

## **The new forms of precarious work for women in urban areas in Southern Europe**

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The 2008 financial crisis and politics of austerity, including structural reforms such as labour market reforms, led to a huge unemployment crisis and increased precarity in Europe, especially in the periphery, producing new social divisions and exclusions. Employment has become more scarce and precarious with the crisis, especially for women, as they are the most hurt by austerity and 'gender-blind' public policies. This paper explores how transformations in the labour market, welfare system and the gender order have increased precarious work undertaken by women, of all levels of education, in urban areas. Women are being trapped in involuntary part-time employment, underemployment and other types of 'non-standard' forms of work. Also, the decline in opportunities for women to enter the labour market often translates into self-employment, which entails another transfer of responsibilities and risks onto workers. Through in-depth interviews with self-employed women working at home or at co-working spaces, and femal informal labourers in firms, the study examines the diffuse boundaries between public and productive spaces versus domestic and reproductive spaces in urban areas. The results show that in spite of the more formal nature of female work at the present day than in the past, still a considerable volume of women's contributions is informal, unregistered and underpaid, even in urban areas of Southern Europe.

## **Symbolic Action and the Virtual Urban Spatiality of Home-Based Online Businesses**

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**Abstract.** With the growth of entrepreneurship and self-employment, policy makers are attributing an increasingly important role to the home as a locus of work. As communication technology disrupts the spatial norms of the workplace, the physical locus of entrepreneurial activity is increasingly moving from office to home. This provides financial benefits but can risk the loss of legitimacy due to stigma associated with home-based work. Whilst academic writing to date has considered tensions at the home/work boundary, we posit a symbolic action framework for theorising how tensions manifest themselves at the boundaries between physical and virtual work. The spatial context in which entrepreneurs operate and project their businesses plays an important symbolic role. New businesses leverage associations with urban contexts including entrepreneurial clusters, neighbourhoods or even specific buildings to signal legitimacy to stakeholders and, in turn, increase firms' chances of survival. We argue that the phenomenon of online businesses working from home can subvert the geographical limitations of the home by creating online personas embedded in the symbolism and context of the city. The use of virtual symbolism becomes unbounded, enabling firms to project an urban spatial feel and dynamism regardless of their actual physical context of operation. However, this unbounding may lead to physical and virtual spaces drifting apart, creating spatial dissonance. We argue that better understanding of the 'spatial debt' of virtual working is critical to the understanding of the future role of entrepreneurship and in particular home-based businesses.

## **The second wave of coworking: neo-corporate movement vs resilient practice?**

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The exponential growth of coworking spaces has been described in the existing literature as the epiphenomenon of a new model of work in the urban knowledge economy. However, a multiplicity of coworking spaces do not adhere to the entrepreneurial narrative that characterises knowledge work in the digital scenario. Through the juxtaposition of thick qualitative descriptions of two cases of 'alternative' coworking spaces – an urban one, located in the global context of central London, and a non-urban one in the Southern Italian countryside – the paper aims to question whether a distinction between 'neo-corporate' and resilient coworking spaces can be made, and to what extent this may be seen as the next phase of growth of the coworking movement. We argue that 'resilient' coworking spaces emerge in contrast to 'neo-corporate' coworking franchises as important organizational actors that operate within a heterogeneous cultural ecosystem made of practices that blend entrepreneurial activity and innovative economic ventures with forms of political and social activism. We evidence how activity unfolds around key events and is shaped by the territorial specificities within which the space intervenes – be it urban or non-urban – thus affecting the quality of social relations within the space, the relations with other spaces (both in diachronic and synchronic perspective) and the degree of reflexivity, the ideas and values that characterise the space.

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

**A location of choice? Relationships between creative entrepreneurs, space and place in 'non-creative' cities.**

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**Abstract**

This paper speaks to the dynamic nature of contemporary creative work and how this is manifest in (new) relationships and interdependencies between creative entrepreneurs, urban spaces and place.

The creative industries operate around individual workers who are embedded in 'place': micro-entrepreneurs, freelancers and self-employed workers function within project-based ecologies of distributed labour, held together by professional networks which are often spatially defined and closely linked to particular localities. Coupled with these labour market characteristics, we can also observe significant and rapid structural changes: the dissolution of discipline-specific boundaries and job specialisms, disrupted 'value chains', new business models and collaborative modes of production.

In response, spatial modalities are emerging which critically challenge traditional concepts of the 'workplace' and the location of creative work, while simultaneously challenging the way in which creative entrepreneurs interact with and relate to space and place (as evidenced by the proliferation of 'new' spatial configurations such as coworking spaces). Taken together, these changes pose significant questions to normative 'creative city' discourses.

Adopting a qualitative, in-depth approach, this paper explores on a micro-level scale (the 'individual' and the 'local') relationships creative entrepreneurs construct with 'space' and 'place' through their evolving working practices. The aim is to expand understanding of why and how 'place matters' to creative entrepreneurs and why and how space and locality can (or could) help entrepreneurs become more flexible and adaptable within this dynamic environment. Within much of the 'creative cities' literature, there is a notable absence of this level of specificity – broad-brush approaches proliferate in both research and resultant policy arenas.

The focus of research is on emerging and established creative entrepreneurs, taking as its context the city of Southampton in the South East of England, which produces a significantly large number of creative graduates each year but has very low levels of retention and creative entrepreneurship by comparison, few recognised clusters of creative industries activity, but an emergent network of small scale specialist providers of creative workspace and dispersed networks of creative professionals. The paper distils the challenges and opportunities that this locality presents for creative entrepreneurs, and asks whether the city can become a location of choice.

## **Making Do? Creative enterprise in domestic settings.**

Carol Ekinsmyth, University of Portsmouth

This paper, drawing upon interviews and survey responses from small business owners explores experiences of creative enterprise within domestic and neighbourhood spaces. It speaks to the creative industry literature that places emphasis on the importance of collaborative working spaces, in particular the role of face-to-face interaction that enables innovation, 'creative buzz' and stimulation. The rise in co-working spaces in cities and increasingly smaller towns, and the literature these have spurred (Merkel 2015; Capdevila 2013, 2014; Spinuzzi 2012) also speak to a narrative of the importance of spaces of interaction for creative enterprise. But flying in the face of this evidence and wisdom are the many individuals who undertake all or most of their creative practice alone in their homes. Are these homes and the neighbourhoods that surround them therefore less than optimal spaces for creative business? The paper explores this question and asks what it is like to practice creative business in the potentially sub-optimal space of the home, neighbourhood, suburb and small town/city. How is collaborative working achieved? And what is the role of technology when face-to-face collaboration is difficult? It explores the resources necessary to enable enterprise in domestic urban settings.

## **Migrant workspaces**

Elena Sischarenco, University of St Andrews

How should we think of workplaces? Are they always the fix and formal spaces of offices, or is this image sometimes deceiving us? How should we rethink the theoretical division between formal and informal workspaces; between private and public space?

With my fieldwork among small-medium entrepreneurs of the construction business in Lombardy, North of Italy, I discovered how the company is in fact, almost never their space of work. My informants' work is multi-sided; they constantly move from one place to another, one village to another; from the headquarter of their company to a construction site, from a bank to a business consultant office. Sometimes their workplace becomes the car, where they often coordinate other people's activities while they drive from a place to another. At other times, business meetings happen in informal places like a bar or a restaurant.

Observing my informants' movements and spaces of work is fundamental if we want to understand the company's identity, productivity, and networks. If we consider the workplace as a community (Aguilera 1996), my informants' workplace is extended as extended are their networks. Businessmen seem to particularly cross the borders of the virtual community of their company. Their movements are wide and their interactions often happen in informal spaces outside the office. If we restrict this community to the physical space of a company, as much literature assumes, we would never understand the construction business and the work of my informants.

## **The public workplace and digital work**

*Lizzie Richardson, Department of Geography, Durham University*

Digital technologies enable mobile, disruptive and diverse forms of 'office' working space to emerge in the city. This paper considers what it might mean to call these urban practices of digital work 'public'. Put another way, it shows that focusing on working activities offers insight into modes of being public in the city with digital technologies. Digital work opens out complex performances of urban public space. This is because, rather than a characteristic of a particular sector or task, digital work is understood to involve an array of activities enabling and enabled by forms of working extension and intensification beyond contained location. This necessarily raises the question of the presence of work, of how work is defined without fixed starting and stopping points. Coping with such contingencies of presence is central to many understandings of public space. Thus three figurative activities of digital work in and beyond fixed office spaces are used to examine these contingent presences of urban public space. These are: making a phone call as an act of exposure and decency; taking a coffee as a familiar and formal ritual; and watching 'slack' channels as an act as information exchange and surveillance. The paper situates this discussion in ongoing ethnographic research examining urban 'digital work'. I draw on examples predominantly from London and Newcastle, with the observations primarily orientated around the urban working cultures caught up in two co-working offices.



## **Changing Commutes and the Changing Future of Urban Transport**

**Simon P. Blainey (University of Southampton)**

Changing urban working patterns mean that the traditional daily journey to and from a single workplace is becoming a progressively less typical part of people's lives. Growth in home, flexible, mobile, itinerant and peripatetic working is leading to increasingly complex and heterogenous commuting and work-related travel behaviour. At the same time, a number of potentially transformative changes are taking place in the way that urban transport systems operate and function, such as the development of autonomous vehicles, the growth in 'on demand' transport services, and the introduction of measures to reduce transport-related air pollutant emissions. The interactions between these two processes of change are likely to have fundamental implications for the way in which urban land use and transport systems are planned and designed. However, while it is generally accepted that significant changes are taking place, there is still a high degree of uncertainty as to how the processes of change will play out in the future. It is also not clear that the implications of these changes have been fully appreciated by urban transport and infrastructure planners, which is unfortunate given the capital intensity and long lifetime of urban transport assets and the key role they play in facilitating the activities of urban residents and workers. This paper draws on insights from modelling work carried out by the Infrastructure Transitions Research Consortium to examine the interactions between changing working patterns and the changing nature of urban transport, and to consider their implications for urban residents and workers.

## **Learning from the Netherlands: urban challenges and consequences of design for home-based work**

**Dr Frances Holliss, Cass School of Architecture,  
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There is, currently, a rapid rise in flexible working practices globally that has home-based work at its core, as a result of new technologies, more women in employment than ever before, structural employment and devolved corporate risk, amongst other factors. This has profound implications for people's lives - and also for the city in terms of infrastructure, urban design and planning. In the UK, however, this home-based workforce is for generally invisible. And as a consequence, despite the fact that one in seven in the UK now works mainly at or from home and this number is increasing rapidly, we do not develop policy around this working practice, or design for it at either the building or the urban scale. A substantial proportion of UK home-based workers therefore live and work in spaces that do not suit them, resulting in inefficiency, frustration and stress. Lessons can be learned from the Netherlands in this field. This paper discusses two Dutch housing case studies that, for different reasons and through different procurement processes, have design for home-based work at their core. The first is a co-housing scheme for musicians, the second a self-build development built to a masterplan by leading Dutch architect MVRDV. Investigating ways in which these schemes support home-based work and the impact this has on their neighbourhoods, this paper explores the implications for the city of the densification and layering that accompanies home-based work. Investigating the architectural and urban challenges and opportunities, and how these ideas can enrich urban life, it also examines the conditions that permit such developments and what changes may be necessary to enable this in the UK.

## **Home and Business - working spaces, places and practices**

**Cornelia Toppel** (ILS – Research Institute for Regional and Urban Research, Dortmund, Germany)

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### **Abstract**

The home is predominantly associated in the literature with the emotional and social domain of people's life while self-employment and entrepreneurship are largely associated with business and occupational aspects of people's life. However, in home-based self-employment and business the home and domestic sphere overlaps with the business and entrepreneurial sphere. While the social and emotional overlap of work and family in home-based business has attracted interest in entrepreneurship research, little is known about how the working practices are shaped by housing and neighbourhood circumstances, decisions and preferences. This paper makes this link based on the empirical analysis of 35 in-depth interviews with business owners and self-employed workers, who work mainly or exclusively in their own home, as well as photographs taken by the interview participants in their homes. The employed research design differs from existing research in this field in that we use a geographic approach in order to explore how different housing and neighbourhood situations (house type, living space and layout, tenure, neighbourhood characteristics) shape working practices and experiences. For this purpose, two neighbourhoods with distinct characteristics (inner city with tenements vs suburban with detached and semi-detached houses) in the City of Dortmund, Germany, were selected. The study reveals a great variety of working practices and experiences in homes and, crucially, these are shaped by housing and neighbourhood characteristics, housing choices and the family housing career.

**CHANGING PLACES OF WORK:  
EXAMINING THE GROWTH OF REMOTE WORKING AND THE JOB QUALITY TRADE-OFF  
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**Abstract**

This paper critically assesses the assumption that more and more work is being detached from place and that it is a 'win-win' for both employers and employees. Based on analysis of official labour market data taken from over the last twenty years, it finds that around two-thirds of the increase in remote working cannot be explained by compositional factors such as movement to the knowledge economy, the growth in flexible employment and organisational responses to the changing demographic make-up of the employed labour force. Drawing on data provided by around 15,000 workers to surveys carried out in Britain in 2001, 2006 and 2012 the paper also shows that remote working is positive for job quality in some respects and negative in others. It is associated with higher organisational commitment, job satisfaction and job-related well-being, but at the cost of greater levels of work intensification and a heightened inability to switch off.

Daniel Wheatley

The quality of work among mobile workers

Abstract: This paper considers the quality of work among mobile workers. In recent years the quality of work has come to the policy forefront prompting debates surrounding factors affecting job quality, methods of improving the quality of work, and its relationship with well-being. Concurrently, there has been a growth in highly mobile employment and self-employment, including precarious forms of work e.g. gig work. Using data from waves 2 (2010-11), 4 (2012-13) and 6 (2014-15) of Understanding Society, this paper explores the different experiences of work encountered by mobile workers, measured with respect to workplace location. Findings are indicative of diverse experiences of mobile workers from those in highly skilled professional to low skilled, often self-employed, roles. Many mobile workers experience lower quality of work evident in lower levels of autonomy over job tasks and the order of task completion, more insecure employment, difficult subjective financial situations, and lower incomes (among the self-employed). Among some self-employed mobile workers, in particular, these findings reflect the low quality of gig work.

Kaveh Jahanshahi

## **Workplace typologies and their influences on commuting behaviour-evidence from latent categorical analysis**

Many studies have examined the role of built environment characteristics of the residing neighbourhood on commuting patterns; however, few have explored that of the workplace neighbourhood. This is despite the growing evidence on the continuous changes in the employment types and spatial distribution patterns and concerns about the effects of this on job accessibility specifically for the socially and economically disadvantaged population segments. .

This paper uses a new latent categorisation approach (LCA) to gain fresh insights into the trend break influences of the workplace built environment characteristics upon commuting behaviour. We use an extensive list of built environment descriptors from the 2002 to 2015 UK National Travel Survey (NTS) data in the analysis whilst accounting for the high correlations among them. Reducing the data dimensionality by LCA allows defining a tangible typology of the built environment at workplace in the UK and examining trend break in the influences upon both commuting distance and time.

Segmenting by socioeconomic classes would further assist in identifying the potential disaggregation across socioeconomic groups. To the best of our knowledge, few papers (if any) have examined workplace typology and its influence on commuting. This novel approach is capable of making the analytical results more cogent to formulating new, proactive land use planning as well as

monitoring the outcomes of on-going planning and transport interventions.

Since travel survey data are regularly collected across a large number of cities in the world, our approach helps to guide the design of future travel surveys for those cities in a way that enhances the analysis and monitoring of the impacts of planning and transport policies on travel choices.