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## From communities to territories: towards a Mediterranean coworking network

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FROM COMMUNITIES TO TERRITORIES: TOWARDS A  
MEDITERRANEAN COWORKING NETWORK  
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In the last few years there has been a growing number of what are known as “coworking” spaces in the world. While they first appeared in the United States, half are now located in Europe. Given the growth of freelancers and teleworking practices, their emergence corresponds to a certain need. Beyond a transformation of the world of work, with fewer salaried employees and localized businesses, they also show another form of management, an alternative production, territory and governance management model – even a new economic and democratic model.

That is the context of the European project CoWorkMed led by the Agency for Sustainable Mediterranean Cities and Territories (AVITEM). Co-financed by the Interreg MED programme, the project involves French, Greek, Italian, Croatian and Spanish partners. It aims at providing an inventory of coworking spaces in these five partner countries and at creating tools adapted to cross-border networking between these third places.

A first study carried out in the framework of this project enables us to examine the emergence of these new ways of working and social construction methods. What do these new places tell us about the transformations of our professional, social and political world? What are they witnessing? How can we turn them into springboards for territorial development?

## The community

The first coworking spaces started out in 2006 in the United States and were directly related to the development of knowledge-based and digital economy – they were created for freelancers who wanted to share a workplace in a community of needs, constraints and values, as well as through the will to create an active network to trigger professional opportunities. The first principle of coworking is therefore a place and a community, a network of shared skills and assets, often animated by social events whose aim is forging links between coworkers on both the social and professional aspect. It is a direct emanation of the concept of the “third place”, between private and public place, home and work, with an informal meeting place that creates opportunities.

Over the following decade, the concept spread to other sectors, resulting in the creation of collaborative production sites, in particular in innovation and research sectors, especially with “fab labs” (for fabrication laboratories). Then the social, cultural and public-service sectors seized them, producing shared spaces adapted to their needs, with a desire to involve stakeholders and users to

develop services through a co-construction logic. Fifteen years later, there is a strong and direct impact on the territories.



*Coworking space Make it Marseille. Studiolar artisan, Author provided*

## The territory

Following the logic of pollination, acceleration, incubation and other processes of transformation of ideas involving a community, these places have become true hubs of local innovation. Bringing together a range of actors in a spontaneous way, they're epicenters of creativity at the scale of a territory, a city or a city center. Thus they activate local economic dynamics and combine them with the unique features of a territory, creating a genuine regenerative ecosystem.

In addition to the direct effects of economic growth, coworking spaces also have indirect impacts on land management. For example, users of these places place an emphasis on proximity between living places and work, they influence mobility and transport. They thus act against urban

congestion, reducing commuting and decreasing the environmental and economic costs linked to transport.

These meeting and interaction points between professionals and users also contribute to restoring the wealth of a territory in its geographical coherence. By creating a concrete and driving network between the inhabitants, citizens, users, workers, who are concerned by the same issues, especially local ones, they value the territory as an integral capital, converging its strengths towards common objectives.



*The coworking space 'Make It Marseille'. Studiolar artisan, Author provided (No reuse)*

## The governance

These third places were designed as spaces for sharing knowledge and building collective dynamics. They are built on values of sustainable development, including in terms of management and governance. Through the development of teleworking, big companies improved their

employees' working and living conditions, giving them more autonomy and making them more creative and productive. Entrepreneurs can boost their territories through related projects. Communities are inspired by this trend, seeking to revitalize declining territories through the impulse of third places in the social and public-service sectors.

Groups and stakeholders that were formerly less open are now creating links. Indeed, from the first "coworking spaces" where professionals from various sectors formed "opportunistic" partnerships (optimising the opportunities offered by the circumstances) to the new forms of innovative, social and cultural third places, real public-private-citizens partnerships are being formed. Through more or less informal places that help people meet each other, civil society and popular democracy reinvent themselves.

After 18 months of implementation, the CoWorkMed project will provide a global vision of these networks in the partner territories (France, Italy, Spain, Greece and Croatia) to promote their institutional recognition and their transnational structuring as a lever of innovation in the Mediterranean. Through the study of new models, it will provide the basis for the creation of a Mediterranean coworking network.