

COWORKING IN LISBON

Experiences of collaboration and sharing on changing urban contexts

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Abstract

As innovative and creative ecosystems, Coworking Spaces (CWS) show high adaptability and recovery capacity in facing global event disruptions. This article is an exploratory study that aims to approach the development of coworking spaces in the city of Lisbon. It investigates the location patterns and adaptation of such ecosystems in Lisbon, by mapping the phenomenon and examining its spatio-temporal dynamics that was influenced by the urbanisation phases of the city, as well as the development and planning policies designed over the years. Starting from a broader view of CWS location in the city, this article moves on to present two particular cases, implemented in a different time and socio-economic circumstances in different parts of the city: LxFactory and The Creative Hub. This study is part of a broader contribution to COST Action (CA)18214 "The geography of the new workspaces and the impact on the periphery".

Keywords

Coworking Spaces, Spatial Patterns, Creative Economy, Urban Development, Lisbon

1. Introduction

The concept of coworking emerged in early 2000 (see, e.g. Moriset, 2014; Gandini, 2015; Waters-Lynch *et al.*, 2016). These collaborative spaces proliferated rapidly all over the world. They tended to locate on renovated and reconverted urban deindustrialised or brownfield areas, providing shared offices and hosting a variety of activities for different types of users, including events, training, and networking sessions, among others. Its members, mostly freelancers, entrepreneurs, startups, small companies, seek values of collaboration, openness, knowledge sharing, promoting partnerships and social interaction (Fuzi, 2015; Merkel, 2015).

Innovative and creative ecosystems, such as Coworking Spaces (CWS), have attracted the attention of the media, politicians and academics, due to their ability to adapt under pressure and provide new alternative solutions for work activities and work regimes, thus stimulating urban regeneration processes (see for example the work of Akhavan and Mariotti, 2018; Durante and Turvani, 2018; Capdevila, 2019).

Despite the popularity of CWS, to our knowledge, there is no systematic and interdisciplinary approach to the study of this phenomenon in urban studies fields, specifically for the Lisbon Metropolitan Area. A holistic vision can promote a more comprehensive and integrated action to solve urban problems and achieve long-lasting improvements (Roberts, 2016). The changes brought by the emergence of CWS have sparked a debate on how to best respond to current and future crises, and their effects on cities, work patterns and life routines.

2. The research background and review

The spread of coworking practices and the enthusiasm for their ability to improve the socio-economic conditions of knowledge-based workers (Gandini, 2015) is based on the shifting nature of work, the essence of knowledge networks, labour markets dynamics, and a growing discourse around proto dynamics of class recomposition (Arvidsson, 2014).

Albeit still scarce, influential research in creative industries studies (Gill and Pratt, 2008; Pratt, 2008; Grugulis and Stoyanova, 2011, no date) have shown how knowledge workers are mostly freelancers and precarious professionals, often in the early stages of their careers, that need to manage social capital and to be proactive in their professional networks, as a decisive source for incoming jobs.

It is also argued that people in creative occupations who were offered *permanent* jobs in media firms, willingly or not, have moved to different job titles such as freelancers, 'startupper' and even 'changemakers' (Bandinelli and Arvidsson, 2013). This path usually leads to the creation of their own enterprise, project-based work, subcontracting, with varying levels of job stability and security (Bandinelli and Arvidsson, 2013)

The rapid diffusion of CWS, mainly since 2007-08, can be partly explained as a reaction to the subprime, then eurozone crisis (Moriset, 2014; Gandini, 2015). From then on, one may observe a growing stream of academic work concerning coworking practices. The Covid-19 pandemic is a second shifting moment in 2020 when lockdowns were implemented to overcome the health emergency, mostly social and economic (Coworking Europe, 2020)

According to Botsman and Rogers (2010), the Coworking movement agree with the international online editorial Deskmag data collection, that supports coworking is part of 'collaborative and a 'sharing' economy'. According to Deskmag 2019 Coworking Forecast (2019), there are currently around 18,700 CWS around the globe.

Moriset (2014) noticed that even big firms and corporations who are investing on CWS projects are looking for open office spaces in city centres or neighbourhoods that provide the facilities and infrastructures needed for their work as well as proximity to the urban buzz of the city centre.

In the same vein, Mariotti et al. (2017) confirm that the location of CWS in the core of Milan may be explained by a high density of firms and population, good local public transport accessibility, skilled labour force availability, as well as the proximity to universities and research centres.

In turn, Boschma (2005) states that geographic proximity is not a sufficient condition to sustain aspects of innovation, interaction and knowledge exchange, but other essential forms are needed - cognitive, organisational, social and institutional.

For Capedevilla (2015, 2019) one of the main reasons for choosing a CWS is the proximity to coworkers' housing as well as the proximity to their customers, or being in a central location. However, localised innovation spaces, such as the CWS, involve formal and informal interactions between individuals, communities, and firms.

The search for a better work-family balance is also considered decisive for CWS' professionals (Tremblay, 2019). CWS founders' social bonds with the communities, as well as a central location, infrastructure, human, and financial resources, have also been identified as crucial factors of choice (Tremblay and Scaillerez, 2020).

3. Methodology

Urban planners, policymakers, economists and the whole variety of professionals and researchers dealing with metropolitan areas have long sought to understand, explain and – of course - plan the location of human and, notably, economic activities and their impact on innovation and development indicators of a region. Such concerns consist of significant planning and policy documents, including the ones related to the Lisbon Metropolitan Area and its Municipalities. Therefore, several actions and interventions interlink or influence the creative industries location (Área Metropolitana de Lisboa, no date; CML, 2019; Carvalho and Almeida, 2020).

Lisbon's experience may contribute to a deeper understanding of the phenomenon, benefiting from the participation in the international COST Action (CA)18214 "The geography of the new workspaces and the impact on the periphery" (www.new-working-spaces.eu).

The overall architecture of the COST Action (CA)18214 provides a methodological backbone that allows establishing similarities (or dissimilarities) between the various Metropolitan Areas already studied. Milan, Oslo, pave the path (Micek *et al.*, 2020), but Lisbon is tailing these research developments.

In this Action, typologies of New Working Spaces [NWS] include coworking, co-creation, maker-spaces, and similar structures.

In line with the four-tiered structure of this COST Action, the paper delves into a first empirical approach to CWS in Lisbon, by mapping them as a testbed to the eighteen municipalities of the Lisbon Metropolitan Area¹.

The desktop research for CWS mapping was done based on multiple listings, databases, and social networks online². Data comes from platforms that collect data from CWS, as well as data from startups and fab labs

¹ Working Group 1 Glossary and Taxonomy: Collection of state of the art about new working spaces in Europe and outside. The following activities will be carried out: Task 1.1. Definition of the phenomenon; Task 1.2 Definition of the working spaces typologies; Task 1.3 Geographical distribution and location patterns with a specific focus on peripheral areas. COST Action (CA)18214 "The geography of the new workspaces and the impact on the periphery" (www.new-working-spaces.eu)

² <http://www.incubadoraslisboa.pt/>; <https://www.coworker.com/portugal/>; <https://startuphub.pt/pt-pt/mapa-do-ecossistema/>; <https://madeoflisboa.com/>; <https://portugalcoworking.pt/espacos/>; <https://investidor.pt/utilidades/lista->

in Portugal. Collected data about the CWS location (latitude and longitude) include 148 CWS so far, which has enabled the construction of a Georeferenced Database and which together with other information being analysed will feed a set of indicators. The research is in an exploratory phase, so adjustments are expected.

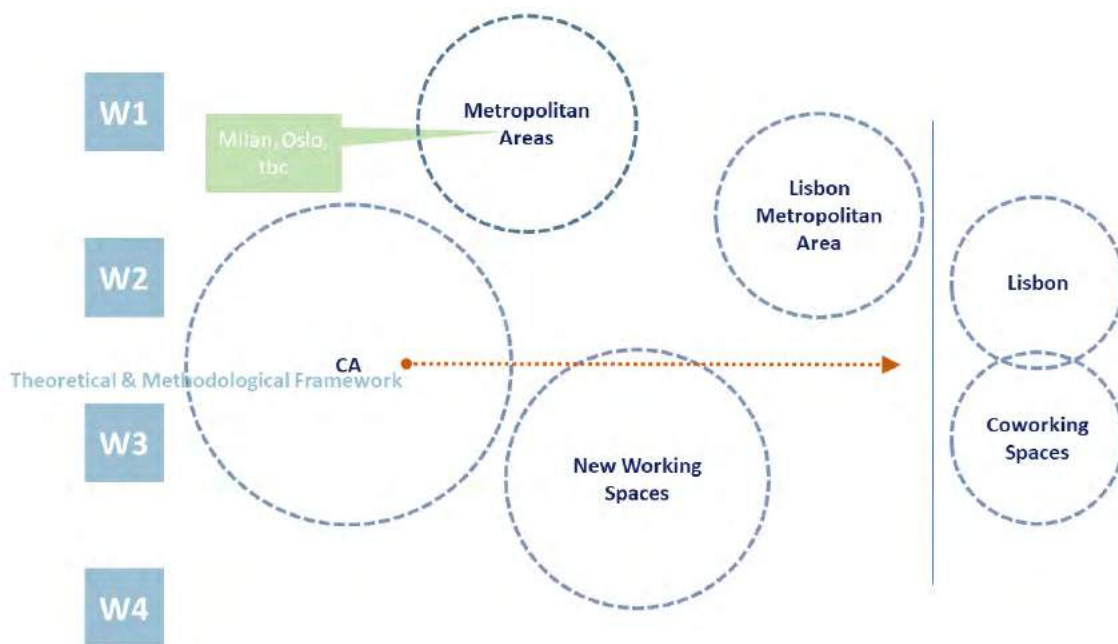


Figure 1. Coworking in Lisbon – Designing the approach. Source: authors' production, 2020.

4. Lisbon: LxFactory and Beato Creative Hub

The city of Lisbon is one of the oldest cities in the world continuously inhabited. Located in one of the few natural deep-water harbours in Europe, the Estuary of the Tagus river provided, for centuries, safety against a range of menaces including, but not restricted, to the Atlantic Ocean. It is an inner sea, with a Mediterranean micro-climate condition, faced by a stepped topography in its *lisboesque*³ northern side.

Lisbon settled and conveyed quasi-optimum conditions for trade. Its geostrategic position allowed a competitive position within world maritime routes. Between the Tagus's embankments, boats of all types would stitch, with fine thread, the fabric of relations between the riverside towns and other settlements.

In recent times, the Lisbon City Council has positioned the creative industries at the heart of the city's development strategy in order to transform it into one of the most competitive, innovative and creative

<https://techmeetups.com/8-best-coworking-spaces-in-lisbon/>;
<https://www.coworkies.com/cities/Lisbon>.

³ Specific urban character of Lisbon introduced by A. Nouri.

European cities in Europe by increasing visibility and stimulating entrepreneurship, knowledge and innovation as well as investment (CML, 2019).

In the approach to CWS in Lisbon, the urban layout and the two relevant moments (2008/09 and 2019/20) - its inherent activities, stakeholders and communities – play the leading role in the selection of Lx Factory and Beato Creative Hub.

Starting from a broader view of the location of the CWS in the city (already mapped but undergoing analysis), this article presents two particular cases, implemented in different temporal and socio-economic circumstances in different urban areas: LxFactory and the Beato Creative Hub.

The first case emerges informally as a response to the eurozone crisis in the former industrial site of Alcântara. LxFactory received the city's first CWS, recognised as such, the Coworkinglisboa (Roussel, 2018; How, 2019).

The second case, in Beato, was created in response to the growing demand for this type of spaces and regeneration of a former military-industrial complex, refrained by the current pandemic of COVID-19.

These new centralities find support under the Strategy for the Municipal Master Plan for Lisbon (ratified in 2012, with later amendments). The Plan anchors new centralities around the ring railway stations, especially those in need of urban rehabilitation (former industrial fringes) and core areas losing population and activities, civic engagement and a range of innovative activities.

4.1. LxFactory and the emergence of the CWS in Lisbon

The Alcântara neighbourhood became, in the second half of the 19th century, a symbol of Lisbon's industrial development. Located on the outskirts of the capital at the time, it clustered companies in textiles, metallurgy, typography, chemistry, among others, supported by the opening of several road infrastructures and a new railway line on land conquered by the Tagus River (Pistola, 2009).

The industrial activity in Alcântara was being abandoned and relocated throughout the 20th century, originating a vast abandoned and degraded brownfield area. Several projects were developed for the reconversion and requalification of this area, since the beginning of the 21st century. The place became a vital centrality for the city. In 2007, a new Development Plan for Alcântara⁴ foresaw the preservation of almost the entire industrial complex for the tertiary sector. In 2005, the real estate company MainSide Investments SGPS S.A. acquired the buildings of the former Companhia de Fiação de Tecidos Lisbonenses. Due to the successive delays of the requalification plans promoted for that area, in 2008, this private investor decided to proceed with a temporary space project, called Lx Factory. This place quickly attracted cultural and creative businesses given the central location regarding public and private transportation, low rental prices, availability of large spaces and the complementary synergies, like other cultural clusters in many European cities.

The Coworklisboa was founded in February 2010 by the couple Ana Dias and Fernando Mendes (an over 20 years freelance designer). In contact with pioneers of the coworking movement at the European level,

⁴ The Alcântara Development Plan, approved in 2011, was subject to several corrections and adjustments, and the final version was approved only on 2014 by the Lisbon Municipal Assembly. Resolution No. 318/AML/2014 http://www.cm-lisboa.pt/fileadmin/VIVER/Urbanismo/urbanismo/planeamento/termosaprovados/pualcantara/P_112_A_-_2014.pdf

they decide to start a space where people could work and collaborate rather than be alone at home. In search of adequate space, they settled in the Lx Factory.

As the space motto goes: "This is not about work anymore", this project was based on a strong community and cooperative spirit. Therefore, Coworklisboa has become an inescapable place for entrepreneurs and digital nomads – ranging from designers and architects to programmers or marketers, and a national reference for shared workspaces and Lisbon creative ecosystem. Several coworkers who start their business in this collaborative space, become tenants of LxFactory. The complex, composed of several industrial buildings, provide a unique environment attracting many innovative projects in various sectors of activity and hosting diverse events. In 2017, the space of Lx Factory was purchased by French Keys Asset Management. The increase in the value of rents led to the closure of Coworklisboa at the end of 2019, which moved to a new open-space of 4000 square meters in Beato, called NOW_No Office Work. Realising that 30% of the companies that used Coworklisboa's spaces were foreign, they intend to offer living spaces alongside shared work areas that bring freelancers and companies together. The project also has a community focus and will carry out social projects such as the studio "Manicómio" ["Loony Bin"], opened in April 2019 to receive artists with mental health problems for the creation and exhibition of works of art away from psychiatric hospitals.

4.2. Beato Creative Hub and the Startup Lisboa

In the late 19th century, the development of railways, the enlargement, reorganisation and specialisation of the Lisbon harbour quays and storage areas, the eastern part of the city of Lisbon suffered a change in its urban, economic and social fabrics. Thus, in this rural area, where convents and recreational parks predominated, a new urban reality emerged from a delayed industrialisation process and the development of communication infrastructures.

At the beginning of the 20th century, a significant part of the urban fabric of Marvila and Beato housed several warehouses and manufacturing units, interspersed with residential units integrated into the pre-existing urban network for the growing workforce, called "vilas operárias" (*villas* – detached housing typologies for workers) promoted and built by the industry owners, a rising bourgeoisie, following hygienist ideas for the working families. Precariously, "pátios", usually resulting from the subdivision of old manors. These manors, often organised around courts (pátios), were let, per room, by a decaying aristocracy.

A manufacturing complex for the production and supply of food products for the Portuguese Army, known as Military Maintenance was founded by the Portuguese State, which operating between 1897 and 1998., In 1997, given its architectural, scientific and technological value, a museum was created that portrays the history of this institution.

The 1998 World Exposition - EXPO'98, in Lisbon boosted an urban regeneration project in the eastern riverside area of Lisbon, through the design of public space and the construction of infrastructures that promote a new centrality.

With the reconfiguration of the port infrastructures, the riverside area between the train station of Santa Apolonia and the Expo 98 area, belonging to the Beato e Marvila parishes, attached to this area and with a vast obsolete industrial area, has become the target of growing interest. The Regional Spatial Plan of the Lisbon Metropolitan Area - PROT AML defined this area "marked by obsolete or deactivated occupations that tend to be reconverted or renovated. Its position in AML and the size of the areas to be renovated

create conditions for the development of new metropolitan centres with the installation of dynamic and innovative activities"⁵.

In 2016, the Municipality requested the concession of the southern section of the Portuguese Army Maintenance complex, which had been decommissioned for more than a decade, to fit it into its economic and innovation strategy in the city. After the signing of the agreement, the City Council invited the StartUp Lisboa⁶ to design the concept and model and ensure coordination of the construction project for the Beato Creative Hub. This project is part of a loan of €250 million from the European Investment Bank to regeneration strategy of the Municipality (European Investment Bank, 2017).

The Beato Creative Hub spans 32,195 square meters from the south wing of the former the old Military maintenance to accommodate businesses in technology, innovation and creative industries. The former house of the commander of the military maintenance compound, "Casa do Capitão", opened in August 2020 as a space for cultural programming and the project "Praça" [*Piazza*], launched in October 2020, a restaurant and market space in the old workspace and the cafeteria. The second phase is already under negotiation. The future intents aim to an all-encompassing requalification of the neighbourhood and surrounding areas.

	LX FACTORY	BEATO CREATIVE HUB
FORMER [2008-2018]		
Developer	Private	Military
Site	Alcântara	Beato –Military Maintenance
Public Transportation	Railway, Bus, Tram	Railway, Bus, Tram
Land Use	Industrial – Mixed Urban	Military-Industrial-Mixed Urban
CURRENT [2019-2020]		
Developer	Real Estate	Startup Lisboa
Type of Site	Derelict/Mixed Urban	Derelict/Mixed Urban
Public Transportation	Railway interface; Metro (soon);	Bus (near airport)
CURRENT/FUTURE [2021-]		
Developer	Real Estate	Startup Lisboa
Type of Site	Mixed Urban	Mixed Urban
Public Transportation	Multimodal interface	Public and Private

Table 1 Lx Factory and Beato Creative Hub location features. Main characteristics of the two cases at three relevant time stages of the development of the urban areas where they are established (table 1). Source: authors' production, 2020.

⁵ The PROT AML was approved at the Meeting of the Council of Ministers of February 7, 2002 and published in DR, by The Council of Ministers Resolution No. 68/2002. Available at <https://dre.pt/application/conteudo/302557>.

⁶ Start-Up Lisboa is a private non-profit association, founded in 2011 by the Lisbon City Council, Montepio Bank and the Portuguese Agency for Competitiveness and Innovation (IAPMEI) to support and incubate companies. In addition to contributing to the regeneration of the city center - the first building at the Rua da Prata 80, Baixa (Lisbon downtown)- bringing together innovative economic activities and rejuvenating the social fabric. Available at <https://www.startuplisboa.com>, accessed 11/02/2019

5. Concluding remarks

Coworking spaces have exploded in recent years in the city, which attract more and more nomads and digital entrepreneurs attracted by the low cost of living, pleasant climate, quality of life, security, as well as by the international dissemination and encouragement of local authorities to public and private initiatives to develop an innovative business ecosystem.

Urban planning actions involving rehabilitation, social-inclusiveness projects and large scale investment. Interventions led consistently since the 1994 Lisbon Master Plan, and more recently by the one in force (2012, and following amendments) were strategically identified as crucial to a city that has lost over 40 % of its inhabitants, together with productive activities to other municipalities in the Lisbon metropolitan area. As a result, CWS are popping in the city, especially in former industrial and underprivileged areas, evolve from peripheral structures to a constellation of emergent new urban centralities.

In the approach to CWS in Lisbon, the urban layout and the two relevant moments (2008/09 and 2019/20) - its inherent activities, stakeholders and communities - play a significant role in the selection of the two cases analysed: Lx Factory and Beato Creative Hub.

These two spaces reflect the urban transfigurations that the city has experienced in its progression, from markedly rural areas, going through a period of intensive industrialisation and reaching, today, the challenges of a 4th industrial revolution in a global world. They are anchor points in the conversion of their urban neighbourhoods with vast industrial heritage (former industrial fringes), which require an urgent socio-economic revitalisation and new development paths. If LxFactory took place by private initiative, Beato Creative Hub is part of the municipal strategy of promoting entrepreneurship and the creative economy, which are considered as a way of resilience capacity under disturbing events such the 2008 economic and financial crisis.

Further research aims to focus on the analyse the consequences of the covid-19 pandemic, with unparalleled impacts in cities, work patterns and life routines. Despite Covid-19⁷, public combat measures and strategies are being devised to initiate the recovery process. Coworking spaces are trying to adapt and react to present circumstances.

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⁷ As the paper is being written, Europe is under a severe 2nd wave. Experts, scientists and politicians announce a 3rd vague to the 1st trimester of 2021.

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