The third wave of coworking: neo-corporate movement vs resilient practice

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Abstract Coworking spaces affirmed in recent years as a mainstream, 'neo-corporate' model of flexible work in post-recession, urban knowledge economies. However, there is growing evidence of spaces that apply the discourses and practices of the coworking movement in ways that are alternative to the 'neo-corporate' model, both in urban and non-urban contexts. Exploring the ethos and practices of an urban co-operative space in London and a rural 'innovation hub' in Southern Italy, the article illustrates the emergence of coworking endeavours that set in opposition to the 'neo-corporate' paradigm, defining these as 'resilient'. We show 'resilient' coworking spaces are organizational actors that interact with the surrounding context much more than their counterparts, blending entrepreneurial logics with forms of political and social activism. We argue their emergence might be the harbinger of a new phase in the evolution of the coworking phenomenon.

Keywords Coworking spaces, knowledge economy, collaborative work, creative city, social relations

Introduction

Started in 2005 in San Francisco as a self-proclaimed grassroots 'movement' promoting collaboration and communitarian interaction among freelance workers (Reed, 2007), the diffusion of coworking spaces in the knowledge and creative economy has quickly become a global phenomenon (Moriset, 2014; Lindtner and Li, 2012). Initially understood as 'third places' between home and work and a response to the constraints of freelancing, such as isolation and homeworking (O'Brien, 2008), today coworking spaces represent the main workplace for a variety of workers, mainly located in global cities such as London, San Francisco, or Berlin. The 2018 Global Coworking Survey estimates that 1.2 million workers have worked from coworking spaces by the end of 2017 (Deskmag, 2018). Over this time, coworking has affirmed as a mainstream, 'neo-corporate' model of flexible work that caters

to the emergent tech sector and its entrepreneurial-driven ideology (Johns and Gratton, 2013).

More recently, however, we have witnessed the emergence of coworking spaces that make use of the discourses and practices that are typical of the 'neo-corporate' model but explicitly set as alternative to it. Interestingly, some of these spaces have also appeared outside the usual setting of the global city, in more peripheral or disadvantaged areas (e.g. Fuzi, 2015) and emerging economies (e.g. Thailand and Malaysia, see Leung and Cossu, forthcoming). To the aim of offering new insights on the evolution of the coworking phenomenon, this article takes a closer look at two examples of 'alternative' workspaces – an urban co-operative space in North London, and a non-urban 'innovation hub' in Southern Italy. Through an ethnographic exploration of these spaces, comprising of visits and interviews to key informants active in these contexts, we illustrate how these spaces are organizational actors that interact with the surrounding social realm much more than their 'neo-corporate' counterparts, promoting practices that blend entrepreneurial logics with forms of political and social activism. We define such spaces as 'resilient', with this term drawing from existing research in urban and cultural studies (Pratt, 2015) to indicate an ethos that does not explicitly refute the discourses and practices that characterise the 'neo-corporate' coworking model, but actually makes use of these to pursue outcomes that stand in opposition the neoliberal values of entrepreneurialism and 'collaborative individualism' (Bandinelli and Gandini, forthcoming) that the 'neo-corporate' model of coworking often engenders and reproduces (De Peuter et al., 2017).

Based on our observation of these spaces, we argue that the diffusion of 'resilient' coworking practices as here defined might be seen as the harbinger of a new phase in the evolution of the coworking phenomenon. Following the 'avant-garde' phase of coworking, characterised by a grassroots and communitarian but not necessarily anti-corporate ethos (Reed, 2007), and the subsequent affirmation of coworking as a 'neo-corporate' model of flexible work (Johns and Gratton, 2013), we contend 'resilient' spaces might be seen as a counter-movement to the 'neo-corporate' turn. This is characterised by coworking spaces and practices that: a) seek economic sustainability *and* social impact as non-mutually exclusive outcomes; b) politically oppose the hegemonic, 'neo-corporate' model of coworking and reaffirm the original meanings and practices of workspace sharing that characterised the avant-garde phase; and c) search for new territories of action outside the traditional boundaries of the global 'creative city' (d'Ovidio and Cossu, 2016).

The paper is organised as follows. In the next section we look at the academic debate around coworking spaces and practices, aiming to observe the evolution of the coworking phenomenon in a historical perspective. Subsequently, we observe the two spaces at the centre of our research and give account of how these make use of the discourses and practices of the coworking movement to set themselves aside from the mainstream, 'neo-corporate' model. In the conclusive section, we expand on the notion of 'resilience' and contextualise it within the argument of a new phase in the evolution of coworking practices, at the same time offering suggestions for future research.

Coworking and the creative economy

Research on work in the urban knowledge and creative economy has occupied the pages of this journal, and of similar outlets, for more than two decades (Banks and O'Connor, 2017). Throughout this period, and particularly around the early 2000s, we have witnessed the emergent critique to the diffusion of precarity and self-employment in this context, and to the contextual affirmation of a distinguished entrepreneurial culture of work that is reflected into the ethos and practices of 'being creative' (McRobbie, 2016). Coworking spaces and practices emerge in this same period precisely as a response to the increasing fragmentation and individualisation of work practices in the creative economy. In its original understanding, coworking was conceived of as a grassroots, communitarian model of workspace sharing that would cater to the practical and emotional needs of displaced freelancers, offering them an opportunity to socialize and work from a place that is different from the domestic environment (Spinuzzi, 2012). Taken in a historical perspective, this should be seen as the 'avant-garde' phase of the coworking movement, led by what may be described as a 'marginal elite' of creative workers who aspired to take part in the emergent creative economy but were somewhat excluded from it, and henceforth explored alternative practices and meanings to work (Gandini, Bandinelli and Cossu, 2017).

Research from different disciplines has looked at the diffusion of coworking spaces and practices, highlighting the heterogeneity of the coworking phenomenon (Waters-Lynch, 2016). Different kinds of spaces have been grouped under the 'coworking' umbrella, including collaborative offices for freelancers working in advertising and marketing (Spinuzzi, 2012; Merkel, 2015) as well as 'hubs' for social entrepreneurs (Bandinelli, 2016), 'makerspaces' and Fab Labs (Ramella and Manzo, 2018; Niaros et al., 2017; Soderberg,

2016) but also, controversially, spaces managed by firms with available office space, that establish a 'coworking zone' at their premises (JLL, 2016). This paper adopts the extensive definition of coworking proposed by Parrino (2015), by which a coworking space is characterised by:

"1. the co-localisation of various coworkers within the same work environment;
2. the presence of workers heterogeneous by occupation and/or sector in which they operate and/or organisational status and affiliation
3. the presence (or not) of activities and tools designed to stimulate the emergence of relationships and collaboration among coworkers." (Parrino 2015: 11).

After an initial enthusiasm, largely owed to its grassroots and communitarian origins, the academic debate on coworking spaces and practices soon started to take notice of the somewhat incoherent nature of this 'movement'. Empirical research evidenced that workers access coworking spaces primarily with instrumental motivations, that include reducing isolation and homeworking but also the strategic necessity to 'network' (Gandini, 2015) and search for professional collaborations (Brown, 2017). Some highlighted that collaboration among workers within coworking spaces actually occurs to a far lesser extent than what is commonly believed (Parrino, 2015), and warned that coworking practices instead largely consist into 'working alone together' (Spinuzzi, 2012).

It may be argued that, throughout its evolution, after the initial grassroots phase coworking practices instead affirmed as a distinct 'neo-corporate' model of work aimed to cater to the post-recession knowledge and creative economy, and particularly the emergent 'tech' sector across global cities - famously described by McWilliams (2016) as a 'flat white economy'. In this model, coworking spaces and practices appeal to freelance creative workers but also other subjects, such as entrepreneurs, changemakers (Bandinelli, 2016) and 'startuppers' of the tech scene, as a consumer-driven endeavour, that offers the option of enjoying a 'cool' workspace that matches the lifestyle and ethos of the mainstream tech economy (Gruen and Bardhi, 2018). This is epitomised by the rise of global coworking players such as WeWork, Google or Impact Hub, that put into practice what is essentially a scheme of renting out real estate space, usually through a franchise operation principled on the payment of periodic fees by members. These operate essentially as market intermediaries, that allow workers to come into contact with others and develop relationships of various in a pseudo-corporate environment (Gregg and Lodato, 2018; De Peuter et al., 2017). In so doing, these spaces

sell to their members what is akin to a perceived sense of community, intended as a form of interaction that is designed to foster knowledge exchange and serendipitous encounters, but does not entail the actual sharing of values (Arvidsson, 2018; Bandinelli, 2016; Butcher, 2016).

In other words, as De Peuter et al. (2017) have underlined, coworking practices are connoted by an 'ambivalent' set of discourses and meanings, that bear an unfulfilled potential for the enactment of collective-based work practices that do not reinforce the neoliberal entrepreneurial ethos:

"Coworking is deeply ambivalent. It emerged from below and was subsequently harnessed by private market interests. Coworking softens effects of flexploitation, albeit in a manner that tends to deepen neoliberal subjectification. Pushing back against both recuperation and individualization requires that coworking spaces explore alternatives to capitalist ownership conventions" (De Peuter et al., 2017: 701).

The ambivalence of practices and meanings that De Peuter and colleagues note as a peculiar feature of coworking practices implies, in other words, that the currently dominant, mainstream 'neo-corporate' model should not be seen as the *only* kind of coworking model available. In fact, as Merkel (2018) sustains, although coworking affirmed in its evolution as an eminently urban, commercially-driven phenomenon, bottom-up initiatives principled on the idea of 'commoning' resources have also continued to appear. These, Merkel (2018) argues, consist in grassroots coworking initiatives characterised by smaller, independently-run spaces which primary purpose is to "create new socio-material infrastructures for freelance work (...) to coordinate and facilitate an alternative organization of work" (2018: 13-14). Interestingly, also, some of these bottom-up coworking endeavours have started to appear in contexts that are not necessarily that of a creative city. Fuzi (2015), for instance, studied emergent coworking practices in South Wales, suggesting that when coworking spaces emerge within contexts where entrepreneurial cultures are weaker, these transform into hybrid social spaces whereby the features of corporate coworking practices blend with those of a grassroots accelerator or incubator (Fuzi, 2015). As noted by Brown (2017), the urban nature of coworking has somewhat been taken by existing research as an unchallenged assumption. Virtually all empirical work on coworking practices in fact recounts of coworking experiences in global 'creative cities', mostly in the West - such as San Francisco (Moriset, 2013), Berlin (Lange, 2011), Barcelona (Capdevila, 2013), New York

(Merkel, 2015), Milan (Colleoni and Arvidsson, 2014; Parrino, 2015; Arvidsson, 2018), London (Bandinelli, 2016), Athens (Papageorgiou, 2016) - and in South East Asia (Lindtner and Li, 2012; Leung, 2015). This reflects the somewhat 'natural' connection between coworking and the urban environment, as coworking spaces represent a key interface and a 'middleground' for knowledge production and dissemination around creative projects (Merkel, 2015). However, it also shows that non-urban coworking practices are still significantly under-researched.

The continuing appearance of examples of grassroots coworking practices in global cities, together with the emergent diffusion of coworking practices in social contexts that differ from that of the global city, bring about the question of whether the coworking movement is experiencing a new phase in its evolution, that is characterised by a countermovement to its affirmation as a 'neo-corporate' model of work in post-recession knowledge and creative economies. Tab 1., below, summarizes this evolution and its main traits.

Tab. 1 - The evolution of coworking

Phase	Value Logic	Imaginary	Subjects in Context
Avant-garde phase	Social value is prioritised regardless of space sustainability	Crafting pre-existing work cultures into new meanings and practices	Aspirational 'marginal elite' of creative workers
Mainstream, 'neo-corporate' phase	Economic value is prioritised, and discursively framed into social impact	New set of meanings and practices consolidate into a coherent neoliberal imaginary	Centralised, urban-based and top-down logics of space sharing with economic barriers to access (membership fee)
Resilient, 'alternative' phase	Seeking economic sustainability *and* social impact	Political attempt to 'de-stabilise' the hegemonic 'neo-corporate' culture and reaffirm original grassroots practices	Refusal of the top-down logic, attempt to re-calibrate practices around new spaces and territories.

In other words, following the initial 'avant-garde', grassroots phase - characterised by an eminently 'social' logic and by the attempt to reshape flexible work cultures into new

meanings and practices - and its evolution into a 'neo-corporate' model of work - considered as a consumer-driven endeavour whereby economic value is prioritised, and meanings and practices are aligned to a neoliberal context - there may be evidence of an emergent, new phase in which 'neo-corporate' coworking spaces coexist with spaces that explicitly use the same discourses and meanings to set against the 'neo-corporate' model. These pursue economic ends *as well as* social impact, and immerse much more in depth within the territories they reside, within and beyond the global city. In the next sections we take a closer look at two examples that adhere to this 'alternative' framework.

Methodological note

The empirical evidence upon which this paper builds originates from ethnographic research conducted as part of the project [EDITED OUT FOR ANONYMISATION PURPOSES], that aimed at studying practices of commons-based peer production in various contexts in the period 2013-2016. Through a multi-method approach, the project investigated the cultural notions of value and the processes of value formation in emergent collaborative contexts, taken in a broad sense and including, among others, free and open software communities in digital and non-digital spaces, makerspaces, and coworking spaces. This broad scope was aimed at gaining an in-depth understanding of how individuals involved in these communities interact, collaborate and culturally conceive social and economic exchanges within and beyond them. As part of this project, and thanks to its extensive nature, the authors visited a variety of shared and collaborative spaces in Europe and beyond. The ethnographic illustrations offered in this paper pertain to two, purposely-selected spaces visited within the remit of this work.
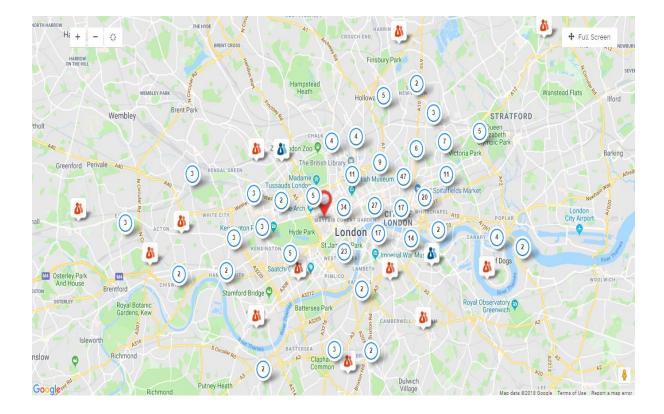
The first space we will observe in this article is Outlandish, a coworking co-operative based in north London, where affiliates work in a shared office and often on shared projects, receiving forms of 'give-back' payment for work they engage in as a collective, rather than as individuals. Part of Outlandish is also a 'traditional' coworking space, named Space4. Outlandish offers an example of coworking practices that aim to suppress 'alone togetherness' by design, and instead seek to promote an approach to freelancing in a global creative city that refutes the hyper-entrepreneurialised Silicon Valley culture, using some of its features to promote fairer work practices. The second case here observed is RuralHub, a shared space located on the hillside of Salerno, in the Southern Italian province, that aims to foster social innovation in a rural context. In chronological order research at RuralHub was

conducted first, and entailed repeated visits at the space by authors (a first one in 2013, when the space first opened, and a last one in 2018), each lasting between a day to two weeks. This also entailed semi-structured interviews with the founders, some of the key members of the space and also representatives of the local network of collaborators established by RuralHub. Outlandish comes to be part of this research at a later date, as a follow-up to the project previously mentioned, when we decided to develop a specific focus on 'alternative' coworking practices. Research at Outlandish (and Space4) was conducted in 2017-18 and entailed multiple visits to the space, during daytime as well as in occasion of specific events held at their premises. Alongside qualitative notes, an interview with one of the managers of the space was conducted as a key informant. Representatives for these spaces have agreed not to be anonymised in the presentation of findings.

As it presents illustrations, or 'vignettes', about two purposely-selected spaces, this article maintains an exploratory scope based on an unstructured qualitative approach. As a result, it does not represent a systematic account of ethnographic observations conducted at each space, nor it seeks to present a somewhat generalisable account of 'alternative' coworking practices. Rather, it is designed to provide with insights on the existence and contours of an approach to coworking that sets as alternative to the 'neo-corporate' model, to the aim of stimulating further research on the topic.

Alternative coworking in the city: Outlandish

The urban context of London is an established and lively, global coworking scene (Merkel, 2016; Moriset, 2014). The website *Coworking London*, that hosts a directory of coworking spaces in the British capital, lists more than 170 coworking spaces active at the time of writing, and estimates that around 5000 workers inhabit them. Here below is a screenshot of the geographic distribution of these spaces, per urban area, taken from the same source, in July 2018.

Fig. 1 - Coworking spaces distribution, London (July 2018)
Available at: www.coworkinglondon.com (Last accessed 4 July 2018)

As the map shows, numerous spaces are located in the Eastern part of the city, where most tech startups have their headquarters, and essentially grapple around the Old Street area - now commonly labelled as the Silicon Roundabout, in an attempt to draw a parallel with the Silicon Valley (see McWilliams, 2016). This area also hosts the Google Campus, among the first large scale 'neo-corporate' coworking spaces worldwide, as well as two branches of the coworking franchise WeWork. Yet, spaces that are 'alternative' to the neo-corporate version of the coworking model exist within the very same context. A report from IPPR (2016) estimates that a majority of shared workspaces in London are actually run by charities, social enterprises or local co-operatives (see Merkel, 2018: 13). Among these are, for examples, grassroots spaces such as Camden Collective, Hackney Downs Studios, IndyCube and Outlandish/Space4.

Outlandish is a tech co-operative specialised in providing consultancy on a range of digital services. Established in 2010 as a grassroots organization based on the practice of working together, initially its status was that of an asset-locked LLP. In 2016 it turned into a cooperative.[1] Members of Outlandish work for the cooperative for a minimum amount of time over a year in order to be eligible for membership, but can also use the space to work on their own independent projects. In this sense Outlandish is *also* a coworking space;

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[1] *Outlandish*, available at: https://outlandish.com/about/ (last access 24 July 2017)

Outlandish in fact also hosts a separate coworking space, named Space4, open to workers who do not want to join Outlandish as a co-operative. Space4 is housed in the same premises of Outlandish (one floor down) and is also used by co-operative members as a venue for events or public talks.

Practically speaking, Outlandish is headquartered on the third floor of an old building in the multiculturally diverse borough of Finsbury Park, North London. This neighbourhood is a typical area of residence for tech workers who partake in the Silicon Roundabout and Shoreditch scene, areas where renting is usually unaffordable (McWilliams, 2016). Incidentally, Outlandish is located just a few blocks away from the residency of Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn, who is also the local Member of Parliament for this constituency. Our key informant and guide through the space, Kayleigh, is a project manager and designer in her 20s and a very active member of the collective, that she frequently represents at events and conferences. Kayleigh explains that the very own existence of Outlandish within this area is very much at risk, since the neighbourhood is undergoing a rather classic process of gentrification via real estate financing. This is visibly marked by the demolition of the buildings that used to stand right in front of Outlandish, that are going to be rebuilt into new 'luxury accommodations' (on this practice see Hatherley, 2016). Kayleigh tells us that, for the time being, the space has managed to renew its location agreement but the future of their premises is very much uncertain, as the area is undergoing rapid and significant change.

As a result, the space itself is quite tiny and old, and appears more similar to an arts space than to a corporate office. Members are variously dislocated into what Kayleigh describes as 'thematic' rooms - one hosts developers, another hosts designers, and so on. This denotes a slightly more structured organization of space sharing by Outlandish if compared to that of a traditional coworking space, and is a reflection of the co-operative way of working that Outlandish pursues. Observing the space, we are struck by the level of interaction among workers, that is far superior to what can be observed in a 'neo-corporate' coworking space where silence is a major presence, and exchanges among users usually take place somewhat casually in communal areas or by the coffee machine. This, Kayleigh explains, is very much a reflection of the ethos of Outlandish, that wants to be seen as a safe haven for freelancers:

"I would definitely class Outlandish as a community, as the organization itself, because one thing that we really value, probably over skills to be honest, is alignment to our ethos, and it's

kind of like a way of thinking, being committed to Outlandish, and working on socially good projects, and also because we're a worker coop this idea of community kind of goes hand in hand"

While making broad use of the imaginary and practices that are typical of a 'neo-corporate' coworking space, including the 'community' signifier, Outlandish engages workers into sharing the ethos of the co-operative. Outlandish does not disdain to call itself a 'brand', as it sees its own branding as a device for members to take projects on board, both individually and on behalf of the space. Just like any other actor in the tech scene, Outlandish has developed a lively online presence, particularly marked by a Twitter feed with more than 1200 followers on the date this article is being finalised. Yet contrary to a 'neo-corporate' coworking space, this communitarian ethos is translated into actually communitarian practices, as one of Outlandish members recounts in a post on the space's blog, where she outlines how being an 'Outlander' allows her to 'work with her friends', maintain a degree of the 'good' flexibility that the independent status offers but with the added responsibility of an employee-owned endeavour, and avoid the necessity of profit-maximisation at the expense of quality work. Accordingly, the forms of sociality that can be observed among workers in the space signal the presence of an 'alternative' mentality, funnily epitomised by a selection of 'anti-neoliberal' mugs on display in the communal kitchen. Kayleigh explains this further:

"It's quite a world away from the kind of Old Street startup mentality, completely different … I find that startup mentality a bit of a shame, because it's kind of like "make your business as much valuable as you can in a short amount of time",. which usually means having quite a big gap in pay and perhaps exploiting workers in the sense that you're not getting paid very well or working long hours, free internship and stuff like that… making it as much valuable as possible and sell it for as much cash as you can." (Kayleigh)

Through its co-operative status, Outlandish signals its aim to foster collectively shared work practices; its members can work flexibly, collectively and individually, on both commercial and charity projects. The ethos of Outlandish rejects 'alone togetherness' by design; at the same time, some of the Outlandish coworking practices entail forms of skill development that are akin to that of a 'community of practice' (Wenger, 1998), as encapsulated in the expression "See one, do one, teach one". [2] Just like any other coworking space (eg. Fuzi,

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[2] *Outlandish*, available at: https://outlandish.com/blog/whats-it-like-being-abi-the-outlander/ (last access 24 July 2017)

2015, Forlano, 2011), also for Outlandish events are a key moment in the establishment and growth of a coworking endeavour. Outlandish regularly host events, mainly at Space4, and participates to events hosted by others, including tech conferences. Its many projects maintain a strong social angle, and often entail campaigning around social issues such as precarious employment, school funding, or the condition of women working in the tech sector, usually involving the local community. An example is the 'School Cuts' project (see: http://www.schoolcuts.org.uk), an awareness campaign developed in collaboration with the National Union of Teachers to supply more funding to underfunded schools. Started as a local endeavour, the campaign developed into a national one, and the participation by Outlandish consisted in the design of a platform through which members of the public were able to fact-check school funding by searching a database of schools per postcode or name. This also represents an example of the kind of embeddedness with the local community that Outlandish actively pursues.

While it performs consultancy work for some important actors in the tech world, at the same time Outlandish aims to establish as an example that advances the cooperative model of work within the digital economy. In line with what argued by Sandoval (2016), the observation of Outlandish testifies to how the cooperative model can potentially establish as a viable alternative to the precarious and exploitative worklife of the knowledge worker. Co-ops, Sandoval argues, have "*the potential to maintain the autonomy enjoyed by many freelance cultural workers while at the same time creating a workplace that offers security instead of precariousness, equal rights instead of inequality, and solidarity instead of individualisation" (Sandoval, 2016: 56).* Its ethos, together with the forms of interaction that members are required to nurture to be part of Outlandish and its positioning as a social actor in the neighbourhood it inhabits, make Outlandish a paradigmatic example of coworking practices that makes use of the discourses and practices of the coworking movement to actually depart from the 'neo-corporate' version of coworking spaces as a consumer-driven, lifestyle choice, and set explicitly in opposition to it. As a co-operative, Outlandish makes use of the discourses and meanings of coworking practice that actors such as Google or WeWork also display, but sets itself apart from the competitive, profit-driven model of work these promote.

Alternative coworking beyond the city: RuralHub

In parallel with the continuous appearance of grassroots coworking spaces animated by communicarian logics within cities (Merkel, 2018), another interesting aspect in the current evolution of the coworking phenomenon is the diffusion of coworking spaces and endeavours outside of the usual environment of the city. The Italian context offers an interesting example of this proliferation, as a coworking scene characterised by a 'distributed' geographical presence.
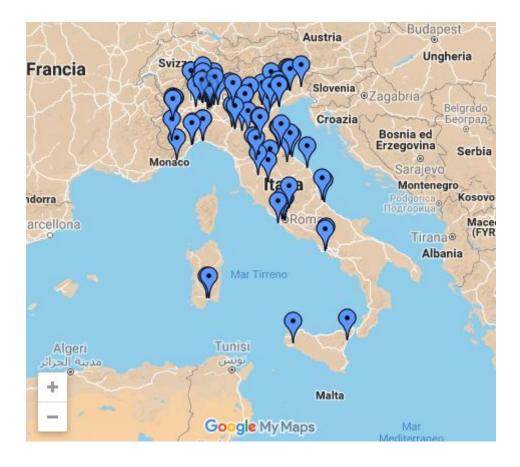
Italy has experienced a spike in the diffusion of coworking practices starting from 2008 in Milan, when the first coworking space appeared. In the same year *La Repubblica*, one of the leading newspapers in Italy, dedicated a special issue to the rise of coworking spaces in the city. Milan remains a significant coworking hub to date, as it hosts a remarkable number of spaces - 54, as 'certified' by the local municipality.[3] Yet coworking spaces in Italy have regularly appeared also in contexts that are not necessarily a major city or urban aggregation. This can be observed if we look at the map of one of the main coworking networks, the franchise Cowo. Cowo is one of the initiators of the Italian coworking scene, being the space that introduced coworking practice 'as we know it' in Milan in 2008 as part of an experimentation during the Milan Design Week. It remains an active voice in the Italian coworking movement to date, having spread its presence across various locations throughout the entire country.[4] (Fig. 2).

Fig. 2 - Cowo spaces in Italy (September 2018)
Available at: http://www.coworkingproject.com/coworking-network/map/ (last access 28 September 2018)

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[3] See also http://www.loft-coworking.it/coworking-milano-certificati-elenco-aggiornato-dal-comune/ (last accessed 28 July 2017)
[4] See CheFuturo, 2012, available at:
http://www.chefuturo.it/2012/08/la-storia-del-coworking-italiano-che-conquisto-litalia-da-lambrate/ (last access 28 July 2017). See also Colleoni and Arvidsson (2014) and Pacchi (2015)

Alongside Cowo, a number of established coworking franchises exist across the country, such as Impact Hub and Talent Garden. While Impact Hub is an international initiative, Cowo and Talent Garden are Italian-born and became successful in parallel, albeit different, ways. While Cowo is a pioneer in the local coworking scene, Talent Garden has established as a more international actor embedded in the startup scene, with a presence also in London. Both Cowo and Talent Garden maintain a 'neo-corporate' nature, that is evidenced by a predominant attention to entrepreneurship and the active search for funding opportunities. Talent Garden, for instance, has been the beneficiary of a round of venture capital investment for entrepreneurial expansion in 2016. [5]

Many other coworking spaces, however, are active across the peninsula as 'independent', grassroots endeavours that emerge as a result of the political context within which some among their founders and key actors are, or have been, involved. These spaces are designed to actively reject the precarious lives and underpaid jobs that young graduates often experience in a country characterised by high youth unemployment (Eurostat, 2018). Interestingly, some of the more grassroots Italian coworking spaces appear to be principled

[5] *Endeavor*, available at: http://endeavor.org/in-the-news/talent-garden-catalyst-investment/ (last access 24 July, 2017).

on an idea of work that is intimately connected with a sense of belonging to a local territory, and attempt at putting in practice peer-to-peer initiatives inspired by hacking or de-growth movements (see Orria and Luise, 2017). Such independent spaces are either self-funded or seek access to public funding on a competitive basis. They are mostly located in peripheral areas that nonetheless maintain some form of connection to the nearest urban context, and usually establish a network of local partners who share the 'alternative' approach to work these spaces promote. The role of such spaces in the context in which they appear is therefore often that of a platform for the translation and dissemination of knowledge and innovative organisational models of work in relatively deindustrialised areas.

RuralHub represents an interesting example of this kind of 'alternative', localised approach. Based on the hillside surroundings of Salerno, in the South of Italy, RuralHub is the first shared space based in Southern Italy, in the Campania region, that takes inspiration from the hacking movement and works as a connection hub and workspace for a number of different subjects, including researchers and activists but also local entrepreneurs who are interested in experimenting with new models of economic development in rural areas. Like Outlandish, RuralHub is in many ways *also* a coworking space; a key aim of RuralHub is in fact to facilitate the connection among subjects, innovative project and enterprises, as well as with local investors and grassroots associations active in the local area. Akin to a community of practice (Wenger, 1998), it fosters the learning and sharing of innovative practices. It is at once a co-living and co-working rural space, a research lab on social innovation and Do It Yourself (DIY) practices, a place to experiment new communitarian endeavours, both formally and informally, and an environment whereby participants can develop projects that involve local rural communities. As a space for education and learning, RuralHub supports and integrates with the formal education provided by a branch of the University of Salerno, located only few kilometers away. Thus, Rural Hub also represents a training ground for young graduates of the area to experiment with new technologies, experience work in the collaborative economy as well as exercise a critique to its most controversial features.

Similar to Outlandish, RuralHub uses the lexicon, imaginary and discourses of the tech economy - especially those related to the signifiers of 'innovation' and 'entrepreneurship' - to promote grassroots practices that are embedded within the local community in which it resides. As with a traditional space, events represent an important aspect for RuralHub both for economic sustainability as well as for aggregative purposes. An example of this is given

by the event that took place in Caselle in Pittari (Salerno) in July 2016, in which RuralHub participated. The event was called "Antibodies to the Sharing Economy", and sought to promote innovative 'good' practices of sharing in the context of the rural economy of the region. On the one hand, the event was aimed to challenge the ultra-positive narrative around the global 'sharing economy' through an open dialogue among experts, scholars, activists and the local community, hosted in both formal and informal settings. In parallel, it sought to engage in a highly participative and complex collaborative effort, the organization of the "Palio del Grano" (literally 'award of grains', a 'grain fair' created less than a decade ago that draws from the agricultural traditions of the Italian South in previous centuries). The event, designed to include both the local population and the wider community of artists, researchers and hackers in residence at RuralHub, also gained coverage from media outlets at national and international level.

This showcases the communitarian approach that is at the heart of the RuralHub ethos, and that is epitomous of how Rural Hub, just like Outlandish, distances itself from the 'neo-corporate' model of work and space sharing. The 'Palio del Grano' event represents a discursive and material collaborative effort the success of which was also due to a five-year long, behind the scenes work of nurturing of relationship between RuralHub and the local community of Caselle in Pittari, that was actively 'taken care of' by representatives and members of the space. It is worth mentioning how such 'taking care of relations', according to the RuralHub founders, was also able to save it from bankruptcy. The public funding call originally won by RuralHub failed to deliver the money to most of the winners (31 projects never received funding for about 1 million euros per project). By engaging in forms of self-organization and commoning, RuralHub was able to survive as an atypical space. This is also exemplary of how grassroots models of workspace sharing may be capable of achieving economic ends even outside institutional funding schemes, and without transforming their activity into an consumer-driven, lifestyle experience.

Conclusion. 'Resilient' coworking practices?

The article has presented two examples of 'alternative' coworking initiatives that make use of the set of discourses and practices of the 'neo-corporate' model but position themselves in explicit opposition to it. We define these spaces as 'resilient'. With this term we seek to reconcile with a tradition in urban and cultural studies that conceives of resilience as '*an open perspective that does not resist but embraces change, and accepts it as part of*

existence and being. This is closer to a notion of sustainable living; a process of organisation and adaptation to work in harmony with others, the surroundings, and the wider world: one that enables adaptation and thriving' (Pratt, 2015:62). Yet, we do not intend 'resilience' here simply as a strategy to cope with the individualisation and uncertainty brought about by neoliberalisation (Joseph, 2015; Anderson, 2015), and that in so doing abstains from a larger critique to its consequences. Rather, we conceive of 'resilience' here as a heuristic that adequately describes how the social actors involved in 'alternative' coworking practices frame their distinctiveness as opposed to the 'neo-corporate' model while at the same time often using the same language and practices, but nevertheless working to produce outcomes that do not foster those neoliberal values the 'neo-corporate' model engenders and reproduces.

From a historical perspective, we have argued that the emergence of such 'resilient' spaces as here conceived might be seen as the harbinger of a new phase in the coworking movement. This should not be seen as a rigid, chronological partitioning; rather, we frame this as a fluid transition in a dynamic context whereby various practices and approaches coexist and reciprocally interact with each other, as some of the original features of the coworking movement blend with new and innovative aspects. 'Resilient' spaces, we contend, attempt at repurposing the grassroots logic of the initial phase of the coworking movement in new contexts and settings, and aspire not to reproduce the neoliberal ethos of the global knowledge and creative economy. In so doing, as shown, these spaces interact with the surrounding context in a much deeper way than how a 'neo-corporate' space would, aiming to establish themselves as relevant actors in the local context they inhabit, weaving strong social relations with other actors and with members, and promoting bottom-up social and political action on a larger scale. In so doing, these spaces make use of a grammar that is similar to their 'neo-corporate' counterparts. They do so, we contend, to the instrumental aim of being understandable and recognizable by their audiences - in fact, a more 'radical' approach that refuses to use the same language would probably alienate some of their potential participants.

At its core, it may be argued that the distinctive difference between 'neo-corporate' and 'resilient' coworking spaces and practices should be seen in the recognition, by 'resilient' spaces, of the extent to which social relations and affective engagements are literally put at work in coworking. At the same time, it consists in the attempt to ensure that the outcomes that derive from the development of these social relations, and the consequences these

have within the social context in which they appear, are taken into account. While in a 'neo-corporate' coworking environment social action is collaborative but also largely individualistic (Bandinelli and Gandini, forthcoming), on the contrary the (sometimes explicit) political subjectivation that 'resilient' spaces promote fosters practices that aim to reconstruct and privilege actually communitarian exchanges, and not just 'imagined' coworking communities (Arvidsson, 2018). 'Resilient' spaces strive to bring the quality of the social relations created within and beyond a shared space, back at the centre of the purpose and ethos of what a coworking endeavour should be. In so doing, they embrace innovation and change but do not accept it as a given, or abstain to criticise it. On the contrary, they might be seen as socially-embedded forms of *resistance* to the individualised work practices brought about by the neoliberal model.

As demonstrated by existing research (De Peuter et al., 2017) with which this paper aims to dialogue, we believe the critique to the 'neo-corporate' evolution of coworking practices and the role of coworking in reproducing the neoliberal, individualised ethos of work despite (or, perhaps more appropriately, by means of) promoting a pseudo-communitarian approach to work should be of interest to cultural studies research as much as the individualisation and precarisation of work was to cultural studies scholarship in the early 2000s. The emergence of 'alternative' and 'resilient' coworking spaces and practices, particularly outside the boundaries of the 'creative city', suggests the existence of places, spaces and practices that do not want to be incorporated into the mainstream, 'neo-corporate' scenario of the current creative, digital and tech economy. It will be interesting to see if and to what extent this will develop into a fully formed, coherent countermovement, capable (at least in part) of becoming a larger political proposition.

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