I still had a couple of hours before my plane took me home, so I was looking for a quiet place to relax. As I looked around, I saw a colleague from Norway sitting at a bar table and working on the computer. I stopped to say hallo and we talked about some interesting data she was collecting in Northern Europe, which prompted the idea of working on the research together. This episode narrated by the first author illustrates how the idea of the study presented in this chapter was born: thanks to an unexpected conversation and sharing of ideas in an international airport, a “third place” (Oldenburg, 1989).

Third places are “informal gathering place[s] between work and home where people meet and engage in a range of social interactions, from an exchange of glances to conversation” (Bookman 2014, p. 89). Studies have highlighted how creative professionals (such as visual artists, designers, musicians or writers) have often the tendency to move away from traditional workspaces (e.g., their studio or office), preferring to work instead in third spaces such as bars or coworking spaces (Merkel, 2015). Consequently, these places have increasingly attracted the interest of scholars exploring creativity (e.g., Wittel 2001; Moriset 2014). For example, Furnari (2014) has shown how these spaces, that he calls “interstitial spaces” might affect creative activities facilitating “the individuals interacting in them to temporarily break free from existing institutions and experiment collectively with new activities and ideas” (p. 439).

However, studies on third places and creativity have mainly taken a social network perspective (e.g., Montanari, 2018; Moriset, 2014; Wittel, 2001), leaving almost unexplored the relationship between how these spaces are aesthetically perceived and the creative processes that take place there, namely the emergence of novel and useful ideas (Amabile, 1996). An aesthetic analysis, however, would greatly improve the understanding of the creative process (De Molli, 2019). Indeed, studies have shown how the way people perceive through their senses
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both the tangible (e.g., furniture, plants, and office size) and intangible (e.g., sound, light, temperature, and smell) features of the place where they work might either facilitate or impede the creative process (Friedman, 2014; Meinel, Maier, Wagner, & Voigt, 2017). In this respect, third places represent a new and almost unexplored aesthetical environment for studying the creative process.

This paper aims to fill this gap, by answering the following research question: How does the aesthetic experience of third places influence the creative processes that takes place there?

To answer this question, a qualitative empirical research has been conducted on some of the networks funded by the Nordic Cultural Point (a cultural organization that has been set up to increase the exchange of knowledge, contacts and interest among professional artists and cultural workers in the Nordic Region and the Baltic Countries). Data collection has been run between August 2018 and July 2019 and consists of 27 interviews with creative professionals (i.e., artists, choreographers, dancers, and video games producers) involved in these projects.

Our findings contribute to the growing academic debate on workspace and creativity (see Meinel et al., 2017; Thoring, Desmet, & Badke-Schaub, 2019), shedding new light on the aesthetic dimension of the third places. The study illustrates how the aesthetic experience of third places - namely the way people sensorially perceive these places - makes the creatives working there feel emotionally closer to others around them. The study also illustrates how this feeling of emotional proximity helps them to overcome the fear of being judged and influences not only ideas and knowledge sharing, but also focus and concentration, all factors which are considered to be central in the creative process (Dul & Ceylan, 2011; McCoy & Evans, 2002).

Aesthetic experience, workspace and creative process

Aesthetics – whose Greek etymology recalls the ideas of “perception” and “sensing” – is “the practical knowledge [that people] acquire through the five senses of sight, hearing, smell, taste
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and touch” (Strati 2003, p. 5). It is a kind of knowledge which is acquired before any sort of reasoning about the experiences, that we qualify with adjectives such as “repulsive”, “beautiful” “sublime”, or “ugly”. Being so much dependent on the individual perceptions, aesthetic experience is therefore deeply subjective. “For some, the small white mouse may be ‘cute’ whereas for others it may be ‘disgusting’ and others might not name the experience at all – It’s simply a mouse” (Taylor, 2013, p. 71).

Aesthetic perceptions accompany the person in every moment, even during work activities. Several studies (for an overview of the recent developments in the field, see De Molli, 2019) have shown how the aesthetic perceptions of the workspace influence not only individual feelings and moods, but also the way in which employees collaborate, interact with each other, and share knowledge, which are central aspects in the creative processes. For example, McCoy and Evans (2002) have illustrated that offices with manufactured and composite materials (e.g., plastic laminate, steel, or synthetic fibers) that convey to the user the feeling of touching unnatural materials, have a strong negative impact on the creative potential of their users. Other studies have shown how indoor plants and flowers (Hoff & Öberg, 2015) or windows and views to outside the office (Dul & Ceylan, 2011) might instead have a positive influence on creativity, giving users the feeling of being in a natural and safe environment, in which they feel they can work in a calm and, consequently, free and creative way (Friedman, 2014).

Moreover, it has been observed that working in small offices (such as the so called “cubicles”) makes users “feel in trap”, thus leading them to assume defensive behaviors which do not favor flexible thinking nor generation of creative ideas (Friedman, 2014). On the other hand, working in open spaces might impede the development of creative solutions. These places, indeed, by forcing users to a continuous (visual, sound, olfactory) contact, seem to hinder social interaction, collaboration and exchange of ideas (Friedman, 2014), which are considered to be key elements in the development of creative processes. According to Fayard and Weeks (2011),
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Indeed, places, in order to be creatively effective, should “bring people together and remove barriers while also providing sufficient privacy that people don’t fear being overhead or interrupted” (p. 104). Together these studies have demonstrated the importance of the aesthetic experience of the workspace in affecting people’s feeling and emotions and, consequently, their behavior and creative processes.

Third places and creativity

“Third places” (Oldenburg, 1989) are places that “host the regular, voluntary, informal, and happily anticipated gatherings of individuals beyond the realms of home [first place] and work [second place]” (p. 41). Practically, they are non-traditional workplaces attended by different users who might be just clients of the place (e.g., clients of the bar) or carry out their work activities (e.g., freelancers). Examples of third places might be cafes, bars, collaborative spaces or hangouts. Third places have become so popular in recent years, because companies are increasingly embracing new forms of work (such as “smart working”) that offer their employees the possibility of working in places different from the corporate office and in flexible hours (Felstead, Jewson, & Walters, 2005).

In third places, creatives find an informal environment with the possibility to make “spontaneous and accidental meetings [that] can stimulate new ideas or provide an opportunity for the development of the network of contacts” (Wittel 2001, p. 68). Recent studies (see Montanari, 2018; Sgourev, 2013) have shown, indeed, that creativity is not the result of the genial intuition of a single isolated individual, rather, it is a social phenomenon, shaped by social relations and multiple actors. For example, being part of a professional network, by allowing individuals to acquire information and ideas from people with different cultures, experiences and backgrounds can positively affect creativity (Perry-Smith & Shalley, 2003).
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Third places therefore, by bringing people from different fields and hosting “spontaneity and accidental encounters, may spark new ideas” (Wittel 2001, p. 68) and positively influence creativity. Recent studies have shown that users of third places build their network by “co-constructing a sense of community through their day-to-day interactions in the space” (Garrett, Spreitzer, & Bacevice, 2017, p. 821). This physical and emotional proximity also creates an environment that does not make people feel judged by co-workers, and this has been considered a key factor for creativity development (Amabile, Conti, Coon, Lazenby, & Herron, 1996). At the same time, third places – being very dynamic and hosting several co-workers – also offer many occasions of distraction that can interrupt focus and concentration, which are very important for the creative “flow” (Csikszentmihalyi, 1997). Nevertheless, studies (e.g., Füzi, Clifton, & Loudon, 2014) have shown that third places seem to facilitate the creation of network, the exchange of information, the development of collaboration among users and, consequently, the development of creativity.

Researches on third places and creativity have mainly taken a social network perspective (e.g., Moriset, 2014; Wittel, 2001), leaving almost unexplored the relationship between the aesthetic experience of the third places and the creative processes that takes place there. However, analyzing how the aesthetic dimension of third places affects not only users’ feelings and emotions but also their thoughts and actions, and their way of relating with the others would allow to acquire a fresh and deeper understanding of the creative process.

Methodology

This is a qualitative study to the analysis of the aesthetic experiences that the members of a cultural network have in the third places where they meet and work. Qualitative methodologies are considered adequate for exploring the aesthetic experiences of spaces as they allow to understand the phenomenon in its richness and complexity (Warren, 2008).
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Case study

Our case study is the Nordic-Baltic Mobility Programme for Culture. This is a program funded by the Nordic Cultural Point, a cultural organization that has been set up to stimulate the creativity of professional artists and cultural workers in the Nordic Region and the Baltic Countries, by helping them to exchange knowledge, contacts and ideas among them (for a detailed description of the project, see De Paoli & Foss, 2019). The program awards 1.8 million Euros in grants annually, funding networks of professional artists and cultural workers, who operate in several artistic fields, such as contemporary visual art, contemporary dance, performative theatre, music, film, gaming, or writing, but also less common cultural fields such as slam poetry or contemporary dance for dancers over 50. The program delivers two funding types: short-term network funding (one-year funding) and long-term network funding (three-year). The size of the funded network varies from 3 to 20 involved artists. In order to participate, networks must have at least three Nordic and/or Baltic countries as partners. This is the only role artists have to follow when composing the networks. The Nordic Cultural Point leave them free to choose the artists to involve. Sometimes artists already knew each other before working together in the network, others did not.

Furthermore, the choice of where and when to meet is not regulated by the program, which leaves ample freedom of choice to the members of the networks. In general, the networks meet 1-3 times per year for meetings, workshops or seminars and meet more often by telephone or skype. They meet in different countries, choosing the ones that are logistically most suitable for the members. During the study, we have noticed that most artists started to meet in cities and in places such as universities’ spaces or seminar rooms in hotels. However, they soon experienced the limits of these spaces, which were rather informal and subject to strict management rules (e.g., imposed hours of use, prohibited sounds). Therefore, they soon moved...
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to smaller villages and remote places in the country side, meeting in informal gathering places (such as municipal spaces, schools or small cultural centers that joined the program by making their own spaces available), where they felt less bound by limitations. These places are immersed in the groove and there is often nothing but the forest outside the work space (see Figure 9.1). Participants worked and lived together in these places for few days.

<FIGURE 9.1 HERE>

Data collection and analysis

In order to understand how the aesthetic experience of third places influence the creative processes over time, we decided to focus only on long-term funded networks (three-year funding). This study is based on an analysis of 27 interviews with professional artists and cultural workers whose network have been funded by the project in the years 2014, 2015, and 2016; networks that received funding in 2017 were not chosen because they might not yet have concluded their network projects (that last one or two years maximum) during the data collection. The interviews were conducted face to face (24 interviews) in Denmark, Sweden, Finland, Norway, Iceland and the three Baltic countries: Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia, or via Skype (3 interviews). Data have been collected from September 2018 until July 2019 (see Table 9.1).

<TABLE 9.1 HERE>

During the interviews we asked participants about their aesthetic experiences in the places where they met for the project (e.g., what they felt as soon as they arrived; which smells /
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sounds / aspects of the place they remember and the sensations they raised; how they perceived the other participants).

Data analysis followed the principles of inductive theory building with an interpretive approach (Yanow & Schwartz-Shea, 2014). While collecting and analyzing data, we gradually realized that the aesthetic experience participants had in the meeting places was influencing the creative processes and we therefore decided to focus on this phenomenon, comparing the experiences of the different participants to see if there were interesting patterns.

Findings

When asked to describe their experience, the interviewees reported a feeling of being cut away from their everyday world – using expressions like “being in a bubble”, “in a remote and isolated place” – immersed in an environment where the presence of the nature was very strong. They also refer about the uncomfortable initial feeling of not being able to avoid the others; and since the meeting places were mainly surrounded by nature, the only way of escaping the others, was to go into the forest. Despite this discomfort, overall this experience is narrated by the participants as very positive and creatively stimulating. Participants refer to feeling of being at home, in a protected, “cocoon” (Interview 25) environment shared with others. In the beginning, the others are considered as co-workers but by the end of the project as “friends” (Interviews 25, 26). This feeling makes participants relaxed and free from judgement, making them more willing to share ideas, knowledge and experiences with each other. Furthermore, the instantiation from daily activities and the contact with the nature helps them to focus on the activities of the project. Overall, the aesthetic experience of working in these third places is described both as “intense”, “creative”, “stimulating”, and also “very relaxing” and “regenerating”. Answering the research question of this study (namely how does the aesthetic experience of third places influence the creative processes that takes place there?), in the
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Following section, we will present three main aspects of the aesthetic experience of these working places that have shown to have an influence on some of the dynamics underlying the creative processes, namely overcoming the fear of being judged (Amabile et al., 1996), ideas and knowledge sharing (Füzi et al., 2014), and focus (Csikszentmihalyi, 1997).

Feeling emotional proximity: Overcoming the fear of being judged

Although people were forced to stay in the same isolate place with other co-workers for a few days, only a few developed forms of closure and resistance: “What is interesting is that if somebody new enters the group they rapidly become part of the group. If he doesn’t like it from the beginning, he will probably will never show up again” (Interview 25). Generally, findings show that this forced physical proximity stimulated also a sort of emotional proximity, a feeling of being part of a group, as an artist interviewed describes:

“We are quite introvert here; Baltic people are not so communicative. We do not always want to share our time with others... if there is a possibility to run away after the meeting, probably 70% of the people will do it! But in these places, where whether you stay with the group or you go to the forest... I don’t know, I think that this helped people to communicate. I think this was crucial for building a group” (Interview 26).

Being in these isolated places, together for a few days, seems therefore to have a positive influence on the relationship between people – “being surrounded by the mountains keeps people together” (Interview 7) – who, at the beginning of the project, refer to consider the other participant as colleagues, but after a few days together, develop a very intimate relationship with them, perceiving them even as “friends” (Interview 25, 26).
From co-workers to friends

“When we arrived, at the beginning of the meeting we had a kind of institutional communication, where you mainly speak about the work, your project and share your professional experience. Then things started to change after the first social occasions, like dinners... In the next days you already start to see that things are changing because you hear much more noise in the rooms as people are chatting! Everything gets more emotional and people share ideas, personal experiences. I can say that at the end of this project I don’t feel some of these people as colleagues anymore, but as friends!” (Interview 26).

These examples clearly describe the feeling of intimacy developed by participants in these places which has a positive influence on the way participants feel free to express their ideas, without being judged, as state by another participant:

“I feel that this experience is directly related with my creativity. The more people feel good, in a cozy environment, the more people feel open and free to give suggestions, new ideas, brainstorming... I think it is very important to create this [cozy] environment, because it makes people feel relaxed, not tense and open to bring new ideas. Because usually we are concerned about the criticism, about what others will think or say, but in this relaxed environment people just feel that they can through ideas on the table” (Interview 27).

In summary, we find that the emotional proximity felt by participants in these third places allows them to express their ideas without the fear of being judged, resulting in a positive influence on the creative process (Amabile et al., 1996).

Feeling at home: Favoring ideas and knowledge sharing
From co-workers to friends

The second aspect of the aesthetic experience of these third places that influences the creative processes is the feeling of being “in our special world” (Interview 25), in a sort of “cocoon environment” (Interview 25), a place that reminds of home:

“Cozy here is really important! If the whole concept of coziness here that is important! With the temperature, the hot tea, the coffee, the warm sweater that we wear... As organizers we were working very hard on the hospitality, it was for us a priority to make people feel welcome. Also because people involved in this network normally travel really a lot during the year. In my case, for example, the year before the project a travelled more than three months! That means that you are often far from home. And therefore you really start to appreciate places where you feel welcome, where you have the possibility to feel relaxed and balanced, where you feel at home. That’s very important” (Interview 27).

Furthermore, in these places, “people share the same experience so it doesn’t matter who is famous and who is not, who is a composer, who is a choreographer, who is just from the village and maybe has never even worked in his entire life” (Interview 6). This sense of equality given by the absence of a hierarchy, combined with the fact that participants often have different backgrounds and work experiences, makes people willing to share their knowledge and, eventually, to develop new projects together, as a participant told us:

“Seeing what others are doing and sharing experiences helped me to develop my work. For example, I was working on a project of crowdsourcing and I saw other people working on digital platforms in ways I did not see before. So I became curious: why people in Latvia do it is? Why in other countries like Sweden they do not? I formed
From co-workers to friends

therefore a small group with people with my common interests and started projects together” (Interview 26).

Feeling in a protected and almost domestic environment, with the absence of hierarchies, facilitates the sharing and development of new and creative ideas, as one participant told us: “All the inspirations I had here would not have come without the network” (Interview 14).

Feeling of being in a bubble: Increasing focus and concentration

The third aspect of the aesthetic experience of these third places that influences the creative processes is the feeling of “being disconnected from their daily activities” (Interview 2), in “a kind of a bubble!” (Interview 25): “This place takes you out of your daily routine. This makes you stop running. Here I tend to forget where my phone is. Take the example of the village where we are working now. I came here by car at night and, as soon as I came out of the car, I was immersed into a complete silence, there was no highway nearby so I heard no sounds” (Interview 25). This feeling of being in a bubble seems to be accentuated by the fact that “during the projects everything becomes part of the whole process: from the coffee breaks, to going out for a cigarette. Here we all live together, we spend the whole time together” (Interview 25). Furthermore, these places are generally surrounded by forests and also this feature seems to convey the feeling of being disconnected by the daily life:

“I guess that the fact of being in nature generally balances your life, reduces the stress... Here people really can somehow go away from stressful thoughts and concentrate on things that are important. I like to go to the nature to the important decision, or to come up with ideas or inspiration for a project” (Interview 27).
From co-workers to friends

These examples indicate that the feeling of being in a sort of bubble, distant from the daily activities and surrounded by nature allows people to focus and concentrate on the activities of the project: “During the project I feel focused; I am totally focused on the creative work we do there” (Interview 10).

Conclusion

In this paper we have examined the aesthetic experience that the participants of the Nordic-Baltic Mobility Programme for Culture perceive in the third places where they meet and work, with the aim of understanding the relationship between this aesthetic experience and the creative processes happening during these meetings.

Our findings show that the aesthetic experience of participants in these third places positively affects some of the dynamics underlying the creative processes. In particular, findings show that there are three main aspects of the aesthetic experience that have a positive influence on the creative processes: (a) feeling emotional proximity: overcoming the fear of being judged; (b) feeling at home: favoring ideas and knowledge sharing; and (c) feeling of being in a bubble: increasing focus and concentration.

Our research contributes to the emerging stream of organizational research on the relationship between workspace and creativity (see Meinel et al., 2017; Thoring, Desmet, & Badke-Schaub, 2019). We concur with the extant literature (e.g., Füzi et al. 2014; Garrett et al., 2017) that affirms that third places facilitate the creation of network, the exchange of information, the development of collaboration among users and, consequently, the development of creativity. However, our study furthers our understanding of the relationship between third places and creativity, shedding new light on the role of the aesthetic experience and its relationship with the creative process.
From co-workers to friends

Furthermore, our study shows that although existing literature (e.g., Fayard & Weeks, 2011; Friedman, 2014) has underlined how workspaces that force a continuous (visual, sound, olfactory) contact between people can hinder collaboration and exchange of ideas, our study shows that this forced physical proximity helps to create a feeling of emotional proximity that makes people feel more like “friends” rather than co-workers; this feeling makes people feel free from judgement and therefore free to express themselves, enabling creative processes (Amabile et al., 1996). Additionally, if it is true that third places are “place[s] between work and home” (Bookman 2014, p. 89), our study shows that the qualities that determine the sensation of "feeling at home" play a very important role in the creative process happening here, favoring ideas and knowledge sharing. Furthermore, although previous literature has underlined how the numerous distractions present in coworking spaces can distract people, thus interrupting the creative “flow” (Csikszentmihalyi, 1997). Our study instead shows that the feeling of “being in a bubble” can favor concentration, allowing people to feel isolated from everyday life and activities and therefore able to focus totally on the activity of the moment.

Furthermore, our findings are counterintuitive if we consider the previous literature (e.g., Montanari 2018) that stresses how places that favor creativity are often populated by numerous creative workers and organizations (such as the case for creative clusters or ecosystems) that facilitate network development and knowledge sharing. Our study, instead, shows how the very fact that third places are isolated and located in remote places helps in creating an emotional proximity among the participants. This does not happen in urban, socially-dense contexts, where instead the same people interviewed sometimes meet by chance as they attend similar events and report to have instead more formal and less productive relationships compared to the ones developed in the third places. It could be objected at this point, that although the wider context is not part of a dense network, the projects involve several creatives recreating therefore a sort of network just inside the third places. However, this is not always true, as often these
From co-workers to friends

projects involve not only creatives but also local people who have never dealt with creative projects. Even in this case, the aesthetic experiences related with the observed creative processes were the same.

A limitation of our study can be the fact that the third places observed were immersed in nature, and this is not the case for many other third places (such as cafe, hotels, coworking spaces) that instead are located in urban areas. Although nature has often emerged in findings as an important element in the aesthetic experience of the participants, we can say that there are also other features that have determined the feeling of “being in a bubble” or “far from everyday life” that eventually made people feel emotional proximity and made them willing to share ideas and knowledge and to increase focus. For example, the disconnection from the daily life and activities, the forced co-habitation with the other participants, the fact of being in a cozy environment that reminds home, and the absolute absence of hierarchy.

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From co-workers to friends


A diachronic view of the role of collaborative spaces in the creative industries
The singular case of the French “atelier Nawak”

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Abstract
The role of collaborative spaces in creativity has mostly been studied from a *hic et nunc* perspective. The literature focuses on the role of collaborative spaces in the way they encourage the production of new and valuable ideas. Studies focus on the effects on creativity, considered as an immediate artistic creation, at a given time and place. Based on a study of Atelier Nawak, a workshop that has hosted authors who initiated the revival of the French comics industry, we will shed new light on the role that these spaces may have on the creative process. We introduce a diachronic perspective: creativity is not assessed at the moment, but over time, at the meeting of the artistic creations with the art world in which it takes place.

Keywords: collaborative spaces, creativity, creative industries, comics industry, Nawak, France
Introduction

There is growing interest in collaborative spaces. They are defined as spaces where different actors meet and interact in order to boost creativity and may include co-working spaces, fablabs, social hubs, etc. Because employee creativity is vital to the growth and competitiveness of many organizations (Tushman & Moore, 1988), researchers have studied the factors that can increase individual creativity (Amabile, 1996; Zhou & George, 2001). Today, most of the research on collaborative spaces focuses on their influence on creativity at a given time and place.

This chapter aims to contribute to this stream of research by focusing on the outcomes of collaborative spaces in a broader perspective. Although research generally considers the immediate products of creativity, this chapter proposes to consider the ability of the collaborative space to alter an individual's trajectory and focus not on his/her artistic output but on the socially constructed value of his/her production.

This chapter is based on the unique case of an original collaborative space in the French comic book industry: the “Atelier Nawak” workshop. Over time, this workshop has acquired an extraordinary reputation in the world of comics, owing to the creativity of the authors who worked there. Nevertheless, it is not possible to explain this case using the theoretical frameworks employed by existing research on collaborative spaces. Indeed, at first glance, this workshop seemed to have no particular characteristics that distinguished it from other workshops.

The originality of this case is that it brings out the possible impacts of a collaborative space on creativity, not “here and now”, but on a broader scale of time and space. This chapter’s contribution is to propose a diachronic perspective of the role of collaborative spaces in the creative industries.
Nawak: A diachronic view of the role of collaborative spaces

Theoretical background

As defined by Amabile (1983), creativity is the ability to conceive an idea or to make a prediction that is both new and adapted to its context. Creative industries (Caves, 2000) are those industries whose organization is structured around creativity. This implies specific ways of functioning (Caves, 2000). And, far from the image of the solitary creative artist that this may evoke, the creative industries have a collective dimension (Becker, 1982). Collaborative spaces, given that they promote interactions and collaboration, are considered supportive of individual or collective creativity (Capdevila, 2015).

The role of spaces in the creative industries has been studied for a long time, at different scales (Scott, 2005), from the smallest to the largest. On the smallest scale, that of collaborative spaces, the literature has focused on three major impacts of spaces on creativity. These spaces facilitate collaboration between individuals by offering the proximity needed for day-to-day interactions, and such collaboration enhances their creativity. Research has highlighted the importance of interactions (Perry-Smith & Shalley 2003; Cattani & Ferriani, 2008; Montanari, Scapolan, & Giannecchini, 2016) and networking (Cooke & Leydesdorff, 2006; Hekkert & Negro, 2009) for innovation and creativity. It mostly explores how the physical proximity of individuals may prompt interactions that stimulate innovation or creativity (Oksanen & Stahle, 2013).

They are also seen as a locus for new discourses and new practices. Collaborative spaces can host communities, which makes possible the institutionalization of such new discourses and practices. Collaborative communities are groups of individuals who can work together on common projects, not only pursuing their own interests (Frieling, Lindenberg, & Stokman, 2014; Garret, Spreitzer, & Bacevice, 2017). Sometimes creative people have to create their own institutions in order to impose their own aesthetic conventions (Moulin & Costa, 1992). New discourses and new practices emerge from a community and lead to the creation of new...
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conventions (Rao, Monin, and Durand, 2003). On many different scales, the space may act as a catalyst for the dynamic emergence of new discourses and new practices: Paris for Cubism (Sgourev, 2013); Vienna for sciences and arts (Andersson, 1985); New York, Liverpool, or Nashville for music (Power & Hallencreutz, 2007).

Finally, collaborative spaces may provide tools and materials for innovative activities. The literature has highlighted the relation between the physical characteristics of the environment on the creativity of knowledge workers (Dul, Ceylan, & Jaspers, 2011). Because the creative industries are often project-based, the availability of resources in a given location facilitates their use. This makes even more sense in sectors where the irregular activity of companies does not allow them to support high fixed costs (Benghozi, 1989).

These different streams focus on the role of collaborative spaces in stimulating the production of new and valuable ideas. They focus on the immediate effects on creativity: creative outputs at a given time and space.

None of these explanations help us to understand the singular case of Nawak. In this workshop, interactions between individuals were rather unremarkable (nothing different than any other workshop). The workshop was not rooted in any institutional discourse (no manifesto was written). The place itself did not have any resources necessary for the authors’ work (they did not need a lot of materials for drawing). We therefore suggest considering creativity in a broader perspective and integrating dimensions that are exogenous to prior research streams.

This chapter raises the question: To what extent can the influence of a collaborative space on creativity go beyond its hic et nunc context? We propose to shine a new light on the influence of a collaborative space on the creative abilities of a group of individuals.
Nawak: A diachronic view of the role of collaborative spaces

Methodology and data

The singular case of the French “atelier Nawak” & “atelier des Vosges”

At the beginning of the 1990s, the publisher Guy Delcourt left his premises at 44 rue Quincampoix in Paris. He proposed to Thierry Robin, a French comics author, to turn it into a workshop for comics authors. Robin found five people with whom to share the rent and formed the workshop’s first generation of occupants. Soon, some of the authors left and, in order to continue paying the rent, they were replaced by new ones. Henceforth, the workshop’s existence was punctuated by departures and arrivals of new people.

During the summer of 1995, David B. found a new place in the prestigious Place des Vosges, a very chic address in Paris. Frédéric Boilet decided to name this new workshop “Atelier des Vosges”. The entire group moved in summer 1995. The atmosphere changed somewhat: from the dark workshop of Quincampoix street, they found themselves in the very chic Place des Vosges, in a much bigger and brighter workshop.

Later, the Nawak workshop and Les Vosges workshop would become mythical in the world of French comics: the industry, the readership and even the non-specialized press spoke of this place where a few dozen genius authors had been able to restore the grandeur of French comics.²

Gradually, the authors began to experience some small successes. Eventually, television, radio and newspapers started to pay attention to these strange little workshops where something seemed to be happening. A young author who arrived in the 2000s described his first steps in the workshop:

“One day I saw France Inter³ at the workshop. I did not know why they were there, it was very, very weird. One day Christophe received the prize for the best first album at Angoulême [International Comics
In 2000, a Nawak author, Marjane Satrapi, released *Persepolis*. It was a huge success: more than ten million copies were sold worldwide to an audience that went beyond the usual comics readership, thus pushing the boundaries and popularizing this genre.

“And that was a fantastic achievement. Marjane had been published. *Persepolis* sold well, but not a hundred thousand copies like *Largo Winch*. It reached a wider audience than the traditional comics readership. That’s what we all seek. We wanted to get out of this ghetto of comics readership and open up to everyone. And it worked. *Persepolis* has sold ten million copies worldwide, including in circles where they had never heard of comics. And they said to themselves: so, this is what comics are. It was at this point that publishers began to create their collections, somewhat alternative, and to pay attention to people who hadn’t been interested in traditional comics. And that was a great achievement for us. What we were doing could become the locomotive of comics. It was a big step forward in this environment, I think.”

Following the success of Marjane Satrapi, most of the Nawak authors had successful careers, such as Joann Sfar, who went on to make several movies. Moreover, Christophe Blain, Emmanuel Guibert, Marjane Satrapi, Joann Sfar, and Lewis Trondheim were all awarded the French Order of Arts and Letters.

The traditional publishing houses took notice of this new wave and tried to catch it, each in their own way, for example, the Poisson Pilote collection from Dargaud or the great French
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publishing house, Gallimard, who put Joann Sfar in charge of a new collection. Nowadays the comics industry is much less dichotomized (mainstream/independent) than in the early 90s and diversity is reaching an unparalleled level.

The Nawak & Les Vosges workshops were a key player in this renewal.

Data collection

The origin of this research was an exploratory study to understand the groupings (on various scales and in various forms) in the creative industries. This phase led us to discover Nawak and its mythical dimension. We met one of the authors, who highlighted a contradiction between the successful careers of its members that can be observed years afterward, and the banality of what they had experienced there. This contradiction convinced us of the uniqueness of the workshop and the utility of studying it to develop a new perspective to understand collaborative spaces.

Because we were not testing new propositions but trying to understand a new phenomenon, we determined that a comprehensive and qualitative approach (Dumez, 2016) through a single case study (Yin, 2012) was the most appropriate way to understand the impact of the workshop on creativity. Indeed, our intuition after that first interview was that this case might call into question some of the existing theory. Described as a “workshop like any other”, even though the writers who worked there went on to have remarkable careers, the conventional explanations of a collaborative space’s influence on creativity did not seem to explain what had happened there.

More than just a gathering of artists, the workshop was a locus of many and diverse interactions and housed an ad hoc community that evolved over time. In addition, this space differed from the types of spaces often studied in management sciences: the people who belonged to it acted in complete autonomy.
We faced a methodological difficulty. This case took place 20 years ago and the actors had since become stars in their field. As a result, they were difficult to access. And when we did manage to interview them, we were asking them to make a significant effort to remember. A series of semi-structured interviews was conducted with past authors. We interviewed 17 authors. In addition, we analyzed a series of documents on the history of the workshop and the history of the comics industry in France.

This heterogeneous material was coded using a combination of findings from the data (grounded theory) and from existing theory (Ayache & Dumez, 2011) in order to avoid any risk of circularity (Dumez, 2016).

Data analysis

We approached the authors fairly openly, only specifying that we were doing a case study on the Nawak and Les Vosges workshops. We began with open-ended questions and focused on factual information (careers, motivations for joining the workshop or leaving it) to avoid any risk of circularity. Nevertheless, very broad theoretical frameworks were also invoked: the impact of third places or collaborative spaces on creativity. The interviews were transcribed and coded using categories that had emerged from the field or were provided by the literature.

We put all these categories in an Excel sheet that we filled in gradually.

As the interviews were unstructured, the duration varied depending on the people interviewed, lasting between 30 minutes and two hours. The first few questions were factual: “Could you describe your career before your arrival in the workshop?”; “Why and how did you join the workshop?”; “Why did you leave the workshop?”; “How do you work nowadays?”. Asking such factual questions allowed us to evaluate the role of the workshop as a collaborative space for these authors while protecting us from confirmation bias.
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Two of the 17 interviews were conducted by both authors, and fifteen were conducted by one. This allowed us both to converge on the questioning, and to keep some distance with the material. The data collection work was spread over two years from January 2016 to December 2018. We alternated phases of data analysis using the floating attention method with phases of coding. Repeated readings of the interview transcripts led to the emergence of new ideas that sharpened our understanding of the material and were then incorporated into the following interviews (Dumez, 2016). This abductive method allowed us to develop a new understanding of our object within a theoretical framework.

Moreover, in order to mitigate the effect of biases from the interviewees and to correct for the natural approximations due to recollection of events that took place more than 20 years ago, we triangulated our data collected in the various interviews with the data from our secondary sources.

Findings

Nawak or Les Vosges

Nawak and Les Vosges can be considered as a single entity. All the authors interviewed who made the move from one location to the other confirmed this same impression: according to them, it made no difference.

“I was very happy to move to Les Vosges. The neighborhood was prettier, there were beautiful girls everywhere. But from the workshop point of view, apart from the fact that it was brighter, it made no difference.”

Moreover, our analysis of the answers from authors who only knew Nawak and those who only knew Les Vosges did not reveal any influence of this variable. The workshop evolved depending on the people who were part of it. “The real change was when people arrived or left.
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That could create a truly new atmosphere.” Consequently, we analyzed the two workshops as a single collaborative space and call it Nawak, as that is the most commonly used name.

Reasons for joining the workshop

Getting a creative boost does not appear to have been a motivation for joining the workshop. The main reasons evoked are: seeking a stimulating work environment where artists motivate and encourage each other (50% of the interviewees); having a place to work other than home (35%); by accident (10%); for a lifestyle change (one of the interviewees).

“They helped me out at first. Then I wanted to try it. It gave me a boost at the beginning. I had trouble concentrating alone at my desk.”

“I was very lonely. (...) I tried to make sure not to get up after nine, to get to work at ten o'clock and then try things, even when I did not have any order. And then one day, I totally cracked, I thought: what’s going on? I cannot stand being here anymore. I need a workshop.”

“I arrived in Paris and I was living in an apartment that was quite small. I had already heard about the workshop, which had existed for some time, and so the idea was to have a place to work outside of my home.”

“I did not go there voluntarily. I did not know who was working there at that time. I had a confused impression. (...) I joined because a friend suggested I join the workshop. It was a bit by chance.”

“I had a home where I could work. I could have done without them materially. (...) When I joined, I was looking for a break with my previous life.”

This shows that the main motivation to join the workshop was not to be part of an artistic movement. Indeed, although recruitment was done naturally by affinity and with the same
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desire to change the world of comics, the workshop did not espouse an institutional discourse.
Everyone freely expressed their art.
This means that the authors did not perceive the workshop as something that could increase their creativity, at least before they joined. Those who sought a stimulating work environment believed in the potential of the place to improve the quantity or quality of work done, but none thought it would influence their creativity.

Reasons for leaving the workshop
Similarly, the motivations to leave had nothing to do with their creations. The main reasons evoked are: they just stopped going there or stopped working in the workshop (30% of the interviewees); not for rational issues (25%); because it was the end of a cycle (25%), because the ambiance in the workshop had changed (20%).

“I went there to drink, to see people. I felt that I was paying rent for nothing.”
“One day, I realized that I was paying but not going. So I told them that I was leaving.”
“I started to meet somebody for work outside Paris, so I went less and less, until one day I decided to leave the workshop.”
“And then there’s alchemy. A place… with artists… you may feel bad. Sometimes we may want to leave.”
“I don’t know. I needed a change.”
“I left because I wanted a change. There were no problems. But I really needed a change, to talk about other things, with other people.”
“I left Paris so I had to leave the workshop.”
“I had a job opportunity in Angouleme, so I left.”
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“As often happens, after two years, disagreements occurred. And then
I was fed up. So, I left.”

Again, none of the authors evoke the influence of the workshop on their creativity to justify their leaving.

Impact on artists

We then try to understand what they got from it: 90% of them knew stimulating work environment, a motivation to get to work; all of them talk about the artistic freedom they enjoyed there; 35% benefited from opportunities to find odd jobs more or less related to comics; 50% appreciated the social life.

“It was especially interesting and important for mutual motivation. We showed everyone what we were doing. We gave each other advice on our work.”

“We supported each other. We could ask our peers for their point of view. When we were embarking on a project, we showed it to each other. We watched their reactions.”

“We motivated each other. A year later I met Joann. We immediately became very good friends. With Emmanuel too. It was a very stimulating environment. I had a great desire to write. I saw the freedom Joann had when he wrote. It made me want to do the same. I became my own scriptwriter. I always had them read my albums.”

“The place absolutely did not create constraints for our work.”

“We were young and looking for money, for jobs. We circulated offers for odd jobs.”
“From time to time we organized parties, for example to celebrate Beaujolais. It fostered ties between us.”

The effects can be divided into two categories. As far as their work is concerned, the authors do indeed acknowledge having found a stimulating work environment, by which they mean that the workshop helped them to get down to work, without necessarily making them more creative. In parallel, the workshop brought other effects that did not have a direct influence on their work.

*Short-term effects*

The workshop seems very ordinary from the authors’ point of view: “Sure, the idea of the studio is a complete fantasy, like people imagine that it will smell of linseed oil, that there will be easels or a naked woman posing. We do not know what people imagine, what a workshop is. And no, no, you're not coming to see my studio, I'm just going to work, so it's not going to be interesting.”

However, the workshop allowed the authors to take their work even further. By allowing them to express themselves as they wished, to dare to do things, the authors were able to push back the barriers.

“They made me understand that one should not hesitate to try things. They helped me become self-confident. I know for a fact that if I had been alone at home, I would never have looked for other possibilities. But with their comments... Sometimes just a comment: you could try something here. Ah yes. Why not? I’ll try– it's not bad.”

Nevertheless, even this stimulating work environment does not explain the great creativity that inspired the Nawak myth. Indeed, such an environment may be provided by any workshop.
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Long-term effects

The ability of places or spaces to stimulate interactions has often been studied. We focus on the role of collaborations between individuals who belonged to the workshop. In this paper, a collaboration is defined as a joint artistic project between at least two individuals from the workshop. This definition therefore excludes even frequent and regular assistance that one individual may provide to another if the individuals do not sign the work together. Whereas interactions may have a positive impact on the motivation to get to work, here we are interested in joint collaborations.

We found three main types of collaboration in our data.

One-shot collaboration: two individuals decided to work on a joint project when they were in the workshop. This collaboration was not pursued afterward.

Continuous collaboration: the collaboration was initiated in the workshop and continued when the authors left.

Postponed collaboration: the collaboration began when the authors were no longer at the workshop.

<TABLE 10.2 HERE>

These findings show that interactions between individuals also have an impact in that they lead to long-term collaborations. Such interactions are the source of successful projects.

Recognition of success

Based on the data collected, we propose a new reading of collaborative spaces in the creative industries and how they can be seen as a quality label.
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“Something happened with the workshop. It’s very strange. The workshop became a label in the eyes of publishers. We must put ourselves in their place: all at once, Guibert, Blain, Sfar, Satrapi, Bravo were in the same place. Of course, the publishers wondered what was going on there.”

A virtuous circle was created: the successes of some authors attracted the attention of publishers, who conferred value on the workshop and thus made it easier for its authors to find their market.

Discussion

This chapter aims to contribute to the field of research on collaborative spaces, which is currently being structured, by offering a new perspective on their impacts on creativity.

A collaborative space that challenges the literature

Beginning with third places (Oldenburg, 1989), then collaborative spaces, the research mainly focuses on what spaces may offer to the actors they host. Regarding creativity, the research has identified three kinds of mechanisms: the interactions between individuals and their role in fostering new valuable ideas, the role of the space as a locus for a manifesto, and the gathering of specific resources.

As a collaborative space, Nawak facilitated the day-to-day interactions between authors, although in a very ordinary way, which corresponds to the role of a workshop but does not account for the particular creativity that Nawak authors experienced. No manifesto was written. There has never been a Nawak style. The authors were free to practice their art as they wanted. Finally, the authors did not need to go there to use tools or equipment. Indeed, a cartoonist needs very few materials: pencils, paper and a drawing board. Short of money at the time, some
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of them had little room to work at home, but the place offered no particular advantage in their work.

In the unique case of Atelier Nawak we find a contrast between the banality of an ordinary workshop with the recognition by the industry of a place that produced extraordinary creativity. The inability of the literature to explain such a case prompts us to investigate it.

TABLE 10.3 HERE

Impact on creativity: beyond a hic et nunc perspective

The effects of the Atelier Nawak in terms of creativity are not exceptional if one considers creativity in its general definition. These effects occur in two different ways after the authors’ time at the workshop and in the way their work is perceived by external actors. In order to grasp this impact on creativity, we need to move beyond the *hinc et nunc* perspective used by most research on collaborative spaces. The space has no effect on the actual production of ideas but rather on the valuation of these ideas by the industry.

To understand how a collaborative space becomes a quality label, we define what we call a “lighting effect”: when an artist and their work achieves critical and public visibility, all eyes turn towards the place where it was produced. For example, the success of one of Marjane Satrapi’s works, *Persepolis*, or the successes of authors like Lewis Trondheim, Christophe Blain, Joan Sfar or Emmanuel Guibert made publishers feel there was a new market, that of adult comics, which drew their attention to the place from which it emerged.

The discovery of this new market coincided with the emergence of authors who could supply it and the promotion of their work by publishing houses. In this explanatory model, the success of one individual from the collaborative space attracts attention, which in turn facilitates market access for all the individuals from that space and consequently leads to its success *a posteriori*. 
Nawak: A diachronic view of the role of collaborative spaces

The main role played by the space was becoming a quality label in the eyes of publishing houses. The fact that the authors gathered in the workshop did not produce more creative ideas, but it led to their ideas being valued externally.

This perspective is consistent with the literature on the creative industries, and specifically Howard Becker’s work on art worlds (Becker, 1982) and Lucien Karpik’s work on the economics of singularities (2007). Becker emphasizes conventional value, which is socially constructed. In this view, a creation or an idea has no intrinsic value; its value is constructed by the art worlds in which it evolves. Karpik (2007) focuses on industries that produce singular goods or services. In these industries, consumers refer to rankings or labels to choose a good or service (a work of art, a movie, a restaurant, etc.) These “judgment devices” participate in the construction of value.

By reintroducing this dimension – the process of value creation – we can understand the creativity paradox in the Nawak case.

Creativity in collaborative spaces: a diachronic perspective

The development of long-term relationships between authors is another effect highlighted by our research. The workshop can therefore be considered also as a hub where several individual dynamics intersect.

Research on collaborative spaces has analyzed the effect of such spaces on creativity in the framework of Amabile’s definition of creativity. In those studies, creativity is examined from a synchronic perspective. However, the Nawak workshop had no specific effect on creativity, considered from a synchronic viewpoint.

Each author was able to benefit from advice and a stimulating work environment. Nevertheless, all this is quite common for a workshop and does not explain the great creativity attributed to
Nawak: A diachronic view of the role of collaborative spaces

its authors. The most important effects are to be found beyond the workshop: in the collaborations that occurred later in time and broader in space (some of them occurred several years afterward and outside the place). The workshop was a place where, at a given time, the artists’ careers intersected. At this intersection, lasting bonds were created, the effects of which would be reflected in the creativity of the individuals. One may think that this is true for any workshop and that there is nothing unique about Nawak. We have no data to confirm or refute this assertion. Nevertheless, the collaborative space had this effect on creativity, which emerges when studied from a diachronic perspective. Whether this is specific to Nawak or not, this case allowed us to highlight this new dimension. And we can assume that the authors were more eager to engage in such collaborations, having observed each other’s creativity. This long-term effect would play an amplifying role for the initial lighting effect. The lighting effect made the authors more visible and increased the value of their creations. This made them more desirable for collaborations. And these collaborations, initiated in the workshop, amplified their creativity.

Conclusion and implications

Collaborative spaces: a diachronic perspective

This chapter is based on the observation of a case in the creative industries that was poorly explained by the existing research on the effects of collaborative spaces on creativity. This observation led us to study the case from a different perspective. Amabile’s definition of creativity is synchronous (hic et nunc), as it considers the immediate production of a creation and its intrinsic value. Becker (1982), on the other hand, looks at creativity in terms of the value creation process. Creativity is not assessed at a single moment, but over time, when the work meets the art world in which it is produced. We have therefore introduced a diachronic perspective, which helps to explain why the perception of creativity in the Nawak workshop
Nawak: A diachronic view of the role of collaborative spaces

was forged afterwards and not at the moment. This perspective allows us to resolve the Nawak paradox.

Managerial implications

This study examines the effects of collaborative spaces over the long term and with a scope that exceeds the physical boundaries of the place. The creation of a quality label, whether spontaneously or proactively, can facilitate the generation of these effects.

The main implication of this research is that collaborative spaces’ managers (or people working in this collaborative space if it’s not managed) should not focus on the sole creativity dimension, but they should also take into account the whole environment. In order to make this process fertile, one should try to act on this environment. Supporting the lighting effect may be a useful strategy to make the ideas produced valuable. And collaborative spaces, in their ability to become quality labels, may help in this dimension.

Notes

1 Nawak comes from French expression “n’importe quoi”, which means “whatever”.
2 Our research has allowed us to draw up the following list of Nawak authors (by arrival date), which is quite exhaustive even though some people may have been omitted, especially those who were only there for a short time.

<TABLE 10.4 HERE>

3 One of the biggest French radio channels.
4 This quote and all the following come from the interviews we conducted.
Nawak: A diachronic view of the role of collaborative spaces

5 We interviewed the following authors (in alphabetical order): Christophe Blain (author), Frédéric Boilet (author), Matthieu Bonhomme (author), Marc Boutavant (illustrator & author), Émile Bravo (author), Nicolas de Crécy (illustrator & author), Gwen de Bonneval (author); Jean-Pierre Duffour (author), Jean-Yves Duhoo (author), Brigitte Findalky (colorist), Emmanuel Guibert (author), Dominique Hérody (author & teacher), Jean-Christophe Menu (author & co-founder of L’Association), Hélène Micou (illustrator), Thierry Robin (author), Fabrice Tarrin (author), Lewis Trondheim (author & co-founder of L’Association).

6 Secondary sources:

Bravo, E. 2016. La mystérieuse alchimie de l’Atelier Nawak. École de Paris du management


7 Categories we used:

Job

Arrival date

Departure date

Nawak or Les Vosges workshop

Common projects with other Nawak authors

Has worked with “L’Association”?

Main motivation to join

Time spent in the workshop

Reason for leaving

What did he or she get out of it?

Had a particular role
Nawak: A diachronic view of the role of collaborative spaces

Prizes & rewards

8 Interviews

<TABLE 10.5 HERE>
Nawak: A diachronic view of the role of collaborative spaces

References


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Cultural Entrepreneurship Incubators as Collaborative Spaces: A Systematic Review of Cultural Entrepreneurship Incubation

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Abstract
Research on how university-based incubators could be designed to cover the lack of curricular entrepreneurship education and training offers of future entrepreneurs in the cultural or creative sectors is scarce. Following a systematic literature review, we identify six distinct perspectives on cultural entrepreneurship incubation, namely the consultation services, networks, infrastructure, target groups, impact of and effects on incubators, and definitions and conceptualizations of incubators. We distinctively review the literature on cultural entrepreneurship, incubators, and cultural entrepreneurship incubators and subsequently combine and contrast the findings within these research streams to provide a more comprehensive picture on how to effectively configure incubators to meet the needs of cultural entrepreneurs.
Cultural Entrepreneurship Incubators as Collaborative Spaces

Introduction

In many countries, scholars and practitioners observe an increasing economization of cultural and artistic work, a significant decrease in public funding, and changing policy strategies for professionals in the cultural and creative sectors (Ellmeier, 2003; Klamer, 2011; Kuhlke, Schramme, & Kooyman, 2015; Oakley, 2014). Universities and educators are increasingly aware of these issues, as well as the rise of the creative economy. Within the formal education systems, and specifically at higher education institutes (HEI’s), there is an increase in course offers, modules and programs that incorporate business-, management-, and entrepreneurship contents that aim to provide students with skills and competences to better cope with highly uncertain working environments. However, still, many HEI’s offer enterprising- or entrepreneurial education to a narrow set of academic disciplines, typically within the business and management realm. It does not come as a surprise that research on cultural entrepreneurship education and cultural entrepreneurship incubation has only received limited attention from scholars (Carey & Naudin, 2007; Essig, 2014a/b; Hausmann, 2010; Kuhlke et al., 2015; Thom, 2015). In light of this, the study aims at analyzing the potential role of university-based incubators to cover the lack of curricular entrepreneurship education and training offers of future entrepreneurs in the cultural or creative sectors. Within this contribution, incubators are considered as a form of collaborative spaces, besides the co-working spaces, maker spaces, hackerspaces, accelerators, and new learning spaces (Moriset, 2014; Waters-Lynch, Potts, Butcher, Dodson, & Hurley, 2016; Waters-Lynch & Potts, 2017).

Theoretical background
Cultural Entrepreneurship Incubators as Collaborative Spaces

Incubators are creative and collaborative spaces that aim at facilitating the imparting of knowledge (Parrino, 2015). Theoretically speaking, these “third (work)place/spaces” (Füzi, 2015) are contextualized in the framework of proximity and knowledge exchange. The essential aspects of an incubator configuration can be grouped into the following typology: consultation, networks, and infrastructure. Regarding the first aspect, incubators usually offer three groups of consulting services to entrepreneurs. First, entrepreneurs receive intensive professional advice to develop business skills, such as marketing, finance, and management skills (Spath & Walter, 2012). Moreover, incubators offer access to different networks and the opportunity for knowledge exchange and collaboration with various stakeholders (Fritsch, 2016; Spath & Walter, 2012). Finally, incubators provide the physical infrastructure, in particular, favorable office and laboratory spaces for entrepreneurs (Fritsch, 2016; Spath & Walter, 2012). In terms of institutional support for incubators, according to the sources, four main types of funding exist, namely university, public, private and firm incubators (Gaida, 2011). University incubators are typically funded to leverage academic knowledge and technology transfer. Public incubators aim at achieving political goals, e.g., local economic development, social inclusion, and cohesion. In general, these two types are non-profit oriented (Gaida, 2011; Spath & Walter, 2012). In contrast, private and firm incubators tend to expect a monetary return.

Entrepreneurship research has tended to focus on conventional forms of the phenomenon (Cornelius, Landström, & Persson, 2006; Schildt, Zahra, & Sillanpää, 2006). However, entrepreneurship refers to value-generating activities that go beyond generating economic impact (Dacin, Dacin, & Matear, 2010; Mair & Marti, 2006). Academics increasingly recognize that entrepreneurial activities are not merely about profit. Social and sustainable entrepreneurs primarily focus on tackling social or ecological issues (Bürger & Volkmann, 2020; Dees, 1998;
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Saßmannshausen & Volkmann, 2018). Similarly, a cultural entrepreneur (CE) is someone who contributes to – as Klamer (2011) puts it – “the common good that culture is”. The cultural entrepreneur is someone that changes the hearts and minds of those appreciating the work. Cultural entrepreneurs focus on the cultural content, and the creative process itself, applying the business acumen necessary to be able to build a successful and sustainable career in the cultural or creative sectors. Despite the interest in cultural entrepreneurship and efforts in supporting the development of CE education, there is still little progress in offering effective CE education, and still few publications on CE incubation have yet been published. Many HEI’s still do not afford students from the arts, creative, and cultural domains the opportunity to acquire the toolset necessary to run more dynamic, innovative and sustainable businesses. Moreover, university-based incubators may be in place at many universities and would thus be able to offer immediate help to cultural entrepreneurs that lack curricular entrepreneurship courses and modules in their curricula.

Setting and methodology

This study utilizes a systematic literature review (Tranfield, Denyer, & Smart, 2003) to gain insights into the incubator configuration for cultural entrepreneurs. In management and entrepreneurship research many authors refer to the process suggested by Tranfield et al. (2003). Due to the limited evidence base on CE incubators, we pose the following research question: Which incubator configurations and designs are needed to effectively foster cultural entrepreneurship?

To address this question, we set the three previously introduced categories consultation, networks, and infrastructure as fixed categories. Furthermore, we distinctively review the literature on CE, incubators, and CE incubators. By doing so, we are able to subsequently combine specific insights
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and provide a more comprehensive picture of knowledge gaps that can be fueled by findings from the field of CE, and incubators.

Following the process outlined by Tranfield et al. (2003), we conduct the review by identifying the appropriate literature. Based on the definitions of our two main subjects, “incubators” and “cultural entrepreneurship”, we select keywords and derive appropriate search-terms. Aiming to generate a broad picture of these fields of research, and in accordance with the exploratory research questions, we use a broad list of keywords and search terms. To ensure that all possible variations of a keyword can be found we create search terms as (“art* entrepreneur*”) or (“business incubat*”). Moreover, we apply the “AND” operator as well to find literature that addresses CE incubators.

Additionally, we define the databases, taking into consideration that systematic literature reviews ideally should include different types of publications (Denyer & Tranfield, 2009; Pittaway, Robertson, Munir, Denyer, & Neely, 2004). Hence, we select Springer E-Books, Web of Science, and EBSCOhost as relevant databases as they include journal articles as well as books and dissertations. Likewise, we supplement the database search, if necessary, by adding relevant articles and journals, which were not captured by the initial search (Pittaway & Cope, 2007; Denyer & Tranfield, 2009). Each database was interrogated by the search strings noted in Tables 11.1, 11.2, 11.3. Titles, keywords, and abstracts were reviewed, and bibliographical data has been recorded separately.

<TABLE 11.1 HERE>
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To select the relevant studies, the complete body of literature is reduced by employing predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria. For all three research projects, we set these criteria with the help of the short test search carried out during the planning stage (Denyer & Tranfield, 2009). After further removing doublets, anonymous, or not accessible articles, the final body of literature is refined. This selection procedure reduced the relevant articles to 100, as listed in Table 11.4. This body of literature contains only relevant articles and serves as a basis for the subsequent synthesis.

The data synthesis is used to rearrange the literature to gain “knowledge that is not apparent from reading the individual studies in isolation” (Denyer & Tranfield, 2009). This synthesis represents the main challenge of the review since the literature is heterogeneous as indicated by the differing dates of publication, the research fields, and perspectives as well as the research methods applied (Denyer & Neely, 2004; Leseure, Bauer, Birdi, Neely, & Denyer, 2004). This synthesis is deduced of employing thematic analysis (Macpherson & Holt, 2007). As we try to explore the configuration of CE incubators - a topic that has received little attention -, we follow the arguments by Gläser and Laudel (2010) by predefining an initial but open-ended framework for the content analysis. This allows us to modify categories, and add new ones, if necessary. Authors regularly rely on such flexible coding procedures in exploratory settings (Pittaway & Cope, 2007). After the
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preliminary setting and definition of categories, the body of literature is analyzed. Each text unit is assigned to one of the existing categories, or a new category is added, if necessary.

Findings

In this section, we present the thematic analysis of the three literature streams on incubators, CE, and CE incubators. First, we describe our findings of the thematic analysis of the different streams of research. In each stream, we apply the three fixed categories consultation, networks, and infrastructure. These findings will be supplemented by adding further categories that do not fit into this categorization but offer relevant insights to outline effective CE incubation. The thematic analysis of the incubator literature unfolds six categories in total, equal to three additional deduced categories, see Table 11.1 for an overview.

Seventeen articles qualify for the first category of the incubator configuration, namely the consultation services. The literature on incubators suggests that incubators are crucial in providing adequate consultation services for entrepreneurs. Studies show that different skills are needed depending on the development stages of the venture, i.e., general management skills are helpful for entrepreneurs in earlier stages, whilst market knowledge and expertise becomes more important in later stages. Additionally, financial literacy is an essential part of the incubators consultation service to support entrepreneurs in meeting potential investor’s needs.

A total of 22 articles qualify for the network theme, the second category, and a significant theme in the incubator literature. The literature shows the importance of managing the internal and
Cultural Entrepreneurship Incubators as Collaborative Spaces

external networks to strengthen the incubation process and effectiveness. Literature addresses the lack of thorough examination and involvement of existing regional support structures into the process of incubator founding. Moreover, literature observes the role of regional stakeholders and geographically bounded factors on where, and how incubators are set up to boost the regional economy or local labor market performance. Literature reflects on the intensity of the active networking behavior of incubator staff.

Less emphasis is put on the third category of the incubator configuration. Eleven articles deal with the offered *infrastructure*. Furthermore, the first category added focuses on the target group of incubators, its tenants, and potential *entrepreneurs*. In total, 16 articles qualify for this theme. Some studies show that the intention to protect the intellectual property of entrepreneurs impedes networking activity and its intensity over time, whereas other studies show an increase in motivation and exchange of experience, as well as a better market access between entrepreneurs. Literature suggests that incubators are of most use for young academics. Another stream of research focuses on the issues faced by female entrepreneurs.

Moreover, there is a stream of literature not captured by previous categories dealing with *the impact of and effects on the incubators*. Altogether, 27 articles address this topic. Studies focus on the impact of incubators analyzing different performance measures. There is literature comparing the effectiveness and impact of different incubators types. For example, Lasrado et al. 2016 analyze post-incubation performance measures of academic and public incubated firms and find a higher number of employees and a higher average turnover of firms incubated in academic incubators. Whereas some authors are critical towards public incubators referencing their low efficiency in comparison to private ones, other sources emphasize their high importance regarding the broad support of projects of social and public interest without direct commercial benefit expectations.
Cultural Entrepreneurship Incubators as Collaborative Spaces

Likewise, the evidence is presented, showing that the highest risk of failure occurs in the first two years after leaving the incubator. The last category deduced from the incubator literature comprising of five articles deal with definitions, typologies, conceptualizations, and measures of the phenomenon.

The thematic analysis of the literature on CE outlines five of these categories. The literature on CE addresses two of the three fixed categories on consultation, and networks, as well as all other, deduced themes. First, there are 18 publications addressing topics relevant to the consultation services of incubators. Literature shows that artists and cultural workers often lack entrepreneurial and management skills. Additionally, they have to be sensitized for an entrepreneurial career in advance. Literature shows that many of these individuals have a unique challenge of arranging a double-identity as an entrepreneur, and artist with sometimes contrary motivations and aims. Adding to this, support in financial matters, such as consulting on financial literacy, is found to be an essential issue for founders within the cultural and creative sectors. Literature shows that there is a significant gap for this group in terms of financial diversification, issues of acquiring the necessary capital, insufficient information on financial issues, and a lack of contact to potential investors.

Another 18 articles on CE address topics relevant to the networks of incubators, regional aspects, and the entrepreneurial ecosystem or context conditions in which cultural entrepreneurs operate. Studies show that cultural entrepreneurs are heavily engaged in networking activities within the cultural and creative domains to create new products and services, and to generate attention (buzz). Customers present themselves as one of the most important external stakeholders of cultural entrepreneurs. However, whereas customer relationships are important, issues may arise due to the artistic aspirations to remain independent in their cultural production. Whereas a lot of work is
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done in small networks or even on a do-it-yourself base, the literature addresses intermediaries from various fields, like journalists, cultural managers, institutional partners, or established cultural entrepreneurs, as relevant stakeholders. These intermediaries often have significant influence and inhibit various contacts in the cultural and creative sector that are utilized to support others as “super connectors” or “gatekeepers”. Authors underline that locations not only need to offer business support but should also be visually unique and have an artistic reputation relevant to the cultural entrepreneur.

The third fixed category concerning the *infrastructure* of incubators is not addressed. It is worthy to say that CE literature focusses on several topics not addressed by the fixed categories.

The first category added addresses knowledge on the (cultural) *entrepreneurs*, his or her characteristics, and peculiarities, which are relevant to the incubator configuration. All in all, 24 articles address such themes. This literature shows that cultural entrepreneurs tend to be idealistic people, driven more by creative and moral motivation and the wish of artistic self-realization, rather than commercial motives. Moreover, cultural entrepreneurs tend to set up small- or even micro-businesses. The literature highlights the precarious working conditions that cultural entrepreneurs are prone to. However, most of the time, this is accompanied by a high degree of independence and freedom. The literature illustrates that entrepreneurs need to be able to manage themselves and many business functions simultaneously.

In this stream, only two articles address knowledge relevant to the impact or effect themes of incubation (Mandel 2017; Webb 2014).

Finally, eight literature sources address *definitions, typologies, or conceptualizations* of CE. Specifically, literature discussing CE incubation is scarce and addresses four categories. First, two articles refer to the first category of the CE incubation configuration, the *consultation*. Articles
Cultural Entrepreneurship Incubators as Collaborative Spaces

study vital skills such as self-efficacy, planning, opportunity, networking, leadership, finance, and marketing that incubators should impart to the entrepreneurs.

Only one article outlines the third fixed category, namely the infrastructure of CE incubators. Montgomery (2007) emphasizes the importance of physical aspects and infrastructure. CE incubators should be places of cultural production, where the tenants receive favorable workplaces and equipment as well as a gallery and gathering spaces for cheap rent (Montgomery, 2007). On top of this, two studies are dealing with the impact and effects of the CE incubation process. Whereas Essig (2014) evaluates the success of incubators by measuring the enhancement of the entrepreneurs’ self-efficacy (Essig, 2014), Montgomery (2007) focusses on the infrastructural aspects of different incubators on quantifiable outputs.

The last category deduced deals with definitions, typologies, conceptualizations, and measures of CE incubator, offering insights drawn from specific case studies of the phenomenon (Montgomery, 2007).

Discussion and conclusion

We address the research question by asking which incubator configuration is needed to effectively foster CE by synthesizing knowledge based on a systematic literature review and content analysis of the three literature streams. First, concerning the consultation services of such CE incubators, the literature suggests that mixed motives need to be considered. Cultural entrepreneurs tend to be driven by tackling cultural and social issues, and only partly by financial or growth aspirations (Dacin et al., 2010; Mandel, 2017). Therefore, CE incubators should be designed as institutions of “cultural production” (Montgomery, 2007). In order to address the reservations and negative perception of the commercial dimension that is often associated with entrepreneurship, the tenants
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should be sensitized that such skills are vital to prepare prospecting entrepreneurs to establish sustainable businesses (Patton, 2016; Pollard & Wilson, 2014). Consulting services should additionally provide practical and collective training aiming at providing entrepreneurial - and (self-)management skills, providing business planning and advice (Birnkraut, 2017; Brandenburg et al., 2016; Essig 2014; Kütting et al., 2011; Lai & Lin, 2015; Reither, 2008; Thom, 2015, 2016; Warren et al., 2009). 85

Regarding the incubator network, literature shows that networks and the regional ecosystem are important for tenants in general (Cooper et al., 2010; Soetanto & Jack, 2013). Cultural entrepreneurs tend to prefer aesthetic as well as authentic places that offer cheap spaces and a variety of cultural and creative businesses to locate their business in (Heebels & vAn Aalst, 2010; Smit, 2011). Leveraging networks and fostering stakeholder collaboration within the ecosystem/creative cluster and aligning the regional settings’ idiosyncrasies should be considered in setting up CE incubators (Fini et al., 2011). The working practices of new cultural and creative businesses are built on mutual exchange and co-operation (e.g., Cooper et al., 2010, Ebbers, 2013; Soetanto & Jack, 2013), working in small project groups for a limited time (Scott, 2017; Lange, 2017). Adding to this, the importance of networks is most important in the early stages of an entrepreneurial career (Fini et al., 2011; Heebels & vAn Aalst, 2010). Building on this aspect, the stakeholders involved should play an active role to the best of their abilities, e.g., universities should foster the topic, engage in research and develop appropriate curricular offers for aspiring entrepreneurs, whereas external firms best support incubator firms by providing industry knowledge and contacts (Fernández et al., 2012; Mas-Verdú et al., 2015; Warren et al., 2009). CE incubators should strive to build up, or engage in, existing national or international associations to develop the cause.
Cultural Entrepreneurship Incubators as Collaborative Spaces

Literature addressing the infrastructural aspects of incubators is scarce. However, the design of the incubator’s premises should match with cultural entrepreneur’s professional needs (Albort-Morant & Oghazi, 2016). They should be planned as “places of work,” equipped with studios for cultural production as well as places like galleries to present the created products (Montgomery, 2017). Such incubators could offer shared spaces such as meeting spaces and office administration, as well as equipment and technical infrastructure (Lange, 2017). CE incubators could include event locations, gastronomies, galleries that can help generate income and serve as places of exchange between artists/creatives and society (Montgomery, 2007).

Even though evidence on the effects and impact of incubators is mixed, studies show that a thorough configuration of the incubator service design adapted to the specific needs (e.g., sector, firm size) of their tenants has a positive effect on post-incubation firm measures (Mas-Verdú et al., 2015; Schwartz, 2013). Moreover, as the support of cultural entrepreneurs via incubators is a rather new topic and should primarily address the lack of management and entrepreneurship skills, incubators should design evaluation plans based on such learning outcomes and measure, e.g., venture launch rather than longevity of such a venture (Essig, 2014). Literature shows that the formation of CE incubators requires initial investments without instant economic returns, material success, or immediate visible economic regional benefits (Montgomery, 2007; Reich, 2013). Thus, private, but especially public bodies should financially support such CE incubators. Hence, CE incubators should not solely be evaluated by economic growth expectations of the incubated firms, but include social and cultural value creation measures and the impact, such as social cohesion, regional revitalization, among others, to measure incubation impact or success (Essig, 2014; Florida, 2002; Thom, 2015).
Cultural Entrepreneurship Incubators as Collaborative Spaces

To conclude, in this exploratory study, we have identified knowledge gaps and addressed these by synthesizing findings from the literature on incubators and CE. We accept that not all findings may hold to empirical scrutiny and that further quantitative studies are needed to validate. However, our study opens up the possibility for researchers to better position there work on CE incubation and provides exciting insights to researchers, educators, incubator staff, or policymakers dealing with the development of specific policies and CE incubator programs. We recognize that the different fields studied are on varying development stages and differ significantly in terms of the evidence basis. Further research needs to be carried out to establish the generalizability of our findings to other incubator settings, the heterogeneity of the incubator configuration, tenants (sector, age, firm size), the different context conditions (geographical, political, socio-cultural) and ecosystems (Autio, Kenney, Mustar, Siegel, & Wright, 2014; Bone, Allen, & Haley, 2017; Welter, 2011).

References
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SECTION 3 - Collaborative spaces in other contexts
Turning public libraries into collaborative spaces: The role of multimodal imaginaries

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Abstract:
Drawing on a study of Danish public libraries, we examine the transformation of the institution of the public library from a knowledge space for information access and learning to a collaborative space for civil creativity and innovation. We identify three imaginaries that enabled this transformation: city, community, and creation. Each imaginary conveyed meaning multimodally, that is, through verbal, visual and material modes of communication. We propose that multimodal imaginaries are effective for transforming pre-existing spaces, even institutionalized ones, into collaborative spaces.

Keywords: collaborative space, imaginary, multimodality, public library, institution
Public libraries as collaborative spaces: Multimodal imaginaries

Library: A building or room containing collections of books, periodicals, and sometimes films and recorded music for use or borrowing by the public or the members of an institution.

Oxford Living Dictionaries, 2018

We call it a "Do-It-Together Library" … as the concept title is an interpretation of the maker movement's original DIY slogan and is inspired by the libraries' focus on collaboration.

DITbib, Køge Libraries, 2016

Introduction

In recent years, scholars and practitioners alike have identified threats to the well-being of the public library as an institution (Smith, 2019) and forecasted its decline with the spread of online information. Historically, libraries have been conceived as spaces for access to scarce knowledge resources, as the opening definition suggests, and appreciated as “a place for public education and social uplift” (Klinenberg, 2018a, p. 32). In recent years they have been striving to become an example of a great good place or a third place “that host[s] the regular, voluntary, informal, and happily anticipated gatherings of individuals beyond the realms of home and work” (Oldenburg, 1989, p. 16). Far from declining, some public libraries are renewing their role as a public institution of openness and an essential social infrastructure of society serving broader civic agendas (Klinenberg, 2018a, 2018b; Wyatt & Leorke, 2018).

This renewed self-understanding is captured in the following depictions of what several Danish public libraries are about. For example, the Aalborg Libraries is “a modern project organization that fosters synergy and co-creation in collaboration with citizens, grassroots movements, and community associations as well as with societal and educational institutions” (Aalborg Bibliotekerne, n.d.). Similarly, the Ørestad Library aims “to provide the neighborhood with a space
Public libraries as collaborative spaces: Multimodal imaginaries

for the creation of identity, life and social existence in cooperation with the citizens living in Ørestad” (Københavns Biblioteker, n.d.). Relatedly, the Køge Libraries represent their core task as “[t]he spread of culture, learning and community” through both inspiration from physically and digitally accessible resources, “[b]ut equally crucial through multifaceted activities with varying degrees of user involvement or partnerships” (Køge Bibliotekerne, n.d.).

Such ambitions reflect a changed emphasis from collection of different knowledge sources to collaboration with users and other partners and a construal of the public library as a collaborative space for civil creativity and innovation, embedded in a specific locality and community. They prompt the question of how public libraries, institutionalized as a knowledge space for information access and learning, can be transformed in such significant ways to become also a collaborative space for civil creativity and innovation? To investigate these questions, we conducted a study of eight libraries in a Model Program for Public Libraries, initiated in Denmark in 2011.

We investigated the transformation of public libraries into collaborative spaces through the analytical lens of imaginaries. According to Castoriadis (1987), “we speak of the ‘imaginary’ when we want to talk about something ‘invented’ – whether it refers to a ‘sheer’ invention … or a slippage, a shift of meaning in which available symbols are invested with other significations” (p. 127). Imaginaries shape the meaning that we attribute to institutions. Accordingly, Castoriadis construes an institution “as a socially sanctioned, symbolic network in which a functional component and an imaginary component are combined in variable proportions and relations” (1987, p. 132). For him, social imaginary significations are “the invisible cement holding together this endless collection of real, rational and symbolic odds and ends that constitute every society” (Castoriadis, 1987, p. 143). Given this understanding of institutions, imaginaries are at play when an institution changes meaning.
Public libraries as collaborative spaces: Multimodal imaginaries

Prior work suggests that the meaning of institutions gets expressed through different modes of communication, notably verbal, visual, and material modes (Höllerer, Daudigeous, & Jancsary, 2017). Each mode has a different way of constructing meaning, which can operate alone or in combination with other modes. Multimodality refers to the simultaneous combination, orchestration, and interplay of multiple modes of communication (Höllerer et al., 2017; Höllerer, van Leeuwen, Jancsary, Meyer, Andersen, & Vaara, 2019). Extant research indicates that the most powerful communicative effects arise when actors use different modes in combination and alignment with one another (Lefsrud, Graves, & Phillips, 2019; Meyer, Jancsary, Höllerer, & Boxenbaum, 2018). Scholars have also identified how the unique properties of different modes facilitate institutionalization (Meyer et al., 2018). These properties make multimodality a relevant aspect for shifting the meaning of institutions. In fact, prior work suggests that multiple modes of communication co-construct the meaning of a place and interact in defining its evolution over time (Jones & Svejenova, 2018; Ravelli & McMurtrie, 2016). Oliveira and colleagues draw on verbal and material modes of communication and conceive of multimodal imaginaries as “broader ways in which ideas about materiality are carried in narratives, descriptions and often implicit theories” (Oliveira, Islam & Toraldo, 2018, p. 29). We combine ideas on the multimodal properties of meaning with the notion of imaginaries (Castoriadis, 1987) to develop further the analytical construct of multimodal imaginaries, which we employed in our data analysis.

We identified three multimodal imaginaries – city, community, and creation – which individually and in combination contribute to the transformation of the institution of the public library from a knowledge space to a collaborative space. We propose these three multimodal imaginaries as potentially generic tools that are at work in transforming pre-existing social meaning of space, even space that is already institutionalized.
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The chapter proceeds as follows. First, we briefly review the empirical setting and method for this study. Second, we present the expression of the three multimodal imaginaries in our data. Third, we discuss the implications of our findings for changing public libraries into collaborative spaces through multimodal imaginaries. The chapter concludes with suggestions for further research on the role of multimodal imaginaries in the making of collaborative spaces and, more broadly, in changing institutionalized meaning.

Empirical Setting and Method

Our empirical study comprises eight public libraries that were part of a program to renew Danish public libraries. This program, entitled Model Program for Public Libraries (MPPL), was established in 2011-2013 with funding from the Danish Agency for Culture and from Realdania, a philanthropic association aimed at “solving challenges in the Danish society in cooperation with the government, the municipalities, foundations, associations, private businesses and local, voluntary enthusiasts” (Realdania, 2019). The program had a budget of 4 million DKK (€ 0.53M.) and a steering group consisting of the director of the Danish Agency for Culture, library managers, and project leaders from Realdania. It also benefitted from the expert involvement of Signal Architects to support its development. It aimed to address the changing role of the public library “[f]rom collection orientation to user orientation and involvement” (Holmggaard Larsen, 2014, p. 3). The main premise of MPPL was a four-spaces model for the public library, developed by researchers at the Royal School of Library and Information Science at the University of Copenhagen. It was originally articulated in an appendix of a 2010 report (Skot-Hansen, Hvenegaard Rasmussem, & Jochumsen, 2010) and more recently publicized in English (Jochumsen, Rasmussen, & Skot-Hansen, 2012; Jochumsen, Skot-Hansen, & Rasmussen, 2017).
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This model conceives of the library’s space as four-fold: a learning space, an experience space, a meeting space and a performative space.

The program aimed “[t]o develop the public library as a central institution that contributes to ensuring Denmark’s position as a highly developed society… [and] … clarify how architecture itself can support the public library as the central meeting place that invites the citizen inside and is open to the citizens’ networking and learning needs” (Holmgaard Larsen, 2014, p. 5). In addition, upon its completion, the program was expected to “be an inspiration for the library building of the future, so that it becomes a local meeting place that supports the users’ need for information seeking and learning as well as the formation of new social and professional networks” (Realdania, 2011). At a later stage, the program’s ideas and exemplar cases were translated into English, organized visually and conceptually, and shared in a publicly accessible website in Danish and English, welcoming and making available international examples in addition to the Danish ones.

We collected archival data on this program in the form of various program documents. Our data set includes diverse secondary sources, such as verbal texts, images, presentations, and press releases from the program, or related to it. Further, we collected additional archival data on eight Danish libraries included in this program: Aalborg main, Aars, Herning, Hjørring, Køge, Randers, as well as Rentemestervej and Ørestad in Copenhagen, all of which were showcased as exemplars in the program. We collected data on these libraries through the program’s website, on the libraries’ own websites as well as in other sources featuring these libraries, to obtain further insight into their developments prior to, during, or since the end of the program. This additional material had the form of strategy documents, layouts, organizational charts, description, and/or announcements of activities, among others. In addition, we collected images of the public libraries,
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articles by and videos with library managers and librarians, whenever available. Our data collection comprised materials in both English and Danish. We translated relevant quotes and concepts from Danish into English for analytical purposes.

We read the texts, viewed the images and videos, and discussed the main themes in them. In particular, we analyzed the following modes of communication: (1) the verbal mode (in verbal text used in libraries’ public representations and/or strategic documents referring to their transformation), and (2) the visual and material modes (in visual representations of ideas and space). We did not investigate the material mode aside from its visual representation, for which reason we keep these two modes analytically together. Based on these themes, a research assistant developed an overview table with notes and quotes on each library, as well as summaries of emerging patterns. We discussed the notes, quotes, and emerging patterns and, in an ongoing process, arrived at the abstract notion of imaginaries through conceptual leaping based on abductive reasoning (Klag & Langley, 2013). We organized and synthesized the insights into the three most prominent multimodal imaginaries that we found were being mobilized to turn the public library into a collaborative space. As multimodal imaginaries bring together an intricate set of verbal, visual, and material manifestations, we developed illustrative vignettes to make each of the three imaginaries come to life and convey their meaning in a comprehensible way.

Below we present our main findings, namely the three multimodal imaginaries involved in transforming the meaning of public libraries into a collaborative space. We introduce each imaginary through its respective vignette and a representative set of photos, which are followed by a depiction of the imaginary’s main manifestations using excerpts from the data. For ease of reference, we refer to the “model program’s website” when the quotation comes from the website
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of the Model Program for Public Libraries (https://modelprogrammer.slks.dk/en/). If it stems from other sources, we specify and reference these sources accordingly.

Multimodal Imaginaries of the Public Library as a Collaborative Space

Our study identified three multimodal imaginaries at work in the transformation of public libraries into collaborative spaces: city, community, and creation. We present each of them in Table 12.1 and highlight their contribution toward the transition to a collaborative space (see Table 12.1 for an overview).

<TABLE 12.1 HERE>

The City Imaginary

Vignette 1: The Rentemestervej Library is an example of the city imaginary for the public library as a collaborative space (see Figures 12.1 and 12.2). Often described as “the icon of the neighborhood” or its “lighthouse”, Rentemestervej library stands out amongst its rather nondescript surroundings, creating a visual and material signpost with its distinctive architecture symbolizing stacked books wrapped up in gold. This golden expression contrasts the raw concrete and the preserved factory building, which the new building contains, just as a city is full of contrasts and in which buildings morph over time. Situated in the urban border area between two neighborhoods with their distinct lifestyles and identities, the library constitutes a bridge of sorts, which connects across
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more or less visible city divides. One enters this “hybrid culture arena” (a first case of integrating a culture house and a library under the same roof in Denmark) through a “main square” that may be seen as an extension of the street into the library, the feeling of street atmosphere enhanced with artwork by HuskMitNavn graffiti artist. The square is surrounded by delimited spaces with designated functions, such as children’s area, youth library, adult library, culture hall citizen service, local TV/radio station, etc., which resembles the functionality of a city with deliberately situated areas to be used for various purposes. Walls and separating lines are blurred by the use of footbridges, offsets, glass, or movable furnishings, creating an impression of a place welcoming to both individual engagement and social interaction.

<FIGURE 12.1 HERE>

<FIGURE 12.2 HERE>

A main imaginary informing the renewed definition of the library as a collaborative space is that of the city. This imaginary had various manifestations in library policies, practices, and spatial arrangements, as well as in written and video accounts, which we reviewed. The city was evoked in three ways: (1) the library in the city, (2) the city in the library, and (3) the library as a city. The library in the city is about the library building and specific location as an essential element of urban development and potential new kind of a city icon, a role previously reserved for churches,
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museums, or corporate architecture. For example, Rentemestervej library has been defined as “an iconic building sculpture” (model program’s website). Aalborg libraries aspire “to be the meeting place in the city” (RLSM Library for Youth, 2014, 6:57) and Hjørring library has the ambition to become the pivotal point of the town (Søndergaard, 2008). The idea of the library as an inviting and welcoming space is also conveyed through olfactory sensations, such as the aroma of freshly brewed coffee and delicious food from the library café, which serves as a transition space between the city and the library (RLSM Library for Youth, 2014).

Regarding the city in the library, at the outset of the model program, the announced ambition was for libraries “to be more accessible to more citizens”, recognizing that “urban planning and architectural frameworks are crucial to the development of a library space that is welcoming, useful and in balance with the surrounding urban space” (Thorhauge, in Realdania, 2011). In that sense, the library offers a useful urban transition. For example, Herning library is “a concourse between public transport facilities and the city, … an interior urban space and an extension of the pedestrian street” (model program’s website).

An example of the library as a city is Aars library. Here the “main idea of the design concept is ‘the town in the library’, which is reflected in the many house constellations and the naming of the zones”, as well as in an area denoted as The Square, signifying “the library’s multifunctional heart where everything can take place” (model program’s website). Herning library has a “raw New York style” that is “dissociated … from the light and bright Nordic library image” in as much as it uses “carefully chosen colours and materials … to create the essence of a trendy, raw New Yorker loft and industry-like, open urban environment” (ibid.).
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This set of imaginaries connect the library to the city and suggests collaboration across a plurality of actors, mirroring the diversity of city inhabitants and ensuring that the library resonates with the city’s urban development and citizens’ engagement.

The Community Imaginary

Vignette 2: The Hjørring public library is an example of the community imaginary (see Figures 12.3 and 12.4). It draws inspiration from Oldenburg’s (1989) ideas about libraries as third places and great good places. The focus on community is apparent immediately from the point of entering the building: a distinctive red ribbon connects the visitors to the library throughout. As a representation of the library’s lifeline, the red ribbon can be considered not only a “red thread” through the changing shape, form and function of the library but also a binding symbol of the local community and its collective identity. It guides visitors through a variety of multi-purpose spaces – not only spaces for reading and working, but also activities such as youth debates about the importance of democracy, a variety of workshops, children’s reading club, or a knitting club for the elderly. These spaces and their functions are not clearly determined. Multifunctional portable furniture and blurred walls allow for diverse ways of community involvement and collective expression.

<FIGURE 12.3 HERE>
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The second prominent imaginary evoked in defining the library as a collaborative space pertains to its meaning for, and role in, the local community. Community as a multimodal imaginary took shape through signifying (1) connections, (2) active citizenship, and (3) care and cohesion. In terms of connections, the Køge libraries count with a material evocation of community, such as their “Communal Table [that] could contribute to creating and supporting a variety of valuable encounters” (model program’s website). The adjective “communal” in the label is suggestive of its collective and connecting function, where participation and sharing are expected to take place among members of a group or community. The Hjørring library conveys a meaning of connections both visually and materially through its distinctive red ribbon symbol. It serves as a welcoming symbol, which “ties” visitors in to the library and guides them through its different areas, changing form as it passes through tables, seats, and shelves to serve different purposes, such as displays, guidance, and decoration (model program’s website); “sometimes it just grows into the air and is art”, at other times it gets anchored at librarian service points (Søndergaard, 2008).

In terms of active citizenship, libraries seek to engage citizens in active debate and in the cultivation of collective initiatives for the benefit of the community. For example, Aalborg libraries appeal directly to citizens who “have a cause, a start-up initiative, want to cultivate communities of interest, or who want to perform on our open stage” (Aalborg Bibliotekerne, n.d.). Køge libraries seek to “strengthen the democratic space – where the local library develops the role of arena for public debate and power, democratic formation and local communities” (Køge Bibliotekerne, n.d.).
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Lastly, new concepts are being introduced to promote care and cohesion for the members of the community. For example, Aalborg libraries’ “culture vitamins” are aimed at individuals with anxiety or depression, or suffering from loneliness. Another aspect of care for the community is conveyed through library visions aimed at developing a community identity, as in the case of Ørestad library, which seeks “to provide the neighbourhood with a space for the creation of identity, life and social existence in cooperation with the citizens living in Ørestad” (Københavns Biblioteker, n.d.). Similarly, Rentemestervej library is expected “to contribute to creating cohesion and identity in the city neighbourhood” (model program’s website).

This set of imaginaries connect the library to the community and involve engagement with its diverse collectivities and their distinctive needs. They also imply collaboration with the community itself, as well as with designers and artists, to put forward verbal, visual, and material signs of both respected diversities and cohesion, which are conducive to the sustenance of a collective identity.

The Creation Imaginary

Vignette 3: The Aalborg main library is an example of the creation imaginary of public libraries as a collaborative space (see Figures 12.5 and 12.6). One cannot help but notice the abundance of playful concepts for the library’s different spaces, reminiscent of small workshops and playgrounds, surrounding the “main square” that represents the heart of the collection. For example, The Oasis, The Laboratory, The Pulse, The Cave, etc. are spaces that carry names reflecting their unique purpose, function and atmosphere whereas furnishings, selection of reading
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material and decorations abide by the overall concept of the space. The objective is to inspire and engage visitors in creation of various kinds and forms. For example, visitors are encouraged to play creative games from their childhood and to pin their debate-provoking ideas on a tree installation, both of which invite the visitor to get involved and to add their own presence and imprint to the space, hence creating the library. Visitors are also encouraged to join different clubs offered by the library, such as homework café, IT café, reading and music clubs, or a knitting club that “knits generations together”. Ongoing dialogue and questioning about the purpose of the library bring in new concepts and constantly recreate its space and activities.

<FIGURE 12.5 HERE>

<FIGURE 12.6 HERE>

The third prominent imaginary evoked in relation to libraries as collaborative spaces is that of creation, which has three manifestations: (1) space, (2) activity, and (3) concept creation. The space creation refers to an ongoing effort to define inspiring spaces as well as to articulate new areas for the library or to give new meaning to existing areas not for, but with, users. For example, in Rentemestervej library in Copenhagen, “[t]he space invites people to be creative, act and make decisions.” Already at the model program’s announcement there was an emphasis that “[t]he physical space must be conceived and designed as a flexible space that can be easily adapted and
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changed as new desires and needs arise” (Thorhauge, in Realdania, 2011). An overall imaginary runs through the different visions for projects of public libraries’ renewal, namely the libraries’ openness to various users. For example, the Ørestad Library in Copenhagen works with a 24-hour rhythm: it changes systematically “from being a school library in the morning to being a public library in the afternoon and a community centre in the evening. The means used to change the library's identity are visual and material presentations, for instance, on the many screens, the setup of furniture and a simple layout, as well as the type of activities that take place at the library. It is also possible to work with lighting, colours and other visual effects” (model program’s website).

The activity creation refers to a maintenance of a busy agenda for the library, with diverse offerings provided on a daily basis. These activities may involve collective attendance (e.g., talks), interaction (e.g., manga clubs), or individual participation; they may be related to, or go beyond, literature and the library collections, and can involve direct and/or online involvement. For example, in Aalborg main library, visitors encounter activities that invite them to share a point of view (e.g., to post their opinion about a debate-provoking question on a tree) or to engage manually with materials and resources.

The concept creation involves development of playful labels to denote different spatial areas or activities. A number of these labels are associated with not only language of art, technology and innovation, but also nature and relaxation. For example, Herning library displays inspiration islands that showcase materials to trigger visitors’ curiosity. Aalborg main library have zones, such as Oasis, Stage, Laboratory, and Imaginarium, the latter being “designed for free play” (model program’s website). In Aalborg main library one can also encounter a concept labelled #ordunivers (#worduniverse), which “aim is to create a creative word- and writing universe where young people encounter current Danish literature, work multimodally with text production and share
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process and product on social media” (Aalborg Bibliotekerne, n.d.). This initiative engages with five high schools as partners in the project. Another example is the DITbib concept used by Køge libraries, mentioned briefly at the chapter’s opening:

“We call the concept of a Do-It-Together Library (DITbib) … it has always been the ambition of the project to create an umbrella concept that … can be used for the dissemination of other collaborative projects in library management. In this way, the concept can be used for collaborative projects within several art forms. … The concept should be seen as inspiration for the further work on new target types and support for cultural creation.” (DITbib, 2016, p. 5)

Collaboration in creation can take the form of bringing together diverse public, private, and civil society organizations, citizens, and corporations, as well as artists and volunteers, and engaging them as partners in redefining spaces, concepts, and activities.

Changing Public Libraries into Collaborative Spaces through Multimodal Imaginaries

The study drew inspiration from Castoriadis (1987) and used the notion of multimodal imaginaries to examine how an institution known for knowledge and learning is redefined as collaborative space for a variety of activities. In particular, we identified three main imaginaries – city, community, and creation – that each played a role in this redefinition. In the case of the city imaginary, the meaning of the public library was adapted to understandings of what makes a modern city. As Klinenberg (2018a) noted, the openness and diversity one can experience in public libraries was once characteristic of city life and urban culture. This new meaning entailed an
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alignment of the library with urban renewal initiatives and strategic city planning to give strength, support and empowerment to certain areas, and/or constitute a visual and material marker for them through iconic library buildings. In addition, the city imaginary entailed a reproduction of some aspects of city organization within the library, using city notions to designate and shape main areas for public use, such as internal library squares, pathways, streets, bridges, and activities that take place there, including debates, performances, or simply sitting and watching. Evoking the library as modern city brings to life ideals of active citizen participation, civil engagement and activism. At the concrete organizational level, collaborations involve city planners, public administrators, architectural firms. At the individual level, collaborators are more likely to be groups, such as local residents, new immigrants, and even tourists passing by.

The community imaginary is instilling the notion of public library with a sense of belonging. Libraries evoke geographical notions of community in the sense of connecting people living in the neighborhood, including bringing a mobile version of the library to the homes of citizens who cannot visit the physical building. In addition, libraries stimulate interest-driven notions of community when they connect people with similar passions to one another. Here collaboration pertains to different community groups, such as youth invited to not only suggest but also express concretely what the space could look like and be used for. Various clubs have created other ways of expressing community spirit, such as using a shared passion or interest as a driving force for coming together and engaging in ongoing interactions. These two ways of evoking the imaginary of community allude to Tönnies’ (2003) community based on locality and on common interest.

The creation imaginary has moved the public library in rather novel directions. Traditionally concerned with the quality and content of its collections, the public library was a source of knowledge to enlighten, or, at best, entertain, its clientele. In recent years, the public library has
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come to experiment with novel concepts and different forms of spatial and activity-driven expression. These new concepts, spaces and activities require co-construction of meaning, which has opened the library to various collaborators as well as to organizational contributions from volunteers. This creation imaginary could be understood as do-it-together, reflecting the opening quote on the DITbib concept, or as co-creating ideas, spaces, and activities. Alternatively, it could involve shaping up a “makers’ culture”, in which users make and do in the library (e.g., knit, draw, play) to complement, expand, and update the customary reading and search culture. Lastly, it may be conceived in more entrepreneurial and activist terms, in which the library space is a place for growing new start-up ideas or mobilizing activism for different causes. For Castoriadis (1987), creativity is closely connected to processes of institutionalization and deinstitutionalization; the creation imaginary has transformed the library into a laboratory.

Conclusion

Our study has limitations that offer opportunities for further research. First, it was based on secondary data. Whereas the data allowed us to unravel and articulate city, community, and creation as multimodal imaginaries, it did not enable us to distinguish the visual mode from the material mode. Both modes are currently subsumed under the same analytical category because our data sources make the material accessible through the visual mode. Second, we studied the three multimodal imaginaries separately. They appear to sustain each other, but we did not investigate their interactions. Further research is needed on the combination of different imaginaries. Third, we focused on the communication of the library as a collaborative space and not on whether it delivers its aspirations for and promise of collaboration. Based on the literature, we anticipate a collaborative space to deliver on expectations if it successfully aligns different
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modes to evoke an imaginary. For instance, verbal claims may be visually supported and materially sustained to allow for an embodied experience. Further research is needed to empirically investigate if, and when, these findings apply more broadly.

On a conceptual level, we inquired into the meaning of an established institution. In our case, public libraries are being transformed from a place for knowledge and learning into a collaborative space. We leave open how far existing understandings of an institution can be expanded or stretched before the institution changes into an entirely different one. For public libraries, this challenge is important in as much as the library institution may be threatened if it does not evolve, just as it may disappear if it merges with another institution. The challenge lies in using multimodal imaginaries to alter the meaning of an established institution, yet no more so than what is required to maintain its continued societal relevance.

In addition to opportunities for further research, the changing meaning of the public library into a collaborative space presents some organizational and professional challenges. The specific imaginaries bring diverse collaborators and interests in play. Libraries require skills to orchestrate these relations into meaningful collaborations. In managing these collaborations, libraries rely increasingly on initiation and management of projects, which require a different set of skills than does running a collection. In addition, constant redefinition of space, activities, and concepts requires energy and flexibility to notice new needs and opportunities, and the ability to mobilize action on them through voluntary contributions. The expansive meaning of community and the welcoming of diverse audiences from local citizens through immigrants to tourists demand sensitivity to different needs and ways of connecting with the library. From this vantage point, social skills and abilities to deal with vulnerable collectivities become essential to ensure community-relevant collaborations. In this context, the role of librarians needs to evolve from
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information and knowledge competence to creative, social, and collaborative skills, including an increased understanding of the possibilities for multimodal communication. Librarians need to develop the skills to use these possibilities in order to cope effectively with the ever-evolving role of the public library in society.

As libraries continue to adapt to new conditions, they need to reconsider their role(s) in society. The conception and materialization of new imaginaries that turn public libraries into collaborative spaces represents one essential way of adapting the meaning of the institution to contemporary society. We identified the communicative potential of different multimodal imaginaries that may help them do so. The interaction of, and alignment across, multimodal imaginaries may enable the success and sustainability of the renewal in meaning of public libraries. These multimodal imaginaries may also further contribute to institutionalizing the idea of the public library as a collaborative space for civil creativity and innovation.

This chapter focused on public libraries as collaborative spaces, yet our findings have potentially broader implications for the role of multimodal imaginaries in changing taken-for-granted meaning in other institutionalized settings, not least other contexts that are evolving into collaborative spaces, such as corporate offices, collective workspaces, innovation hubs, and universities. For example, Austrian Erste Group completed its Erste Campus in Vienna in 2015 not only as an open office space, but also as a meeting place in the city (Sutherland, Soule, Leixnering, & Höllerer, 2020). It welcomed the neighborhood into its open layout, which is rather unconventional and in stark contrast to the traditional closed and hermetic buildings of banking institutions. It features a variety of restaurants and cafés, an auditorium, as well as Financial Life Park (FLiP for short), a novel financial educational facility with exhibition areas, interactive games, library, and activities. Research could possibly shed light on this and other similar transformations of traditional
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institutions into collaborative spaces by exploring the city, community, and creation imaginaries, or by unravelling other pertinent imaginaries.

In conclusion, as organizational scholars continue striving to comprehend the turning of traditional institutions into collaborative spaces, further research on the kinds and roles of multimodal imaginaries could open up new paths and contribute new understandings at the intersection of multimodality, meaning, and institutional change (see Höllerer et al., 2017 for a review of this thriving area of research). It could also help make visible the efforts in sustaining taken-for-granted and, hence, invisible social infrastructures, such as public libraries, that are essential for supporting civil creativity and, overall, democratic societies.

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References


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Explaining path dependence in boundary work for internal and external innovation. The role of corporate collaborative spaces

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Abstract
This study is concerned with a recent phenomenon by which organizations set up collaborative spaces within their premises to create boundaryless spaces that promise to increase companies’ innovation abilities. We conducted a qualitative study in a traditional multi-divisional organization that created a collaborative space in its headquarters following the design-thinking methodology. We studied the impact of the collaborative space on employees’ ability to perform boundary work inside and outside the organization by comparing their goals about the collaborative space with actual implementation experiences. Findings show that corporate collaborative spaces promise revolutionary effects on how employees collaborate across organizational functions and with external stakeholders by tearing down internal and external boundaries and allowing for free knowledge exchanges. However, when it comes down to implementation, individuals distinguish between internal and external innovation projects based on their previous experiences and interpretations about boundary, generating this way path dependence in both external and internal innovation projects. Although the actual space experiences may be in line with the initial expectations, path dependencies generate unexpected constraints in how a space is used, generating a trade-off between internal and external boundary work. We discuss implications for how organizations may design feasible corporate collaborative spaces to avoid path dependence and unexpected constraints.
Introduction

Following the approach of open innovation (Chesbrough, Vanhaverbeke, & West, 2006) aiming at the systematic hybridization of internal R&D resources with external resources, companies have recently opened up their boundaries to external partners (e.g., customers, suppliers, research centers, universities, local community) who may provide complementary resources in joint innovation projects. At the same time, consistent with the evidence provided by studies on contextual and social determinants of creativity (Perry-Smith & Shalley, 2003; Shalley & Gilson, 2004), many companies are promoting inter-functional projects and innovation teams. Thus they have re-designed some of their internal workspaces to foster collaboration, personal interactions, spontaneous socialization and, thus, divergent thinking and creativity (Jakonen, Kivinen, Salovaara, & Hirkman, 2017; Leclercq-Vandelannoitte & Isaac, 2016; Waber, Magnolfi, & Lindsay, 2014). As a result, companies have started to embrace collaborative spaces and practices with the dual function of promoting internal innovation with internal employees (e.g., R&D and other company departments) and external innovation with a diversity of external stakeholders such as entrepreneurs, freelancers, prosumers, or the civil society at large (Spreitzer, Bacevice, & Garrett, 2015). The aim, usually taken for granted, is that these spaces will make both internal and external boundaries more blurred and consequently more easily to tear down, obtaining a positive effect on the organization’s innovation capabilities. However, there has been little research on corporate collaborative spaces and boundary work, and even less is known about the role of such spaces for tearing down internal and external organizational boundaries. The aim of our study is to explore these research questions by focusing on the use of collaborative spaces for internal and external innovation at the organizational level.
In this research, we argue that innovation projects that aim at spanning internal and external boundaries may come with a price that has been little considered so far in the literature. In particular, the new organizational practice promising to tear down internal and external boundaries simultaneously could also generate the unexpected consequence of path dependence in internal and external innovation projects, respectively. Given that boundaryless spaces are set up within bounded organizations, employees may find themselves managing increased heterogeneity in innovation projects such as dealing simultaneously with the contrasting collaboration goals, interests and backgrounds of colleagues from other functions and of their customers and suppliers. On the one hand, this may provide new work experiences helpful for tearing down collaboration boundaries and increase creativity in innovation projects. On the other hand, it may also generate a set of defensive strategies aimed at maintaining power and identity at the organizational level (Santos & Eisenhardt, 2005). Specifically, because boundary breaching does not come without costs as it requires a large amount of efforts and taxes attention and relational resources (Ungureanu & Bertolotti, 2018), it may negatively affect employees’ perceived ability to manage the ensuing complexity. The paradoxical consequence could be that a practice developed to tear down boundaries could make them re-emerge. Consequently, the benefits of corporate collaborative spaces could be different from what originally imagined.

We investigate our research questions through an exploratory study conducted in a multinational company operating in the food industry, which has recently created a collaborative space inside its premises with the purpose of promoting innovation projects with internal and external stakeholders. The case reported in this chapter is one of the first examples of such space in Italy, inspired by a design-thinking approach. The implications of our study discuss how and why existing and new boundaries may re-emerge as organizations try to tear them down by creating
boundaryless collaborative spaces. We highlight the role of emergent constraints in terms of attention and relational efforts that boundaryless spaces trigger within bounded organizations.

**Theoretical framework**

*The rise of collaborative spaces*

In the past few decades, we have witnessed an increased scholarly and managerial attention to how spatial and material realities can affect how organizations operate and trigger changes in employees’ behaviors (Clegg & Kornberger, 2006). Whereas the first studies on organizational space focused on how the physical characteristics of the space where people ordinarily work affect behaviors (e.g., Davis, Leach, & Clegg, 2011; De Croon, Sluiter, Kuijer, & Frings-Dresen, 2005; Oldham & Rotchford, 1983), a more recent scholarly conversation has started to focus on the phenomenon of collaborative spaces (coworking, incubation spaces, social innovation centers, fab labs, cultural centers, technology parks, etc.). In the digital organization era, collaborative spaces respond to the needs for new organizational knowledge practices, increasing flexibility, and faster responses in the environment. It is interesting to notice that these spaces have been often referred to as “third places”. Accordingly, the collaborative space allows workers to experience and reproduce organizational practices even if they are not part of an organization (Cnossen & Bencherki, 2019).

Till now, potential benefits of collaborative spaces have been mainly targeted to knowledge workers, gig workers and micro start-ups. For knowledge workers and gig workers these spaces may be an affordable workspace which may offer visibility (Merkel, 2019), legitimacy and a sense of community (Garrett, Spreitzer, & Bacevice, 2017), thus contributing to avoiding the risks of isolation and job insecurity as well as to building a professional identity (Petriglieri & Obodaru,
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2018). Similarly, collaborative spaces may satisfy the need for efficiency of start-ups and their desire to join a network of professional relationships which might sustain and accelerate their business ideas (Capdevila, 2015; Spinuzzi, 2012). The systematic hybridization between the internal competences and the external heterogeneous competencies provided by the different actors who work in the collaborative space may sustain creativity, contributing to reducing inertia and avoiding the mere replication of past solutions (Gavetti & Levinthal, 2000).

Organizational workplaces as “third places”. The boundary-paradox

It is noteworthy that recently collaborative spaces have also started to inspire companies to design more open internal workspaces with physical characteristics (e.g., architecture, layout) and functioning logics that recall “third places” (e.g., flexible use of space and time; calls for ideas or innovation projects). Accordingly, extant research on collaborative spaces, distinguish between external, commercial coworking spaces (Bouncken, Clauss, & Reuschl, 2016) and internal, corporate collaborative spaces, i.e., collaborative spaces within large corporations such as internal (open) coworking spaces, corporate fab labs or corporate hybrid spaces (de Vaujany, Dandoy, Grandazzi, & Faure, 2019; Leclercq-Vandelannoitte & Isaac, 2016). However, to the best of our knowledge, extant studies have focused mainly on external collaborative spaces and the few empirical evidence on corporate collaborative spaces is mainly explorative. Nevertheless, extant literature recognize that the use and the practices that construct these spaces can be very different (Bouncken, Laudien, Fredrich, & Görmär, 2018; Jakonen et al., 2017). Thus, for instance, organizations may adopt the model of the collaborative space to communicate aspects such as openness to external stakeholders (e.g., customers, supplier, local community), social responsibility and non-territoriality with respect to internal conflicts between organizational
functions (e.g., R&D, marketing, and finance) (Elsbach, 2003; Elsbach & Pratt, 2007; Leonard, 2013). Given the importance for organizations of managing their internal and external boundaries, we argue that such new trend entails an unexplored paradox interesting to study.

On the one hand, setting up collaborative spaces inside organizations aims at breaking down different types of boundaries, for instance those between different organizational functions to stimulate the exchange of knowledge and co-creation, by making hierarchies flat, team collaborations more spontaneous, and individuals more willing to participate in team work (e.g., Capdevila, 2013; Colleoni & Arvidsson, 2014; Furnari, 2014; Gandini, 2015). On the other hand, such aspirations may often be at odds with the very nature of organizations. According to Santos & Eisenhardt (2005), boundaries reflect the very essence of the organization, the demarcation line between an organization and its environment, and the nature of boundaries can explain the success or failure of an organization. Boundaries necessarily relate to what is inside and outside the organization. The demarcation strategy chosen by each organization allow for efficiency, power, competence, and identity claims (Comeau-Vallée & Langley, 2019; Langley et al; 2019; Santos & Eisenhardt, 2005). To refer to this paradox, we refer to the concept of “boundary work”.

The general definition of “boundary work” refers to any effort to create, maintain, shape or shift boundaries affecting groups, occupations or organizations (Ashforth, Kreiner, & Fugate, 2000; Gieryn, 1983; Helfen, 2015; Lamont & Molnár, 2002). It is noteworthy that boundary work may be both about breaching and defending boundaries. The studies of Comeau-Vallée and Langley (2019), Quick and Feldman (2014), Meier (2015), Kellogg (2009), and Ungureanu and Bertolotti, (2018) highlight the possible coexistence of these opposite forms of boundary work within the same context: Professional groups can create, maintain or reconsider interprofessional and
occupational distinctions in order to build new, more balanced social orders, oscillating between collaborative and defensive attitudes, and using available tools for such purposes.

The questions that rise are thus related to how organizations reconcile their need for internal-external demarcation and the attempts to create boundaryless spaces within their premises. Particularly, we are interested in understanding how a collaborative space may help an organization manage internal and external boundaries, and whether they actually reach the purposes for which they were set up, considering their goals to become more innovative, on the one hand, and the need to maintain distinctiveness (i.e., efficiency, power, competence and identity claims), on the other hand.

**Context and method**

*Context: Larnia Group’s Design-Thinking Collaborative Space*

We conducted our case study in the headquarters of an industrial group that we fictitiously name Larnia, a leader in different segments of the food market. The Group excels in production and distribution strategies and invests in continuous product and process innovation. In the last years, Larnia has also started to embrace the paradigm of open innovation by building a collaborative space in the headquarters. The purpose of the collaborative space (from now onwards, CS) was to foster innovative cross-functional and multi-stakeholder projects guided by the design thinking approach. The CS was created following a “smart urban” style. It occupies a former factory building that was owned and operated by the Group. It is an open space, with minimalist design furnishings, often created with recycled materials. The space is available to all employees of the company, and also welcomes outsiders (e.g., customers, business partners, consumers, masters’ students, and researchers) who are invited to the design thinking sessions by the organizers of each
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session. Each group is called upon to solve a need or to optimize a product, or a process, within projects that last for different periods of time, from several weeks to more than a year. The space is managed by employees from Larnia’s R&D department.

Research design, data collection and analysis: a grounded theory approach

We conducted a field study in Larnia and adopted a grounded theory research approach that entails iterations between data collection, data analysis and theorizing (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). We conducted 30 semi-structured interviews. The semi-structured interviews were conducted face-to-face and have an average duration of one hour. The interviews were organized around a set of open-ended questions following an interview protocol on the management and use of the CS and the issues arising from its design and use. According to the grounded theory approach, the protocol was continually adjusted and changed during interviews, as to leave the interviewee free in providing us opinions and interpretations. Simple open question included: “Describe the CS”, “Why and when do you enjoy the CS”, “Describe a project in which you participated in the CS”, “Describe the use you have made or made of CS”.

Moreover, 23 interviewees were internal to the organization (coming from 7 different functional areas) and 7 interviewees were external to the organization, including actors from other organizations like external consultants and masters’ students. All interviews were fully recorded and transcribed. We obtained more than 1000 pages of field notes that were used to elaborate the grounded model.

The data were analyzed following the grounded theory methodology and three phases of recurrent coding: open, axial, and selective (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). We used the Nvivo software to perform all the stages of coding. During open coding, we focused on the CS itself (features, design)
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and on the interpretations and uses that informants made of the CS. As we progressed through coding, it became obvious that boundaries were a recurrent theme in the data so we started refining our coding scheme to capture as many distinctions as possible regarding the ways in which informants talked about space and boundaries (e.g., how work boundaries were moved, overcome or created in the exchange between users of the CS). It also emerged that informants often made distinctions between internal and external use of the CS, so we started thinking about internal and external boundary work, after going from data to theory and back, we came up with the three aggregate categories (described below) further refined our grounded model.

Findings

The model that derives from the data analysis (Figure 13.1) identifies three dimensions that concur in explaining the use of the CS for boundary work within Larnia: 1) collaborative space goals 2) implementation of collaborative space goals 3) experienced boundary work during implementation, as follows.

<FIGURE 13.1 HERE>

Collaborative space goals

To meet the innovation needs highlighted by the corporate strategy, Larnia decided to create a space in line with the open innovation paradigm, encouraging the search for innovation beyond organizational boundaries, and at the same time by promoting inter-functional projects with a high degree of diversity which aimed at fully exploiting the know-how and internal company skills. The CS therefore sets itself clear and defined objectives: to foster the generation of innovative ideas
through the free exchange of knowledge between people with highly diverse backgrounds and to promote creativity inside and outside the organization.

The informants explained to us that Larnia designed the collaborative space as a laboratory for innovation guided by the design thinking approach, a human-centered approach to innovation that draws from the designer's toolkit to iteratively connect the needs of different stakeholders such as customers, consumers, business partners, with the possibilities of technology, and the requirements for business success (see Brown, 2008). According to the design thinking paradigm, the sessions are organized in such ways that individuals with different backgrounds and/or cultures take part and feel engaged and fully motivated to bring a personal contribution, taking advantage of the enthusiasm that co-generation of ideas and contamination brings along (Brown, 2008).

During the data analysis, we found that all informants ideally referred to the CS as a laboratory in which it was possible to experiment new forms of aggregation and collaboration on inter-functional projects. According to the informants, the space as a laboratory had to be adaptive and located in a central location of the company for easy access. Additionally, it needed to be informal and equipped with tools to generate easy-to-use artifacts and prototypes that could further encourage idea co-generation between people with very different skills and backgrounds. Physical features such as open spaces, bright colors, modular design and informal workstations were expected to stimulate and favor free knowledge exchanges inside and outside the organization by tearing down organizational functions and hierarchies. Also, by adopting the design thinking approach, Larnia aimed at promoting creativity inside and outside the organization by encouraging co-creation and joint decision making inside the CS.
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The goal of collaborative space on internal-external boundary work was therefore to help users break down barriers (in terms of goals, hierarchy or skills) and modify their work boundaries, in order to use a new approach to innovation based on co-creation:

“One has to come here with his skills […] and not asserting his authority with his own competence compared to what others are telling you. […] A free and informal space can facilitate both relations with colleagues from other departments and collaborations with people from outside the organization.” (Informant 3, internal)

Implementation of collaborative space goals

We found that despite the goal of using the CS as a laboratory for simultaneous internal and external innovation, Larnia’s CS generally hosted two different types of innovation sessions with different approaches: sessions for incremental innovations that featured internal collaborations between organization departments and sessions for radical innovations that featured collaborations between internal organizational departments and external stakeholders.

The design-thinking sessions for incremental innovation with internal collaborations between organization departments were often organized by members of the R&D department who invited members of other organizational departments such as Marketing, Quality, Sales, and HR to participate in design thinking sessions organized for a well-defined project. The purpose of the design thinking sessions was often to generate innovative ideas about how to improve existing products or solve pre-existing problems to make product development and product-to-market processes more efficient. All sessions organized aimed at generating exchange and contamination
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of contents coming from different organizational areas, and at sharing different approaches and best practices for carrying out work activities.

“I must say that it was very useful to explore the most important issues and misunderstandings that occur when different business areas interact, not so much to solve the problem but to bring out what was going on and what was wrong with the interactions in a process flow. […] It all happened with people inside Larnia and an external coach (Design Thinking coach) […] we had very different business backgrounds” (Informant 1, internal)

Sessions for radical innovation are organized as collaborations between internal organizational departments and external stakeholders. These were typically composed of employees from internal departments – e.g., R&D, Marketing – who often launched the challenge and invited to the team external stakeholders such as retail clients, consumers, students, suppliers and other stakeholders from the public arena as well, for instance bloggers and journalists. The goal was to develop new idea for new products development. Our informants from Larnia often referred to this type of collaboration as “embedded”, as shown in the following excerpt:

“[…] at the time I was in charge of the 3D Printing project and I worked on a first project, we did a first embedded in Italy made by four master’s students […] they were the outsiders, plus five people from Larnia. […] The goal was not to develop a product but a new Business Model, so understanding how to make money from this innovation.” (Informant 2, internal)
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Experienced boundary work during implementation

Experiences about boundary work in the collaborative space refer to the way people actually used the CS to shape and shift their work boundaries, both internally and externally. In particular, we found that the collaborative space afforded similar positive experiences (i.e., affordances) when used internally and externally, and different negative experiences (i.e., constraints) for internal and external innovation projects. Importantly, we show that the different goals that Larnia mobilized with respect to internal and external innovation (incremental and radical innovation approach, respectively), even if implemented in the same space, required different work method. Therefore, they mobilized users’ attention and resources differently, such that path dependence was created – i.e., innovation problems were constrained by users’ subjective interpretations into pre-existing schemes available to the organization, shaping how internal and external collaborations were implemented, and generating a trade-off between the two.

Free knowledge exchanges internally and externally

Users declared that their experiences with the CS were coherent with their expectations about the CS. The analysis of the interviews suggests that through its affordances in terms of being boundaryless, artifact-based, and accessible, the CS promoted free knowledge exchanges between different business functions which informants deemed important and difficult to experience elsewhere. For instance, many informants referred to the furnishings of the space for the most part modular and mobile, so that users involved can change the space according to emergent needs at each session of use. Being able to change the space according to one’s needs takes into account the individual needs for control of the work area and on the knowledge exchanges that occur inside of it (Dul, Ceylan, & Jaspers, 2011; Elsbach & Pratt, 2007). The space also consisted of a large
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kitchen where it was possible to cook, experiment new ideas, create prototypes or just sit with other session participants over coffee. A large monitor connected to a computer system was also available for content sharing in the standing area of the kitchen. Informants often referred to this set up as facilitating informal knowledge exchanges and tearing down boundaries in the organizational hierarchy, across departments and when meeting with external stakeholders such as clients, customers, or consultants:

“Very, very satisfying, but why? Because [...] it was nice to have different people around the kitchen table, some of the Quality or other folks who are absolutely not in my world, to reflect for three months on this channel here, right? We took time every week for three hours, to reflect, that is to just close all the rest and say – well now I concentrate on this thing here.”

(Informant 3, internal)

The same aspects were mentioned when we asked informants about external boundary work. For instance, thanks to the design thinking sessions in the CS, knowledge exchanges for radical innovation in collaboration with external stakeholders seemed more fluid, intense and dynamic than in other more traditional contexts. Widening the boundaries of the space to outsiders meant changing the organizational boundaries and therefore achieving a higher degree of cross-fertilization, which informants argued it was beneficial in terms of innovative and creative ideas.

Higher outcome quality & perceived creativity internally and externally

Informants often mentioned the physical features of the CS such as furniture, plants, windows position, quality of light, sounds and colors which they associated to creativity, more productive knowledge exchanges and innovation. For instance, sofas, armchairs and chairs, and small tables
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were easy to transport and adapt depending on the space that users intended to create to facilitate brainstorming activities either about radically new product features (external projects) or about improved product features (internal projects). In addition, the space offers many useful objects for constructing artifacts and prototypes (e.g., post-it, Lego blocks, pens, colored pencils, sheets, glue, scissors, string) necessary during the design thinking sessions, but made available to any user at any time. Referring to these aspects, our informants declared that they perceived themselves and other colleagues as more creative, and also the outcome of the projects in the CS was defined as more creative and innovative.

“[output] Let's say that it was very satisfying from the creative point of view. Some things were totally inapplicable from the point of view of reality due to cost or other reasons, but good ideas came out.” (Informant 7, internal)

Creative outcomes were also mentioned when informants discussed external boundary work. Bringing outsiders into the company provided solutions that were deemed “out of the box” and thus more “original, fun and creative”.

Increased cohesion towards a common goal internally and higher reactiveness externally

Living in the collaborative space and participating in design thinking sessions increased users’ perception of cohesion both internally and externally. Internally, informants reported feeling closer to those people inside the organization with whom they worked in the CS, and abler to set differences apart in order to focus on the company’s needs, instead of the needs of their organizational departments. Externally, not only introducing external stakeholders into the company makes the research for customer needs more effective and the response to the needs of
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the suppliers targeted and efficient, but it also involves important improvements in terms of speed of response to these needs. Informants often reported that having external actors within the space allowed them to identify external needs more promptly and therefore to improve their response time to market. For instance, the more they collaborated with external stakeholders in the CS, the abler they were to overcome differences in goals and mindsets and the more important the definition and achievement of a common goal became for all of them:

“[…] Embedded with customers are interesting because also for the customer this is a different space, so surely you win over the fact that it is different, in the sense all the people who come here to see it are affected because there is a choice, a break-with-the-past choice.” (Informant 5, manager of collaborative space)

However, it is interesting to notice that although users identified similar affordances of the CS for internal and external collaboration, they continued to distinguish between incremental projects conducted internally and radical projects conducted with the help of external stakeholders.

Emergent constraints in internal boundary work

In addition to affordances for both internal and external boundary work, our evidence highlights also emergent constraints. Because each type of boundary work (i.e., incremental and radical innovation) was more effortful than initially expected, and required more resources, they became path dependent, i.e., individuals felt constrained by previous goals and experiences to treat the two separately. Consequently, informants experienced a trade-off between the ability to focus on internal boundary work and the ability to perform external boundary work.
Collaborative space as specialized laboratory

During interviews, informants often talked about the CS as if it were a specialized space that applied exclusively the design thinking method. For this reason, they often perceived the space as an overly specialized laboratory to which they were invited whenever design thinking sessions were organized. For instance, informants highlighted that the space was not inhabited by the employees according to their spontaneous needs and impulses for creativity, but rather driven by the fixed agenda of the R&D department. For this reason, many of them reported they felt put down about participating in projects that they “didn’t really feel as their own”, where participation was “not really open and spontaneous” or which outcomes were “not fully understandable from the beginning”.

Collaborative space as controlled area

Although it was designed as a free space for anyone in the company, the CS was systematically perceived as belonging to the R&D area. As informants explained, this was because employees from the R&D department had set up the space in an area that previously belonged to their department and were actively managing the site and all the activities organized there. Another reason why the CS was stably associated to the R&D department was the fact that most design thinking sessions were centered around incremental projects (e.g., product improvement topics), which were seen as “R&D people’s thing”. As a consequence, not only did people outside R&D perceive the collaborative space as owned by R&D, but also people working in R&D identified the space as theirs and instrumental to achieving their work objectives. These dynamics further strengthened the identity of the space like a silo and not as an active and integral part of the organization:
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“At the end of the workshop we asked them (Facility management department) to let us use it a little more, and after a while, we had colonized the space on a permanent basis […] We wanted this to become a space for the whole organization but I know people think it’s our toy, they often come in and say, we went to the R&D people’s area.” (Informant 6, R&D, internal)

Collaborative Space as chaotic area

Finally, space is experienced by internal employees as always moving and constantly transforming, and consequently also deemed chaotic and noisy. For instance, the space does not seem to adapt to the need for systematic collaboration, structured communication or individual task concentration, thus reinforcing the idea that the space was set up for group projects and workshops that required less systematic collaboration for instance collaboration projects with external stakeholders aiming at radical innovation.

Emergent constraints in external boundary work

Concerning external organizational boundary work, informants complained that external boundary work turned out to be much more complex than expected and, thus, also much more effortful.

Collaborative space as black box

As already seen for the internal boundary work, the CS was defined as a black box when it came to interact with external stakeholders for radical innovation projects. In particular, there was little visibility about which external stakeholders entered the CS, when and why. This was also caused by the fact that external stakeholders were always invited by internal employees to enter the CS,
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and it never happened that a project challenge was launched by external stakeholders, as it never happened that external stakeholders substituted internal employees in creating the project team. As a consequence, informants often lamented that each project with external stakeholders became a black box on which the rest of the organization had little knowledge and control.

Collaborative space as restricted area

We also found that projects with external stakeholders were seen by users as restricted and opaque to the rest of the organization. The bureaucratic procedures for access and the barriers to overcome in order to enter the collaborative space made the CS an isolated space also for outsiders. For instance, clients, consultants and students also had the perception that the space was the propriety of the R&D department. In fact, to access the CS inside Larnia, it was necessary for external stakeholders to have an appointment set with the space manager or with other internal employees. In addition, not only did they have to register at the reception, but an internal member of the organization had to personally pick them up at the reception desk. This procedure was deemed long and onerous and discouraged outsiders from using the space, especially outside the collective design thinking sessions.

Collaborative space as showcase

Differently from what happened with internal boundary work, we also found that the CS was used as a showroom for external stakeholders, especially clients and public opinion leaders such as food bloggers and journalists. For instance, whenever working together on open innovation projects were difficult to accomplish, Larnia used the CS as an impression management tool for external stakeholders. This evidence is in line with prior studies on collaborative spaces which highlight
that such spaces are used for visibility, at times aimed at the organization’s employees or at external clients. In the latter case, the space is used as a showroom for showing products and services to customers (de Vaujany et al., 2019).

Our informants often referred to critical incidents in which managers throughout the company brought suppliers and customers to visit the space in order to impress them using the CS innovative aspect, and thus to convey the image of Larnia as an innovation pioneer, but without allowing them to get immersed in the CS and use it as a generative lab for radical innovation ideas. This was often considered a superficial and inappropriate use of the space that needed to be corrected with time, as to allow for more generative and immersive activities to take place.

In conclusion, the emergent constraints to internal and external boundary work were perceived as complications with respect to initial innovation goals and led to a general perception of the need to increase efforts and attention to both types of boundary work.

*Path dependence and CS: trade-offs between external and internal boundary work*

Managers of the CS repeatedly argued that the CS was a critical space which was difficult to animate with shared projects and populate with people with different background. The fact that the space was experimented as having different functions from the ones initially envisaged triggered users’ and space managers’ increasing efforts to make the CS more congruent to the initial goals of Cs as laboratory for innovation. Interestingly, although they dreamed of a CS that blurred internal and external boundaries and encouraged free co-creation, users continued to distinguish between the need to engage in incremental innovation with other internal functions and the need to open up to outsiders to perform radical innovation (i.e., strengthening path dependence). Importantly, as they struggled with the affordances and constraints generated by each type of
innovation, users also explained that they needed more resources in terms of time and attention to perform each type of innovation boundary work successfully. Consequently, internal and external boundary work were perceived by our informants as competing and encroaching upon each other:

“I have participated in different types of design thinking, with external students and internal ones, with coaches and with clients on different topics, not only on products. If there are external people, you are a little more open to contamination, but if we stay among ourselves in the end it is easy to fall into the same ways […] However, when there’s many of us from different departments and we’re not that used to working together, it’s better not to have also external people because then the complexity just explodes.” (Informant 8, internal)

Based on this evidence, we concluded that in Larnia there was a perception of path-dependent boundary work for innovation. Believing that internal boundary work was most suitable for incremental innovation projects and that external boundary work was most suitable for radical innovation projects, directing resources in one direction could come at the expense of the other. Importantly, the perception that internal and external innovation were path dependent was at odds with the initial goal of creating a CS that allowed to do both indiscriminately. This translated in an opposition between the goal of implementing the CS as a laboratory for free internal and external exchanges and the actual experiences that users had of the space – i.e., specialized, controlled, and chaotic area for incremental innovation with internal stakeholders and a black-boxed, restricted showcase for radical innovation with external stakeholders. In other words, what users had meant as a simplification, triggered additional complications in Larnia’s management of innovation projects. Specifically, our informants reported that the multiplication of the CS’s affordances and
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Constraints with respect to Larnia’s initial goals led to the perception that the space was becoming increasingly complex and heterogeneous, and that interacting in the CS required increasing relational efforts which could be difficultly sustained internally and externally at the same time.

Discussion and concluding remarks

In this chapter, we have investigated how people experience corporate collaborative spaces adopting the perspective of organizational boundaries. Because such spaces are basically designed and implemented to encourage creativity and collaboration among internal members and between the organization and the external stakeholders (de Vaujany et al., 2019; Jakonen et al., 2017), we have focused on the boundary work that corporate collaborative spaces require to their users. Our findings show that corporate collaborative spaces imply demanding boundary work both internally and externally. In fact, because companies have traditionally demarcated boundaries (both inside among organizational units and outside with the external environment), the creation of an internal collaborative space open also to external actors requires tearing down internal and external boundaries. However, we have shown that one of the main reasons why this occurs is related to the fact that individuals that set up and use collaborative spaces have pre-existing beliefs about how and with whom they can collaborate for innovation purposes. Our evidence suggests that people involved in corporate collaborative spaces (both the company’s employees and external stakeholders) are aware that a large amount of boundary work will be required and, as a matter of fact, they experience positive consequences in terms of knowledge exchanges, work quality, and increased cohesion. However, our findings also suggest that several unanticipated constraints may emerge both in internal boundary work and external boundary work. We have shown that a collaborative space may generate high expectations about the possibility of tearing down
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boundaries and facilitating free knowledge exchanges. The design thinking approach adopted in the CS had the aim of mixing internal and external stakeholders in highly innovative projects and giving this way space to new ways of collaborating. However, we documented that individuals’ pre-conceptions about innovation may push them to use the CS differently than initially intended: as a place for incremental innovation with members of other organizational functions, on the one hand, and as a place for radical innovation with external actors, on the other hand. Individuals’ cognitions thus condition the way the CS is being used, and thus generate discrepancy between initial goals (CS as laboratory) and experienced implementation (specialized, controlled, and chaotic area for incremental innovation and black-boxed, restricted area and showcase for radical innovation).

Interestingly, we show that the efforts devoted to face and reduce such constraints tax too much people’s relational and attentional resources so to generate a trade-off between external and internal boundary work. Enacting the former encroaches upon the ability to perform the latter and vice-versa.

Taken together our findings offer both theoretical contributions and practical implication.

On the theoretical standpoint, we propose the perspective of boundary work and more specifically the perspective of internal and external boundary work to better understand the avant-garde practice of corporate collaborative spaces in terms of functioning, benefits, and drawbacks, as well as in terms of perception and experience of individuals involved in such spaces. In doing so, we contribute to the scant extant research on internal, corporate collaborative spaces both adding empirical evidence and suggesting a theoretical framework helpful to appreciate the diversity and differences between external and internal collaborative spaces, for instance getting a light on why and how an internal innovation hub may effectively work (or does not work) as a makerspace (for
employees) and showroom (for customers) at the same time (de Vaujany et al., 2019). In fact, a boundary work perspective seems particularly appropriate to study and comprehend collaborative spaces in corporations, where the work is less precarious than for a freelancer and, as result, joining the collaborative space is not a free choice, the interactions may be not voluntary and the collaborative space is an “intentional attempt to make the encounters matter businesswise” (Jakonen et al., 2017). Moreover, large corporations traditionally have marked boundaries in terms of internal functioning and in how they relate with their external environment. Whereas the creation of a corporate collaborative space can be conceived as a means to tear down boundaries, we show that the risk of cognitive path dependence in innovation projects, and the (likely underestimated) existence of a “double work”, both internal and external, runs the risk of affecting the overall ability of such spaces to attain the goals for which they were first created. Literature on boundary work has not explicitly differentiated between internal and external boundary work but this distinction is key in our model.

Also, literature on innovation has been concerned with path dependence from a technological standpoint, and it has only recently started to explore cognitive determinants such as perceptions and interpretations (Garud, Kumaraswamy, & Karnøe, 2010; Langlois & Savage, 2001; Thrane, Blaabjerg, & Møller, 2010; Tripsas & Gavetti, 2000). As a matter of fact, path dependencies in innovation processes are often defined as change process constrained by the prior technologies adopted by an organization (i.e., economies of scale and technological interrelatedness), the pre-existing knowledge at the organizational level (i.e., core competencies), the constraints at the institutional level, which result in self-reinforcing innovation dynamics (Andersen & Howells, 1998; David, 1985; Dosi, 1982; Garud & Karnøe, 2003; Leonard-Barton, 1992; Nelson & Sidney, 1982). The effect of cognitive frames as a trigger of path-dependent behaviors such as the one
mentioned above is emerging as a stream of research (Kaplan & Tripsas, 2008; Tripsas & Gavetti, 2000). Yet, it is rather surprising that the empirical processes by which cognitions shape innovation processes and create path dependence have not been systematically scrutinized (Garud et al., 2010; Thrane et al., 2010; Tripsas & Gavetti, 2000). For instance, Cohen and Levinthal (1990) argue that “lock-outs” from new technologies or innovation processes potentially occur because individuals are conditioned by their pre-existing knowledge and competencies (see also Thrane et al., 2010; Tripsas & Gavetti, 2000).

Our study reaffirms that cognition in general, and in particular interpretations about which innovation problems are more suitable for external vs internal collaborations, play a key role in how individuals perform boundary work. By distinguishing between potential trade-offs between internal and external path-dependencies, and by looking at the role of collaborative spaces in path dependence, we also contribute to this literature. We suggest that to understand the role of collaborative spaces for innovation, it is paramount to investigate the interpretations that organizational members attach to internal and external boundaries, respectively, and analyze the collaboration goals that they set for themselves at the light of these interpretations. Hernes (2004) proposes that organizational actors would act toward three different types of boundaries: physical boundaries (related to physical structure and formal rules that regulate people’s actions and interactions), social boundaries (related to social bonding and identity) and mental boundaries (related to concept and central ideas). The perceptions of unbalance between internal and external boundary work could be influenced by the need to engage differently in the three above boundaries management mechanisms when dealing with internal and external dimensions. Future studies could further explore the relationship between different types of boundary, boundary perceptions and path dependence.
Our work is not, of course, without limitations: We have conducted a single case study based on interviews with space managers and users. Future studies could consider different settings (for instance settings in which the CS is managed with a different approach from the design thinking methodology) or provide evidence with different data support, for instance, observations of collaboration instances occurring inside collaborative spaces. Although we performed observation in the CS, our study relies primarily on individuals’ self-reports because we were interested in understanding their perceptions and expectations, rather than their actual behaviors. Future studies may compare and contrast users’ cognitions and their actual behavior, for instance, their behavior during design-thinking sessions in the CS.

As far as practical implications are concerned, our study suggests to companies engaging in the creation of internal collaborative spaces to take into consideration the relational and attentional resources for internal/external boundary work, without assuming that the design of a “boundaryless” space will naturally diminish the need to put them in place. Conversely, managers should provide space users resources in order to manage the boundary work, thus avoiding constraints and trade-offs in internally and externally boundary work. Our study suggests that to foster internal and external collaboration different types of resources, as well as different types of physical spaces, could be required. Thus, a reasonable insight is that optimizing both collaborative activities at the same time may be challenging, and that path dependence should be taken into consideration when setting up collaborative arrangements for innovation projects.

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Idea greenhouses are made of glass. Tensions in experimental spaces for creative collaboration in front-end pharmaceutical research

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Abstract
Experimental spaces in organizations are often spatial- and temporary-bound, relatively closed, social settings, in which ideas can be developed without actors being pressured to conform to organizational routines or institutional norms. Especially in the phase of idea elaboration, experimental spaces allow moving creative ideas forward by protecting them from the perils of early external judgement or disruption. Such bounded spaces, which require ongoing boundary and distancing work, can stabilize interpersonal relations, foster a sense of togetherness, belonging and cohesion, and set the common goal above that of the individual. By empirically studying two intentionally created experimental spaces for creativity in front-end pharmaceutical research, we find that boundary work does not prevent the involved actors from experiencing tensions. Instead, it comes with side-effects such as pressure to perform, isolation, secrecy and competition. Mobilizing the metaphor of an idea greenhouse, we argue that symbolic privilege and status that is linked to membership in experimental spaces creates a pressure to succeed that can potentially undermine the assumed protective space. Thus, boundary and distancing work is not just required regarding the regular organizational and institutional norms, but also regarding the social dynamics unfolding within experimental spaces, at least temporarily.

Keywords: creativity, experimental spaces, closed spaces, interpersonal relationships, boundary and distancing work
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Introduction

Viewing creativity as a social endeavor, scholars have paid attention to the importance of organized spaces for creative collaboration. As coworking spaces, fab labs, technology hubs or cultural centers, we often find these spaces deliberately designed as an open and accessible place to facilitate creative encounters between different actors (e.g., Capdevila, 2015; Cirella & Yström, 2018; Lange & Schüßler, 2018; Schmidt & Brinks, 2017). On the other hand, collaborative creative spaces such as research labs, music studios or temporary project groups within organizations are based on a more explicit (albeit temporary) notion of closure and exclusiveness (e.g., Knorr-Cetina, 1999; Melchior, Schiemer, & Grabher, 2009). Drawing on recent organizational theorizing, we consider the latter as experimental spaces that are “bounded social settings” only to a selected group of invited members (Bucher & Langley, 2016, p. 595). Studies on experimental spaces unraveled the potential for protected spaces in which alternative ideas can emerge and thrive without being subjected to pressures to conform deriving from institutional norms and early judgement (Bojovic, Sabatier, & Coblence, 2020; Cartel, Boxenbaum, & Aggeri, 2019; Zietsma & Lawrence, 2010).

We aim for a closer investigation of the social and organizational dynamics developing in such spaces that are intended to provide a sense of safety and a stimulus for experimentation to foster organizational creativity. Analyzing and comparing two intentionally created experimental spaces for early idea elaboration in pharmaceutical research, we concur with literature that closed spaces are important for idea elaboration (e.g., Dobusch, Dobusch, & Müller-Seitz, 2019; Shaikh and Vann, 2018). However, outlining the tensions actors experience in bounded settings, we complement existing literature on boundary and distancing work in experimental spaces, by arguing that necessary efforts of “distancing” from regular organizational and institutional norms (cf. Cartel et al., 2019) can have reverse and unanticipated effects on the desired notion of safety from early critique. Our findings show that symbolic privilege and
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status that is associated with membership in experimental spaces creates a pressure to succeed that can potentially undermine the assumed protection of ideas. Thus, boundary and distancing work is not only required to create the experimental space, but also to organize social dynamics within the space.

Experimental spaces for idea elaboration: the role of boundary and distancing work

Publicity can kill a good idea at a premature state and prevent it from its realization (Simmel, 1906). Whereas open knowledge exchange, diversity, and feedback are considered essential for creating novel and useful ideas (Amabile, Conti, Coon, Lanzenby, & Herron, 1996), studies in organizational psychology show that fear of negative evaluation and an intolerant climate for appreciating diverse and dissimilar understandings prevents people from sharing or recognizing original ideas and alternative thoughts (Camacho & Paulus, 1995; Mueller et al., 2018). In other words, psychological safety is necessary for creativity and innovation as it increases trust to make oneself vulnerable in sharing early ideas that do not yet have a legitimate standing and come with a high likelihood of failure (Edmondson, 1999; George & Zhou, 2001). For example, information privacy is an important safety signal for employees as it creates a buffer from criticism and immediate external evaluation (Alge, Ballinger, Tangirala, & Oakely, 2006; George, 2007). Rouse (2018), for instance, shows that ‘intimate cocreation’ happens in dyads precisely because actors share an interpersonal boundary that creates a closed, safe space based on a shared sense of ‘we’ that allows members to be vulnerable and take risks in expressing unfiltered ideas or withholding criticism. Others have also shown that isolation, seclusion and (in some cases) secrecy can foster a sense of intimacy, relationality and community, which generates emotional support and stimulates motivation, commitment, concentration and creativity (Courpasson & Yournes 2018; Madjar, Oldham, & Pratt, 2002; Ryan & Deci, 2000; Shaikh & Vann, 2016). These dynamics are particularly critical in idea
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elaboration, because creators need constructive relationships and emotional support to expand rather than abandon still fragile ideas (Perry-Smith & Mannucci, 2017).

Similarly, studies in institutional theory have used the concept of boundary work to denote the efforts needed to differentiate the experimental space from regular institutional norms and scripts, thus protecting its members from institutional discipline (Zietsma & Lawrence, 2010), reducing external pressures to conform and temporarily freeing members from their organizational roles (e.g., Canales, 2016). Here, experimental spaces are seen as “transitory social settings” in which alternative practices and original ideas can be tried and tested (Cartel et al., 2019, p. 3). Whereas such spaces are deliberately organized different from the rest of the organization and field, they are also firmly and legitimately nested within (Bucher & Langley, 2016). Boundary work denotes the mobilization of symbolic/discursive, temporal or emotional practices to actively differentiate the space from the rest of the organization or field (Bucher & Langley, 2016; Cartel et al., 2019) and can be both intentionally organized or emerge more incidentally when actors take a break from institutional routines and patterns to experiment with new ideas (Furnari, 2014; Shaik & Vann, 2016). For example, membership designation, meeting schedules or internal rules are practices to actively differentiate the experimental space from normal operations (Zietsma & Langley, 2010). Cartel and colleagues (2019) point out that whereas experimental spaces are designed to have such boundaries, their members might find it emotionally challenging to detach from and distance themselves from dominant norms. Thus, experimental spaces require “boundary work”, “distancing work” and lastly “anchoring work” from and to regular activities, colleagues, and norms (Cartel et al., 2019).

This literature indicates that whereas the isolation of experimental spaces from the organizations day-to-day operations enables new practices and ideas, this isolation also creates tensions resulting from their own demarcation of a more “regular” organizational space. What remains underexplored are the social and organizational dynamics developing in such spaces
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that are intended to provide for sense of safety on the one hand, and a stimulus for experimentation on the other, particularly in the context of creative work where the notion of boundary and distancing work has, to date, to our knowledge, not been explored. This raises questions on how actors experience the tensions between alternative practices and organizational routines in their creative work and how engaging in boundary and distance works affects the psychological safety to openly share ideas.

Research setting, methods and data

We analyze two experimental spaces that facilitate idea generation and elaboration in pharmaceutical front-end research. Early idea development in pharmaceutical research refers to activities of basic research that precede the formal and standardized drug development process. This phase is usually imbued with the explicit or implicit expectation to understand basic scientific principles or generate radical or disruptive ideas, typically referring to discoveries that either change the chemical composition of (new) molecular entities or medical components, or the therapeutic potential of a particular product. Such new ideas have the potential to provide new treatments, improve existing treatments or cut costs. Recently, pharma companies have faced critique for bringing too few new and innovative drugs to the market and for allowing too little time and resources for “intellectually stimulating work and truly creative endeavors” (Styhre & Sundgren, 2011, p. 568). Against this backdrop, big pharma firms are experimenting with novel organizational forms to incite creativity and innovation in drug discovery and development (Dougherty, 2007) or to siphon ideas originally developed outside the firm. Similarly, academic research is increasingly under pressure to not only publish and keep up with competing research groups, but also to bear in mind the potential applicability of results in order to accumulate further funds (Backs & Stummer, 2015).
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The theme of ambivalent social dynamics within experimental spaces emerged inductively from a larger research project aiming to understand the role of uncertainty in creative processes in the music and pharmaceutical industries. We selected two cases of experimental spaces for stimulating front-end pharmaceuticals research that are similar in that, despite their special status as experimental space, they are firmly “nested within” a broader organizational setting (Bucher & Langley, 2016). They are different primarily because of their situatedness in a private company (case 1) and a university campus (case 2). Both cases concern research groups with a clear membership definition based on their particular promises as talented researchers, and mission to generate and develop original ideas.

The first case “Big Pharma” is an in-house initiative to establish “working groups” at the Research & Development (R&D) department of a big pharmaceutical company in a European country. The group’s task is to “come up with new innovation strategies and new concepts for treating (disease X)” (Interview BP16: Working Group Chair), as it assembles some of the company's most promising scientists from different organizational departments and scientific fields. This cross-functional and cross-disciplinary group meets on a weekly basis in addition to their “bread and butter” jobs at the company. The group members have relative autonomy and freedom to work experimentally on new ideas and also try to reap external opportunities by closely collaborating with “idea scouts” who travel worldwide to field-related conferences with the aim to scoop promising ideas. Whereas scouts are independent consultants external to the group, the internal members primarily rely on idea generation and elaboration through literature reviews and exchange with other in-house scientists. Once a new idea has been reviewed by selected members of the working group, it is put forward for a more structured evaluation by the entire group (Internal document BP16). Based on this review, the working group chair has the scientific responsibility to decide if a particular idea is promising in terms of inventing something radically new, while still ensuring that there is a “business case” to the
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idea (Interview BP16: Scientist). The critical question thus is whether and which ideas can "turned into a project", which would mean that they can enter the standard innovation path at the company. Our data on this case comprise 9 interviews with scientists and managers from the research group and related divisions of the company. A first set of four interviews was conducted in Fall 2016 before the group was hit by a string of layoffs. We conducted two more follow-up interviews during and immediately after the layoffs and three follow up interviews a year later (one was directly affected by the layoffs and two colleagues from other parts of the organization, who reflected on the layoffs). The analysis also relies on data of two internal presentations about the groups tasks and challenges that members shared as well as self-descriptions on the company website and news articles on the layoffs.

The second case “University Campus” is the Division of Cell Biology at a university campus. It is divided into three scientific working groups, all studying molecular mechanisms that control the organization and function of living cells. The study of the foundations of living cells is not only of interest to understand the physiological “foundation of the humankind” (Interview UC18: Scientist), but also the basis for intervening in cellular processes. For the primary purpose of doing basic research preceding any form of economic exploitability and pharmaceutical development, approx. 30 heterogeneous researchers (approx. 10/working group) in terms of academic (e.g., molecular biology, biology, medicine) and social (e.g., age, origin, academic status) background intensely collaborate. The division is based at the university campus and projects are funded by mostly public sources including two university spin-offs. Thus, the division also provides ideas for subsequent research and drug development, as one scientist notes: “You also have complete freedom in basic research ... they afford the institute as a kind of idea workshop.” (Interview UC18: Scientist). In addition to internal collaboration, some researchers collaborate with external academics across the globe and with the university spin-offs that have developed out of the divisions’ research and are co-founded.
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by the head of the division. The inquiry process is based on the division of labor among specialized and experienced actors with regard to both the research area and the handling of lab tools. The closed weekly lab meetings of the working groups are the prime focus of the analysis of the case as they institutionalize the experimental space in which new ideas generated, elaborated and evaluated. The data for this case comprise 17 interviews with scientists from the observed experimental space and scientists belonging to other research groups. One author observed the regular lab meetings of one working group, inter-group meetings and the everyday life in the laboratory for several months.

Case 1: Big Pharma

The organizational structure of the group aims at creating an open and stimulating working culture and “a protected environment” that allows the scientists to think and act outside the standard procedures of the company’s institutional environment (Interview BP16: Working Group Chair, Interview BP16: Scientist). This horizontally structured setting marks a stark contrast to conventional hierarchies and task-delegation from ‘above’ that perpetuates the large firm. The groups’ members are selected based on their credentials as “brilliant scientists”. They have more freedom and resources to experiment with unconventional ideas as they are lifted of the pressure of producing immediate or concrete output along predefined tasks (ibid):

“Ideas and targets come in different grades of maturation. Some of them, we put in a greenhouse. This means they are so vulnerable that they need protection and nourishment before we can get all our academic criticism and look at them. So, sometimes they are just set on hold or on good soil, where they can grow a little bit, get some leaves, and be more resistant to criticism. (...) some of the ideas don’t cope
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with the harsh criticism or competitive ideas.” (Interview BP16: Working Group Chair)

These special working conditions and the groups’ standing as an exclusive organizational entity makes its membership a special privilege. The scientists consider their “innovation work” as distinct from their more ordinary “bread and butter job” at the R&D department. The latter comprises running standard tests on existing compounds, evaluating them and providing feedback based on demands requested from top-down decisions within the organization. It is interpreted as that “what needs to be done… on a daily basis” (Interview BP16: Scientist). In contrast, the working group’s activities are considered distinct and more challenging than the standard work. These activities are described more proudly and passionately, even though in practice some tasks may overlap with their standard work.

Freedom vs. pressure to perform

A first tension arises from a mismatch between the high expectations put upon the group members by the nature of their task and the accompanying resources to generate “radical innovations” and the mundane aspects of such work that constrain fast progress. The process of idea generation can be “very slow” and based on only “small projects” (Interview BP16: Scientist). For instance, whereas the scientists have the freedom to “see what will happen” (ibid), indicating an experimental space that allows for surprises and moments of serendipity, they also acknowledge the difficulty to organize for such “surprises”, especially as they often happen at much later stages of the process (Interview BP16: Scientist). Whereas scientists value their freedom and autonomy granted by the institutional set-up, they also acknowledge the additional pressure that this privilege produces:

“The more resources we have, the more pressure we have. You can only vindicate this pressure with better results. But you cannot estimate
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this beforehand. This means you have to find a balance between knowing how far you can push a project without risking that it will be thrown out in the next evaluation round, because it does not comply with the requirement.” (Interview BP16: Scientist)

This means that being a member of this space is endowed with a certain status, autonomy and resources supposed to differentiate their work from the more conventional tasks of R&D departments. Such privileges are linked to the expectation to perform at exceptional standards and they come at a cost. Generating promising ideas and developing alternative thoughts is embedded in mundane and routine tasks, whereas concrete outcomes take time and are often unpredictable. Moreover, such alternative outcomes still have to comply with existing requirements. The protective shield of the “greenhouse” cannot completely dissolve the risk of dismissal of immature ideas by colleagues within the group.

Collaboration vs. isolation

The working group’s aim is to create an atmosphere that is “open, ambitious and supportive” and “stimulating, rewarding and fun” (Internal document BP16). Such an informal work culture can create challenges in navigating demands and lines of authority that at points may appear vague and obscure.

“…because you do not really know who can help you, which forum is the best, who is the decision maker, who evaluates the idea and has the power to turn it into a project beforehand.” (Interview BP16: Scientist)

Interviewees indicate that despite the collaborative status of this working group, the practice of early idea generation can be experienced as an isolated and individual process. “[Y]ou use your own time, whenever you have time” without much group support as to whether it makes sense to further elaborate the idea or not (Interview BP16: Scientists). Here, scientists point out
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that they often rely on their seasoned “gut feelings” that tells them whether an idea is worth sharing or not. In other words, trust that colleagues will keep harsh critique at bay is not taken for granted. Some find it challenging to uphold motivation to move the project forward while “feel[ing] a bit alone” and “missing a discussion partner” (Interview BP16: Scientist). A perceived lack of acknowledgement and competition can result in withdrawal from the group work to the "bread and butter" part of the job (ibid). In this case, the expectation to collaborate is experienced by some as competition and pressure and can thus have reverse effects on motivation and creativity.

Privilege vs. expendability

The uncertainty that scientists experience on an individual level can also take a more existential turn. While we were in the process of conducting interviews with members of one of the working groups at this company, the company announced a large wave of redundancy in the R&D departments of their company (resulting from declining market prices of their main product). Whereas the researchers doing the “standard work” of running experiments were kept on, most of the staff doing the more innovative work were made redundant. As one of the working group members who was dismissed told us afterwards “this is the part of the company where you will experience change the least radical” (i.e., in the short run, you do not notice that they are gone).

Case 2: University Campus

The organizational model of the working groups of “University Campus” is to create an experimental space in which promising scientists working on the same subject come together on a regular basis and collaborate, in a playful yet still target-oriented manner, to elaborate ideas. The weekly meetings are meant to be a protected discussion arena in which ideas can be
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reviewed and tested before it is shared with externals. Similar to the case above, it is perceived as both a privilege and duty of researchers to experiment with unconventional ideas without the pressure of producing applicable, immediate or concrete output. The group members especially appreciate the groups’ transdisciplinary diversity within the experimental space.

Individual vs. collective effort and reward

The scientific process in the experimental spaces is associated with both the indispensable need for collaboration to produce ideas, and the ideals of the individual, creative genius who spares no efforts, copes with disappointments and is aware of the ups and downs of their work.

“One tries to go beyond the limits of the known. Yes? To discover something new and to really urge oneself to do so. Because sometimes you are very happy to stay in the comfort zone. I think you always have to go where you do not feel so comfortable. [...] There is not much room left for other things and you really have to like it [the research]. There are no fixed hours, but you have to deal with it [the research] all the time. And if you do not want to do that, you can do something average at best and that’s uninteresting. There is enough of that (laughs). So if you do not have that willpower to go beyond the average or go out, I think you will not make it.” (Interview UC18: Working Group Leader)

The quote illustrates that it is, according to the interviewee, not only the collaborative efforts but also the individual responsibility that allows the discovery of something new. At the same time, it is the diverse group composition between junior and senior colleagues that is considered as crucial for creative success. The group leader engages in symbolic boundary work by reiterating the importance of hard work and exceptionality during the weekly
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meetings, for example, by asking challenging questions and scrutinizing findings in order to test, provoke and evoke the potential of the scientists. The leader aims at “pushing the envelope” (Interview UC18: Working Group Leader) as they want to get most out of the promising scientists. Hence, we find a tension between individual and collective effort and reward resulting from the need to both working on a collective aim but also pursuing (e.g., career) individual goals.

Knowledge sharing vs. secrecy

Whereas temporal and intentional and knowledge sharing with others is one pillar in the experimental space, scientists express tensions regarding sharing of knowledge with scientists within the same working group as well as from partner working groups, as one interview partner indicates: “I think that you just have to pay attention to who you are talking to. […] Well, you know that, but I think that you let something slip out happens quickly.” (Interview UC18: Scientist).

The experimental space comes with clear rules regarding the handling of information, clarifying, for instance, what (not) to share at conferences or with external scientists. Thereby, a sense of belonging and togetherness, of being part of a greater collective research aim that takes time and is worth being protected, is created within the space. This can create trust, but is also perceived as a burden for scientists, not only because the chance to succeed with “hot topics” is not very high, but also because scientists desire to connect in the scientific world and share their knowledge, as this is again linked with individual status and the idea of the upright scientists:

“I’ve been working on it for about four and a half years. During this four and a half years, because this topic is hot, scientifically hot, I’ve not been able to go to any conferences. So I cannot tell other people
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what I’m working on. […] And if you spent four years in which you are not communicating then you are gone, so to say, yeah? Somehow nobody remembers you anymore and this is a bit of a challenge.”

(Interview UC18: Scientist)

Thus, the organization of the sharing/withholding of information is occasionally discussed within the experimental spaces. Commonly deciding on how to deal with sensitive information can lead to clarity, security, create and stabilize interpersonal boundaries, trust and cohesion within the groups, but also disrupt boundaries with working groups dealing with similar issues. Yet, agreed secrecy towards externals can be perceived as hindering for the individual success and thus possibly undermine a collaborate closed space for idea elaboration.

**Competition vs collaboration**

External working groups work on the same “hot topics” which results in a backlash for those who do not “win the race”. This is stressed within the spaces and thus a sense of competition with externals is created, which fosters the internal sense of cohesion. Further, the lab meetings are characterized by a high degree of collaboration and attentiveness towards each other – often perceived as intense and, paradoxically, competitive by the participants due to the manifest comparability of the scientists in those spaces. Hence, competition not only occurs in relation to externals, but can also be observed between members of the experimental space. For example, by comparing the scientists in focus in the respective meeting or discussing precarious and competitive career paths, a sense of competition is evoked. To mitigate competitive tensions, scientists sometimes withdraw to more informal and spontaneously emerging collaborative spaces to discuss and test ideas. For example, secluded lab areas that require higher safety requirements than the rest of the space sometimes serve as a private and
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protected retreat for discussing sensitive matters such as contrary opinions to what has been discussed in the more official setting of the lab meeting.

Discussion and Conclusion

Organizational literature from psychology and institutional theory suggests that boundary work (Bucher & Langley, 2016; Zietsma & Lawrence, 2010) and distancing work are necessary to create experimental spaces and to maintain an environment in which “participants emotionally emancipate from dominant models” (Cartel et al., 2019, p. 17). What remains underexplored are the social and organizational dynamics developing within such spaces that are intended to provide for sense of safety and a stimulus for experimentation. Our cases show that particularly in the context of creative work, where the notions of boundary and distancing work have not been explored, distancing through the demarcation from a more “regular” organizational space, enable new practices and ideas. We concur with extant literature that experimental spaces allow to separate from the organizations’ day-to-day operations and hence create conditions that foster relationship building and idea protection, which we regard as a key for creativity. At the same time, these cases show that exclusivity resulting from their demarcation from a more “regular” organizational space, also creates tensions.

Leveraging the metaphor of the idea greenhouse, we illuminate these dual dynamics. A greenhouse is a space that is transparent, yet shielded. It lets in the sunlight, which stimulates what needs to grow inside, and its inside has consistently agreeable conditions that are protected from unpredictable and changing external ones. The greenhouse conditions can both incite and stimulate ideas, but also allow for some leeway if ideas are not working. The experimental space of the greenhouse provides scientists with the freedom to discontinue an idea without needing to be too specific as to why. The closed space of the idea greenhouse suggests an exceptional status in which competition “should be left outside the door” (Simmel,
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1906, p. 491). The intentional isolation is aimed to create stronger internal cohesion and less internal conflict (compared to the rest of the organization). Such distancing work aims to “protects individuals from social sanctions such as the expression of negative judgement by others” and relieves them from their own emotional attachment to the status quo and the dominant institutional order (Cartel et al., 2019). What is more is that such bounded collaborative spaces can create a shared “we” sense and stabilize interpersonal relations (Rouse, 2018), foster a sense of togetherness, belonging and cohesion, and set the common goal above that of the individual, especially when decisions regarding the further research not depend on one authority within the spaces.

Thus, the intentional establishment of a working group that assembles ambitious scientists across different disciplines creates a protected space to develop particularly risky ideas until they are ripe enough to face publicity and external criticism. These are the main aims behind the creation of relatively closed spaces that provide a form of protection (e.g., Mueller et al., 2018) and the need to create secluded spaces that allow actors to move ideas forward without being disturbed (e.g., Perry Smith & Mannucci, 2017; Shaikh & Vann, 2016).

However, in paying closer attention to the tensions arising in experimental spaces, we highlight that actors have to navigate a paradox that emerges from the exceptional status of the experimental space. A greenhouse creates intense conditions: it is too warm to stay inside for extended periods of time, and not every plant thrives in these conditions. Despite or even because of its special status, the greenhouse is made of glass and breaks easily – it is transparent and fragile. What is kept inside is subjected to scrutiny and observation – from both the outside and the inside. Inevitably, the set-up of a greenhouse establishes tensions that can undermine the intended protection and psychological safety at the institutional and affective level, which in turn shapes creative outcomes.
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The symbolic demarcation of the group is valuable, as it confers credentials and reputation upon the individual researchers that stimulate their passion and motivation for the work (cf. Simmel, 1906, p. 487). Yet, the cases also illustrate that this symbolic demarcation from the rest of the organization and its status as an exceptional space can produce dynamics of isolation, internal competition and critical evaluation that the space aims to avoid. Such a sense of uncertainty can be fortified by the perceived expendability of the work conducted within the greenhouse. In the first case scientists describe an occasional sense of loneliness within the collaborative space. In the second case, our observations show that scientist circumvent internal tensions by creating new informal folds (Shaikh & Vann, 2016) within the experimental space in which they can temporarily be granted another layer of protection from internal competition and criticism. This, in combination with regular and routinized lab meetings at the university campus, further allows to deal with “non-creative”, rather personal matters as well. Such retreat to informal folds may be fostered by an organizational culture in the private and public sector respectively as they differ in regard to the different working conditions, expectations and resources available. Although a high amount of financial resources (first case) might also increase expectations and thus pressures with negative impacts for creativity, the freedom to not worry about working contracts can be seen as one pillar for avoiding motivational struggles and support in experimentally collaborating for the sake of creativity.

We conclude that by symbolically distancing themselves and their work from the more conventional routines of the organization or the research field, members of experimental spaces inevitably reiterate their exceptional position and further these tensions. Thus, evaluation apprehension can endure even in spaces designed to avoid this social dynamic through boundary work.

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Notes

1 Author names are in alphabetical order.

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Festivals as collaborative spaces: 
the worlding ecology of comic conventions

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Abstract
The investigation on collaborative spaces has until now focused mainly on physical places, in which face-to-face interactions take place across mid or long periods of time. Other temporary, ephemeral or even virtual settings have not attracted due scholarly attention, although they can become places in which collaborative practices arise and unfold. This chapter analyzes festivals as collaborative spaces and explores the internal and external determinants that play a role in turning them into creative milieus. The investigation focuses on the specific case of comic conventions, broadly understood as events dedicated to fantasy culture, including literature, games, comics, cinema and their transmedial convergences. Comic conventions embody characteristics of festivals and festive rites, involving multi-faceted spatial, temporal and creative dimensions. At the same time, the relations among the diverse actors involved become part of more complex economic and organizational patterns, unfolding from the production, consumption and reception of transmedial contents. Despite the differences that may be highlighted with respect to more permanent spatial settings, events of this kind display a strong “creative” potential and may be considered as cyclical spaces for collaboration.

Keywords: festivals, collaborative spaces, comics, events, project ecologies, communities
Festivals as collaborative spaces: comic conventions

Introduction

The definition of collaborative spaces applies to spatial settings and infrastructures that stimulate creative production and organizational innovation among diverse actors (Ciaramella, Rossi Lamastra, Rovelli, & Tagliaro, 2018), without rigid boundaries in terms of localization in space and time. The increasing scholarly interest and related empirical investigation have mainly focused on localized “stable” settings, in which face-to-face interaction takes place across mid or long periods of time: coworking spaces (Gandini, 2015; Spinuzzi 2012), fab-labs, open innovation labs (Schmidt, Brinks, & Brinkhoff, 2015) or other “scattered” collaborative patterns, like local ecosystems of “culturepreneurs” (Lange, 2011).

In this chapter, we analyze festivals as spaces able to foster collaborative practices, focusing on the case of comic conventions. These events involve a broad spectrum of transmedial convergences (Harvey, 2015) in the field of fantasy culture, including literature, games, comics, and cinema. From an economic and organizational perspective, these clusters of localized proximity participate in a world spread circuit of interrelated practices, which appear to be structured as “project ecologies” (Grabher, 2002, 2004) and in which “more stable” and “more temporary” forms of collaboration are intertwined. In order to analyze which collaborative dynamics are stimulated, supported, and extended in time by these festivals, we will focus on the case of Lucca Comics & Games.

We will first locate festivals and cultural events in the existing research, with a particular focus on the notion of project ecologies. After describing our methodological approach, we will introduce the case of comic conventions and focus on Lucca Comics & Games as a space where multilayered levels of interaction co-exist. In the conclusions, we will highlight the collaborative values within the examined case and suggest further directions for research.
The ecology of cultural events: festivals as collaborative spaces

During the last decades, temporary phenomena such as festivals, fairs, and cultural events have inspired multiple streams of research: on their social meaning, their production, or their role as tools for economic development and place-promotion (Getz, 2010). Festivals have always played a crucial social function, like all rituals, in which everyday practices and rules related to time, space, and social interaction are suspended and temporarily replaced by specific, extra-ordinary ones. Festivals can create special meanings around a unique configuration of time and space, which becomes more and more powerful as it is repeated throughout the years (Bakhtin, 1998). Despite the enlarged field of contemporary communication and mobility opportunities, most of these events are still situated in time and space according to a cyclical structure, based on a network of social and commercial relations (Power & Jansson, 2008). Music festivals and sports tournaments, art fairs and other cultural events often establish long-term relations with their hosting cities and communities: these overlapping geographies disclose a “temporary township, superimposed at intervals upon a permanent town or city, which in important, although not regularly defined, social and symbolic ways contributes to the global needs of a particular industry and those who work therein” (Moeran & Pedersen, 2011, p.8). Sided by an accelerated circulation of material and immaterial products, cultural trends, and social practices, many of these modern rituals have achieved a "commodified" status, in which the level of professionalization of the event and its organization significantly contribute in shaping technological artifacts, markets, and regulatory frameworks.

As such, the production and re-production of events achieve a “structuring” effect (Giddens, 1979) on agglomerations of individuals, groups, and organizations. The competitive-collaborative
interactions among them reinforce the permanence of specific features across time and space, and the awareness of a shared “identity” in a defined field, even though relying on a diversified temporal continuity. The event’s time, with a situated beginning and ending, and the time between consecutive editions are embedded in a social and institutional context, where new social and economic practices respond to the temporary inputs. This process of cognitive configuration and institutional legitimization is not necessarily linear but also shaped by temporary and intermitted circumstances (Meyer, Gaba, & Colwell, 2005). The framework of Field Configuring Events describes the “temporary social organizations such as tradeshows, professional gatherings, technology contests, and business ceremonies that encapsulate and shape the development of professions, technologies, markets, and industries” (Lampel & Mayer, 2008, p. 1026). These events become arenas in which people from diverse organizations share information, construct networks, transact business, and set the standard of a specific industry or cultural field.

The alternating modes of temporary co-presence (the event), and the mediated connections operating at a distance are both fundamental for the configuration and consolidation of a field. These latent and not geographically fixed networks of actors and objects have been described as “project ecologies”, which unfold from “the interdependencies between a particular project and the firms, personal relations, localities and corporate networks from which these projects mobilize essential sources” (Grabher, 2002, p. 258). Networks and institutions play an active role in shaping these ecologies, around project-driven economic and social practices. The production of knowledge and innovation extends beyond the main organization or firm, merging a diversity of social and communicative logics, organizational identities, and professional ethos into a broader “awareness space”. Within this space, “epistemic communities” (Grabher, 2004) of participants are committed to enhancing specialized project-related knowledge.
Festivals as collaborative spaces: comic conventions

Upon this background, the event becomes the common ground in which the actors operating in a field can meet and experience collaborative face-to-face interactions. Festivals and trade fairs can be conceived as clusters (Power & Jansson, 2008), in which discontinuous and sometimes unexpected interactions take place, within a field in which the circulation of knowledge is continuous (Gibson & Bathelt, 2014). To achieve a cyclical reiteration of the event across time, the collaboration among the organizers and participants takes place along two dimensions: a continuous but distanced network of contacts and a localized clustering of face-to-face interactions. These intertwined patterns of collaboration are fundamental to reiterate and renew the values associated with the event, following its ever-changing social and cultural context. This process of “selective” preservation and renovation is the result of a collaborative work, which takes place at two levels: on the one side, at the level of the organizational structures and institution operating on-site; on the other side, through the circulation and update of specialized knowledge within the communities operating within the event’s “ecology”.

Research design and methodology

Comics inspire diverse, multi-layered, and often diverging forms of cultural and commercial events (Tonga Uriarte, 2016; Tonga Uriarte, Antognozzi, & Catoni, 2019). In each of these cases, different spaces, technologies, and artifacts display multiple socio-material relations, artistic and commercial practices, and, in general, a broad diversity of cultural landscapes. The convergence of multiple media (Jenkins, 2008) promotes a participatory culture and the blurring of boundaries between fans, creators, producers, and consumers.

To explore the collaborative values or potential behind these spaces – at the level of the communities but also in the organizational setting – we designed a qualitative study, aiming at
analyzing “how” and “why” collaboration takes place within fantasy conventions, on which levels, among which actors and with which purposes. We conducted our investigation on two levels. On the one side, we analyzed transformations within the world spread “ecology” related to the comics, exploring specialized websites, blogs, forums, and social media topics related to fantasy culture.¹ We integrated this information with a longitudinal (mainly 2012–2017) systematic keyword search on the web and catalog research in libraries, examining articles published in local, national, and international newspapers and online journals. Despite the methodological limitations due to the events’ constantly growing number and the linguistic difficulties in covering all the interested countries, it was possible to realize a database of 227 comics-related gatherings across the world (Marzo, 2018).

On the other side, we focused on the case study of Lucca Comics & Games, which appeared to be representative of many among the diverse dimensions shared by comics-related festivals: it is currently the most significant European event dedicated to fantasy culture in terms of the attendance, and it takes place since 1966 in the Tuscan town of Lucca. Across a “temporary” but long-lasting presence in the city, this event went through multiple and profound transformations in its nature and organization (Tonga Uriarte, DeFillippi, Riccaboni, & Catoni, 2019). We analyzed this case through a combination of direct and indirect sources. The fieldwork includes: (i) direct observation and semi-structured interviews with the attendees, the exhibitors and the municipal employees (editions 2015-2017, 5 interviews); (ii) six in-depth interviews with the representatives of the public bodies (2016); (iii) a survey study with artists participating in LC&G (November-December 2016); and (iv) a questionnaire filled by 27 owners of “informal” temporary shops that operated outside the boundaries of the official event (2016-2017). During the same years, bibliographic research on the previous editions, media coverage, and archival research in the
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municipal archives provided data about the festival’s programs, exhibitors, and organizational structure in diverse phases.

Collaborative values in comic conventions

Comic conventions as a cross-cultural pattern of temporary proximities

Social and professional interactions in the comics industry result particularly interesting in the analysis of collaborative creative processes, being this field mostly shaped by practitioners (Brienza, 2016). These processes are often structured as project ecologies and involve alternate and intertwined moments of temporary co-presence and collaboration at a distance. Comic conventions become the spaces in which these communities experience face-to-face interaction, and where artists, editors, and producers meet.

Notwithstanding the differences in dimensions, traditions, and participation among diverse events, our research highlighted some recurring patterns. In comic conventions, the collectors’ market – which was at the origin of many events – still represents one of the main attractions, especially in the case of small gatherings. Also, games and movies have increasingly contributed to the success of these events, expanding their scope to the broader domain of “fantasy culture” and involving the participation of major commercial partners. The interaction with the most famous comics’ creators is for many fans one of the main motivations for attending: almost all the analyzed conventions display a guest-list, with pop culture icons for each edition. Awards, exhibitions, but also workshops and demonstrations are included in the program of almost all the events; in some cases, these activities involve local cultural institutions or museums. Comics’ professionals often attend previews with restricted attendance on limited days or areas (Pro-Con); to present their work
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to the wider public, sketches and autographs sessions are often scheduled in “Artists’ Alleys”. Communities and fans are also frequently involved in thematic gatherings and reenactments.

The convergence of multiple audiences and cultural patterns stem from diverse and geographically distributed traditions. Many large-scale comic-cons emerged in North America between the 1980s and the 1990s, as the result of the transition from a system of mass production, with few major comic book publishers, towards an increasingly “scattered” industry (Norcliffe & Rendace, 2003).

The comic book evolved from an artisanal but industrialized object, created in a defined physical space by the direct interaction of a team, into the result of the collaboration among remotely located professionals. This model of virtual co-presence (Torre, 2008) established the basis for a networked ecology of comics’ production, in which the conventions became the occasions for the editors, managers, and subcontractors to meet, discuss collaborations, evaluate new technologies or analyze cultural trends.

However, this is not a unique model. In Europe, the first two comics-related gatherings were the Salons in Lucca (Italy, first edition in 1966) and Angoulême (France, since 1974). These Salons, followed by many others from the 1980s, were founded and organized by academics and experts (Bono & Gaspa 2006), who aimed at the legitimization of comics as a form of art (Guilbert, 2011).

Together with a market section for collectors, cultural activities were offered, such as awards, exhibitions, and international roundtables on comics.

Eastern Asia is a third fundamental area of influence. The manga industry, which developed in Japan and reached the mass audience in the 1950s (Sabin, 1996), is nowadays deeply related to the practice of doujinshi; these self-published non-commercial magazines are mainly authored by amateurs or artists operating outside the restriction of the established industry. Doujinshi culture is one of the main motors of Tokyo Comiket, the world’s largest exhibition marketplace in this
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field, attended by 600,000 visitors\(^4\) and administered by a volunteer-based Comic Market Committee. The organizers describe it as “a \textit{space} operated cooperatively through the involvement of all participants [...] that functions to expand the possibilities of self-expression, where the aim is to accept creators of \textit{doujinshi} and all other types of creative endeavors and maintain continuity”.\(^5\) Even if an area is dedicated to corporate industries, most of the participants are \textit{doujinka}, independent creators.

These diverse traditions emphasize the values of comic conventions as collaborative spaces; through a transmedial, cross-cultural pattern of temporary proximities, these spatial and temporal settings populate a broad and scattered geography, with culture-crossing patterns diffused across diverse social and geographic contexts (Table 15.1).

\textless TABLE 15.1 HERE\textgreater

The panorama of comic conventions is increasingly world-spread; as such, these events become vehicles for the circulation of creative production and organizational innovation among diverse actors. Within this broad ecology, few main players in the entertainment industry organize numerous large-scale fairs, scheduled according to global circuits of market relations (Power & Jansson, 2008). However, more than half of the most attended conventions in the world (Table 15.1) have a particular and specific tradition and organization. Also, numerous “un-conventional” and community-based events populate this same ecology, supporting “underground” or independent comics as lenses to focus on emergent political and social themes. These events become spaces in which emergent communities meet and share common interests and practices, fostering the production/consumption/diffusion of cultural contents. As a whole, this emergent
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system of spatializing practices mixes and matches diverse cultural and social components, within a dynamic and potentially *worlding* topography (Roy & Ong, 2011).

*Short term, long term, and cyclical collaboration*

To sustain the event’s cyclical recurrence, the interaction among the diverse actors is often planned and long-lasting: they establish partnerships and commercial strategies, organize the yearly calendar with diverse related initiatives, promote innovation edition after edition to ensure the engagement of a specialized “fandom” across time. Epistemic communities, often Internet-based, are created at the interaction between the creative process and its commercialization. The ecology of a cyclical event discloses three main spaces for collaboration and levels of interaction.

<FIGURE 15.1 HERE>

The first can be described as the “short-term” and “face-to-face” level: the event represents a moment of temporary proximity for all the actors involved. It includes improvisation – as it necessarily faces unpredictable factors and moments of “organized anarchies” (Bathelt & Gibson, 2015), in which random and unorganized interactions take place. The actors collaborate face-to-face to maximize their economic, professional, or social experience.

“Long-term” interactions take place both “on-site” and across “distanced” modes of collaboration. As an example, the attendance to a specific event may impact on the reputation of an artist by the acknowledgment of prizes or the possibility to show his/her work. Also, the general public and the communities of fans and experts are affected by the participation in a specific event or multiple editions of it. After its termination, the event “survives” in the tangible and intangible memories
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associated with it. The changes in the biographies (Hägerstrand, 1995) of the participating actors serve as a memory to accumulate “personal, organizational and institutional resources for performing projects” (Grabher & Ibert, 2011, p. 176). As an example, the practice of doujinshi represents a case of “fan-to-fan pedagogy” (Ruh, 2009, p. 378) fostered by temporary interactions, that maintains and updates the competences among the manga fandom, in Japan and overseas. The worldwide spreading of this creative-cultural phenomenon can be considered as a consequence of a collaborative and “do-it-yourself-oriented sense of fandom, in which every consumer of manga is potentially also a producer” (Malone, 2011, p. 227).

Within the ecology, the values associated with each event are configured but also cyclically reproduced (Gibson & Bathelt, 2014) to ensure its permanence within mutable but long-lasting structures of actors and institutions. As an example, at the local level, the recurrence of an event requires institutionalized organizational models: the design of “urban stages”, security measures, accessibility plans, or waste management procedures. These “intermittent” forms of collaboration among the local institutions have an impact on the urban landscape and the organizational setting in the long term.

The case of Lucca Comics & Games

Lucca Comics & Games (LC&G) is the oldest comics-related gathering in Europe and, today, among the biggest comic conventions in the world, bringing around 500,000 attendees (Lucca Crea Srl, 2016) to the historic city of Lucca. In this regard, this 100% public initiative, with its more than 50 years of history, embodies unique characteristics.

The main actors involved in the making of the event are: (i) festival organizers (Lucca Crea Srl); (ii) local public authorities (Municipality and other public institutions); (iii) exhibitors; (iv) artists
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and professionals attending the event; and (v) core communities and the general public/attendees. These diverse actors not only transform the official festival space but also change the physiognomy of the whole city. Subsequently, interactions occur in three dimensions:

- The festival space, which is the official area where the LC&G program takes place (e.g., pavilions with booths, exhibition spaces, workshop and seminar venues);
- The intersection between the festival space and the city, such as the un-gated festival areas, and the squares hosting the pavilions;
- Urban landscape, with squares, streets, parks, and monuments that are not in close proximity to the festival areas.

These three spaces are dynamic structures with high porosity; an osmotic balance should be reached continuously within and among these spaces during each edition and through the transformation of the festival over multiple editions.

Festival space is the main area where specific collaborative practices and processes occur. During the 2019 edition of LC&G, this area of around 50.000 m² hosted more than 700 exhibitors, with more than 1.500 sub-events scheduled in the festival program. Considering the diversity of the actors and the complex program, the festival space fosters collaboration and creativity by providing proximities, creating moments of interaction (e.g., through booths, seminars, and special events) and detaching the festival area from the ordinary life through a special spatial and temporal reality.

To this end, we can consider the experiences of artists participating in LC&G as an example to understand how the event stimulates creativity. Our survey among 10 participating artists indicates that they believe participation in LC&G offered them the opportunity to meet other artists and practitioners (100%) potential investors, employers and commissioners (40%), and to improve
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their knowledge and understanding of the field (90%). Such interactions bring about also new inspiration (60%) and opportunity to improve artistic and professional skills (44%) whereas, in some cases, even change the participant’s art practice (33%) through new collaborations after the event. As an artist that had exhibited his artworks and collaborated in thematic workshops during LC&G reported, “the main challenge in this activity is the lack of continuity; with these collaborative projects, LC&G contributes in structuring innovative and long-term artistic projects, giving to the artists the possibility to optimize the management of time and costs and focus on the creative side”.

For other artists, “LC&G is a place of physical encounter among artists, producers and editors that frequently already know each other; […] its dimension is mainly social, more than a work dimension.”

Considering the intersection between the festival space and the host city, we observe that, outside the boundaries of LC&G, other collaborative practices have emerged. Independent editors organize free counter-events and exhibitions inhabiting unused spaces in the city. Among the social and economic practices at the intersection between the festival space and the city, the temporary shops represent an interesting example. These commercial practices are the result of the cooperation among remotely located retailers and local owners: the “external” retailers temporarily sublet commercial premises in the city center, close to the event’s area, to overcome the saturation of space inside the official event’s pavilions. This practice, shaped by spatial and material constraints, testifies to the competition for space in a very dense urban environment, in which informal collaboration among private actors consolidated beyond – and sometimes in opposition to – the official institutional structure (Marzo, Uriarte, and Catoni, 2017). Among the interviewed shop owners, around 60% had already participated in the event before, and 44% activated previous contacts to organize their activity: an informal network of contacts was established across the years.
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among local shop owners and remotely located retailers to allow this “informal” practice. Even if external to the event’s ecology (74% of the interviewed shop owners do not follow the LC&G audience as a community during the year), this practice can be interpreted as a form of creativity that was not within the festival aims and agenda. Economic revenue is the main motivation for these actors to attend the event. However, among the non-financial returns expected by the interviewed retailers, the knowledge of the field and feedback about the audience’s tastes were the leading motivations, testifying to the positioning of the event as a trendsetter in this field – even from a merely commercial perspective.

The urban landscape, the third dimension of interaction, also demonstrates how LC&G works as a collaborative space, by creating exceptional moments of proximity even beyond its official boundaries. Local communities and non-professional attendees also participate in the event: phenomena like cosplay, fictional re-enactments, and other performative manifestations are based on the collaborative activity of local or virtual communities, organized following the event’s recurrence. These diverse spaces (official festival space and the city without proximity to the festival), condensed into the same event, show that at least three main communities are involved: the ecology of comics’ professionals and cosplayers, the larger community of fans, and local inhabitants and commercial actors. These extensions materialize in the forms of handcrafted costumes and objects, unofficial or user-generated contents and products that expand the domain of the festival’s fictional world and merge it into the city, situated in time and space. To this end, for instance, local commercial actors, such as bars, restaurants, and shops, modify their offer and decoration in line with the festival scope and theme during the LC&G period.

<FIGURE 15.2 HERE>
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In Lucca, following a growing tendency in the field of comics-based movies and games, the physical space of the city often becomes part of fictional settings and re-enactments. The permanent features of the city engage in a dialogue with the “festivalized” spaces, contributing to shape the image of Lucca as the comics and games capital of Italy. Cosplay plays a crucial role in this extension, as the cosplayers walk around the city walls and mingle in the side streets of Lucca, introducing a “performative turn” into the world of convention.

From a collaborative perspective, these measures demonstrate that the relation between LC&G and the host city is not only a spatial, infrastructural and institutional “mooring” (Hannam, Sheller, & Urry, 2006), but also a possibility to “anchor” the event to long-lasting social and collaborative processes operating both in the territory and within the global transmedial domain of the fantasy culture. The highly blurry spatial and temporal boundaries of LC&G, along with the festival’s extra-ordinary reality, stimulate creativity in individuals, groups, and organizations at local, national, and international levels. Furthermore, the collaborative outcomes triggered during this experience endure after the festival’s end, both in physical and virtual spaces: for instance, the artists testified about new artistic productions and collaborations. Among the interviewed artists,
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the expectation to improve and renew social connections prevails. By strengthening the relations between different actors, the event is a fundamental appointment on the calendars of the comics and games fandom, developing a sense of creative community.

Conclusions

The phenomenon of comic conventions represents a particular case within a broader tendency towards the institutionalization of festivals to achieve economic, political, and social ends. Because of their “transmedial” nature, these events represent today a primary stage for presenting new products and technologies to the public and – as such – they often involve the participation of the main commercial partners in the field of entertainment and fantasy culture. At the same time, many other “unconventional” gatherings are focused on supporting niche comics industries and promoting independent artists or self-publishers, preserving a grass-root and do-it-yourself character.

These diverse communities share a space that is not only leisure and “fictional” space but involves a multiplicity of cultural and professional practices. Because of their role as interaction platforms for a network of co-participating and knowledge-sharing actors, we can consider comic conventions as examples of cyclical collaborative spaces. Their power to create a “time out of time” through an active cultural process (Falassi, 1987) stimulates creative production and organizational innovation.

Despite the complexity of this phenomenon and its rapid expansion across diverse cultural contexts, which prevent from drawing all-encompassing conclusions, the research highlights how these temporary and apparently ephemeral gatherings have the power to link some physical spaces to specialized communities, which otherwise interact at a distance. The case of LC&G is an
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empirical example of a multilayered space, in which the city landscape and the event co-exist and stimulate collaboration, cross-fertilization, creativity and innovation at multiple levels: in the “more stable” social and economic setting, in the changing organizational settings and work practices of these communities, and in the intersection of these spaces. The event not only constructs a sense of community for distanced networks, but also becomes a platform where local innovations are exposed to a “worlding” public, and local actors get in contact with knowledge and innovation from external sources. In this sense, the analysis of the collaborative values within temporary and cyclical cultural-economic events may expand the knowledge on the embeddedness and cross-fertilization of innovation dynamics at different scales.

Notes


2 The first edition of this event had been launched in 1965 in Bordighera. In 1966, the event moved to Lucca.

3 The term *doujinshi* is composed by the words *doujin* (group of associated persons) and *shi* (publication)


6 Interview with a freelance illustrator and concept artist, LC&G edition 2015

7 Interview with a freelance artist in the field of cross and multimedia art, LC&G edition 2016
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8 *Cosplay* is a practice originated within the Japanese comics subculture, consisting of dressing up as popular fictional characters.

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Growing collaborative creative learning spaces: The case of London School of Mosaic

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Abstract
The chapter builds and bridges together two recent strands of literature on the emergence of collaborative working spaces in the creative economy: on one side it considers the role of shared-work spaces and coworking as platforms for collaboration and on the other it argues also for their role in offering formal and informal learning opportunities. The chapter builds on the communities of practice framework and reflects on the learning opportunities that emerge formally and informally. We use an in-depth case study, the London School of Mosaic, to reflect on how creative collaboration overlaps and flourishes in spaces where both coworking and co-learning take place. London School of Mosaic is a social enterprise that both supports mosaic production and producers but also aims to provide a learning space for new people to engage in this practice. It connects traditional and heritage-based knowledge with new creative enterprises and projects, again offering coworking and collaborations which go beyond the individual practices. The case study allows us to reflect on what role learning spaces can play in the development of collaborative creative practices which connect the economy and the social in new ways.
Growing collaborative creative learning spaces

Introduction

The chapter highlights the importance of learning within the context of creative collaborative spaces. Firstly, we briefly review the literature on coworking and collaborative spaces (Gandini, Bandinelli, & Cossu, 2017; Merkel, 2019) and address the importance of posing more questions around learning and co-learning. Here we are interested in what kind of dynamics of learning are presented and what value is placed on the potential for learning. Secondly, we explore these issues through the lenses of a case study, London School of Mosaic (LSoM). LSoM is a social enterprise that both supports mosaic production and producers but also aims to provide a learning space for new people to engage in this practice. It presents a hybrid model of coworking and teaching structure but also highlights the importance of informal opportunities for knowledge sharing and learning as an asset for internal stakeholders (artists and coworkers) as well as the wider local community. The case study allows us to reflect on what role social enterprises and learning spaces can play in the development of collaborative creative practices which connect the economy and the social in new ways.

Collaborative creative spaces: from coworking to co-learning

Many chapters in this book have already highlighted the nature of the new “collaborative turn” from the examples of Fablab to old space being reinvented (libraries) and traditional formats like Festivals taking new collaborative agendas (Comunian, 2017b). This of course also connects with new work practices, beyond the traditional 9 to 5 office space (Sundsted, Jones, & Bacigalupo, 2009) but we could argue for some creative practices connecting also with the social and collaborative nature of creativity itself (Wilson, 2010).
Growing collaborative creative learning spaces

Whereas in many case studies and research papers on coworking and collaborative spaces we can find references to the value of “learning” as key component and added value (Spinuzzi, 2012; Waters-Lynch & Potts, 2017; Waters-Lynch, Potts, Butcher, Dodson, & Hurley, 2016), there is little research that focus specific on the kind of learning and learning dynamics that are facilitated by collaborative spaces. An example is the work of Bilandzic on public libraries – although his focus is also specifically on the role of technology in connecting and facilitating learning (Bilandzic & Foth, 2016) – borrowing from Ito et al. (2013), he argues that coworking spaces can promote an organic form of “connected learning”. Ito et al. (2013, p. 4) – talking about young people new modes of learning – define “connected learning” as a type of learning that “advocates for broadened access to learning that is socially embedded, interest-driven, and oriented toward educational, economic, or political opportunity”. Similarly, Spinuzzi, Bodrožić, Scaratti, & Ivaldi (2019) argue about the importance of the community dimension behind collaborative spaces but they highlight how even these two keywords “community” and “collaboration” remain mostly underdefined in the literature. This research has connections with other research in management around the importance for learning to take place within connected communities which have shared goals and passions, such as in the case of the concept of “communities of practice” (Wenger, 1998). Wenger describes communities of practice as “learning as a social practice” but highlights also how they only take place around these very practices that are important for that specific community. These practices are generally of cultural character in Wenger’s framework, for example through sharing similar values, an environment, or shared histories. In the context of artistic production, practice could also be specific artistic practices which have shared social and symbolic values and repertoires. Many authors highlight the importance of social dynamics behind learning as “social learning” (Bandura & Walters, 1977; Emami, 2012). Waters-Lynch & Potts
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(2017) find via ethnographic research that individuals in coworking spaces highlighted “the value of discovery, social interactions and learning through observation and imitation” much more than any other amenities coworking could offer. Furthermore, in many collaborative spaces we observe evolving relations of individuals which from newcomers practicing forms of legitimate peripheral participation – slowly entering the community and learning – changes their role overtime to provide learning for others (Lave & Wenger, 1991).

Furthermore, the literature on clusters – which we could argue connects with many of the dynamics of what happens within collaborative spaces on a micro-scale – can provide some value here as it placed historically much more relevance on “learning”. Within this literature in particular Capello (1999) talks about “collective learning processes”: these are learning processes taking place within social contexts or through “institutional routines and behaviors which facilitate the sharing of information and know-how (Capello, 1999, p. 356). In this chapter we argue that within collaborative spaces not only routines and behaviors facilitate learning and sharing but also can stimulate sharing of values towards the community and its spaces. Despite the scarce attention towards the value of learning in coworking and collaborative spaces, more attention recently has been placed on the collaborative turn within usually more formal learning spaces. Ashton and Comunian (2019) review the presence of creative hubs in higher education settings, suggesting that even formal learning structures like universities are increasingly adopting coworking and hubs models for their students proving that these structures might provide a different kind of learning context (Wong & Partridge, 2016). Similarly, Jacobi (2017) highlights how current changes in the UK higher education setting have pushed towards the establishment of new informal learning opportunities for artists. We can argue that learning in the context of arts and creative disciplines represents a series of challenges which go beyond what formal learning can provide (desk-based
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teaching) and needs to engage with specific art or design practices in studios or workshops (Buren & Repensek, 1979; McHugh, 2014) but also collaborative and engaged frameworks which are hard for an individual to devise by him/herself. This connects with the role of learning institutions in their regional contexts (Comunian, Gilmore, & Jacobi, 2015) but also with the network and power dynamics which are often exclusive and not accessible by many (Comunian, 2017a) and the type of knowledge that is being shared.

There is an extensive literature on how learning takes place in formal and informal settings, however we are specifically interested in the latter and how informal type of learning happens in outside mainstream education. Since the seminal work of Polanyi (1966) a specific focus has been place on the way learning and knowledge are exchange in tacit ways (Stenmark, 2000; Tsoukas, 2005). This has also be the interest of scholars in the creative and new media sector. For examples, Pratt (2002) articulates how knowledge in these sectors involve “tacit and situated knowledge. Tacit knowledge is usually encompassed by a range of learning by doing, learning by watching, and simply learning by ‘being there’” (Pratt, 2002, p. 40). We argue that alternative types of learning and especially situated learning (Lave & Wenger, 1991) are central in collaborative spaces. Therefore, it is important to consider the novelty that the collaborative space context may bring to the learning literature. This connects with the specific role of space and materiality, and the affordances that they bring into the learning processes (Dale & Burrell, 2007; Mitev & de Vaujany, 2013). Therefore, this chapters consider that issue of how tacit and explicit dimensions of learning play out in collaborative spaces.

The recent literature on maker spaces places much more emphasis on learning. Peppler, Halverson, and Kafai (2016) define the makers movement as network of connected learning communities. They mix a DIY can do attitude with value placed on both collaboration and the potential of new
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technologies. However, they also highlight the collaborative ethics but question why and how these have become such successful learning environment (which has been included also in schools, universities and other settings) and they consider that “a maker approach to learning is as much do-it-yourself as it is do-it-with others” (p. 5). Therefore, drawing from the literature it is possible to identify an evolution in the way coworking spaces have been understood overtime, moving from services offices to coworking to “new learning spaces” (Figure 1 in Waters-Lynch et al., 2016, p. 421). However, the interaction between learning with coworking needs more investigation and attention. We aim to use these ideas to explore how our case study – London School of Mosaic – can be understood as a collaborative learning space and how learning happens at different levels but always as a collaborative/shared experience based in a physical space.

London School of Mosaic

London School of Mosaic (LSoM) can be considered a hybrid collaborative space. It was set up in 2017 in Gospel Oak, Camden as specialist provider of education in the art form of mosaic, providing short courses, vocational training, and higher education. The organization emerged out 14 years of making mosaic as tool for community cohesion in a small studio near Waterloo Station in central London. However, when the school opened in Camden in the basement of a social housing estate near Hampstead Heath, it immediately provided work spaces not only for fellow mosaic makers but predominantly for local artists working in a range of art practices including painting, print making, drawing, ceramics and book binding. The school currently houses 16 resident artists and a collective of ceramicists, all of them working alongside LSoM’s students and staff who are actively engaged in running and maintaining a shared studio space and workshop.
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Providing affordable studios not just enables artists to have work space in a neighborhood and borough with scarcity of artistic workspace, it also helped LSoM to cover their rent in the set-up phase with social investment finance being drawn down. In April 2019, the school was awarded stage 1 funding with the GLA’s Good Growth Fund for the development of further studios (up to 70) in empty garages adjacent to their current space. For this project a team of architects and council representatives were appointed to develop a feasibility study for a vision that foresees the physical and functional improvement of the site, while building a firm understanding of how the space can cater for shared learning between artists, the local community and LSoM.

Data and Methods

LSOM provided an interesting case study to investigating the interaction between learning and coworking. Whereas LSOM was set-up as a place for learning (in the form of formal teaching and workshops around mosaic), its role has been evolving into a provider for artists space. Therefore, we decided to undertake intensive fieldwork within this context to see how coworking and co-learning emerge and in what ways the organization (and its spaces) are responding to wider needs emerging through providing spaces for artists and the local community.

The data collection took place between April and May 2019 via the form of qualitative interviews (3 with resident artists; 1 short course teacher; 1 short course student, 1 manager of LSOM, 1 technician and 1 with the team of architects appointed to work with LSoM) as well as the observations of the school’s environment and courses (20 hours in total). The central themes discussed in the interview were: 1) how learning was undertaken or developed within the space, 2) how the space stimulate (or not) individuals’ practice, 3) how shared spaces enhanced/influenced (or not) social interactions, and 4) how collaboration was part (or not) of
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individuals’ work and practice. Interviews lasted between 30 and 60 minutes on average and were recorded (with permission) and transcribed verbatim. The interview data was analyzed using thematic coding and the process consists of multiple re-iteration going back to texts to reflect on the emerging themes.

The role of space: open access and learning

Mosaic is a practice based on collaboration especially when it is based on large-scale production where tasks, the studio and workshops are shared. This is reflected in the site of the school which consists of a 650 sqm open workshop, with a long corridor space in the center equipped with tables and chairs from which side studios and material stores lead. These spaces are dedicated for mosaic making and a mosaic-focused education program, but are shared with other groups and activities such as sewing and ceramics workshops to maximize not only the income generated from the space but also the charitable aims of the organization to create social impact through the arts. The openness of the physical space (see Figure 16.1) has been directed through its layout and the DIY attitude of an environment for artistic production, with expenses kept at a minimum during its initial setting up phase between September and December 2017. But as a member of the team of architects who work with LSoM note: “The open space is not so much a coincidence because if it would not have worked out or not have been useful, then you would have built partitions, but you decided not to!” (architect).

<FIGURE 16.1 HERE>
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This suggests that the configuration of laying out space in a shared workshop comes from a learning process that is directed by the practices that users engage with in such an environment. Whereas this is relevant for the collective of users, such as LSoM’s students and volunteers, this also matters for studio users who license workspace from LSoM.

As the school is in its development phase, the staff decided to license 16 spaces for shared artist studios, again to cross-finance the rent during the organizations’ development phase. These were very quickly filled by people engaging in various practices, not restricted to mosaic. Some of these spaces are separated from the main open studio in which mosaic making activities and teaching takes place, providing eight shared spaces in an open plan configuration and an additional two lockable studios, one which is shared among two artists and one housing a book binding workshop.

As these studios were moved into, the artists and makers had to invest substantial time and some of their own resources in painting the walls to make the space brighter, considering the site was a former garage with dark-grey concrete floors and walls. They moved in recycled furniture either found in a skip nearby or borrowed from the school, which receives furniture donations from the British Library. For some of the users of the space this was the first time they had set up an artist studio, as they have only recently started to develop an artistic practice and had to become familiar with environments for artistic production. This meant new skills had to be learned in terms of organizing a space for artistic production, learning about the kind of environment their practice needs to flourish, i.e., prompting questions like: Is there a specific structure or way of organization needed for me to use the space? Or do I require more unstructured or chaotic environment to be creative?

On another level, they learn through sharing space with other artists about their identity as artists or makers, and if they prefer to work in isolation or if they can work with others. For some, this is
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a matter or practice, whereas for others this is linked to personality and character, or a combination of both.

“I move my things around as required with the size of works I make. For me it is important that I can concentrate in my own space, but at the same time I have access to the social environment of the school in the open workshop area. I often talk to members of staff who are always open, which helps me to refresh my mind to then get back to my work with more ideas.” (resident artist/painter)

“The studio is well organized with designated and labelled places for tools and materials, which is important so I know where to look for them and where to put them back. I know the importance of having a self-organized system in place as I work as an artist assistant in a big industrial workshop.” (short course student)

These statements highlight how there are the formally set up workspaces for mosaic students and teachers juxtaposed with the more informal spaces that resident artists shape through the requirements of their own practices. Whereas these formal workshop spaces are accessible to the resident artists, their studios are more reclusive yet accessible through the social and symbolic dynamic that comes with being part of the overall space. An important element here is around the flexibility for artists to shape their space and what kind of learning happens when people are given this choice rather than being moved into a space already designed and finished.

Coworking as co-learning
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Not only does access to other studios stimulate the way of working of other users, but very importantly it allows for absorbing aesthetics into one’s own way of seeing: “Work changes through seeing other peoples’ work develop, not directly but through the process of making” (resident artist/painter). This can be contextualized as symbolic form of learning only possible within shared workspaces, as access to and visibility of other studios is open. Important here is that direct collaboration is not prescribed but might be a result of having conversations with others about the work.

On a very practical and technical level, users of the space learned how to use DIY tools and evaluate health and safety within an artisan workshop. Members have access to a wood workshop, a tool store as well as the mosaic making facilities and the schools’ computers if required. Access to the facilities is negotiated between individuals who carry specific knowledge, i.e., the core staff team at the school will direct users towards specific resources or will give organizational support whereas other users of the space (paying members or volunteers) have specific knowledge such as in wood work which they can share with users on a trust and favor based system, rather than this being monetary transaction or formal teaching arrangement. In this sense the learning in the space is negotiated through individuals who carry specific knowledge that is released through asking for help. Through using materials and tools social interaction emerges, which again creates opportunities for interaction with others and their ideas, fostering innovation, collaboration, and ideas.

“I work for the school on a voluntary basis, helping the studio build storage units or cut wood bases for mosaic courses, in exchange for having space and resources for my carpentry business. People come to me often with very few ideas about what tools they might need to make a frame, for
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example. I then chat to them about their project and guide them towards the tools and materials they need and the ways in which they need to set up their project. I observe often how during the process of working with wood the students or resident artists are verifying with their peers that what they are doing is correct. Often, those that I instruct then tell others how to make a frame. They pass on the knowledge.” (carpenter and technician)

In this quote we can read how the environment of LSoM facilitates legitimate peripheral participation (Lave & Wenger, 1991) allowing for individuals to move from learning to teachers and back to learners in a range of flexible environments and participation opportunities. Interestingly, although the organization has various modes of formal teaching and learning as part of their diverse courses ranging from vocation to higher education, the learning environment is shared between users of the space enrolled on course and those licensing a studio not enrolled on any formal teaching. Studio users therefore may not have access to the specific knowledge mediated within formalized teaching to which they do not have direct access, however because the space is open, they can ask students any questions or observe their progress. This has also been highly beneficial for the schools’ short course students who use the space only once a week and can see progress from other people working on bigger projects and more complex methods around them.

“My short course students benefit from the openness of the space. It allows me to show them work in progress form the diploma, which is a level of practice they would otherwise have no access to. This way they learn about different techniques and approaches for large-scale and professional mosaic.” (short course teacher)
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Learning and shared values

Despite the LSoM focusing on mosaic, members of the shared workspace felt the environment was open and tolerant towards a variety of people, practices and philosophies of making, seeking learning from exchange not only within specialist knowledge in mosaic but through crossover between practices and disciplines. This can be seen as a model of “connected learning” which engages individuals on a range of level and therefore instigate shared values and actions. The school has students and volunteers with special needs and some sessions with children, which is an opportunity many of the artists have used to learn new skills in communicating with potentially marginalized members of the community. They felt that in other shared workspaces they would not be exposed to such a level of diversity, which “makes me a more tolerant person, teaches me how to exercise patience and how to approach diverse audiences about my work or generally about life” (ceramicist).

What these examples of social interaction show, is how the space generates not only an experience of collaborative practice in a shared learning environment primarily for mosaic makers, but an ethos of “tolerance, openness and respect” which is born out of and mediated through the social ethos of the organization. Along these lines one of the students who used to have a studio with the school, expressed that she feels more in common with people of different backgrounds at the school than with people from her corporate background. Another member underlined this by detailing the schools’ openness through comparison with other mosaic schools, for example those in Italy which are more focused on retaining knowledge within an exclusive group of makers in order to retain competitive advantage on a niche market. The LSoM requires openness to increase
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opportunities for the mosaic sector and for the local community, and therefore has an outreach ethos in order to create a much broader movement around mosaic and social impact.

Despite the mosaic process being highly collaborative within a collective of artisans, it is not strictly through this practice that the organizations’ social ethos is mediated. A number of respondents highlighted the role of organizational staff as curators for the space, who have the power to define what this ethos is, yet this does not mean it is a top-down decision. The respondents felt the space was not any more hierarchical because this, and that change within the shared learning space was only possible if these shared core principles were clear, fair and open to criticism. This process of negotiation creates an environment for learning not only for users of the space but also for those organizing it. This horizontal level of learning is achieved through the ethos of being open and listening to suggestions and actioning upon these within the frame of core principles gives.

Whereas some of the respondents referred to the LSoM’s model of shared workspace as Makerspace or Hackspace, others thought it was a Community space because of the openness towards the space’s educational activities being attended by a diversity of people. This is something that all respondents noted as unique and valued. Membership or the status as a user, again, is not only negotiated through a monetary transaction, but through skills offered in exchange of space. This negotiation is something new for people not coming from an arts or potentially activist background and is part of the learning process, where much of learning is mediated through social and symbolic interaction (Wenger, 1998). The respondents clearly identified more with a shared workspace that is for makers, than with a space that caters for digital production “in which images of art are reproduced but not art made” (short course teacher). There are for example spaces with a more design-led corporate appeal featuring hot-desking and entertainment space, which
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cater more broadly to the creative industries and/or the digital sector. Some of the respondents felt interaction in this kind of spaces is on the basis of business with clear set of goals and commercial ambitions, whereas Makerspaces allow for a free flow of ideas, social and material interaction around which social and subject-specific learning evolves.
As Figure 16.2 summarizes the shared space and tool provide a platform for the interaction between school users and studio users. This shared interaction offers the opportunity and affordances to create forms of collaborations, learning and value/aesthetic sharing which bring create a cohesive community within the space.

<FIGURE 16.2 HERE>

Discussion and conclusions
The case study of LSoM provides a useful platform to reflect on the dynamics of learning within collaborative spaces but also the different modes and levels of learning that can be identified in collaborative settings. In particular, we highlighted here that LSoM can be conceived as a hybrid space proving both studio/coworking facilities as well as hosting formal learning opportunities (mosaic teaching). Using Figure 16.3 we could argue that the first function prioritizes the creation of a social/community environment, whereas the second prioritizes learning. However, the open space nature of LSoM and the values of the organization means that rather than these two distinct functions remaining separate, they merge and interconnect generating a model closer to the “makerspace” model, where high levels of learning and interaction co-exist and interconnect with a highly connected community.
In the chapter we highlighted a range of nested and interconnected opportunities for learning: from learning specific skills, to learning by relating with others, to learning through access to individuals and their values and approaches, to identifying with modes of artistic production. These are very much individual trajectories which are facilitate by a social context which outside of LSoM would not have emerged. However, we argue that this can be seen as a model of “connected learning”, not only because it engages individuals on a range of levels and therefore instigates shared values and actions but because the learning is not only experienced by the individuals involved but shaped by them and their action, both everyday practical actions as well as actions of political engagement or activism. This also underlines how the LSoM’s model is more of an ecosystem that needs case-by-case decision making by those identified as “curators” of the space, rather than a generalization of how it should function. The architects however felt that for this ecosystem to work it should have a maximum size, and that, if the school grew their provision of spaces, this should be separated and its ethos managed by new curators, i.e., a studio manager and various volunteers who will run the new space. Changes of structure might change patterns of learning and would need to be carefully considered and researched.

LSoM represent a case study of hybrid space that offers learning opportunities and coworking. Whereas the practices emerging in LSoM cannot be generalized or replicated in other spaces, we believe the issues of learning and collaboration are intrinsically very relevant. We propose that bridging learning and collaboration using a situated learning approach can be a useful lens to analyze any collaborative space, even spaces that focus just on coworking. Whereas LSoM can
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provide an interesting input in this discussion, we recognize more research is needed and specifically around these dichotomies:

1) The negotiation between hierarchy and self-organization in collaborative spaces, which brings to attention evolution of such spaces between planned and organic development;

2) The importance of materiality versus technology – shared tools as well as space to create connection and opportunities for learning;

3) Material and aesthetic implications of space are important, for example how the design of workspace can foster collaboration or cater flexibly for the physical and mental needs of artists.

Finally, we highlighted in the paper how a benefit of having an open community-based shared learning space, is that users are exposed to members of the locale and therefore engage in conversations about place. One of the users highlighted how there could be much more emphasis for studio users to explore the neighborhood, in particular because the school is so close to Hampstead Heath, as a source of inspiration and using the park for their wellbeing. In this respect, we argue that the impact of the connected learning of LSoM also reaches beyond its spaces and have wider regeneration potential also for its context. As Glaeser (1999) discusses in relation to city “as impressive as the role of cities in generating new innovations may be, the primary informational role of cities may not be in creating cutting edge technologies, but rather in creating learning opportunities for everyday people. Dense urban agglomerations provide a faster rate of contact between individuals and each new contact provide an opportunity”. This captures the ethos of LSoM but also the wider potential for learning that collaborative spaces can have in our cities. We hope that future research can consider this impact within the broader community.
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References


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