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COMPRENDRE

THIRD PLACES AND EUROPEAN PUBLIC AUTHORITIES

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FOREWORD:

THIRD PLACES: EMERGING CITIZEN SOLUTIONS AT THE HEART OF EUROPEAN ISSUES

"The best places are the ones you leave with the feeling that the future can be changed, even just a little". These words by Rob Hopkins perfectly embody the spirit of third places: spaces for social, ecological and cultural innovation that are profoundly transforming our territories. Rooted in hyper-proximity, they are generating a buzz among citizens, entrepreneurs and institutions across Europe and beyond.

This publication is the fruit of an initiative organized by the ANCT, in partnership with "France Tiers-Lieux", that was held in Montpellier in June 2023, bringing together for the first time more than 300 third-place users from several European countries. The contributions here gathered highlight an emerging reality: third places, conceptualized by an American sociologist: Oldenburg, in 1989, have been a European territorial reality since the 2000s, and are clearly growing since the health-crisis in Europe. From *chitalishte* in Romania to rural third places in Wallonia, from coworking in Catalonia to fablabs in Central Europe and France, these spaces share a common citizen DNA: hybrid, inclusive and deeply rooted in the territories.

Today, this movement is attracting the attention of new territories, countries and even international institutions for its ability to stimulate creativity and rebalance territorial dynamics. The contributions of the researchers and observers in this issue bear witness to this: third places embody a new, bottom-up and profoundly innovative way of "doing things together".

The ANCT, which has been supporting these bottom-up territorial approaches since 2020 via the New Places, New Links program, felt it would be useful to initiate this cooperative movement between European countries in order to strengthen these citizen spaces, and the territories that see them develop throughout Europe.

While third places are already part of a transnational dynamic, their potential could be even better recognized and integrated into European politics. This shared ambition marks the start of a new chapter in cooperation, in the service of territories and their inhabitants, and particularly fragile territories that deserve our commitment and resolute support throughout Europe.

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INTRODUCTION: EUROPEAN PUBLIC AUTHORITIES FACING THE CHALLENGES OF A PLURAL REALITY

Katia Barthélémy[3], Anaïs Colin[4]

On a European scale, third places are booming, and in France there has been a significant increase in their number since the COVID epidemic; in 2020, the GIP "France Tiers-Lieux" counted 2500 third places, while in 2023, there were 3500 across the country. Although the visions and definitions of this movement vary from country to country and within each of them, depending on the academic, political and activist spheres, it seems to be generally accepted that third places have many virtues, whether they bear the name or not.

By encouraging unexpected encounters and putting the focus back on inter-knowledge and cooperation, third places contribute to a better quality of life for the inhabitants of these areas. Their usefulness is seen as central to strengthen a sense of belonging, getting citizens involved in the community and the city and, in so doing, generating greater cohesion within neighborhoods. As Antoine Burret[5] points out, Ray Oldenburg, the American sociologist behind the original name "third place[6]", was inspired by Georg Simmel's work on sociability and the joy of being together, which nourishes the democratic experience. The concept of "third place", which he defined for the first time, evokes spaces for sociability, innovation and creation outside the traditional framework of home and work.

In France, the "third places" (tiers-lieux), presented as spaces of freedom, citizen participation and democratic life, embody an ideal of collective emancipation, defining themselves as places of social experimentation and alternative. They are increasingly integrated into national and local planning policies. The fact remains, however, that a certain variability of definition has developed since the origins of the concept of the third-place, making it more difficult for public authorities to appropriate. Indeed, while the notion of "third places" evokes spaces for social innovation and collective creation, its fluctuating contours make it difficult to come up with a single categorization, with each territory or national culture reinterpreting the concept according to its own dynamics and needs.

As the Agence Phare report[7] points out, this diversity reflects realities adapted to local contexts and territorial dynamics, but it also poses challenges for their integration into public action.

Notes

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[5] Burret, A. (2021). Published in French La politisation des tiers-lieux. *Multitudes*, *83*(2), 208-214.

[6] Oldenburg, R. (1989), *The great good place: cafés, coffee shops, community centers, beauty parlors, general stores, bars, hangouts, and how they get you through the day,* Parangon House, New York.

[7] This report, produced by Agence Phare for the French National Agency for Territorial Cohesion (ANCT), aims to assess the impact of the "Fabriques de territoire" scheme launched in 2019 as part of the "Nouveaux Lieux Nouveaux Liens" program. It uses a qualitative and participatory methodology to analyze the effects of State support for 300 selected third places in order to structure and sustain these initiatives in rural and peri-urban areas. Published in French : Rapport ANCT, Collection *Comprendre – Le soutien de l'État aux tiers-lieux sur les*

Whether militant, entrepreneurial or parapublic, third places take a variety of forms that influence their governance, role and impact on local areas. This heterogeneity, while a testimony to their richness, sometimes limits their structure and their ability to fully meet the expectations of the land use planning. In rural or fragile contexts, these differences can be amplified by a lack of resources and support. Towards these diverse realities, Europe's public authorities are faced with the challenge of identifying and framing these issues: how can they incorporate these local and global issues into public policy without limiting their creative potential or diluting their specific characteristics? This calls for a rethink of the normative frameworks and a preference for flexible and inclusive approaches, capable of supporting this diversity while enhancing the territorial impact of third places, and also capable of questioning the forms that these places can take elsewhere in Europe.

In Italy, third places that don't bear the name

In Italy, the term "third place" does not exist. Although civic and hybrid spaces do exist, the term "terzi luoghi" is little used in academic, political and public spheres. Sociologist Giampolo Nuvolati refers to them as "interstices" (interstizi) in the lives of citizens between private living spaces and work spaces. In his view, they are not only places where the city can be rethought, but also where identities are (re)constructed. The urban planner Elena Ostanel[8], for her part, speaks of "spaces out of the ordinary" (spazi fuori del commune) that enable urban regeneration through so-called "bottom-up" processes. As there is no consensus on the term, third places are primarily thought of in terms of the themes they address, which does not allow for the emergence of a real ecosystem that would define and recognize itself as such. A number of thematic networks and private initiatives that bring together third places and other structures have nevertheless developed in recent years, such as the "State of the Places" network (Stato dei luoghi[9]), which is made up of people involved in the management of spaces and urban regeneration, or the network of the CheFare[10] association, which supports new independent cultural centers.

However, "community cooperatives" have also emerged, based on a model similar to that of rural third places[11]. Their aim is to contribute to the regeneration of the rural socio-economic fabric and to the creation of both economic and social value through the implementation of multi-sectoral activities (Berti, 2019). The underlying principles of 'rural welfare', according to the researchers who work on these subjects[12], help to create links between the stakeholders in these areas, thereby helping to make them more attractive. But there is no harmonized national or regional recognition of these community cooperatives, and Italian public policies for local development are more territorial than national in scope, with the exception of the 'inner areas' for which revitalization objectives by strengthening public services and promoting local development projects have been defined at national level by the Italian Agency for Territorial Cohesion[13].

The places that seem most likely to adopt the name of "third places" are spaces of resistance and protest with a strong militant culture. This is the case, for example, of the Parco delle energie in Rome's Pignetto district, a former working-class suburb that was very active in the resistance to

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territoires : Recherche évaluative sur les enjeux, impacts et dilemmes des fabriques de territoire. Agence nationale de la cohésion des territoires, Agence phare, 2024.

[8] See in particular : Ostanel, E. *Spazi fuori del commune* https://www.francoangeli.it/Risultati?R=Libri&Tp=true&Aun=Elena&Au=Ostanel&Ar=0&Lv=0&

[9] https://www.lostatodeiluoghi.com/chi-siamo/

[10] https://che-fare.com/chi-siamo-chefare-agenzia-trasformazione-culturale/

[11] For more information : Berti, Fabio (2019) , « Coopératives communautaires italiennes : le «Welfare rural» et la renaissance des campagnes » , Revue du CREMIS , 11(1) , 11-16.

[12] See in particular : Moruzzo R., Colosimo V., Di Iacovo F. (2018), Welfare rurale e agricoltura sociale: tra innovazione di significato, rigenerazione di comunità e usi strumentali, Paper presentato al convegno Oltre la continuità. Le sfide del welfare in un mondo globale, Firenze, 13-15 settembre 2018.

[13] Confers: Agenzia per la coesione territoriale (2013), *Le aree interne: di quale territori parliamo? Nota esplicativa sul metodo di classificazione delle aree*, http://www.agenziacoesione.gov.it

Nazism and Fascism, and which is still marked today by an activist and participatory culture. At the heart of this district, the Parco delle energie is a former viscose factory that closed in 1924, and later became a place of political resistance against fascism, and then of commitment to ecology. In the 1990s, the park was bought by a property developer who wanted to build a shopping complex, but the project was abandoned when an underground lake was discovered during the works. Since then, the whole park has remained an emblematic place of struggle and socialization for the young people of the district, around a social center. Despite its role as a public service relay within the district and for its residents, this third place is, because of its history, viewed with caution by the public authorities. The same is true of the self-managed social centers (centri sociali), which grew out of the city protest movement of the 1970s. The Asylo in Naples is a good example of this; it grew out of an occupation that was part of this tradition, against the centralized management of the center by a foundation. While the militant aspect of these centers remains a barrier to support for some public authorities, the relationship can also be characterized by a certain ambivalence. In the case of Asylo, for example, the city of Naples has gradually become aware of the intangible contribution made by this venue and has supported it.

It therefore appears that in Italy, the term "third place" is rarely used, but that several thematic action venues have elements that "make them third places", even if they do not define themselves as such. The essentially thematic approach of these places has not, however, enabled them to form an ecosystem, and the heterogeneity of public policies on spatial planning between the regions makes it more difficult for a unified public policy to emerge.

In Bulgaria, traditional sites recognized for their social value

In Bulgaria, *chitalishte* are community cultural centers or, literally, "reading rooms"; they have characteristics and functions identical to those of third places, although they do not bear the name. Selected for UNESCO's Register of Good Practices for Safeguarding the Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) in 2017 because they "*meet the needs of citizens for cultural development and enrichment, offer educational and social activities in towns and villages, preserve the customs and traditions of the Bulgarian people, ensure access to information, disseminate knowledge and familiarize citizens with the values and advances of science, the arts and culture*"[14], these cultural centers are present in all 28 administrative regions of the country. Between 1856 and 1870, more than 112 *chitalishte* were set up by local people to meet local educational and cultural needs, based on the democratic values of openness and free participation, fairness of services and preservation of traditional crafts. The rapid spread of these grassroots initiatives has helped to generate greater cohesion among the nationalist forces through cultural transmission, as recent studies have shown[15]. The beginnings of the creation of these cultural institutions are closely linked to a particular historical context, that of the Bulgarian cultural renaissance, which led the country's inhabitants to develop new ways of preserving their culture and local heritage as they were occupied.

The first law on *chitalishte* in 1927 not only gave them status and a legal framework, but also enabled the State to centralize these initiatives and make financial and organizational efforts to preserve and democratize them, particularly in villages with few facilities. In 1929, there were 1228 *chitalishte* in Bulgaria; ten years later, the number had clearly doubled. The advent of the Communist regime then had a major impact on their autonomy, their economic model and their organization. Funding for these initiatives, initially provided by the local communities, was transferred entirely to the State, and the degree of centralized control over these institutions increased until 1989. The fall of the USSR led to a restructuring of this system, and a shift towards municipal funding in a complex migratory context, leading to the decline of many *chitalishte*. The

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[14] UNESCO, RPB 2017 n°00969 – Convention for the safeguarding of the intangible cultural heritage, Available online at: https://ich.unesco.org/en/BSP/bulgarian-chitalishte-community-cultural-centre-practical-experience-in-safeguarding-the-vitality-of-the-intangible-cultural-heritage-00969

[15] Hristova, R. Y. (2011). Models of the Past-Models for the Future: A Comparative Analysis of the Traditions of the Bulgarian Chitalishte and the American Public Library.

1996 law on popular *chitalishte*, following the liberation of the country, led these spaces to regain a balance between political, legal and financial support, enabling them to survive.

There are now approximately 3600, and the resilience of these local community initiatives bears witness to their ability to adapt to social transformations and changing local social, political and economic contexts[16]. Now supported by the State, the regions and the municipalities in line with the social usefulness recognized and valued by local residents, these places have become an essential link in thematic public policies aimed at territories and rural areas in particular.

In Romania: an emerging dynamic, subject to inspirations

In Romania, the trend towards alternative venues is a recent one. Initiatives are springing up based on local needs and a desire to come together and create a different kind of society. The places that are emerging easily claim to be third places, and the embryonic support of the public authorities leaves them free to appropriate the term and adapt it to local contexts.

For example, the Reper21 association (European network for the promotion of a responsible 21st century economy), set up in 2006, is very active in Bucharest; as its website states[17], it "*encourages the voluntary involvement of responsible citizens, entrepreneurs, employees and consumers in the construction of a Romanian and European society based on economic competitiveness, social equity and environmental balance*". The association's aim is to raise awareness and bring about change, and in so doing it is taking an interest in the third places model. This same desire gave rise to the C.U.I.B (Urban Centre of Good Initiatives), which opened 10 years ago in Bucharest on the initiative of the Mai Bine association, which wanted to offer citizens the city's first sustainable consumption space. Gradually, the C.U.I.B became a place for socializing, exchanging and sharing, with an active community committed to a different kind of society. Today, it is a national reference point for those involved in ecology.

Public places such as bookshops, schools, social centers and even museums are discovering the "third places" model through their thematic commitment, and are taking inspiration from it. The Seneca Anticafé in Bucharest, for example, is a café, bookshop, coworking space and alternative publishing house, as well as a place for activism and civic engagement. It's a place for socializing and sharing, recognized by both local residents and those involved in environmental issues. So, the development of third places in Romania is still in its infancy, and subject to external influences. Some projects in Romania are in fact the fruit of inspiration from other European countries. The Faber third place in Timisoara was created by a number of Romanians who had returned from abroad and wanted to "create third places" by buying up a former industrial wasteland and transforming it into a place of hospitality and conviviality based on what they had discovered abroad. Financial support for third places comes mainly from the European Union, non-governmental organizations that support development projects in emerging countries, and private investors such as banks.

The definitions and representations of these third places are therefore plural and vary from country to country. As we have just seen, in Bulgaria, the community cultural centers that emerged during the Communist era play a role similar to that of third places, although they do not bear the name. In Romania and Italy, these spaces tend to emerge on the fringes of the institutional system, as places of resistance or cultural alternatives. So, in Europe, the use of the term "third places" is still in the minority compared to the phenomenon itself, which is emerging and growing. While in France, an agreement has been reached on what constitutes a "third place", an ecosystem has been clearly identified around this theme, most third places define themselves as such and a public

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[16] See in particular the work of : Brake, R., & Deller, U. (Eds.). (2008). *Community development–A European challenge*. Barbara Budrich ; Marinova, T. (2021). 2. Idées et politiques publiques en faveur de l'ESS au sein des pays des Balkans. *L'esprit économique*, 43-65.

[17] https://reper21.ro/

policy is dedicated to them, in other European countries - such as Italy, Bulgaria and Romania - there is no consensus on what a "third place" is, nor is there a dedicated public policy.

In France, the ability of third places to act as local drivers of territorial resilience has raised issues of territorial cohesion that have revealed the need for government support, and quite naturally made the National Agency for Territorial Cohesion (ANCT) the operator of support schemes for third places at national level. This is in response to a twofold challenge: on the one hand, the aim is to ensure a balanced supply of third places throughout the country, with a particular emphasis on vulnerable areas. Secondly, to enable local initiatives to have greater resonance, by increasing their impact beyond the local level and through networking. The growth of these initiatives at European level and their impact - whatever they may be called - means that we now need to think about this dual challenge beyond France's borders.

PART 1
THIRD PLACES AT THE HEART OF NEW CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF TERRITORIES

THE EFFECTS OF THIRD PLACES ON INDIVIDUALS, ORGANIZATIONS AND TERRITORIES

Ilaria Mariotti[18], Chiara Tagliaro[19], Oliver Rafaj[20] et Gislene Feiten Haubrich[21]

Introduction

Third places are shared spaces where people can work, distinct from their home (first place) and traditional workplace (second place). Third places include a range of spatial devices from cafes, bars, community centres, and public libraries to various types of collaborative spaces, such as coworking spaces or marker spaces among others (Mariotti, Tomaz, Micek, & Mendez-Ortega, 2024), which represent the heart of a community's social vitality, conviviality, and inclusion dynamics (Oldenburg, 1997; Migliore, Manzini-Ceinar & Tagliaro, 2021). People in third places can work alone, independently from each other (Spinuzzi, 2012), or they can freely engage in various types of collaborations with other users (Garrett, Spreitzer & Bacevice, 2017). These places promote interactions between users, such as social networking, professional collaborations, brainstorming or innovative activities, joint learning exercises, and other professional and personal development activities.

In the past decade, third places became an alternative solution within the context of the digital revolution and the rise of the sharing economy. They are popular among a wide range of individuals, including remote workers, students, freelancers, digital nomads, small business owners and companies, that prefer to establish their branches or satellite offices in vibrant places (Mariotti, Di Marino & Bednar, 2023). Also, third places can be found in the cities' central business districts, as well as in peripheral and even rural and inner areas.

This chapter presents the direct and indirect effects of third places as they were analyzed in four-year research conducted by scholars involved in the European-funded COST Action CA18214 project involving more than 30 countries: "The geography of new working spaces and the impact on the periphery" [22]. After a literature review, the identified effects of third places were discussed in a European Workshop held in Brussels on February 5th, 2024, with the aim of exploring opportunities for policy development.[23] The workshop brought together 40 participants representing different stakeholders, including scholars, public administrators, and practitioners. In the next section, we will present the results of the dialogue among these different stakeholders.

The direct and indirect effects of third places

The academic literature focused on the direct and indirect effects of third places. Direct effects refer to the immediate and tangible impacts that third places have on individuals and organisations, while the indirect effects concern the territory, e.g., built environment, urban

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22 COST Action CA18214 "The geography of new working spaces and the impact on the periphery" (https://new-working-spaces.eu/), funded by the European Co-operation in Science and Technology (COST) whose aim is to address contemporary issues and develop innovative solutions through networking among researchers and innovators.

[23] More information is collected in a Toolkit, which can be downloaded from the CA18214 website: https://new-working-spaces.eu/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/TOOL-KIT-NeWSp.pdf.

planning, transportation (Mariotti, Akhavan, & Di Matteo, 2021) and community wellbeing (Ciccarelli, Mariotti, 2024) (Table 1).

Effects on individuals

Among direct effects (Table 1), third places allow cost saving (office rental, office energy consumption), increase flexibility for employees (reduction of time lost by employees due to commuting to work), reduce risks of isolation of users, increase meeting and networking opportunities, and boost business collaboration and innovation. As they facilitate social interactions among users, they foster connections, cultural exchanges, engagement, friendships, and bonds within the community hosted in the space, by proxying "social proximity" a là Boschma (Mariotti, Akhavan, 2020). They may provide upskilling and networking opportunities, and support innovation capacities and creativity by providing inspiring environments that stimulate collaboration and idea-sharing. These effects may enhance employee productivity and efficiency, improve job satisfaction, well-being, and work-life balance, reduce costs associated with office rental and energy consumption, increase flexibility for employees (reduction of time lost by employees commuting to work, higher motivation, and work-life balance), and assistance in mitigating gender issues (e.g., specialised female-focused spaces), thus for example, offering childcare and home-schooling. However, third places may indirectly generate job insecurity and lack of social protection.

Effects on organizations

The effects of third places on organizations (Table 1) should be considered both on the demand and the supply side of the ecosystem, respectively end-user organizations (i.e. companies occupying third places and giving the possibility to their employees to work remotely from there) and provider organizations (i.e. coworking owners and managers offering space and services to the end-users). In this regard, three are the main areas for policy implications: (1) from the end-user viewpoint, flexibility entailing a potential reduction in footprint and costs of space, along with the possibility to update the space (layout, equipment and more) on an as-needed basis; (2) still from the same viewpoint, talent and team management, regarding the possibility to recruit talent from anywhere in the world, which requires the ability to manage a dispersed workforce; and (3) from the provider's perspective, the issue concerns space utilization, including the possibility to optimize underutilized space and taking advantage of third places. The first and third issues can be addressed by leveraging the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) reporting, which are gradually encouraging companies to adopt more holistic perspectives on their businesses, including how they utilize available space. Many corporations are renegotiating their office contracts, but there is no standardized scheme or model to help companies understand how much space they need and what kind of space would be most beneficial. New binding standards and regulations would support, on the one hand, private companies in defining the needed space and, on the other, coworking providers in utilizing empty space in public buildings fostering public-private partnerships. However, making space available where it is needed remains a major challenge. Much of the available space is privately owned and managed, which disincentivizes organizations from providing it to those in need.

Finally, decentralized work models are not for all companies and those which are suitable for their adoption need guidance to manage safety and security issues for their employees. Industry-sensitive legal rights are to be framed to protect both the companies and the workers using third places through flexible work models. Regulatory frameworks to encourage near-working strategies should be fostered, namely policies supporting employees working in locations (e.g. coworking and other collaborative spaces) close to their place of residence (Mariotti & Tagliaro, 2024).

Table 1 Direct and indirect effects of third places

Direct effects on individuals	Cost saving (office rental, office energy consumption); increased flexibility for employees (reduction of time lost by employees due to commuting to work; higher motivation and work-life balance); reduce risks of isolation; increase meeting and networking opportunities; boost business collaboration and promote innovation; foster employee work productivity and working efficiency; improving job satisfaction, well-being, and work-life balance; help mitigating gender issues (specialized female-focused spaces); keeping older generations in the workforce and promote generations mix.		
Direct effects on companies	Higher flexibility entailing a potential reduction in footprint and costs of space; recruit talent from anywhere in the world; optimize underutilized space and taking advantage of third places.		
Indirect effects	Space and economy	Environment (energy)	Urban planning and policy
	• **Urban regeneration** and **revitalization** of abandoned/underutilized spaces. Development of spontaneous **communities** in the neighbourhood (i.e. Social Streets in Italy) • Transformation in the **public space** (temporary installations, permanent/new elements) • Flexible work arrangements, innovation, entrepreneurship → **development potential for peripheral areas** • Enhancing rural attractiveness • Gentrification effect (digital nomads vs. local village population)	• **Pollution** reduction • Decreasing **traffic** congestion • Enhance the **energy use** patterns both at home and associated with travel/transportation • Reduction of greenhouse gas emissions • Rebound effects (private mobility increases during the Pandemic—also in the case of peripheral and remote areas)	• Changes in the urban transport planning • Policy on remote working and teleworking • Alternative uses for traditional office spaces and changes in real estate prices • Rethinking local urban plans: the **concepts of 15-min city** and neighbourhood coworking—due to pandemic restrictions

Source: authors' elaboration on Akhavan, Hölzel, & Leducq (2023, p.151), adapted from Mariotti, Akhavan & Di Matteo (2021).

Effects on territories

The literature has underlined three main **indirect effects**: space and economy, environment (energy), and urban planning and policy (Table 1). Third places contribute to creating a sense of belonging and attachment to the local community, and also build social capital by strengthening social networks and trust among users and communities, thus improving community wellbeing (Ciccarelli & Mariotti, 2024). To foster entrepreneurship and innovation in specific territories, it is vital to connect professional (business) communities with social communities. Additionally, local, and regional self-governments can provide discounts for members of disadvantaged social groups, such as the unemployed, or offer full membership in third places for a certain period. The effects on the space also concerns the transformation in the public space (temporary installations, permanent/new elements), urban regeneration and revitalization of abandoned/underutilized spaces. This effect can have a negative impact on the space and place, boosting a gentrification process (digital nomads vs. local village population). Third places also affect the environment since they boost near working, thus contributing to pollution and traffic congestion reduction, changes in urban transport planning, and the use of traditional office spaces.

In sum, while direct effects of third places are more immediate and observable, indirect effects are often more nuanced and encompass broader social, cultural, and economic impacts that unfold over time.

Perspectives for policy-development

While looking at the effects of third places, multiple key stakeholders emerge within the ecosystem. They are numerous and diverse, thus they may be affected by third places in different and even contrasting ways. They include both the direct community and an extended community. The direct community concerns, in the first place, **those who manage** (e.g., community managers and other staff members) third places, being coworking spaces, libraries, fab-labs/workshops, cafes, hackerspaces, living labs, and corporate labs, sometimes in partnership with each other. Besides, direct **users (i.e. members)** express their own needs such as independent mobile workers, digital nomads, freelancers, entrepreneurs, and employees working away from their companies' headquarters. However, the impact of third places extends beyond this direct community to include an extended network and the local ecosystem. This network encompasses **workers in neighboring services** such as cafes and shops, public administrators, and civilians. In attempt to support the development and positive effects of third places, some policy implications should be considered.

First, it is fundamental to **invest in education** about third spaces, with a particular emphasis on coworking and hubs. Indeed, literacy about what these spaces are and where they can be found is scarce. Many potential users still do not fully understand how these spaces operate, and language can sometimes create a barrier to familiarizing and experiencing with them. Therefore, communication campaigns and initiatives like the New European Bauhaus[24] or the Startup Village Forum[25] can be leveraged to create culture and improve common understating of the phenomenon. Additionally, the term 'coworking space' may limit creativity in exploring different forms of organization. Therefore, adopting broader terms, such as 'Collaborative Spaces' or 'Third Places' could be beneficial for exploring new overarching policies and funding opportunities.

Second, **public administrators** are called to take the lead, albeit in different ways, and acknowledge the potential of formal and informal networks in supporting third places' development and strengthening. In rural areas, the government carries the responsibility to initiate the local development of communities. For instance, repurposing old or uninhabited buildings and/or providing tools such as subsidies and reduced fees to support the creation of communities in third places are both strategies that can launch new initiatives in isolated, remote geographical

Notes

[24] https://new-european-bauhaus.europa.eu/index_en.

[25] https://startup-forum.rural-vision.europa.eu/?lng=en.

areas. One valuable case is The National Connected Hubs Network in Ireland, which assists employees or companies to relocate from major urban centres to rural areas, and offers a wide range of training courses to young people.

Conversely, in urban areas, the government should facilitate and support the expansion of existing communities by fostering network creation and exploiting the proximity typologies a là Boschma ocial, institutional, cognitive, and organisational proximities). A few examples already exist of public administrations encouraging work from third places for their own employees. In Italy, administrative staff in the municipalities of Bologna (Smart Bo initiative) and Milan (Milano Strategia di Adattamento 2020), are allowed to work from home in both urban and suburban collaborative spaces associated within a recognized network of third places. Similarly, in France, the National Association of Third Places (Association nationale des tiers-lieux ou ANTL) is helping to structure and increase the number of third-places across the country, which, as a consequence, has positive effects in terms of reducing traffic congestion, pollution and commuting in large cities.

Sometimes, **private entities** can engage themselves as active promoters of similar strategies. This is the case of the Milano Smart City Alliance involving fourteen private enterprises in a public-private partnership with the Milan Municipality to open access to their offices for the employees of the other enterprises in the community, thus encouraging short commutes. All these initiatives leverage the concept of near-working (Mariotti & Tagliaro, 2024).

Moreover, third places play a crucial role in the **innovation and entrepreneurial scene**, serving as catalysts for ideas and initiatives, as well as offer a "living" or "recreational" dimension to work. The abovementioned networks like France Tiers-Lieux or Connected Hubs constitute best practices in launching training courses aiming to reduce the number of NEETs[26] and to exploit the full potential of third places. Also, they can be the vehicle through which staff members acquire set of skills to facilitate relationships, identify business opportunities, and foster connections among potential partners to make third places thrive.

Besides, third places can easily facilitate the hybridization of functions being available as spaces for coliving or coworkation. Finally, as pointed out by Akhavan, Hölzel, & Leducq (2023), taking into account coworking as an attraction strategy of talents and remote workers, it is important to comprehend the efficacy of policy and planning tools, like the 15-min city concept, to ensure long-term sustainable development in terms of land use, density, and mobility.

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DEVELOPING NEW NETWORKS VIA THIRD PLACES: HOW A LOCAL ACTOR HELPS TRANSFER KNOWLEDGE BASES ACROSS INDUSTRY SECTORS

Juan Diaz[27]

Introduction

The significance of networks (Gulati et al., 2000) and knowledge sharing among entrepreneurs (Acs et al., 2013) is crucial for economic development, especially in rural areas where geographical dispersion can hinder collaboration and innovation (Maillat & Lecoq, 1992). Local actors are pivotal in connecting disparate groups across unrelated industries, addressing local dynamics and challenges such as income inequalities (Manduca, 2019). The concept of knowledge bases (Manniche, 2012) is linked to local networks, explaining different types of knowledge and their sharing across stakeholders.

This article emphasizes the importance of networks in driving economic growth through new network formation and knowledge sharing facilitated by a local actor, illustrated by a case study of a regional association supporting workers in cultural and creative industries (CCI). Overcoming the challenge of connecting unrelated groups for innovation requires a local actor equipped with knowledge, community integration, and an understanding of diverse regional needs, facilitated by physical "third places" (Akhavan, 2021).

In rural areas, dispersed networks hinder knowledge flow and entrepreneurial endeavors, exacerbating income inequality (Berrone et al., 2016). The case study from Saxony highlights a grassroots association that addresses the disconnection among workers in cultural and creative industries (CCI) and other economic actors. Through entrepreneurial training, education of traditional industries, workshops, events, and collaborative projects, the association fosters networks, serving as a conduit for synergy among diverse actors. The article aims to answer: *"how a local actor facilitates the transfer of knowledge bases in newly formed networks via third places".*

Literature Review and knowledge bases

A local network encompasses interactions among individuals or entities (actors) connected by specific relationships, such as friendship or professional connections in a specific geographical area (Borgatti & Halgin, 2011). These connections enable indirect connections between other actors, fostering regional resilience and competitiveness (Crespo et al., 2014). Network structures are influenced by relational ties (Granovetter, 1973), examining how relationships among diverse actors are formed and the strength of these ties. The study focuses on how knowledge is transmitted within local networks in rural and peripheral areas (Chaudhury et al., 2017), core-periphery patterns (Kudic et al., 2015), and the influence of networks on regional economic growth (Huggins & Thompson, 2017).

Network theorists categorize ties into states and events (Borgatti & Halgin, 2011). State- type ties exhibit continuity over time, including kinship connections, role-based relations, cognitive/perceptual links, and affective bonds, measurable in strength, intensity, and duration.

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Event-type ties are discrete and temporary, such as email exchanges, phone calls, and transactions, measurable by frequency over time. Networks are defined as recurring patterns of these ties, facilitating and restricting various flows between nodes.

This study connects the two types of ties in network theory (states and events) to the theory of knowledge bases to better understand how knowledge is shared among newly formed networks.

The term "knowledge" encompasses various types and transmission methods. Knowledge bases offer clear definitions of these types and explain how they are disseminated. While some studies explore knowledge bases in proximity and regional innovation, others focus on knowledge sourcing in regional innovation, particularly in rural areas (Martin & Moodysson, 2013; Tuitjer & Kupper, 2020). Asheim and Coenen (2005) initially proposed knowledge bases, distinguishing between synthetic and analytical knowledge. Synthetic knowledge involves applying or combining existing knowledge, emphasizing interactive learning and tacit knowledge exchange. Analytical knowledge focuses on creating new knowledge, often leading to radical innovations.

Manniche (2012) expands on Asheim and Coenen's work, introducing symbolic knowledge as a crucial base linked to community and trust-building. Symbolic knowledge involves creating and communicating cultural meanings, relying on socio-culturally embedded perceptions of "meaning." It fosters open-ended, creative thinking, often involving expertise in art, design, marketing, and communication, and is facilitated by temporary, project-based work organization.

This study emphasizes that knowledge transfers among newly formed networks result from iterations inspired by a local actor's intermediary function. Places and spaces play a vital role in facilitating interactions, uniting people through shared knowledge activities.

Linking knowledge bases to local networks through third place bounded interactions

The literature on networks often emphasizes how connections are formed but may overlook the specific locations and spaces where interactions occur, which are crucial for fostering networking and community building. Activities like events, projects, and collaborative initiatives, intrinsic to knowledge sharing, inherently require physical locations. This article aligns with the notion of third place (Akhavan, 2021) and the concepts of place and space by Cohendet et al. (2010), emphasizing the importance of places and spaces in facilitating knowledge sharing within creative industries in what they term creative cities.

Grandadam et al. (2013) characterize creative cities as local knowledge ecologies where novel ideas and skills emerge through interactions among various creative actors. Places like coffee houses, performance halls, and old warehouses serve as intermediaries, facilitating knowledge flows by providing settings for creative agents to convene and exchange ideas. Spaces such as collaborative workspaces (CWS), makerspaces, and fablabs (Capdevila, 2017; Capdevila, 2019) serve as cognitive platforms for idea confrontation and knowledge exchange, potentially spanning geographical boundaries. However, as highlighted by Grandadam et al. (2013), the mere existence of physical places and spaces is insufficient to facilitate knowledge exchanges. These locales serve as instruments where projects and events unfold, attracting communities to engage in knowledge sharing activities.

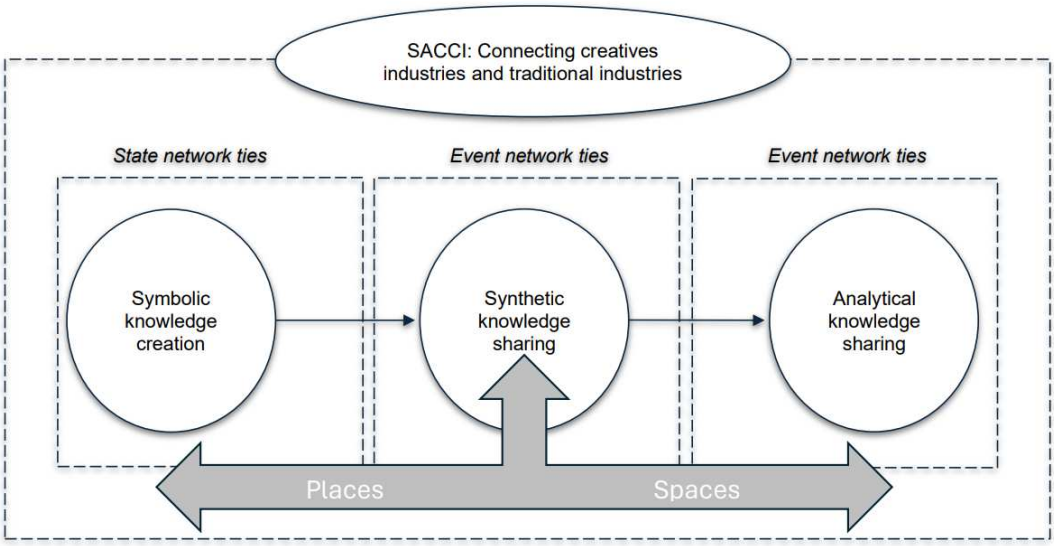
Results

The article utilizes qualitative case study methodology to examine how a local actor, the Landesverband der Kultur und Kreativwirtschaft Sachsen (SACCI), plays role in developing networks for knowledge sharing among diverse community actors. In this section, the empirical findings are described, thus, shedding light about the role of a local actor in sharing knowledge bases among new regional networks of previously unconnected actors thanks to connections established using third places.

Figure 1 illustrates that SACCI first engages in the creation of *symbolic knowledge* (Manniche, 2012). This process uses various state ties in networking theory—kinship connections, role-based relations, cognitive/perceptual links, and affective bonds (Borgatti & Halgin, 2011)—to foster trust among members of different cross-sector industries. SACCI builds relationships with stakeholders including creatives, traditional sector industries, state policymakers, local business owners, and managers of collaborative workspaces. Symbolic knowledge creation, occurring in public places and collaborative workspaces, is a precursor to synthetic and analytical knowledge sharing.

Synthetic knowledge (Asheim & Coenen, 2005) involves inductive processes, creativity, and problem resolution through iterative methods. SACCI connects with traditional industries during events to educate them about the work of creative professionals, fostering collaborations where creatives solve traditional industry problems and create innovations. *Analytical knowledge* (Asheim & Coenen, 2005) is based on scientific knowledge and requires longer-term, project-based interactions. Typically, synthetic knowledge is transferred through events, and successful collaborations can lead to the transfer of analytical knowledge through cross-innovation projects.

Figure 1 - SACCI: Connecting creative industries and traditional industries



Places

SACCI strategically utilizes various regional places to cultivate symbolic knowledge. They explore venues like concert halls, bars, cafes, and public spaces to create environments where diverse stakeholders can gather, fostering trust through informal interactions. SACCI members' deep roots in Saxony enable them to understand cultural nuances, facilitating the forging of relational ties that promote community building and a sense of belonging. By leveraging diverse physical spaces, SACCI emphasizes the significance of informal connections and shared cultural understanding in fostering collaboration and innovation.

"My spouse is from here, and my children were born and raised here. It is important for me to have a strong connection to the place and to its people" – SACCI member Collaborative Spaces

Collaboratives spaces

For SACCI, generating symbolic knowledge is crucial, as it highlights the role of physical spaces in extending location-based knowledge sharing across the region. They emphasize collaborative spaces as vital for uniting people and fostering creativity outside traditional confines. SACCI assigns socio-cultural significance to these spaces, particularly those that emerged post-Berlin Wall, which lacked community initially. These spaces now symbolize community-building, challenging norms, and conveying cultural meanings. Unlike synthetic and analytical knowledge, symbolic knowledge is deeply rooted in local customs and traditions, emphasizing its local character.

"We have very few spaces to meet demand. We tell policy makers that spaces are important to bring people together and build community" – SACCI member

Synthetic knowledge (knowledge sharing function)

Places

SACCI employs an inductive observational approach to thoroughly understand the challenges of traditional industries, enabling them to identify collaboration opportunities with creative sectors. They utilize public spaces as initial meeting venues, fostering informal stakeholder interactions conducive to relationship building. Prioritizing community integration, SACCI establishes credibility by frequenting public places and offering valuable assistance. Leveraging their understanding of community dynamics, SACCI connects traditional sectors with creative partners to address specific needs. Through informal relationships, SACCI facilitates collaborations between traditional and creative industries, fostering innovative solutions and mutual benefits. This approach enables SACCI to navigate diverse networks involving various stakeholders effectively.

"I did not know that SACCI existed when I moved to Saxony, but I learned about them over a conversation in a local pub. It is truly valuable the work they do for people like me to find opportunities to collaborate with companies in the area" – Freelance creative Collaborative Spaces

Collaboratives spaces

Collaborative workspaces have gained popularity for fostering collaboration and knowledge exchange among diverse stakeholders. In Chemnitz, an initiative aims to establish a network of makerspaces to address labor shortages and brain drain by connecting individuals with varying skills. Driven by curiosity and problem-solving, SACCI members acknowledge the crucial role of coworking spaces and incubators in facilitating knowledge sharing. The absence of such spaces in the past may have hindered innovation during periods like the brain drain of the 90s. While there's a current effort to enhance makerspaces in Chemnitz, SACCI adopts a long-term perspective, viewing these spaces as interactive hubs for continuous learning beyond specific events. Their proactive approach, rooted in observation and problem-solving, benefits from a deep understanding of the region's capabilities, historical context, and alignment with policy objectives for local economic development.

"Incubators and coworking spaces can help with capacity building, but you need the creative industries initiatives to bring communities together and work towards a common goal to avoid brain drain as it happened in the 90s" – SACCI member

Analytical knowledge (knowledge sharing function)

Places

SACCI aim to diversify the environments in which they engage their target audiences. This approach not only enhances the accessibility of knowledge-sharing events but also facilitates a dynamic and inclusive atmosphere. The deliberate choice of public places ensures a more inviting and open setting, encouraging a wide range of individuals from both creative and traditional industries to attend and actively participate in the exchange of expertise and ideas. This strategy aligns with the overarching goal of fostering collaboration and innovation within the regional knowledge ecosystem.

"The image of Saxony is significantly influenced by companies involved in the cultural and creative industries. They are constantly engaged with the public, so they have become important catalysts for innovation and knowledge-based economic growth" – Policy maker Collaborative Spaces

Collaboratives spaces

In the city of Annaberg, analytical knowledge transmission is exemplified through a fablab where experts collaborate with high school students on projects involving 3D printing, robotics, and technology-driven endeavors. Despite employing a deductive process, interactions are structured to provide students with a secure and enjoyable space to explore creativity and develop skills relevant to future studies. SACCI actively connects with epistemic communities interested in sharing technical knowledge with young students, motivating them to explore careers in technology and design. These efforts foster a culture of community and inclusivity, extending participation opportunities to school-level children and teenagers. Simultaneously, they strategically aim to retain talent within the region and encourage young minds to pursue careers in local universities.

"The goal is to attract young talent by actively looking for cooperation with schools to make fablabs and other collaborative spaces, a space where young people can have the opportunity for self-realization beyond the strict agenda of the school system and where they can explore their talents" – SACCI member

Discussion and conclusion

This research provides valuable insights into the significant role of SACCI as a central figure in creating symbolic knowledge and facilitating the sharing of both synthetic and analytical knowledge. In this study, the term "spaces" is specifically referred to as "collaborative work spaces," which include coworking spaces, makerspaces, fablabs, hackerspaces, and incubators, extensively explored in existing literature (Capdevila, 2017; Capdevila, 2019), also known as third places (Akhavan, 2021).

The article bridges network theory (Borgatti & Halgin, 2011) with knowledge bases (Manniche, 2012; Asheim & Coenen, 2005) and explores how places and spaces catalyze knowledge sharing in new networks. States involve ties like kinship and role-based relations, linked to creating symbolic knowledge (Manniche, 2012). SACCI acts as an intermediary, leveraging these ties to unite various industries in Saxony. Events, temporary by nature (Borgatti & Halgin, 2011), gather individuals at meaningful places to share synthetic knowledge. Longer-term interactions for analytical knowledge sharing are project-based. A key contribution is showing how local actors create new networks and knowledge bases by connecting unconnected actors. The study also highlights the importance of new networks across diverse industries for knowledge sharing, crucial for innovation and economic development, especially in rural areas. Physical third places facilitate network formation and knowledge exchange, with symbolic knowledge building trust and enhancing these interactions.

This study is particularly beneficial for managers and policymakers in peripheral and rural regions who aim to connect unrelated actors under common collaborations to foster cross-innovation projects and drive economic development by using third places to bring people together.

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THE DEVELOPMENT OF THIRD PLACES IN WALLONIA: A DIVERSITY OF DYNAMICS

Bruno Bianchet[28]

From Upper to Underground

Richard Florida highlighted the role of the "creative class" in business location choices and the importance of local networks, even though the relationship between talent concentration and growth remains to be proven. This approach underscores the territory's essential role in the "innovative milieu" concept (Camagni & Maillat, 2006). Similarly, there's a growing awareness among public authorities, economic actors, and citizens of the potential to enhance natural and cultural heritage (Dümcke, Cornelia Gnedovsky, 2013) (European Commission, 2014). What these trends have in common is the increased mobilization of local resources. Thus, bottom-up is tending to replace top-down. This emergence of the endogenous, which materializes notably through the various dynamics of networks, was first formalized in the rural world following the introduction of local action groups (LAGs) as part of the revision of the Common Agricultural Policy in the mid-1980s (Campagne & Pecqueur, 2014). It should be remembered, however, that the notion of the industrial district was introduced by Alfred Marshall at the end of the 19th century and then applied to the analysis of the economic dynamics of the "third Italy" (between Northern Italy and the Mezzogiorno) in the course of the 70s. These forms of localized productive organization were apprehended through the concept of the "localized productive system" (Pecqueur, 2000).

The third place, conceptualized by Ray Oldenburg in 1999, aligns with this local resource mobilization trend, contributing to the "territorial innovation" process, which encompasses innovative changes in goods and services production, sociopolitical activities, and interactions that transform a milieu (Divay, 2020).

We'll use Patrick Cohendet, David Grandadam, and Laurent Simon's stratigraphy of the creative economy to examine Walloon dynamics. As a reminder, they structure the creative ecosystem into three layers: underground (creative, artistic, and cultural activities outside formally organized networks), middleground (creative communities and collectives interfacing between the two levels), and upperground (institutions, creative clusters, and cultural organizations) (Cohendet, Grandadam, Simon, 2010).

Supporting Creativity through the Establishment of Creative Hubs

This dynamic began in 2010 with the regional government's launch of the Creative Wallonia program, placing creativity at the heart of Walloon economic development. It allowed for testing different experiences to support the creative economy through top-down calls for projects. The program's three action axes include promoting a creativity-driven society, fostering innovative practices, and supporting innovative production.

In 2014, the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) fully funded the Creative Hubs policy. Initially launched as pilot projects under Creative Wallonia, the Creative Hubs expanded to major

Notes

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Walloon cities, gradually acquiring spaces, equipment, and dedicated animation teams to promote creativity locally.

Generally, the hubs have become emblematic support centers for the creative economy, illustrating the evolution of local production systems (Pommier, 2002). They aim to support creative sectors from their local roots, functioning as a community of local key partners and actors. There is this willingness to provide a middleground specific to each territorial basin. The proximity of these hubs brings together companies, funders, public authorities, intermunicipalities, research centers, and other organizations. Each hub has its unique characteristics based on its local fabric. Hubs typically offer awareness events, skill transfers (e.g., workshops), individualized or group support through creative formats (e.g., focus groups, ideation, design thinking, rapid prototyping), coworking spaces, fab labs, and cross-sector networking.

Additionally, the idea is to structure them into a network. While nine hubs have operated based on their local resources, a regional coordination exists to ensure the circulation of lessons and best practices. The local anchoring of hubs aligns well with Wallonia's polycentrism.

These hubs, however, will undergo a model overhaul. The Néo-hubs specifications, published in March 2021, consider these structures more as "network heads" coordinating at the living area scale.

The model's overhaul rests on four guiding principles:

- Capitalizing on a limited number of physical spaces selected based on clear criteria:
- Concentrating a broadened service offering (animation, fertilization, usage experimentation, pre-incubation, prototyping, etc.) within these relevant spaces to create a "totem" dynamic.
- Networking these "network head" locations with rural or small-town third places within the basin.
- Monitoring results based on specific key performance indicators (KPIs).

As noted by Laurence Moyart and Bernard Pecqueur, "this reform (...) significantly recenters the missions of creative hubs to support innovative entrepreneurship development. One of the strengths of this public mechanism has been significantly challenged. By narrowing the Néo-hubs' activity to 'companies and project leaders,' the originality of what made Walloon hubs unique is lost, reverting to very conventional economic animation policies" (Moyart & Pecqueur, 2023). This consolidation through the new specifications represents a shift from the middleground to the upperground.

The Emergence of Unique Structuring Dynamics

Alongside various local spontaneous third-place creation initiatives, a specific and original dynamic emerges from the underground to become structurally significant today: the Creative Resources Counter (CRC). Established in Liège in 2012 by cultural actors, CRC is a platform offering tools and services facilitating creative processes and networking creators with their partners. CRC leverages field experience to pool resources and energies to build collective, mutualistic, or cooperative solutions.

CRC has five independent branches in the form of non-profit associations in Charleroi, Mons, Liège, Namur, and Verviers, functioning as incubators for artists and artisans. The platform comprises about fifteen spaces in these cities, permanently hosting over 350 creators.

CRC offers mutualized spaces for creators by reoccupying vacant spaces, mutual investments, and support and animation services.

A well-defined charter promoting values like social economy and participation guides CRC, and each CRC must adhere to it to receive the "label" while maintaining total autonomy. The platform:

- Welcomes all creators without status, sector, or style conditions, respecting their pace and uniqueness.
- Supports collective and participatory solutions that encourage co-construction.
- Does not replace existing structures and responsibly and sustainably strengthens the local ecosystem.
- Practices fair prices aligned with professional or emerging creators' means.
- Is non-profit, reinvesting potential profits for creators' benefit and fairly remunerating work. ([Creative Resources Counter] (https://www.comptoirdesressourcescreatives.be/les-comptoirs)).

Benefiting from social economy support, CRC's various locations contribute to urban neighborhood revitalization, both economically and for social cohesion.

Supporting Rural Areas through Third Places

In July 2022, the Minister in charge of rurality launched a "Rural Third Places" call for projects aimed at "improving service provision in rural areas." "By nature, third places are multiservice setups. By supporting the creation and strengthening of rural third places, Wallonia aims to provide flexible and adaptable solutions to best meet rural populations' needs: local services, adapted services, new dynamics, and new uses. The Region believes these places enhance village and small-town attractiveness and vitality, fostering territorial resilience" (Walloon Government, 2022).

Out of 102 applications, 23 projects were selected, receiving funding between €250,000 and €677,000. For some structures, this support consolidated existing dynamics through activity diversification. For others, the call for projects enabled the realization of latent projects, raising the challenge of structure sustainability. These projects will benefit from specific support, and it's too early to draw conclusions about this experimentation. However, the sheer number of applications testifies to the enthusiasm generated by the initiative, which clearly met a strong expectation on the part of local players.

This type of support for rural areas is clearly middleground, mobilizing the endogenous potential of the areas concerned.

Conclusions: Structuring Dynamics Adapted to Their Territorial Realities

These three dynamics fit within distinctly different territorial contexts, mobilizing the three creative ecosystem layers. The Creative Hubs, especially under the new framework, are dedicated to urban poles linked to innovation and university resources, belonging to the upperground. They draw from metropolitan strategies, whose foundations have been challenged by literature (Bouba-Olga & Grossetti, 2018).

While CRC also targets urban areas, it focuses more on reconversion or rehabilitation spaces, starting with brownfield. This "underground" actively contributes to revitalizing degraded urban neighborhoods and the "city-on-city" reconstruction process.

As for support for rural third places, corresponding to the middleground stratum, this is in line with the tradition of actions aimed at maintaining and even strengthening the attractiveness and quality of life in the countryside.

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SUPPORTING THIRD PLACES, SPACES FOR PROXIMITY, EMANCIPATION AND SYSTEMIC TRANSITION[29]

Sybille Mertens[30]

Introduction

The phenomenon of third places is of interest to a growing number of researchers, in the humanities and social sciences, but also in an interdisciplinary way, sometimes combining academic expertise with that of people in the field. Third places help to shape the economic systems in which we find ourselves. It is therefore important to name and define this phenomenon and the way in which it combines citizen initiative and public action. This is the purpose of our approach, which borrows concepts from institutional economics in order to identify the systemic contributions of these new players to local areas.

The reasons for the existence of third places and the assets that characterize them are examined through three questions relating to the ways in which they constitute local community spaces, spaces for emancipation and creativity, and spaces for systemic transition.

Local community spaces

The complexity of the transitions underway deprives citizens of a global understanding of the difficulties relating to climate, bio-diversity, migration, war... Several decades of market expansion and the generalisation of individual and individualising solutions have deprived individuals of a global vision. Each "consumer" believes that he or she has no capacity to solve the problems, that the solutions must come from the major players, from public authorities. After thirty or forty years of ideological formatting, the stowaway syndrome has spread: everyone thinks they have to manage their own lives and assumes that the solutions to collective problems must come from elsewhere, that the institutions are probably equipped to respond to these needs in their elected territories.

However, it is increasingly the case that needs and difficulties emerge on a wider scale than that of territories, rendering these institutions inoperative for reasons of perimeters of competence and intervention, but also because of the difficulties of aggregating collective choices, which are increasingly qualitative and composite. A process of fragmentation of social consensus makes public action more complex and increases the difficulty of building a calm public action.

Identifying local solutions, involving local players, therefore becomes crucial. Elinor Ostrom, who was awarded the Nobel Prize in Economics in 2009 for her work on the commons, emphasises the extent to which it is at local level that collective solutions are likely to emerge, because they draw on local knowledge and resources, are the subject of co-constructions of adapted solutions, are based on a capital of trust linked to proximity and enable the development of locally accepted common standards.

Notes

[29] Speech at the "Third places for Europe, from citizenship initiatives to public policies » meeting, Montpellier, 8 June 2023.

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So there is a parallel between the demand for local collective action and the ability of third places to support the formalisation of responses, particularly in the field of the social economy. Third-Party Centres start with everyday problems and address a "community of destiny". They are therefore players capable of coordinating and supporting the way in which communities share learning and collective capitalisation. In this context, forms of local collective self-organisation can draw on the experience of the social and solidarity economy, particularly associations and cooperatives, based on economic activities and extra-economic links.

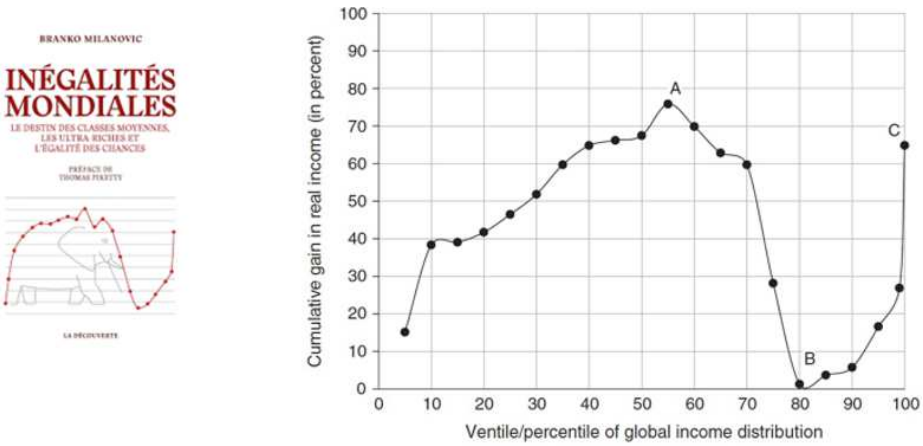
These dynamics are fundamental because they are part of the long term and are not subject to the urgencies dictated by the market or by electoral "short-termism". If the expression "third places" means being "neither quite at home nor quite at work", it could just as easily mean being in an interstitial space between the world of government and that of the market. Because they are not very far from homes and businesses, third places have a territorial anchoring that is conducive to the emergence of appropriate solutions to the difficulties encountered by local residents.

Spaces for emancipation and creativity

A second resource concerns the ability of third places to respond to a need for emancipation and creativity. Our societies are characterised by a great fear of powerlessness, even for enterprising or cultured people, when faced with the nature of the difficulties to be resolved. Third places therefore offer accessible spaces and mechanisms that give people back the means to act. This aspect is essential in the context of the rise of populism: third places produce concrete and operational solutions, involving all social categories.

This need and approach for emancipation and creativity is argued by Branco Minalovic, who analyses people's behaviour at the turn of the 1990s-2010 period based on World Bank statistics. Using his famous graph entitled "the elephant curve", he notes that two categories of population have seen their incomes rise over two decades: middle-income earners, better protected by social regulations, and higher-income earners, whose growth is supported by globalisation.

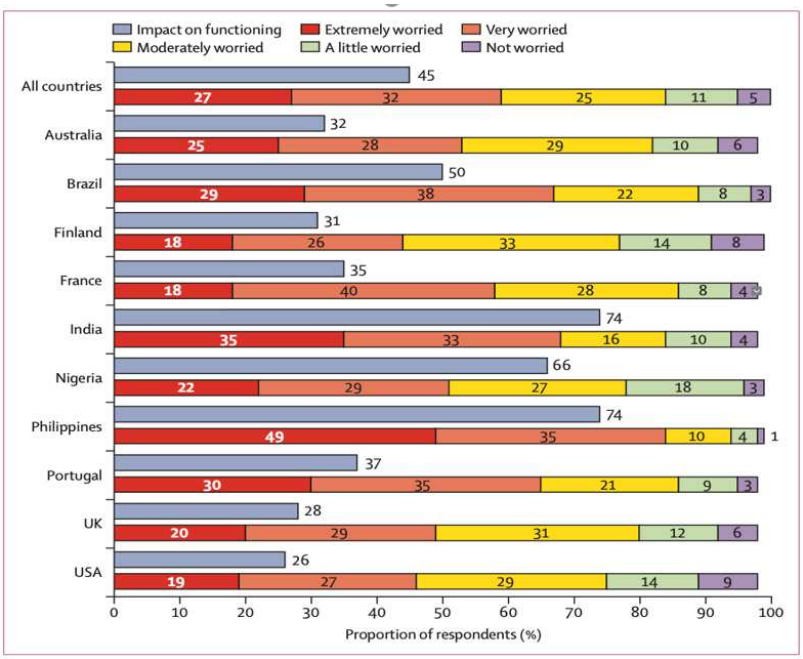
Figure 1 - Change in average income by income group from 1988 to 2008, Milanovic, 2010



Branco Minalovic notes as a counterpoint that the poorest people and those with above-average incomes, particularly the middle classes in emerging countries, have seen their situations stagnate. These people who have been "left behind" by globalisation are expressing their regret at losing control over the course of their lives, and are adopting an attitude of rejection, an expression of their unease that is leading to increasingly extremist voting, or to positions such as the one that led to Brexit. But they are also the ones who find solutions to everyday problems in third places.

Another significant survey of students was carried out in 2020. It shows the extent to which concern and anxiety are rising in the face of the current crises. For example, the following figure shows concern about climate change: 45% of students surveyed are very or extremely worried, with this percentage rising to 84% in the Philippines.

Figure 2 - Concerns about climate transitions and their impact on organisations, Sims et al. (2020)



Similarly, when asked about the rise of extremism, 45% of young people say they are worried or very worried, with this rate rising to 75% in the Philippines.

In this context, Canadian researcher Laura Sims (2020) proposes breaking down the problems identified to enable people to reappropriate solutions on a scale that they control, around "desirable futures" that they themselves identify.

Similarly, in 2011, Korean researcher Kyung Hee Kim showed that while the average intelligence quotient was rising, the level of creativity had been falling since the 1990s.

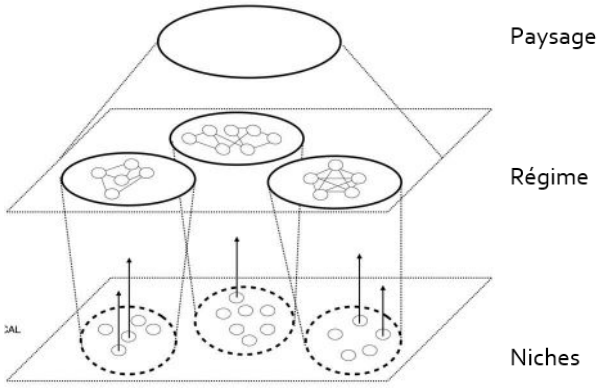
Rob Hopkins, building on this work, identified how "Place is crucial to the spirit and soul of a community (...). Places designed for connection, creation, collaboration and serendipity, places that are welcoming and inviting to a rich diversity of people, and perhaps most importantly, the best places are the ones you leave with a sense that the future might be changed, even just a little bit" (Rob Hopkins, robhopkins.net).

Hopkins explains that creativity needs time and places where people can meet and trust each other. Third places, spaces of emancipation and creativity, are appropriate for developing the capacity for innovation, particularly because they are places of social mixing that are not reserved for the winners. Third places are springing up in areas that have been left behind by globalisation, where people are looking for collective solutions using *low-tech* technologies that can be directly tested with the help of local residents. This approach is an alternative to the anonymity of the market, where the customer is far removed from the manufacturing decision, but also from the decision-making processes of the welfare state. In this way, the "tiers-lieu" takes on its full meaning and enables a local solution to be developed. The success of the approach leads to virtuous circles: the more positive the operations, the more actively partners are sought, and the more people are convinced of the value of working on these desirable futures and seeking resources from citizens, especially as third places, which are often festive, make it possible to mobilise a large number of citizens.

Spaces for systemic transition

Systemic transitions, whether in ecology, energy or digital technology, can be understood as resulting from the interaction between three levels that characterise any human organisational system. The diagram below, proposed by Franck Geels (University of Manchester) in 2002, distinguishes the upper level, the landscape, where we see the major trends and expressions of incomprehension or dissatisfaction with developments. This is the place of shocks, which send messages to the second level, that of the regime, i.e. the usual ways of doing things. Finally, the third level is that of the niches where socio-technical experiments are conducted sheltered from the orientations and directives of the dominant regime. When there are major shocks (global warming, floods, conflicts, wars, the energy crisis, etc.), the landscape sends out signals and questions the regime. We then look to the niches for experimental elements that seem more appropriate and that can inspire the regime or even replace it.

Figure 3 - The multi-level perspective, Geels, 2002



Geels notes that if innovations are produced at a niche level, they may be contested or blocked by established players, which prevents the innovation from being transformed into a development rationale.

It now seems necessary to build global niches that would enable local niches to be strengthened and to gradually establish common operating rules that would enable the barriers to be overcome little by little by authorising the production, in the territories and in society, of elements of standards, which could take the form of extended commons (Lanzi and Maréchal, 2023).

Are third places places where these experiments can continue? This is likely to be the case, as we find places that are capable of testing processes as well as functions, becoming multifunctional spaces that enable us to move from the local niche and scattered niches towards a more shared solution. Because we all come from the same place and work in the same area, our innovations can reinforce each other. It is vital to recognise that third places can be places where innovation can be passed on from the local to the general level, passing through intermediate stages, acting at a local level but also at a more global level by linking up experiments that are alternatives to the dominant dynamics that are now out of breath. These experiments, for example, are absolutely essential to the design of local public policies.

It is important to emphasise the decisive role played by global niches, which reinforce local niches and gradually generate common operating rules capable of "setting the standard" in society, making it easier to cross thresholds and foster more balanced power relationships with dominant players. Third places will host social or technological niches with different types of function. These multi-functional spaces will make it possible to move from scattered niches to global niches, including through the territorial aspect where players will be able to work together even if they are located in different social functions. These shared rules of the game are likely to support the development of the regions.

Third places therefore appear to be sources of organisation for fundamental responses, such as local food autonomy or digital learning, but they are also spaces for emancipation and creativity that enable public players to organise systemic transition dynamics. This is a major lever for action that is particularly well-suited to the challenges of our time.

However, in order to design public policies that will enable real action to be taken, three tensions need to be taken into account:

- The fact that third places are a multifaceted object does not make the task of the public policy designer any easier: the action taken must therefore be comprehensible and consistent, and must make it possible to identify cross-cutting policy areas, including through evaluation, if necessary with the support of European funds;
- The hybrid funding arrangements for these facilities need to be explained more clearly, since the aim is not only to satisfy solvent demand but also to respond to collective ambitions, resulting in a mix of both commercial and public resources, which muddies the waters and gives the impression of amateurish opportunistic tinkering. There is a fear that third places are too fragile, whereas we need to assert the capacity of third places to test new elements, even if they are in a fragile start-up phase, which they need to be able to overcome by means of hybrid financing, particularly when, after the period of voluntary work, there are opportunities to acquire the property or land needed to develop the third place. Appropriate financing tools need to be developed for this important period in the consolidation of third-party centres;
- The third tension that needs to be resolved is that third places will never be enough and will not replace local public action: a balance needs to be found between these categories of players, and roles need to be clarified as soon as the specifications for public support schemes are drawn up.

The future of our societies will undoubtedly take a path that we can already call the path of post-growth, more oriented towards respect for climate and environmental constraints. Third places are useful places to experiment at this time of paradigm shift. They are already showing how concerns for social justice and the protection of our living conditions can lead us to rethink our modes of production, consumption and solidarity in our territories. In this respect, they are already proposing an alternative to traditional industrial growth. It would therefore be useful to examine how the responses they provide can inspire us to think about the transition of our current production systems.

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PART 2
THIRD PLACES FACING ITS INNER CHALLENGES

ADDRESSING THE CHALLENGES OF BUILDING COMMUNITIES IN RURAL THIRD PLACES: THE CASE OF THE COWOCAT RURAL NETWORK IN CATALONIA

Ignasi Capdevila[31]

In the last decade, the coworking movement, initially centered in urban environments, has expanded into rural areas. Community is a crucial aspect in both settings. However, while communities in urban third places often focus on internal dynamics, rural third places emphasize territorial embeddedness. This chapter, based on the Cowocat Rural network in Catalonia, analyzes community dynamics at different spatial levels—from internal to regional—and examines managerial challenges. Findings indicate that for rural coworking spaces, developing local communities at the municipal level and beyond is vital for project sustainability and contributes to local socio-economic development.

Introduction

Amidst the surge of freelancers and knowledge workers and the growth of the sharing economy, coworking has evolved into a global phenomenon, prioritizing collaboration and community (Gandini 2015; Merkel 2019; Capdevila 2014). While urban third places (such as coworking spaces) have dominated research and policy discussions, attention is shifting to rural and peripheral regions, where third places initiatives contribute to both individual well-being and local socio-economic development.

This chapter addresses the gap in research on rural coworking by examining community development within the Cowocat Rural network in Catalonia. It explores how these spaces identify potential members and foster community engagement at various levels, from local municipalities to regional initiatives.

The chapter outlines a five-year study of coworking in Catalonia, spanning three phases of data collection. Initially (2013-2015), interviews were conducted with Barcelona coworking space managers and stakeholders. Subsequently (2015-2017), the inquiry expanded to include rural coworking space managers and government representatives. Finally, follow-up interviews with Cowocat Rural coordinators and managers were conducted. Additionally, archival and online data were analyzed. The analysis focused on community dynamics at various levels, aiming to comprehend the evolution and management of rural coworking communities in Catalonia.

Cultivating Communities in Rural Coworking Spaces

Initially urban, coworking spaces offer flexible environments for independent workers, providing workspace, social interaction, and collaboration for a fee (Gandini 2015; Blagoev, Costas, and Kärreman 2019; Orel and Alonso Almeida 2019). Thriving in dense economic areas, they foster social interactions crucial for digital entrepreneurs and freelancers (Brown 2017; Parrino 2015). Community is central, managed by curators who organize events and maintain networks.

Coworking development spans three phases: an initial urban-focused wave, a corporate-driven phase, and a current blend emphasizing resilience and decentralization (Gandini and Cossu 2019;

Notes

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Avdikos and Iliopoulou 2019; Merkel 2019; de Peuter, Cohen, and Saraco 2017). The third wave extends coworking into rural areas, addressing economic challenges and attracting policymakers' interest (Fuzi 2015; Flipo, Lejoux, and Ovtracht 2022; Fasshauer and Zadra-Veil 2016; Avdikos and Merkel 2020).

Rural coworking spaces, though nascent, aim to boost local economies by retaining and attracting talent, especially amid urban exoduses like those prompted by COVID-19. Regional support focuses on strengthening networks and creating economic opportunities. Community building involves informal social interactions and collaboration. Informal engagements build trust and community, while organized events promote socialization and knowledge sharing.

Urban coworking research emphasizes internal synergies, while rural coworking highlights external connections and local integration, contributing to economic revitalization and social cohesion (Akhavan and Mariotti 2019). Despite urban coworking's dominance, rural coworking presents unique dynamics and impacts on local communities. This research explores these differences, examining internal and external community dynamics in rural coworking spaces.

The case of Cowocat Rural

Over the past decade, Barcelona emerged as a significant coworking hub, fostering over one hundred spaces by 2015. This growth prompted public interest, with the Catalan Government initiating Cowocat (the Catalan network of coworking spaces) to promote coworking as a means to foster entrepreneurship and combat unemployment. In 2011, Riba-roja d'Ebre (a village in southern Catalonia) explored the concept by converting a former library into Zona Líquida coworking space, with support from the local consortium. Initial challenges included low utilization, rectified by sending rural entrepreneurs to Barcelona for exposure to coworking concepts. In 2014, Cowocat Rural launched, replicating Zona Líquida's model across rural Catalonia with EU rural development funds. The initiative faced hurdles in rural settings due to sparse populations and transportation constraints. Key to success was community development preceding space establishment, avoiding rushed launches. Side projects included temporary co-living experiences and coworking pass programs, along with a coworking lab for research and an online platform for inter-space collaboration.

In the context of Cowocat Rural, coworking communities emerge at multiple levels, from the immediate coworking space to the broader regional context. At the space level, communities often consist of a small number of frequent members, typically around six in rural areas, who form strong bonds through constant interaction. These tight-knit groups provide crucial moral and professional support, facilitating collaboration and mutual aid.

Beyond the core members, a secondary community includes sporadic visitors who contribute to a dynamic environment despite their inconsistent presence. Public spaces without monthly fees encourage such sporadic use, fostering greater interaction among local professionals.

At the municipal and county levels, coworking communities integrate local residents beyond just the coworking members. Shared tables and online directories enhance inclusivity and communication, strengthening community cohesion. However, rural coworking often struggles with achieving a critical mass of diverse professionals, making effective facilitation by managers essential for fostering collaboration.

Regionally, the Cowocat Rural project supports online platforms for members from different spaces to collaborate on projects. These platforms encourage cross-space interactions, leading to beneficial partnerships and knowledge exchange. Additionally, the project's website serves as a hub for facilitators to share experiences and learn from one another.

Identification and support of existing communities are crucial for successful coworking initiatives. Understanding the local entrepreneurship landscape and the needs of self-employed professionals helps align coworking initiatives with community needs. Strategies for identifying potential coworking communities vary from bottom-up initiatives driven by local demand to top-down

approaches initiated by public or private entities. Active outreach to economic promotion agencies, youth organizations, and local government bodies is essential. Word-of-mouth referrals and personal contacts are particularly valuable in rural areas with limited formal networking resources.

Determining the territorial scope of coworking initiatives involves considering factors like population density, critical distance, and existing coworking spaces. A broader territorial perimeter increases the chances of finding interested individuals and complementary profiles. However, initial interest does not always guarantee sustained engagement, necessitating ongoing evaluation and adaptation to meet evolving community needs.

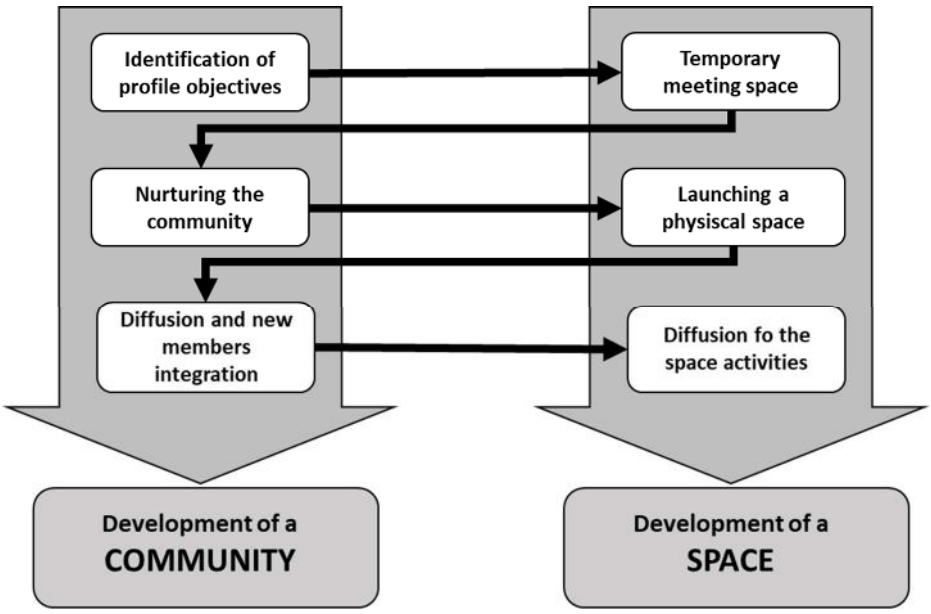
Disseminating the concept of coworking is a key challenge in rural areas. Early stages are critical, as initial experiences shape the project's trajectory. Misinterpretations of low initial participation can jeopardize support, making institutional backing crucial during the consolidation phase. Increasing visibility and community engagement through open events and outreach efforts helps familiarize neighbors with the space and its occupants, dispelling misconceptions.

Differentiating rural coworking from its urban counterpart is essential. Critics often see coworking as mere space rental, overlooking its community-building essence. Emphasizing the value of interaction over cost reduction is vital for rural coworking's success. Managing spaces to foster collaboration rather than mere space utilization is pivotal.

The results showed that effective rural coworking depends on overcoming dissemination challenges, securing institutional support, and aligning spaces with coworking principles. Emphasizing community interaction over space provision and debunking misconceptions are crucial for fostering vibrant coworking ecosystems in rural areas.

Discussion and conclusion

Figure 1 – Incremental development of a community in a rural coworking space



Premature space openings may hinder community building efforts. Successful practices involve simultaneous development of space and community, gradually expanding as shown in Figure 1. This iterative approach optimizes resources and prioritizes community building.

Rural coworking's local embeddedness is crucial due to low population densities and transportation constraints (Avdikos and Merkel 2020). Unlike urban settings, rural coworking fosters external collaborations, enhancing social cohesion and local economic development (Fuzi 2015). It facilitates professional networks, organizes events, and attracts public funding for rural revitalization (Avdikos and Iliopoulou 2019). Rural coworking is perceived as resilient, promoting social goals and sustainable local economies (Gandini and Cossu 2019; Jamal 2018).

Despite challenges, coworking initiatives have the potential to address rural exodus and appeal to digital nomads (Pettas and Avdikos 2023). Our results emphasize the importance of leveraging rural coworking's unique characteristics to maximize societal and economic impacts.

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PARTICIPATION THROUGH SELF-MANAGEMENT OF CULTURAL AND CREATIVE SPACES: A PROPOSED ROLE FOR 'HOMES OF COMMONS' IN MULTILEVEL CULTURAL POLICIES

Maria Francesca De Tullio[32] – Matina Magkou[33]

Introduction

Community-driven cultural and creative spaces play a vital role in the cultural landscape of both urban and non-urban areas across Europe. These spaces, diverse in their origins and forms, have become hubs of artistic experimentation and social innovation, fostering new collaborative working methods. They cultivate a shared creative mission, serve as centres of collective intelligence, and establish communities of practice. By offering numerous opportunities for interaction, they attract diverse audiences and frequently contribute to broader social and civic objectives within their neighbourhoods. Although the term cultural third places (tiers lieux culturels) might not be the one used in different contexts in Europe (Magkou et al, 2023; Magkou et al, 2024; Magkou, 2025), we observe that there are many similarities.

One of these similarities is that often such spaces revolve around the notion of the commons. Despite the term's conceptual ambiguity (Vacaro & Beltran, 2019), commons, as social arrangements beyond the public-private paradigm, have emerged as a potential alternative to address a wide range of social and economic challenges. Similar to their use in the digital environment (Pélissier, 2018), the commons as a semantic framework at the territorial level serves to legitimise participatory cultural practices and more democratic modes of governance (Pélissier & Magkou, 2024). This narrative identity has become integral to several places in France and is evident in other countries as well. Drawing from our own geographies, we just want to mention some examples of commons-led cultural and creative spaces in Italy and Greece. For example of l'Asilo in Naples, which was occupied by groups of cultural professionals and managed as commons showing a pathway for a commons-oriented approach to culture, and Communitism in Athens, which evolved as an open community of creative professionals post-Greek crisis, facing the urgency of their building's sale in 2023 and looking for other alternatives to continue their activities.

Such shifts imply a metamorphosis in the ways in which cultural actors produce content, use resources, interact with communities and finance their work. But most importantly, It calls for rethinking the kind of policy infrastructure needed to make commons arrangements possible and

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sustainable. This is what we wish to address in this short text based on the experiences learnt through a Creative Europe policy co-funded project that has ended already a couple of years ago. The authors of this text are researchers that have been involved in different intensities with the project. Maria Francesca De Tullio has worked on the project as a researcher at the University of Antwerp which was part of the consortium. Matina Magkou got a small grant to report on a co-creation activity involving practitioners and policy makers all over Europe. The aim of our text is to share a reflection from a project that can help as learnings for future commons-centered policy interventions for cultural and creative spaces. While our focus is the European level, we feel that such an approach can inspire local policies as well.

The Cultural and Creative Cities (CCSC) project

The Cultural and Creative Cities (CCSC) project (www.spacesandcities.com) was a policy project co-funded by the Creative Europe programme of the European Union between 2018 and 2020 and managed by a consortium of eleven non-profit and public organisations. Seven Urban Labs based in seven European cities formed the core of the project. Bringing together non-governmental cultural organisations and local/regional authorities, they addressed local challenges and sought to find participatory and commoning solutions to them. The CCSC was based around a vision of culture that places local communities at the centre of social life. In the same time, the founding principle of the project was around the re-positioning of culture beyond the market economy and being operationalised for urban regeneration purposes or the attractivity of cities. It embraced an approach in which the cultural and creative sectors can address urban challenges in cooperation with public authorities, by proposing alternative city governance models based on sharing and care. The project aimed at inspiring a vision of cities and as cultural spaces as commons: as shared resources that require attention and care from its citizens, encouraging a new vision of local participation in which exchange and horizontality and cooperation rather than competition prevail.

Commons as Enhancers of Participation in EU Cultural Policies

The EU recognises local institutions as key interlocutors for EU cultural policies, given their geographical and political proximity to inhabitants. In that sense, the EU makes international multi-level cooperation a key enabler for cultural rights and fundamental rights in general. However, EU intervention also affects the content of local policies. Indeed, EU programmes – despite their formally non-binding nature – actually influence the local authorities' and local stakeholders, both in the field of culture and beyond, positioning by means of economic incentives. Faced with a structural scarcity of resources, local stakeholders are inclined to apply for EU funds, therefore try to comply with the EU agenda, criteria and requirements.

This form of EU 'soft power' is hardly controllable by local actors (and even more for people who are not entitled to political rights). EU funding programmes are intrinsically more opaque because of their demanding technical requirements linked to their application and the multi-level nature of the project sought to be funded (Gouin and Magkou, 2020). Thus, access to funding for local, small, informal organisations is difficult and sometimes even impossible. The CCSC project took into consideration these limitations and made recommendations for promoting an approach at local and EU level that is intentionally weighted in favour of participatory democracy and positive actions to correct exclusions and asymmetries.

For these purposes, the project introduced the concept of 'Homes of Commons'. We named 'Homes of Commons' cultural and creative spaces – also providing access to digital spaces that are allocated as resources for autonomous, open and horizontal communities – including cultural and creative workers – to share knowledge and means of production, to initiate actions of solidarity and mutual aid as well as to prototype their own policy proposals. This concept recognises that some cultural spaces are more than material resources and represent a commons because they join together a resource, a community, and an action of commoning, along with purposes of ecology and social justice (Coriat et al., 2019). Additionally, in the Europe-wide landscape,

commons are increasingly connected to participation, especially in cases where their community of reference acknowledges the utility of some places to be managed for fundamental rights (Micciarelli, 2014) and spontaneously decides to reappropriate them collectively and self-manage them.

For these reasons, 'Homes of Commons' can be cultural and creative spaces of encounter between the EU, local institutions and the community at large. Their role in EU policies can be to amplify the voices of communities and cultural actors in order to build a bottom-up agenda for local and EU institutions, starting from the needs that they meet by being at the frontline with marginalised communities.

Building a bottom-up agenda requires the EU to correct the present imbalances, by actively supporting 'Homes of Commons' and civil participation. Through 'Homes of Commons', the EU can learn about local contexts and needs, cooperate with civil society in prototyping solutions, and thus become more responsive as well as gaining consent and reinvigorating its democratic legitimacy. In that sense, 'Homes of Commons' also represent 'communities of practice' and 'transition arenas' where innovative policy-making can be tested on the issues that crop up in each context.

Defining, Identifying and Funding Cultural Commons

With that in mind, the project highlighted that there are at least two forms of protection that commons need from institutions, and thus from EU institutions (Torre, 2020): funding and recognition, understood as self-recognition, mutual recognition and institutional recognition.

At the same time, recognition needs to preserve and not steer commons' autonomy with respect to both market and institutions. In particular, there is the need for EU incentivising policies to neutralise two main risks:

1. 'Commons washing': Due to territorial, legal, and procedural barriers, commons often remain invisible to institutions. This makes it difficult to distinguish genuine commons from other entities that label themselves as such but are either top-down initiatives—self-declared as participatory—or well-established organizations operating with corporate-like criteria (De Tullio and Torre, 2020).

2. 'Commons fix' (De Angelis, 2013): Commons are transformative because they challenge existing economic and political power structures. However, both public and private sectors may attempt to support them superficially to mitigate their own responsibilities, using commons as a 'buffer' to absorb distress and avoid social conflict.

The recognition and support of commons by the EU should, therefore, focus on maintaining their integrity and transformative potential without co-opting or diluting their core principles. Recognition of commons needs therefore to be consistent with a grassroots and non-competitive approach. Indeed, on the one hand, a clear definition is necessary to counter 'commons washing'. On the other hand, commons is an inherently flexible concept, constantly adaptable to the community's self-determination, through an everyday self-reflexive practice aimed at negotiating values in a world that is not commons-based.

For this purpose, the project proposed a Participatory Guarantee System (PGS) for commons, inspired by a similar system that has been recognised in some countries around food certification (Boza Martinez, 2013). PGS are systems of quality assurance "based on the active participation of farmers, consumers, rural advisors, local authorities: they come together to make decisions, visit farms, support each other and check that farmers are producing according to an Organic Standard" (FAO and IFOAM, 2018) established by the PGS networks themselves. It is an alternative to traditional third-party systems, whose costs are unaffordable for many farmers and whose standards are defined top-down, often by private institutions connected to organised large-scale distribution (Caruso, 2018; Lo Cascio, 2018).

Such mechanisms can ensure requirements that are mostly absent in current funding programmes (Acosta Alvarado et al., 2021). Such programmes should support further peer-to-peer networks, rather than being enforced by top-down control. They should also try not to make a distinction between "experts" and "commoners", valuing those whose experience derives from learning from informal realities as the genuine local experts. They should also reflect self-regulated political values, rather than standard quantitative indicators established from an external (usually corporate) party, thus allowing informal organisations being eligible and having access to funding.

Finally, the biggest challenge when thinking about a commons approach to cultural and creative spaces lies in the sustainability of funding. Programs like Creative Europe, along with other national, regional, or local project-based funding, have defined start and end points. While they may offer opportunities for reflection and the development of innovative approaches, they often remain confined to the project cycle. Their transformative potential is frequently limited by a project-based logic, which local actors struggle to sustain once funding ends. This is evident in the case of CCSC and other funding models. It is also a point to be considered by the support for third places in France over recent years, which is much more generous compared with funding opportunities for similar spaces in other European countries.

To ensure the longevity and impact of cultural and creative spaces, it is crucial to address the sustainability of funding. This involves not only securing ongoing financial support but also fostering the engagement and participation of local communities in the funding process. Additionally, exploring alternative funding models beyond the public sphere is essential for these spaces to thrive.

Conclusion

Thinking of commons and community driven cultural and creative spaces is challenging. We should consider the 'internal' characteristics of commons (space, common use of resources, modes of labour, governance, community), but also the ways those spaces' ecosystems partake in broader circuits and flows (e.g. of the market, the state and civil society) and the diffusion of a broader transformative social impact in the surrounding environment that empowers wider ecosystems of urban commons and citizen participation.

In this text we have proposed a reflection on commons that we hope can nourish the debate on third places in Europe. Looking into culture as a shared resource and a commons ecosystem can help us identify the main factors and social dilemmas impacting the production and evolution of cultural expressions and encourage citizen participation in democratic life. Culture should not be addressed merely as a shared asset and a universal right for all but also as a *collective responsibility.* We must honour its diversity, preserve it in all its forms, and ensure it remains accessible to everyone. Recognising the importance of civil society in the cultural sector and its governance is essential to achieve this (Magkou, 2024). In this way, we can also begin to understand cultural and creative work not as a matter of individual transformation and competition but as a practice of co-operation and social change.

Commons represent innovative and democratic experiments - in the cultural sector and beyond. They give priority to the ecological self-government of an open community, based on anti-discrimination criteria, and reject top-down labelling and control from the authorities. This dialectic is what nourishes change and transformation, inspiring the creation of proximity public services (Coriat, 2024) placing objectives of ecology and solidarity at their heart. In that sense, a main question for urban policies is how the public sector can support these experiences by recognising the logics of commons and without imposing authoritative standards of performance - especially standards originating from market actors.

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COLLECTIVE ACTION OF COLLABORATIVE WORKING SPACES. A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF ECHN AND VULCA IN DEVELOPING PUBLIC POLICIES AND PRACTICES

Costantino Romeo[34]

Introduction

This contribution aims to further the research on diverse approaches to organising collaboration within 'collaborative working spaces' (hereafter referred to as CWSs).

To date, research has neglected how CWSs, even those far from each other's, foster shared initiatives to achieve a variety of common goals. Such arrangements, often involving diverse organizational structures, have been essential not only in establishing the legitimacy of CWSs as socioeconomic actors, but also in enabling their significant contributions to the development of public policies at various territorial levels, including internationally.

Our research interest aims to understand how different initiatives, shaped by various strategic decisions over time, contribute to the creation of policies related to CWSs. For this purpose, we will introduce a comparison between the European Creative Hubs Network (ECHN) and Vulca two organizations that are alike in their goal of connecting CWSs (and, naturally, their users) beyond national borders. Starting from distinct membership criteria, principles, and organizational choices, these initiatives have developed activities that have ultimately transformed the relationships generated through organizational activities into proposals for public policies or practices that anticipate public policies.

Conceptual Foundations of 'Creative Hubs' and 'Makerspaces'

From a theoretical perspective, it is widely accepted that in CWSs, individuals come together «in order to develop their personal and collective projects using shared resources» (Capdevila and Zarlenga 2015: 272). Besides that conceptual definition, reality has proven to be much more complex because of several initiatives outlined under various umbrella terms such as third places or new workspaces (Avdikos and Pettas 2021; Micek et al. 2024; Scaillerez and Tremblay 2017; Van Holm 2015). While coworking spaces are arguably the most well-known concept of CWSs, our research focuses specifically on two cross-national organizations that aim to connect 'creative hubs' and 'makerspaces' (or 'fab labs'[35]), which are interpreted here as two distinct types of CWSs.

According to Micek at al. (2024) there is no agreement about the definition of 'creative hub'. From a generic perspective, they are typically described as *environments* where creativity fosters economic activities. By highlighting the concept of geographical proximity as a driver of social interactions, that definition encompasses co-locations, including districts, cities, and so forth (d'Ovidio and Pacetti 2019; Ferilli et al. 2016). Additionally, there is a more specific interpretation that defines creative hubs as *workplaces* focused solely on distinct economic activities within the cultural and creative sectors (Lee 2019).

Notes

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[35] As will be detailed further on, the concepts of 'makerspaces' and 'fab labs' will be treated as equivalent.

Makerspaces, as the name indicates, are venues originally designed to gather individuals who identify themselves as makers or within the do-it-yourself (DIY) movement (Gantert et al. 2022), both professionally and recreationally, to come together (Berrebi-Hoffmann et al. 2018). One of the main characteristics of makerspaces is the availability of community-shared facilities for learning or experimental activities such as designing, prototyping, or hands-on manufacturing[36] (Gantert et al. 2022). Given the global success of fab labs, which represent a distinct model of makerspaces, following the institutional framework formalized by the Fab Charter developed at MIT's Center for Bits and Atoms (Gershenfeld 2005; Van Holm 2015), the audience of users of makerspaces or fab labs has expanded. Thus, it's not only makers, but also creatives, entrepreneurs, students, engineers, and hobbyists who have taken advantage of the opportunity to use tools that make technology more accessible.

Following the growing relevance of creative hubs and makerspaces as actors for local development (Ramella and Manzo 2018; Van Holm 2017), also efforts by the organizations managing these CWSs have also multiplied. They aim to create ways of building communities, fostering connections, and collective actions (Cattabriga 2020; Li and Gao 2021; Magkou 2021; Menichinelli and Schmidt 2019) that highlight the similarities among these CWSs (Ahrne and Brunsson 2005), despite their geographical distances.

In so doing, CWSs are here conceived as organisations (Cnossen and Bencherki 2019; Mortara and Parisot 2016; Scaillerez and Tremblay 2017) capable of cooperating through collective initiatives to achieve system-level goals (Gulati et al. 2012). However, these initiatives have proven effective in shaping public policies across various territorial levels (Magkou 2024) or industries (Rayna and Striukova 2016).

For this reason, the selection of ECHN and Vulca as case studies[37] proved to be highly relevant. Both Despite their differing targets, evolving trajectories, and organizational structures, they have facilitated their capacity for aggregation beyond mere representation. Indeed, they have actively engaged in collaborating with organizations and have significantly contributed to the formulation of public policies or of widely adopted practices among their actors.

European Creative Hubs Network (ECHN)

In the early 2010s, a group of managers from various cultural and creative spaces, based in major cities in Europe, in order to organize a conference focused on these emerging space typologies. Interestingly, the definition of "creative hubs" was not a prerequisite for participation, as it was chosen by the organizers for communicative purposes to encompass as broad a range of participants as possible. A few years later, the ECHN association was founded in response to the growing interest in those conferences, which led to both potential participants identifying as creative hubs. Such enthusiasm around creative hubs also caught the attention from policymaker of the European Commission who decided to support the creation of a European network of creative hubs. As reported by one of the founders of ECHN:

«And what happened there is that, by coincidence actually, there were some representatives of the European Commission there. And they really liked the idea because one of the special characteristics of the creative hubs…that now we know…. we did not completely understand back in the time…that it was a next type of structure after museums and cultural centres…so, it was the

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[36] Gantert et al. provide a list that is not exhaustive, but indicative of the tools shared by makerspace communities: «Users of makerspaces access digital and manufacturing technologies ranging from 3D printers, laser cutters, various milling devices, workbenches, and everyday tools, such as hammers and saws, that enable the creation of material artifacts» (2022: 1565).

[37] The research was conducted through interviews, ethnographic notes, and access to secondary sources such as documents published by the organizations themselves or by public institutions; a textual analysis was then carried out. This analysis aims to facilitate a comparison, presented here in an exploratory format, highlighting contrasts between the founding members of the respective organizations.

first and formal structure that would embrace both cultural sectors and creative sectors altogether in one».

The engagement of European institutions is marked by a top-down approach to policy development about CWSs since the definition of creative hubs, formulated by the conference organizers (who later founded ECHN), aligned with the objectives of innovative policies aimed at integrating the creative and cultural industries within a unified framework (Magkou 2024).

Given that the term 'creative hubs' had not previously been part of the public discourse about policymaking in the cultural and creative industries, the establishment of ECHN was innovative to the extent that created the conditions for the development of those types of CWSs within policy frameworks. In so doing, the establishment of a "creative hub" identity has enabled the recruitment of hundreds of associates, registered as collective members, paying a regular annual fee to participate in activities. Moreover, adherents democratically elect board members since the organization encompasses a hierarchical structure. Over the years, ECHN's activities have focused on building an international community of members through the organization of events, the development of learning programs, and mobility initiatives aimed at training professionals capable of managing creative hubs or effectively utilizing the resources available within them.

In other words, the evolution of ECHN is marked by its role in externally translating EU policy strategies into practice, as well as its ability to internally build an organization capable of representing creative hubs.

Vulca

The establishment of Vulca was inspired by one of the founders' insights to align the creation of an international makerspace community with the objective of creating European mobility programs (including Erasmus+) for makerspace users, who are increasingly acknowledged within innovation ecosystems.

Although the concepts of maker, makerspace, and fab lab were already present in public discourse, the founders of Vulca recognized the challenges in fostering genuine connections. They specifically criticized existing network-based initiatives, such as those by the Fab Foundation, for lacking the ability to effectively construct and sustain relationships between makers located in distant and heterogeneous areas.

However, Vulcamembership, regardless of whether individuals or collectives, is characterized by informality, flexibility, free of charge. It is necessary to have established a trustworthy relationship with the most active members of the association to be included in the communication channels or invited to their annual gathering, also known as 'Vulca Seminar'.

Consequently, its evolution is marked by the efforts of the so-called 'explorers,' who voluntarily devote their time to road trips aimed at recruiting members. These actors visit makerspaces, document their observations, and cultivate trust before enabling distant connections through digital platforms like instant messaging apps or Slack, where individuals share ideas or mobility proposals. As one of VULCA's founders remarked when questioned about membership:

«With us, we just we need to visit their makerspace. This is the only rule we established in this proposal that "You want to become a member of Vulca?" We need to meet you. To physically meet you. So, we need to visit your makerspace, if you are a space. […] Our explorer or board members or the closest ones need to know you, basically. For me, this is the minimum. […] Because this is basically the Fab Foundation concept. This thing doesn't work. It has a limit because someone can approve that you can be a member but never visited you. How do we make sure that the person that validates you also visited you, knows you personally, had more than a beer with you? Vulca works because you come to sleep to my home, or I came to sleep to your home».

While the organisation is formally structured without pursuing any profit, within which a small group of individuals voluntarily commit to foster connections among makerspaces. According to the interviewees, everyone (even newcomers) can operate under a 'do-ocracy' model, where no formal roles are pre-assigned because every action, even the abovementioned explorations, depends on actors' free initiatives. Such a work methodology distinguishes the operations of Vulca, nevertheless, a growing sense of belonging has led members to pursue grants, with the aim of establishing a more structured organization and implementing clear decision-making processes.

What takeaways in terms of public policies and cooperation modalities?

The similarities between ECHN and Vulca are limited to the efforts to connect their respective members despite the long distances. Both of them participated in the Creative Europe, an open call financed by the European Commission for establishing cross-national organisations within the cultural and creative industries. Although ECHN successfully secured funding from European institutions, Vulca is seeking alternative sources, not necessarily financially, to support its mission. As a matter of fact, the two organisations differ their respective strategies to extent that they have evolved by following distinct structures that emerged over time. The founding core of ECHN was formed prior to its internal conceptualization of creative hubs (or alternatively, it is the organisation that develops its own membership). Moreover, the interest of policymakers for developing creative hubs as suitable organisational forms to merge creative and cultural activities within the same policy framework probably enabled ECHN to adopt a more formalised structure with defined roles and decision-making processes. In contrast, even though makerspaces and fab labs were well-established concepts prior to the establishment of Vulca, the creation of a meta-organisation composed of defined members could have been a path pursued by those who are engaged in its the development. In fact, the priority given to building trustworthy relationships rather than roles enabled the creation of an international community of makers able to self-organise, and so to find other ways to structure the association beyond the actual organisational arrangement.

Thus, the two organisational forms shaping respectively the two case studies enabled distinct ways to generate both innovation and practices. The establishment of the "creative hubs" concept, along with its subsequent evolution—including training, mobility programs, and research initiatives—laid the groundwork for ECHN to become an active contributor to innovate international, national, and subnational policies:

« Every time we're part of those groups and we are part of the bodies working on that. And not only on EU policies, but every year we have also a specific country focus…like this year is Portugal to kind of put in the agenda creative hubs on a local level…because it's one thing the EU level, and another is the local level…» [one of the ECHN's founders]

Examples of subjects developed by the ECHN team are (but not limited to) education, patenting, cultural agendas, and the standardization of creative and cultural occupations across Europe «*because this is the only way that you can also have mutual exchange of critical cultural professionals across Europe, which is something that is not happening right now*» (one of the ECHN's founders).

Considering that Vulca has focused on building trustworthy relationships among makers in Europe, their intentions to propose mobility programs for makers has been successful to the extent that the contacts they generated turned into a brokerage activity. By observing Vulca's communication platforms, makers regularly share mobility offers with the whole community or they privately contact the core team to propose or demand residencies. Therefore, those who consider themselves to be part of Vulca are encouraged to seek either private or public funding to finance the so-called 'makers in residency'. Although cross-national cooperation among makers has not been a structural program part of public policies, particularly at EU level, the establishment of Vulca sets the stage for an organisation capable of facilitating such initiatives. In this regard, Vulca's ability to build international ties has facilitated the establishment of a bilateral agreement between

'RFFLabs' (the national French network of fab labs and makerspaces) and 'Verbund offener Werkstätten' (the national German organisation of open workshops), probably the first case of international diplomacy involving makerspaces. In other words, although there is no high-level institutional recognition, the informal structure based on trust allows the actors involved with Vulca to utilize the organisation as a valuable infrastructure for implementing knowledge exchange initiatives that are still undervalued by public policies.

«Because this is the only way we have to connect with more than 200 of the people we met so far, and we know they have this in the pocket. And we know…we keep them with us. If there is no spamming. If this is well organised and the information are valuable for them like: "I look for a job", "I look for a fab lab", or "I look for a fab manager", or "I look for residency" or "There is this consortium that is starting and we look for these kinds of partners, guys". This is valuable for them. And they need to read it only more or less». [One of Vulca founders]

Conclusions and Perspectives

We have demonstrated here the evolution of two characteristic international CWS organizations, based on their strategic choices, which can lead either to the formulation of policies or to compensating for their absence. ECHN has focused on the creation and expansion of "creative hubs" with its growth directly contributing to policy development in the cultural and creative sectors. In contrast, Vulca's efforts are centred on transforming connections made during visits to makerspaces into strong, lasting ties. This approach has proven effective in identifying opportunities from various sources, fostering greater exchange among makers.

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THIRD-PLACES AND THE CHALLENGES OF EUROPEAN PUBLIC FRAMEWORKS

Jean Michel Lucas[38], Cédric Brossard[39]

Introduction

He's a gypsy, implacably identified with the local gypsy community. Yet he has a name of his own, like his hero: Manitas de Plata, whose music has shone all over the world. It's a name that raises hopes, albeit low ones, because for the rest of the city, he's only a man from the "City of Gypsies". He certainly lives through the freedom of drawing his music from the life of a community association created in the neighborhood, but he has no illusions. This musical freedom has little future; it's lived solely in this small, discredited area of the city, separated from the others by the huge wall of the former military site next door: everyone is free, but in a way, walled in at home.

A cultural third-place takes up residence where the military left off. This urban innovation heralds new freedoms, imbued with the lives of artists. So what to do with this wall between neighbors? The simplest thing to do would be to keep it, since the "gypsies" clearly don't need the services of the third-place, just as the third-place's needs don't depend on the activities of the "Gypsy City". No need, therefore, no exchange of services; no economy between one and the other, no commercial service, no service of general (economic) interest. And yet, when the third-place was created, its promoters had ambitions other than the provision of "services"; what mattered most to them was the "Gypsy City" through the communal life of the place. It was inconceivable, then, to deploy such a humanist ambition without taking the people in the neighborhood into consideration. The stigma of the "Gypsy City" had to be overcome, and therefore the wall was a persisting constraint. The challenge was certainly a delicate one: addressing Manitas' heirs is no easy task, and achieving reciprocal consideration between such different neighbors requires a great deal of time and care.

First and foremost, by avoiding the condescension of those who give generously of their good intentions, forgetting that the giving hand still hangs above the receiving one. The people working in the third-place know this; they have made a point of listening; they have preferred the humility of attention, the respect shown for verbal and symbolic languages as well as rhythms and rituals. They have affirmed the equal dignity of all those involved in this adventure, and have taken care to indulge and welcome each other: listening, drinking or eating, walking or singing to open up to each other's freedoms and hope that these journeys in dignity will give rise to mutual trust, esteem and recognition. This approach, over time, allowed the workers of the third-place and the people living in the "Gypsy City"to gradually find the words and deeds to establish human relationships with each other.

In what way does this example serves as a paragon of the difficulty for third-places to be considered in the place they occupy in terms of general interest?

A call for dignity and freedom

Let's continue our attempt to characterize this difficulty: we could congratulate both the third-place and the gypsy community on their state of mind, be equally satisfied with this psychology of "benevolence" and hold it in our analysis as a private virtue. Yet such an interpretation would be a

Notes

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[39] A founding member of [la fabrique francophone], Cédric Brossard has over 15 years' experience of international cooperation, notably with several artists from sub-Saharan Africa, as director of Cie Acétés. Committed to the defense of living French-language writing, he has staged several theatrical productions that have been presented in France, Africa and the rest of the French-speaking world. With [la fabrique francophone], he is pursuing his ambition to combine sensitive, respectful international cooperation within the French-speaking community with a strong local base in the Lot department, where his activities are based, in the image of the poet Edouard Glissant's quotation: "Act in your place, think with the world".

highly partial one. In fact, the relationships established and consolidated between the two communities are the hallmark of larger values: they have given concrete expression to the founding pilar of the European Union, permeated by a principle of respect for the equal dignity of each and every human being; they have made the first value of the Charter of Fundamental Rights a reality in this territory, on an everyday scale. This relationship at the crossroads has generated virtuous effects: the shared recognition of all these people has opened the way to new freedoms. Users of the third-place were able to identify with these musical heritages from the "City of Gypsies", and the heirs of Manitas found the support they needed to make their music appreciated throughout Europe. The relationship has given birth to a thriving festival, with more than 4,000 visitors, as the gazettes and reviews will report.

However, the general interest of this "economic attractivity" is only the tip of an iceberg whose very existence has been based on the quality of relationships between people. The general interest here lies not so much in the services provided and rendered, as in the deliberate and controlled requirements to show consideration for people, whether they live in the third-place, the "Gypsy City" or elsewhere.

To put it bluntly: however local these relationships may be, they have given tangible life to the universal values of humanity on which the European Union is founded: "dignity" and effective "freedom".

What, then, is the most coherent european public policy framework for these third-places that have become "first-places" for such an humanistic agenda? We could imagine the framework of Services of General Economic Interest, the famous SGEI; but its principles, recalled by the Höfner ruling of the European Court of Justice, are the supply of services and goods, at the best competitive price, which seems, here, only marginally satisfactory. The SGEI is, in fact, indifferent to the quality of the relationships between the people contributing to the production and exchange processes, which are of primary importance here.

The SGEI, literally understood, conceives "interest" according to a restrictive definition of social utility, and in so doing, it places third places in a kind of marginal exception, necessary but unloved, with regard to the queenly conception of SGEIs. In a way, this narrow framework muzzles the dynamics of third-places, which are conducive to human relationships, and prevents us to understand their potential true valorization. With consideration for these values and for the respect of cultural rights, another european public framework should be sought.

The art of reconciling irreconcilables

Leaving this example aside, we turn to another situation that reveals the same limitations: a third-place in a rural environment, where people from elsewhere have settled. This organization is doing well in terms of the number of jobs it generates, the space it rents out to resourceful entrepreneurs, and the goods and services it produces, as well as the shows it puts on, attracting a large "audience". We could even boast about the business figures of this third-place, which adds to the economic attractivity of the collectivity.

However, a different picture emerges as soon as you realize that this third-place is being set up on land that has long been occupied by other people: there is a long tradition of hunting here. And the "hunters" don't ask for the services of the third-place. On the other hand, the people who frequent the third-place are hardly passionate consumers of hunting products; perhaps even some of them have strong animosities at the very idea of killing animals.

The collective life of a territory cannot be satisfied with these discrepancies. The general interest must be sought elsewhere than in the economic competitivity of a place that remains alien to the people who hunt on its lands.

The third-place has understood this, and testifies that the common interest should be born of the freedom that each person allows the others to develop: hunters must have the freedom to hunt on the territory of the third-place, and, reciprocally, the people of the third-place must be recognized as free to develop their activities while benefiting from the consideration of hunters.

Now that common sense had been established, it had to be translated into the delicate reality of consideration for others and reconciliation between competing freedoms. The third-place took the risk of calling on an artist, dancer and photographer to stimulate the imagination of those involved

in this relationship. During his residency on the territory, the artist asked hunters if they would agree to pose for him in a particular posture: to be carried in his arms.

There's no functionality or rationality to be found in these moments of shared bodies, only a freedom of artistic expression symbolizing the unlikely hope of possible attachments to others. Moments of humanity, always unstable, as we know. After the initial surprise, the hunters accepted this artistic freedom, as did others like farmers and kayakers: the hunters became actors, delighted and willing, in the realization of the fundamental value of "freedom of the arts". The quality of the relationship between the inhabitants was a milestone. The founding values of the European Union, including artistic freedom, which defines the general interest for all, found an effective expression here, on this territory.

The question remains, however, what the "right" european public policy framework should be, one that would be adapted to the human relationships initiated by third-places. Once again, the SGEI framework may appear imperfect: subject to economic rationality aimed at optimizing expenditure, it neglects people's dignity, freedom and power to act in relation to others: this component being so difficult to measure. The fact remains, however, that the desire to live together is well illustrated here, and often remains a matter of shared imagination, irreducible to the volume of quantified businesses.

Living and building Europe's heritage together

From these two stories, let's draw a new thread: gypsies have a centuries-old history, which is part of their heritage. Hunters, too, draw on history, since the practice of hunting is just as much a part of our heritage, as hunters see it as a reflection and expression of their constantly evolving values, beliefs, knowledge and traditions. For their part, the two third-places in question are not lacking in depth either, anchored in combative pasts where community life and its associated modes of cooperation have also had their moments of glory. Europe is made up of these different attachments to a variety of cultural heritages. These very different ensembles of values and memories have been able to reconcile without losing or distorting each other, and the third-places have been the facilitators here: they have ensured that the people of each community can affirm their attachment to their cultural heritage, while sharing it with others, in an open public setting.

In short, these third-places, without necessarily knowing it, have exercised that magnificent responsibility incumbent on "every person, alone or in community, to respect the cultural heritage of others as well as his or her own heritage, and consequently the common heritage of Europe", as the Council of Europe reminds us in the article 4 of the Framework Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society, commonly known as the "Faro Convention".

These third-places and the other communities involved have thus, on the ground, given substance to Europe's fundamental heritage values. They have all acted in the general european interest. However, the European Union often neglects the public framework of the Faro Convention, leaving the designation of common heritage to the States and their scientific experts, while satisfying itself with the -sometimes reductive- approach of "world heritage" or "intangible cultural heritage".

Like the examples given here, third-places, through the relationships they forge, should be key players in the heritage dynamics advocated by the Faro Convention. When wars often threaten in the name of sometimes rigid attachments to ancestors, democratically reconciling irreconcilable narratives of the past may appear to be an urgent matter of general interest for Europe.

Third-places, whose efforts are already highly commendable in terms of their contribution to the most inclusive possible digital transition and the development of broader digital freedoms - would become an innovative model for the general interest, far surpassing their unfortunately frequent reduction to the status of inexpensive producers of economic services like any other.

Conclusion: questioning the values of general interest

All too often, third-places in Europe find themselves trapped in systems that are ill-suited to their needs, and think only in terms of the hours of work and tasks they have to perform in order to earn revenue - just like any other business, but without the same wage guarantees. The competitive quantitative nature of SGEIs imposed by public policy has gradually dissolved the human relationships at the heart of the third-place dynamic.

Yet it must be possible to imagine another public framework that would consolidate third-places as "first-places" for human relationships. We know that the Services Directive (2006/123) foresaw this when it spoke of services of general interest guaranteeing people's dignity. All that remained were imperfectly defined services of general interest, described as "non-economic" to distinguish them from SGEIs. The same is true of social utility services associated with associative life, which have only a minor status, even though they respond concretely to the fundamental values of human dignity and freedom.

The development of third-places throughout Europe means that the cards have to be reshuffled: their ways of thinking and acting about community life could positively be considered as primary for the general interest, when they are consistent with Europe's founding values. The "first-places" for relationships of humanity deserve a new angle of consideration within a public framework fostering collective capacities to "make humanity together".

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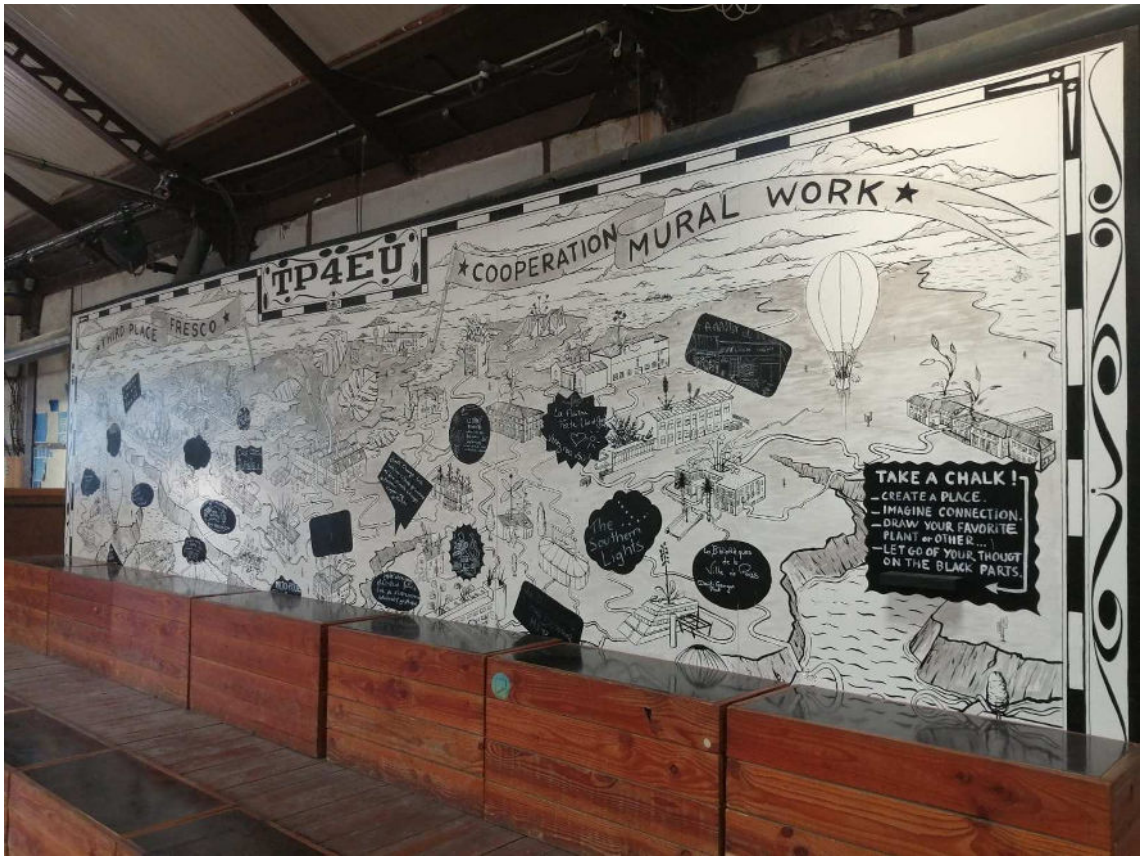
Contributory fresco created during the "Tiers-lieu pour l'Europe" event held in Montpellier in June 2023 © FOA (https://www.instagram.com/foa.ink/ ; FOA | Facebook)



CONCLUSION: WHAT PUBLIC POLICIES FOR THIRD PLACES AROUND THE WORLD?

Marc Laget[40]

Third places are an object of public policy that varies greatly from country to country and territory to territory. In 2023, ANCT published two benchmarks[41] on the development of that "third places" in Europe, attesting the vitality of the dynamic in many countries. The reasons for this status differentiation, as well as the forms of support given to third places, depend - as this publication shows - mainly on the understanding given to the concept of third place, the place of the social and solidarity economy, the proximity between institutions and local players, and territorial disparities. The fact remains, however, that third places are now being created by local players on every continent: These spaces, which are open to all, are adaptive responses to the ecological, digital, food, work and health transitions, and are receiving varying degrees of public support.

Third places: a concept and public initiatives in a consolidation phase

Ray Oldenburg's visionary approach to serendipity has been the subject of research into the definition and usefulness of third places. These open meeting spaces, where the difficulty of having to invite guests into one's home is overcome, where "consumers can satisfy their needs for consumption, companionship and emotional support[42] » (Illinois), where one of the most significant aspects of mental health can emerge: a sense of community[43] (New Zealand), are increasingly sought after by senior citizens, as shown by a study conducted in Malaysia[44]. This usefulness is social, as they provide open meeting places, and even spaces for multicultural integration, as demonstrated in Sydney[45]. It is also economic, since according to a study conducted in the United Kingdom, whether physical or mental, places that are not reserved for work allow us to recharge our batteries and regain the energy, motivation and creativity we need to work[46]. The usefulness of these places is corroborated by their presence on every continent and by the variety of facilities offered to most categories of population. At the crossroads of Europe and the Mediterranean, the socio-economic, environmental and territorial benefits of coworking spaces

Notes

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[41] The first one wrote by the Cerema: « Dynamique des tiers-lieux en Europe : étude exploratoire », May 2023. (Etude exploratoire) Dynamique des tiers-lieux en Europe | ANCT - Agence Nationale de la Cohésion des Territoires; The second one by the do tank Pour la Solidarité, « les tiers lieux en Europe : une analyse comparative », May 2023 : (Analyse comparative) Les tiers lieux en Europe | ANCT - Agence Nationale de la Cohésion des Territoires

[42] Mark S.Rosenbaum: Exploring the Social Supportive Role of Third Places in Consumers' Lives - Mark S. Rosenbaum, 2006 (sagepub.com)

[43] Rebekah White A third place | New Zealand Geographic (nzgeo.com)

[44] Teck Hong Tan & Ji Hei Lee, School of Economics and Management, Xiamen University Malaysia : Residential environment, third places and well-being in Malaysian older adults | SpringerLink

[45] Rebecca Williamson, South West University, Sydney : Producing Multicultural Belonging: The Possibilities and Discontents of Local Public Spaces in Suburban Sydney, Academia, 2013

[46] Tim Pittman, London school of economics: Hey…Leave my third place alone! - Urban Planning and Design - architecture and design (gensleron.com)

have been characterized by their capacity to increase the production and performance of companies, employees and collaborators, as well as their quality of life, while stimulating transformations in the labour market, collaboration and innovation processes[47].

Following this very broad definition of "third places", city leaders have gradually reintroduced into their development and renovation plans efforts to revitalize metropolitan neighborhoods, particularly public spaces, in an attempt to break down social barriers[48]. And, since the end of the 2010s, the third-place dynamic has spread everywhere beyond cafés, theatres and public parks. The concept of the third place has rapidly taken on a style of its own: the third place is an open, cross-disciplinary, citizen-centered, hybrid mode of operation that is readily adopted by cultural wastelands, coworking spaces, fab labs, short circuits, libraries, professional networks, players in the fields of transition and smart territories...

The first support for these cross-disciplinary initiatives came from institutions using segmented criteria (age, profession, qualifications, income, etc.) and approaches. The redevelopment of industrial wasteland, the creation of Fab Labs, training in the use of digital technology and the promotion of collective cultural initiatives were supported almost everywhere in Europe by different levels or specialized departments of the public administration, often on a case-by-case basis for operations that were the subject of a local consensus or were emblematic in character (Darwin in Bordeaux, the Oslo Media Library, the Wuk in Vienna). It is only more recently that the first large-scale initiatives have been taken by ministries that have spotted the potential of the concept, such as the French Ministry for Spatial Planning, or by local authorities that have identified the economic and territorial challenges of third places (regions of Italy, Wallonia, New Aquitaine and Occitania).

In France, the "Nouveaux Lieux Nouveaux Liens" program, led by the ANCT, has mobilized €130m over three years to finance the creation of 400 reference third places, professional networks in each region and a training programme, involving several ministries and most of the regions, mobilized in particular through European funds. While we can't yet speak of a complete public policy in the same way as we would for vocational training, research or rural development, it is a public policy in the process of consolidation that is demonstrating its usefulness every day.

Elsewhere in Europe, the main actions have been carried out via tax incentives for companies or aid for the self-employed, in order to support the development of coworking and teleworking, particularly in the Nordic and Baltic countries, favoring the growth of commercial services more than the deployment of citizen initiatives (such as the coworking voucher introduced by the Walloon Region, not renewed at the end of 2022). The measures taken to redevelop brownfield sites have been organized around the urban transition piloted by local authorities, in very different ways, sometimes in the context of environmental policies and sometimes in relation to smart city objectives.

What does the future hold for third places in the face of this highly differentiated support?

Third-Party Centers carry out non-market activities of collective utility, linked to innovation, solidarity and education, which positions them on a hybrid economic model, the robustness of which depends on the recognition given by the public authorities to the collective utility of non-market services. Three scenarios can coexist: in a liberal context, the entrepreneurial nature of the action is considered, to the detriment of social utility activities, which are encouraged on a secondary basis; conversely, in the context of a public positioning favorable to the social economy, third places are supported : either as players in the SSE and, as such, receive support from traditional institutions dedicated to employment, training and popular education; or as new entities, recognized for their ability to steer bottom-up projects. The latter approach to public

Notes

[47] Raphaël Besson, étude conduite dans le cadre de Coworking Med, 2018 : Quelle politique européenne pour les tiers lieux mediterranéens? (archives-ouvertes.fr)
[48] Stuart P.Butler et Carmen Diaz "Third places" as community builders (brookings.edu)

policy on third places does, however, require changes to be made to SSE practices, which are too specifically built around training, qualification and social and professional integration procedures.

The weight of the benefits to the regions is also an important issue for the future of this public policy, and is also subject to great variability. In centralized countries, it seems difficult to implement a public policy on third places without the players on the ground demonstrating the relevance of their approach beforehand. We sometimes hear that 'third places can't be decreed, they have to be invented', and this 'invention' can only come from the local area and be driven by local players. This dynamic still seems fragile in Greece, Poland and Sweden, where initiatives are recent or very scattered. Elsewhere in Europe, however, it is taking shape, as in Portugal, where a number of cities (Fundao, Porto, Lisbon) have actively cooperated in setting up FabLabs. The same is true in Slovenia, where the project leaders in Ljubljana have presented a very successful proof of concept (starting their activities from a simple container!), on the basis of which the local authorities have decided to construct a building capable of housing over a hundred makers, designers and trainers in a genuine third-center city. In countries that have embarked on a genuine decentralization movement, such as France, third places are springing up everywhere and are calling on the intermediary bodies (municipalities, inter-municipalities, departments, regions), generating major differences between regions, depending on the appetite of local authorities on the subject. Lastly, in federal or regionalized States, the Regions are each positioning themselves in their own way: while third places have already been genuinely recognized in Italian Regions with a cooperative tradition, the situations are much more differentiated between German Länder or Spanish Regions, while the creation of third places is more recent and scattered in Austrian Regions.

Approaches to supporting third places are also sensitive to territorial disparities. Third places develop spontaneously in large urban areas, where there is a large and solvent demand for coworking services, and where there are procedures in place to assist with project management. On the other hand, in sparsely populated areas, the existence of a public policy dedicated to third places is decisive for their future. In small countries such as Malta, Cyprus, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, and even Slovenia and Croatia, the small number of towns in sparsely populated areas will limit the importance of third places in the eyes of governments. Similarly, in countries with a strong urban fabric such as Germany, the Netherlands or the Flemish region of Belgium, the relatively low proportion of the population in rural areas will make the territorial development prospects of third places less clear at national level. Thus, it is probably in countries and regions where the proportion of dispersed population is high that a third-center policy appears most necessary. This urban/rural divide is further reinforced by the regulations governing state aid, which must be compatible with competition rules. This limits the scope for intervention in densely populated areas, where a commercial offer is present, with the exception of working-class neighborhoods.

Rather than financial support, the actions to support third-party premises should be structured around facilitation, promotion, the structuring of trades and professions, the use of brownfield sites and the provision of premises.

Epilogue

The way in which institutions and local authorities are able to develop public policies in support of third places is difficult to identify, as economic, political and territorial variables lead to geographically differentiated and overlapping implementations. Few recent studies have been identified in this area[49]. However, the robustness of their deployment is undeniable, and regularly reinforced by their serendipity function, which encourages initiative and increases the probability of success for those who cooperate. Using the enabling power of information and communication technologies everywhere, easily sharing tried and tested solutions in the technical, legal, logistical

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[49] Two studies identified : Social Activity in Gothenburg's Intermediate City: Mapping Third Places through Social Media Data, Marco Adelfio, Leticia Serrano-Estrada, Pablo Martí-Ciriquián, Jaan-Henrik Kain & Jenny Stenberg, et Gerhard Krauss, juillet 2022 L'exemple des tiers-lieux du Bade-Wurtemberg : puissance publique à la manoeuvre ? - HAL-SHS - Sciences de l'Homme et de la Société

and educational fields, organizing frequent exchanges through numerous professional networks, third places can be considered as independent players, or as objects or even relays of public policies[50]. Their open, collaborative approach and their ability to extend their reach via the shared assets they organize to govern are vectors for political change. Because it is local citizens and players who define the purpose and organization of a third place, the projects they support address the major challenges of the ecological, energy and digital transitions, as well as those relating to work, health and mobility. In doing so, third places pursue the same goals as national and European political bodies: to pursue green, intelligent, inclusive and socially responsible growth. Support for third places should therefore probably be seen not as an additional public policy, but as a means of strengthening existing public policies or developing new ones. As such, it should receive increasing attention from the public authorities.

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[50] François-Xavier De Vaujany, 2016 : Les communautés collaboratives dans la cité: De politiques pour à des politiques par les tiers-lieux? (archives-ouvertes.fr)

In France, the ability of "tiers-lieux" to act as local drivers of territorial resilience has raised issues of territorial cohesion that have revealed the need for government support, and quite naturally placed the Agence Nationale de la Cohésion des Territoires (ANCT), as the operator of support schemes for "tiers-lieux" at a national level.
Its "Nouveaux Lieux Nouveaux Liens" (New Places, New Links) program has produced this publication, which follows on from the "Tiers-Lieux pour l'Europe" conference held in June 2023, organized by ANCT in partnership with GIP France Tiers-Lieux, bringing together for the first time over 300 third-place players from several European countries.
This new volume in the ANCT's Comprendre collection sheds light on an emerging reality: third places, which have their roots in a recent 1989 concept by American sociologist Ray Oldenburg, have been a territorial reality since the 2000s, and a growing one in post-health-crisis Europe. From chitalishte in Romania to rural third places in Wallonia, from coworking in Catalonia to fablabs in Central Europe and France, these spaces share the same citizen DNA: hybrid, inclusive and deeply rooted in the territories.
On a European scale, these hybrid places of connection are booming, and while visions and definitions of this movement vary from country to country, it seems generally accepted that third places, whether they bear the name or not, have many virtues, and are now attracting the attention of new territories, countries and even international institutions for their ability to stimulate creativity and rebalance territorial dynamics. Europe's public authorities are faced with the challenge of supporting this diversity while enhancing the territorial impact of these places.
This publication presents the contributions of European researchers and observers who bear witness to the way in which third places embody a new way of "doing things together", and, in its eight chapters, presents illustrations of third places, enabling us to see them as being at the heart of new contributions to the development of territories, but also prey to a multiplicity of challenges.

COMPRENDRE

THIRD PLACES AND EUROPEAN PUBLIC AUTHORITIES

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