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Remote and connected. Negotiating marginality in rural coworking spaces and “tiers-lieux” in France

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Abstract. Originally associated to big cities’ centres, coworking spaces and “tiers-lieux” (“third-places”) have been blooming in rural regions and small towns over the past five years. The development of those places has been critically supported by local and national authorities, with a growing interest from rural localities. Indeed, those places are supposed to provide answers to numerous contemporary territorial challenges, and to tackle several dimensions or rural vulnerability. They are supposed to enhance sustainability by reducing the need to commute and car-dependence, by bringing both workplaces and services closer from home. They are also mobilised to tackle the issue of the digital gap between centres and peripheries, providing digital infrastructures and hardware. Finally, they are supposed to reduce territorial inequalities by strengthening rural entrepreneurship, safeguarding local jobs, facilitating professional retraining and attract new residents by providing an easier access to telework.

Conducted between 2017 and 2019 in the Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes region, our study provides some elements to evaluate the effects of those places on territorial vulnerability and marginality. Based on the study of 17 coworking spaces situated in rural areas, their funders’ trajectories and their users’ profiles, we discuss the motives and the expected returns of those places, and their actual potentialities and limits.

In this article, we intend to shed light on the actual practices, uses and users of rural coworking spaces and third places, in order to question the territorial change they bring about from a demographical, sociological and territorial point of view. Interrogating the notion of marginality at the light of those places and their users, our study highlights the diversity of lifestyles in the rural areas. Coworkers display particular spatial anchorages, with local resources being valued, though combined with forms of plural and multilocalized belongings. Their relationship with the margin is chosen, controlled and reversible, sometimes even yearned for. Their connectedness is not so much defined by where they live rather than by who they know and where they move, embodying the social dimensions of marginality.

1 Introduction

Coworking spaces have emerged at the beginning of the years 2000 in the San Francisco Bay. They have originally been created by digital workers themselves, in search of a place to work when their status allowed them to work anywhere (Liefoghe 2018). Shared spaces of work also responded to the need of the growing freelance workforce to have access to an affordable workplace, in the context of booming prices on the Californian real estate market (Lallement 2015). Soon attracting the curiosity of the media, they are

now seen as one of the symbols of new ways of living and working, typical of the so-called “collaborative” economy and of digital nomadism (Scaillez, Tremblay 2017).

During the years 2010, coworking spaces have spread throughout Europe and the world, first in the major cities and more recently in medium-sized towns and even some villages (Besson 2018, Leducq et al. 2019). In France, many non-profit coworking spaces adopt the label of “tiers-lieux” (third-place). In the French context, the “Third place” movement, reuniting diverse collaborative workplaces such as coworking places, fablabs and makerspaces, has emerged at the same time, a proof of both dissemination and differentiation of those shared places of work in different urban environments (Leducq et al. 2019).

Indeed, recent data shows that the biggest increase of such places in the past 5 years was recorded outside the metropolitan areas (Lévy-Waitz 2018, 2021). In 2018, they represented 42 % of all spaces in France and up to 70 % in some regions where special public policies and funding have been implemented (Nouvelle-Aquitaine, Occitanie). Indeed, there is a growing interest from municipal communities for those projects. Following the first report of the Mission on Coworking Places and Third Places commissioned by the Ministry of Economy (Lévy-Waitz 2018), the State has also launched its own funding scheme, with a wide 5-year subsidy programme aiming at creating 300 new third places in particularly vulnerable rural and suburban territories (“Fabriques de territoire”¹). This territorial dimension aims, on one hand, at operating a “re-balancing” between inner cities and their peripheries (both urban and rural), and on the other hand, at fostering local development. The consistent budget dedicated to this programme (175 million €) highlights the importance of expectations towards those places.

In France, according to the latest classification of the National institute of statistics based on population density, a third of the population lives in rural areas (D’Alessandro et al. 2021). The population living in rural areas faces the increasing scarcity and remoteness of everyday services (Doré 2019), while employment areas are concentrating in the metropolis thus expanding daily commutes (Reynard, Vallès 2019). This reliance on mobility to access diverse resources (work, services, healthcare) has been particularly exposed during the “Yellow Vests” movement, highlighting the acute risk of social exclusion due to the lack of accessibility in rural areas (Farrington, Farrington 2005).

Third-places are supposed to answer some of those challenges. First, they are supposed to allow employees to work closer from home, and to bring back services in remote areas through the functional mixity of those spaces (Lejoux et al. 2019). Third-places are also assumed to build on the digitalisation of the economy to reduce territorial inequalities: the opportunity to provide more and more products and services at distance through the internet is supposed to boost rural entrepreneurship, create new jobs and allow rural entrepreneurs to access distant markets. In addition, third-places could avoid emigration and help attract new residents through telework. Finally, third-places are also expected to counterbalance the territorial effects of the welfare State retrenchment (Courcelle et al. 2017), by offering multiservices hubs while rationalising public spending through the use of digitalisation (Courcelle et al. 2012).

The idea, however, is not new: as early as in the 1990s, the State already saw in telework a potential tool of local development (Salgueiro et al. 2017). The DATAR (Interministerial direction of planning and regional attractivity, suppressed in 2014 and replaced with the General commission of territorial equality) launched in 1990 a programme to set up “telecottages” in order to promote telework in the countryside and address territorial inequalities through the support of remote work in rural areas. But the experience fell short of expectations and never really reached an audience (Crouzet 2002, Moriset 2011, Pouly 2020). In 2005, another call for tender by the Interministerial Direction of Planning and Territorial Competitiveness aimed at implementing 100 telecottages on the national territory. But by the year 2008, there were about 35 of such places in rural areas (Salgueiro et al. 2017), versus about 20 times more coworking spaces and third-places ten years later (Lévy-Waitz 2018).

¹“Fabriques de territoires” is a national program launched in 2019 by the Ministry of Territorial Cohesion and renewed in 2021, aiming at labelling “Territorial hubs” . It comes with an operating grant of 75 000 to 150 000 € over 3 years (50 000 € per year maximum). See <https://www.cohesion-territoires.gouv.fr/labellisation-de-300-fabriques-de-territoire-en-france>

The recent success of coworking spaces in the countryside thus comes with a little surprise. We argue that it can be explained by changes in the demography of some rural areas, that have become more and more attractive to “creative classes” that are increasingly sensitive to environmental amenities and to the values and narratives of contemporary “neo-rurality”. The multiplication of social innovations in the countryside across the past ten years testifies from a renewed dynamism in those residential flows from the city to the countryside, that was already tangible before the Covid-19 pandemic, but gained new attention since 2020. Indeed, a new research agenda has emerged after the pandemic on the opportunities of coworking spaces to respond to the challenges of the rapid increase of telework, including in rural areas (see, for example, [Manzini Ceinar, Mariotti 2021b](#)). In the same time, there has been an increasing interest for the possibility for generalisation of telework to allow for a large-scale relocation of jobs from the urban to more peripheral areas, thus reviving the interest to use telework as a tool for local development ([Hölzel, de Vries 2021](#), [Sen 2021](#), [Reuschke et al. 2021](#)), but also to tackle the issue of spatial inequalities ([Reuschke 2021](#)). However, not all countrysides benefit from such dynamism, nor all parts of those countrysides.

In this article, we intend to shed light on the actual practices, uses and users of rural coworking spaces and third places, in order to bring out the social and spatial patterns of those places prior to the pandemic. We don't seek to evaluate their effects from an economic point of view (for this, see for example [Besson 2018](#)), but rather to highlight the territorial change they bring about from a demographical and sociological point of view, while questioning to what extent marginality can be defined as the property of places, or of people. We will first present the methodology and scope of this study, before revisiting definitions of coworking and third-places and the origin of their recent spread in the rural areas (Section 3). Then, we will present the empirical results of our study. First, we will present the characteristics of those places and their users, by focussing on the users of shared offices (Section 4). Then finally, we will examine the motives and expected benefits of the social and spatial networks derived from those places (Section 5). Third-places, we argue, are not at the origin of the contemporary rural dynamism in the places they establish themselves, but may accelerate it by creating networks of entrepreneurs. In this respect, we will point out some potentialities and limits of this model, including the risk of rural gentrification and deepening of inequalities between territories in the context of State retrenchment.

2 Methodology

In this article, we rely on data gathered between 2017 and 2019 in the Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes region in the framework of a publicly funded research programme called Coworkworlds².

The fieldwork, completed before the 2020 lockdown, comprised 4 different phases. We first conducted an inventory of all coworking spaces open at the time of the survey. This census that we expected to be as exhaustive as possible indicated that although 47% of those spaces are located in the centres of big cities, there were also many coworking spaces in the suburbs, medium-sized towns and rural areas, attesting to the geographical spread of coworking ([Leducq et al. 2019](#)). Indeed, almost a quarter of those spaces were situated in rural areas of the region (see Table 1). The second phase of the research aimed at characterising the coworker population and a panel of coworking spaces. A quantitative survey was administered to 377 individuals (including 79 in rural areas) in a panel of 54 places, including 12 in small cities and rural areas (mostly in Drôme and Ardèche). Table 1 summarises the geographical scope of the research.

We originally did not include third places in our study, which was focused on coworking spaces exclusively. But the progressive dissemination of this word, especially among rural non-profit shared places of work, coupled with its progressive institutionalisation with the creation of France Tiers Lieux, forced us to re-evaluate this choice and to broaden our sample to all collaborative shared offices.

²French National Agency for Research, contract nr. ANR-17-CE22-0004

Table 1: Data collection process according to urban environments

Urban type	Number of registered spaces		Number of investigated places		Number of persons interviewed for the quantitative survey		Semi-structured interviews
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N
Metropolis – centres	72	57.60%	27	50.00%	237	59.70%	12
Metropolis – suburban	24	19.20%	15	27.78%	101	25.44%	1
Rural	29	23.20%	12	22.22%	59	14.86%	19
Total	125	100.00%	54	100.00%	397	100.00%	32

Table 2: Interviewees

Name	Gender	Age	Status	Occupation	Founder or user
Agata	F	36-55	Self-employed	Photographer	Both
Alice	F	36-55	Self-employed	Photographer	User
Baptiste	M	26-35	Salaried employee	Engineer	User
Benoît	M	36-55	Business owner	Informatician	Both
Clément	M	26-35	Salaried employee	Project developer	User
Damien	M	36-55	Self-employed	Ergonomist	User
Gaëlle	F	36-55	Self-employed	Stylist	User
Jeanne	F	36-55	Business owner	Founder and manager	Both
Julien	M	36-55	Self-employed	Web developer	User
Maëlle	F	26-35	Self-employed	Photographer	User
Matthieu	M	26-35	Self-employed	Forest manager	User
Mickaël	M	36-55	Both	Web developer	User
Patrick	M	36-55	Salaried employee	Founder and manager	Both
Paul	M	36-55	Self-employed	Photographer	Both
Quentin	M	36-55	Self-employed	Engineer	User
Rosa	F	36-55	Self-employed	Translator	User
Stéphane	M	36-55	Self-employed	IT consultant	Both
Théo	M	26-35	Self-employed	Music producer	User
Yannick	M	36-55	Both	Multiple businesses	User
Cécile	F	26-35	Self-employed	Naturopath	Founder
Eric	M	36-55	Self-employed	Photographer	Both
Sebastien	M	36-55	Salaried employee	Web developer	Both
Alizée	F	26-35	Salaried employee	Communication	Founder

A third phase of the research has consisted in semi-structured interviews conducted with 32 coworkers who agreed to be contacted after the questionnaire (including 19 in rural areas), and with 20 founders of such places (including 5 in rural areas). For this qualitative part of the project, the researchers sought out a diversity of professional and family situations, as well as a diversity of spaces frequented: interviewees have been recruited in 12 different rural coworking spaces. Table 2 summarises the sample of interviewees. As many founders of those places are also users, some interviewees have been interviewed both as founder and user.

Finally, ethnographic research has been conducted during 2 years in a “third-place” situated in a small city (8,000 inhabitants). A last phase of the research was supposed to be based on collection of GPS tracks of a subsample of voluntary coworkers, but had to be cancelled because of the lockdown.

3 Coworking spaces and third-places in the French context

3.1 From diffusion to differentiation

Coworking is a new form of spatial organization of work that is closely linked with the knowledge and creation economy (Spinuzzi 2012). It is a fee-based service defined by the share of a place with office equipment (typically a high-speed internet connexion, a copy machine and coffee) and a network of individuals (Blein 2016, Gandini 2015). But more importantly, coworking is a practice based on specific references and values that stem from digital culture and the knowledge economy (Berrebi-Hoffmann et al. 2018).

The “third place” movement originates from a wider set of actors. Referring themselves to Ray’s Oldenburg concept, they put the local community at the centre of their definition. Ray Oldenburg originally defined third-places as neutral places, opened to the public and ordinary in their appearance, like cafés, cinema, libraries and so forth, and that ensure daily sociality in a given community (Oldenburg, Brissett 1982, Oldenburg 1999). Those places are “third” because they are different from the first place (home) and the second place which is the place of work. In Oldenburg’s initial work, the focus was put on ordinary sociality places in the city and on social mixing opportunities they brought about, with the opportunities to bond with individuals that were neither co-workers nor family. A few decades later, the concept of third-place has first been excavated in the French context by public libraries in their strategy of user diversification (Burret 2017).

Indeed, the development of digital nomadism has increased the possibility of working “anywhere, anytime” (Alexander et al. 2011), allowing for a “multilocality” of workplaces (Di Marino, Lapintie 2020). This allowed a growing number of places to become “third places”, including coffee shops, librairies, universities, etc. The concept has also expanded to a wide range of activities in the cultural and social sector, which now frequently refer themselves to this notion, including community cafés, cinemas, restaurants, artistic wastelands, etc. The dimension of collaboration and co-operation is frequently at the centre of their “raison d’être” (Akhavan 2021). The development of a broad national grant programme for “third places” in 2019 in France has also contributed to the spread of this label among a diversity of actors. Indeed, the programme aimed at creating a nationwide network with the creation of a national agency “France Tiers Lieux.” However, their actual definition remains very lax and focuses more on intentions than actual content: they are defined as “places that reunite diverse activities, participate in the local economic development and animate a community”³ or “places for doing together (...) that have spread thanks to the digital development on the territory”⁴. More generally, we can define third-places as hybrid non-profit community-based places that provide various services. Their very originality is that they refer to a place (and not to a specific activity or organisation), and they imply some dimension of functional mixing: being both a coworking place and a workshop or a studio, both a community garden and a place of work, both a café and a coworking place, etc.

Third-places now designate a wide range of places and practices, accounting for a progressive differentiation, adaptation and hybridation of the original concept (Liefoghe 2018), in particular in rural areas where multifunctionality is needed because of the low-density context and of the specificities of the local labour force. Since the focus of our study is on the effects of telework, we have included in our study only those “third places” which designates or includes shared office spaces. Indeed, many non-profit coworking spaces prefer to label themselves “third-places”, to distinguish themselves from a more business-oriented vision of coworking.

3.2 Third-places and local development policies: Promises and pitfalls

Popular in the social innovation and creative economy sphere, third-places have also attracted the interest of public policy, whether it be at the local or at the national levels. Indeed, those places are in line with the newest forms and precepts of territorial development, since “the search for synergy between actors has been the new alpha and

³France Tiers Lieux

⁴Ministry for Territorial Cohesion (Ministère pour la Cohésion des Territoires)

omega of local public action”, says André Torre (Torre 2018). By bringing together various local actors in a same physical place, they thus represent the spatial transposition of this ideal of social networking. In addition, they embody a certain vision of the “creative city” or the “smart city” that has been appropriated and promoted way beyond the city, with the idea of a “smart countryside” being more and more trending.

As a result, in many cases those places have been supported, directly or indirectly, by actors of territorial development. In some cases, the support to coworking spaces (CS) has been a continuation of previous policies of telework and telecottage implementation and promotion (Salgueiro 2015), in the framework of digital development policies. In some others, it has come as a complementary tool for policies aiming at attracting migrant entrepreneurs (Sajous 2015). In the Ardèche county, the network of CSs has been partly funded by a scheme of rural youth support, while it has been developed by a scheme of digital economy development support in the Drome county.

Although coworking is mainly an urban phenomenon, the last few years have seen a flourishing of CSs in peripheral areas (Capdevila 2021). Different factors can explain this widespread of CSs in rural areas (Mariotti et al. 2021). On the one hand, CSs may operate in rural areas as well as in urban areas because the geography of creative industries is more complex than the simple concentric circle (Felton et al. 2010). On the other hand, more and more knowledge workers tend to work from rural locations because of their benefits: higher general wellbeing, lower congestion, less polluted air, lower cost location, exploiting institutional leeway, etc. These elements show that CSs are expected to become drivers of economic change while retaining the creative class and knowledge workers in the periphery, thereby increasing the competitiveness and performance of rural areas.

But the literature exploring the “indirect” effects of CSs on the local environment is still scant (Leducq, Ananian 2019), especially in rural areas (Knapp, Sawy 2021, Mariotti et al. 2021). The main studies have shown that CSs can have positive effects on rural areas, in different countries and regions. For example, Fuzi has shown that CSs can support entrepreneurship in sparse regions like South Wales (Fuzi 2015) and Capdevila that CSs can be considered as drivers for economic development in rural areas in Catalonia (Capdevila 2018). Heikkilä studied the Finnish case and argued that rural coworking supports local economy by enabling collaboration, subcontracting, joint ventures, and all other forms of shared activities (Heikkilä 2012). In Italy, Mariotti, Akhavan and Di Matteo showed that, on average, CSs in rural areas, compared to those in urban areas: (i) perceived a higher positive impact of the in the urban context; (ii) declared to be more satisfied; (iii) experienced higher social and organizational proximity, and lower institutional proximity; (iv) have created new professional relationships, and had the chance to access new information channels and new training opportunities inside the CS (Mariotti et al. 2021). Recently, Mariotti et al. have also shown that being located in a rural area may represent an economic benefit for coworkers’ organizations (Mariotti, Di Matteo 2022). According to their results, if an organization collocates its employees in a CS settled in a rural area, the organizations’ incomes would probably be more performative as against the case in which the employees had been placed in a CS located in an urban area. Nevertheless, further research is needed to better understand the diffusion of CSs in rural areas and its effects on socio-economic spatial development. According to Mariotti et al., “Although CSs seem a very attractive instrument for small towns and rural communities, we know very little about their functions, user profiles, their links with socio-economic spatial development, etc” (Mariotti et al. 2021, p. 189)⁵.

The COVID-19 crisis has been an accelerator of the knowledge workers’ increasing lure for more remote destinations. For example, the share of teleworkers outside metropolitan areas has massively increased in Italy (Mariotti et al. 2021) but also in remote parts of the UK like South West England and Wales (Bosworth et al. 2021). Different factors could foster the implementation of coworking spaces in rural areas: (i) the willingness of companies to downsize their offices by relocating employees in other locations and promoting remote working; (ii) the tendency by freelancers and digital nomads to move to rural areas to experience a higher quality of life (Manzini Ceinar, Mariotti 2021b).

⁵A European research project, funded by the COST Action, and untitled “New working spaces and the impact on the periphery” aims to fill this gap in the literature.

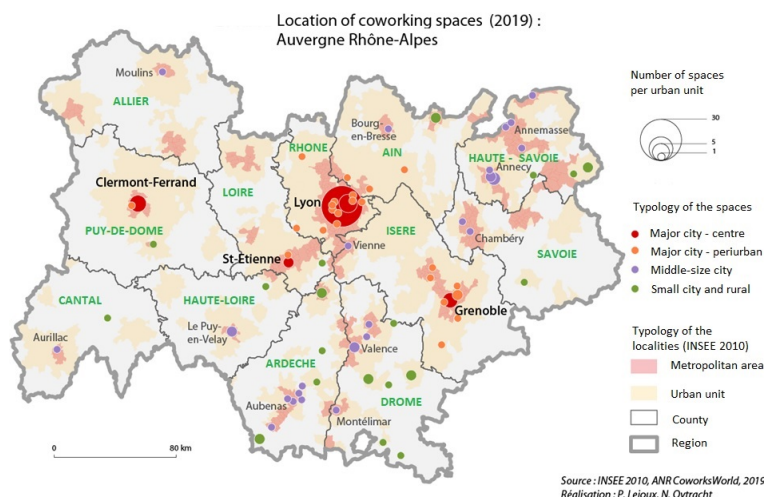


Figure 1: Location of coworking spaces in Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes (2019)

CSs in rural areas could thus provide new opportunities for new network connections and relationships to emerge within rural spaces, by connecting rural people into wider knowledge networks (Thomas 2019) but also by creating new interdependencies between urban and rural areas (Bosworth et al. 2021, Bürgin et al. 2021). In that case, attracting CSs located in urban poles that have been greatly affected by the COVID-19 might be a good strategy for local authorities located in rural areas. But this implies to develop tailored policies and to enlarge the (CS) toolkit for local development in smaller towns and rural areas (Manzini Ceinar, Mariotti 2021b). Local authorities have a key role to play in enabling coworking in such areas in its function as operator and financial supporter (Knapp, Sawy 2021), but, at the same time, they should also respect the spontaneous and flexible aspects of these new working spaces (Fuzi 2015).

3.3 The geographies and demographics of remote working in the Auvergne-Rhone-Alpes region

After having set the general framework of the dissemination of shared places of work in French rural areas, we now turn to the empirical results of our study in the Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes region. The Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes region is known for its economic and cultural dynamism as much as for its numerous environmental amenities. It is amongst the most dynamic French regions and one of its particularities is the high rate of professionals and managers in the population (INSEE 2019). Indeed, it is a region that comprises several big cities and recognised universities and campuses, thus attractive to a highly qualified population.

A first significant fact (Figure 1) that arises from the quantitative data we gathered is that metropolitan areas put aside, shared places of work are not to be found in the countrysides that are closest to the main cities and in the counties that are more polarised by them and most metropolised (Loire, Ain, Rhône and Isère). They are more numerous in Drôme and Ardèche which are further away from the main urban areas and have lower overall density⁶ (respectively 78 and 59 inh./km²), and no important city (Valence, the main city, has 62,500 inhabitants and no university of its own, while Aubenas is a very small urban area of 12,000 inhabitants). However, other peripheral rural counties such as Cantal or Allier, that are more remote and less populated, were not affected in the same way.

An interesting parallel emerges when the geographical repartition of coworking spaces throughout the region is confronted with demographic trends at the county-level. Table 3

⁶As a comparison, Rhône has a density of 572 inh./km², Isère 170, Ain 112, and Cantal which is the less dense county of the region has a density of 25 inh./km².

Table 3: Evolution of the population between 2008, 2013 and 2018 per county, AURA region

	Population			Annual variation rate of the population (%)					
	2008	2013	2018	total		natural change		migration	
				P1	P2	P1	P2	P1	P2
Ain	581,355	619,497	647,634	1.3	0.9	0.5	0.4	0.8	0.5
Allier	342,807	343,431	337,171	0.0	-0.4	-0.3	-0.4	0.3	0.0
Ardèche	311,452	320,379	326,606	0.6	0.4	0.0	-0.1	0.5	0.5
Cantal	148,737	147,035	144,765	-0.2	-0.3	-0.4	-0.6	0.2	0.3
Drôme	478,069	494,712	514,732	0.7	0.8	0.4	0.2	0.3	0.6
Isère	1,188,660	1,235,387	1,263,563	0.8	0.5	0.6	0.5	0.1	0.0
Loire	742,076	756,715	763,441	0.4	0.2	0.3	0.2	0.1	0.0
Haute-Loire	221,834	226,203	227,552	0.4	0.1	0.0	-0.2	0.4	0.3
Puy-de-Dôme	628,485	640,999	659,048	0.4	0.6	0.1	0.1	0.3	0.5
Rhône	1,690,498	1,779,845	1,859,524	1.0	0.9	0.8	0.8	0.2	0.1
Lyon agglomeration	1,272,188	1,336,994	1,398,892	1.0	0.9	0.9	0.9	0.1	0.0
Savoie	408,842	423,715	433,724	0.7	0.5	0.4	0.2	0.3	0.2
Haute-Savoie	716,277	769,677	816,699	1.4	1.2	0.6	0.6	0.8	0.6
Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes	7,459,092	7,757,595	7,994,459	0.8	0.6	0.4	0.4	0.3	0.3
France (mainland)	62,134,866	63,697,865	64,844,037	0.5	0.4	0.4	0.3	0.1	0.1

Source: INSEE, population censuses

Notes: **P1**: 2008-2013, **P2**: 2013-2018

highlights the very diverse situations that is to be found in the 5 most rural counties of the AURA region (highlighted in grey)⁷.

Indeed, part of the explanation for the uneven spread of coworking is to be found in the changing demography of some French countrysides, especially in the “presential countrysides with residential and touristic attractivity” (Pistre 2012). This typology refers to the theory of presential economy, coined by Davezies (2008), Terrier et al. (2005) and Terrier (2006) to describe the economy of a territory based on consumption, rather than production. In Pistre’s typology, presential countrysides where locally consumed services and tourism are dominant are opposed to productive countrysides, where industrial and/or agricultural activities prevail. Based on demographic trends, Pistre’s typology shows that presential countrysides with residential and touristic attractivity are affected both by temporary flows of visitors (tourism) and internal residential migration from both active and retired populations. Those categories of countrysides are to be found in the South-Western oceanside and in Southern France, including the Drome and Ardèche counties.

Indeed, those new “lifestyle migrations” (Benson, O’Reilly 2009) or “amenity migrations” (Cadieux, Hurley 2011, Martin et al. 2012, Moss 1987, 1994) are historically particularly important in the south of France. Among them, the proportion of more qualified populations such as professionals, artists, cultural workers and managers is on the rise (Bilella 2019, Charmes 2019) as shows the Table 4.

Independently from those wide demographic trends, the practice of remote working has also been developing in the last ten years, mainly because of the wide precarisation and subcontractualisation of many professions of the knowledge and creation economies, with a bloom of free-lance (Gill, Pratt 2008, Gill et al. 2019). An indication of this increase of the “gig economy” can be found in the number of self-employed persons through micro-enterprises. Unfortunately, statistical data can’t be disaggregated both by sectors and by counties. However, data per county shows that Drome and Ardeche have a rate of micro-enterprises that is more than 3 times the national average (respectively 27, 25 and 7 per 1000 inhabitants).

Though still a marginal practice, remote working for salaried workers has also been expanding in the last five years, prior to the pandemic which has obviously been a game

⁷This table is extracted from Bianco E. and Geymond J., “Près de 8 millions d’habitants”, INSEE Flash Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes, 2020, <https://www.insee.fr/fr/statistiques/5006465#documentation>

Table 4: Net internal migration rate per socio-professional status, 2016, per 1000 habitants

	Ardèche	Drôme	AURA Region
Farmers	3,70	7,70	0,70
Entrepreneurs, tradesman and craftsmen	12,80	4,70	-0,10
Professionals and managers	10,90	8,60	2,70
Technicians and associate professionals	5,00	6,60	3,00
Clerks and administrative staff	5,70	4,40	2,80
Blue-collar workers	10,50	4,70	2,30
Retirees	9,90	5,80	0,50
Other inactive	0,50	-2,70	2,50
Total	6,40	3,20	2,10

Source: INSEE RP

changer. In 2017, 3% of the employed workforce reported teleworking regularly, but the number rose to 9% for those who lived more than 50 km away from their workplace. Moving further away from the city centres and teleworking had already been described as a solution for young families to circumvent the housing crisis in the cities and increasing commuting times and costs, though a solution that was (and is still) restricted to highly qualified jobs (Ortar 2009).

Indeed, for the overwhelming majority of our respondents, coworking is linked with residential migration and a project of lifestyle change and establishment in a place of choice – rural in some cases, urban in other (Flipo, Ortard 2020). Being able to pick a lifestyle and an attractive – yet remote – place of living can thus be considered as a privilege for high-demand profiles. As the example of Quentin, a highly qualified engineer with a PhD in environmental biology shows, for some rare and demanded qualifications, remote working can be negotiated even before hiring:

At the time, I was in Lyon and I was looking for a job, anywhere really. And a few months before my contract ended, I had not found anything that suited me (...) So I decided to take control of things. I thought: "Let's settle in a place that we like". And so, we decided to settle here, and to find a job after. And that meant there was a 99.9% probability that it would be a job in telework, since my job is pretty specific. (...) My current supervisor, he knew I was looking for a job. We discussed, and he thought about it. He didn't have much time to recruit, and he knew me already. So he trusted me, and I think I was the only candidate. So I asked what I wanted [telework with an office in a coworking space subsidised by the employer] and he accepted everything.

4 Daily practices of coworking: Living a rural life while being connected

4.1 Motivations for choosing remote working in the countryside

As several works on amenity migration have described, newly arrived populations in the countryside ("neorurals") are frequently attracted by environmental amenities and recreational activities many of them have discovered during holidays (Pistre 2012, Talandier 2007, Tommasi 2014). Indeed, it is not by chance that those territories are affected by both touristic and lifestyle migration flows, since both are frequently interconnected in individuals' biographies. When asked about their motivations to move, many interviewees refer to environmental amenities as the following excerpts from respectively Maëlle, a photographer and Matthieu, a forest manager, show:

I came for the holidays. I knew a little already. But it was mostly my intuition, from when I came. The landscapes, really, it was mostly about the landscapes. And I also had the intuition that there was a social life that would fit me.

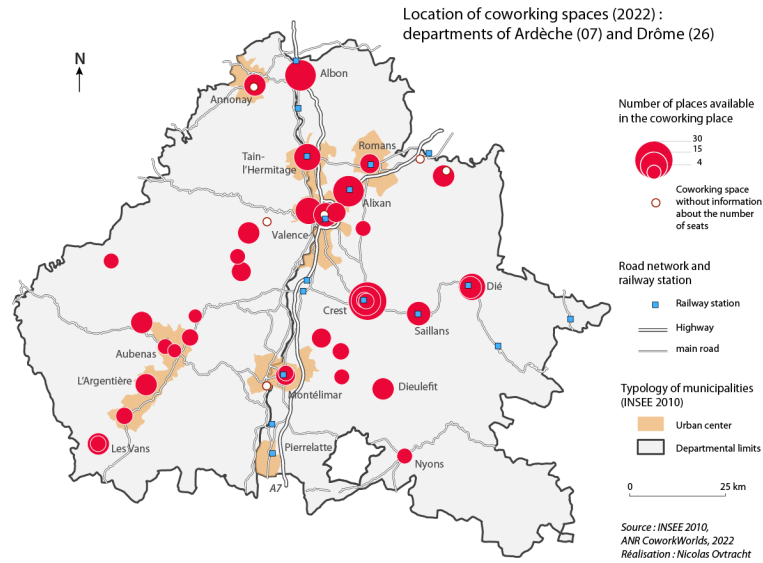


Figure 2: Map of CSs in Drôme and Ardèche

It was a bit by chance, a bit from the feeling, a bit ... because it's well placed, between the Chartreuse, the Vercors, Ardèche⁸. ... With my wife, we have the same attraction for mountains. (...) We could have lived elsewhere. That's really by taste that we chose here.

The cultural dynamism of those rural areas, inherited from a long history of waves of demographic renewal (Cognard 2006, Sencébé, Lepicier 2007), also plays a major role in the positive image they reflect, as we can see in the first interview excerpt. For many of our interviewees, those countrysides are remote enough to “look like a real countryside” (versus more artificialised peri-urban landscapes) but still attractive enough to remain “alive” (with activities and an important service-oriented local economy that, as we saw, is partly driven by the touristic flows).

On a living area scale, we notice that connectivity remains an important feature of coworking spaces. Most of them are located along the main local roads and in the local centralities. Few of them depart from those structuring axes, as we see in Figure 2 focused on the counties of Drôme and Ardèche.

Though those territories lack mobility infrastructures and transport services for daily commutes, the temporalities of teleworking, with rares episodes of long-distance mobility intersected with longer periods of sedentarity, projects accessibility on a different scale, as those two coworkers, Mikaël, a web developer, and Alice, a photographer, explain:

With this job, it's about once a month in Paris, so generally I drive to the fast train station⁹ and after, I take the train. I was doing more or less the same thing when I was working for M. [in California]: taking the fast train to Paris and then a flight. And I think it will be the same with this project in Germany I'm going to start soon: a fast train and then...

[I go to Paris at least twice a year]. When I was still a member of an agency, I used to go more often. I was on the board so I had to go every two months in Paris, and I was going through my meetings with clients at the same time.

Again, the transportation needs of the coworkers are more similar to those of the tourists than to those of the average population who commutes mainly within the county, from residential to industrial areas. In the case of coworkers, the proximity of the Rhône valley, that is particularly well connected to big cities and especially Paris with the presence of

⁸Those are different chains of mountains and/or regional natural parks.

⁹In his case, a one-hour drive.

the high-speed train from Paris to Marseille, is frequently referred to as an important factor for having chosen Drôme and Ardèche as a place of work.

Another striking fact when looking at the localisation of CSs at the county-level is the fact that they are situated in local centralities and small cities that correspond with the most urbanized areas of the countryside. Not being “out of nowhere”, they are frequently situated in the inner areas of those small towns, close to shops and services (schools, retail trade, services and equipments). As Agata, the co-founder of a coworking space in Isère explains what motivated the choice of the centre of a 1,450 inhabitants village:

This is why we chose here, it's ideal because it's really a central location, the farmers' market is just here. (...) We chose here because it's the central town in the area, it's the village where you have some shops, maybe a dozen. And there's also school, kindergarden and middle school. There is everything, in fact.

In this respect, the case of coworkers highlight the importance of those local equipments in the creation of a dynamic of attractivity (Talandier, Jousseau 2013). Characterized both by centrality and the presence of equipments, they reflect a desire to conjugate both the benefits of the city and the countryside in “human-sized” microcities (Charmes 2019). This dimension of access to services and equipments has also been found by Hölzel, de Vries (2021) in the context of German rural CSs.

4.2 From the shared office to the collective utopia: Varieties of third-places in the countryside

The spread of CSs and third-places outside the city results from a progressive differentiation from the original californian concept. They thus share a certain number of characteristics that one can find in any of such places around the world and reflect their common culture: paperboards, sticky notes and colourful decoration, mix of home and office furniture (couches, balls, cushions, but also printers, screens, and a lot of wires), DIY experiments are amongst the most common features of such places wherever they be, giving a sense of common identity all around the world (Fabbri 2016, Flipo, Lejoux 2020, Gourlay et al. 2021).

However, despite a common “look”, those places differ in their organisation and purposes, including within small cities and rural areas. The data we have gathered allow us to distinguish between 3 main categories of places.

The first and most common is the small shared self-administered office (5 to 10 persons). It is created at the initiative of a group of independents and remote workers who used to work from home and that gather around the will of having a common place of work in order to help them differentiate their private and professional lives (Flipo, Ortar 2020), ensure a daily sociality and share the costs. As Stéphane, co-funder of a CS in Drôme, tells:

We were a group of 5 persons ... our motives were to break down social isolation and having a friendly place to discuss, share and pool resources.

Added to those motives is the need for gaining visibility, thus ensuring potential outputs to their members. Indeed, it is not rare that coworking space initiatives derive from business and employment co-operatives as Paul, co-funder of a coworking space in Ardèche, explains:

We have created sort of a brand, I mean a network of skills that are highlighted and allows us to showcase different provisions of services (...) and despite all the benefits of teleworking and modern telecommunications, it is way more natural and motivating to share a common space.

Those places are organised through independent and self-managed non-profit associations, are self-administered in most of the cases, and are frequently supported by local authorities through the provision of premises belonging to the municipality at low rent. In exchange, municipalities find a way to renew and value vacant premises with the help of public

subsidies, and to promote their digital dynamism. In our study, the wide majority of places belong to this category, many of them being very small.

The second model is the hybrid non-profit third-place, created at the initiative of a person or a group of persons that do not necessarily have a use of such a place for themselves, but wish to bring a new type of service on the territory. Those places are generally bigger (10 to 50 persons), offers a range of activities (café, workshops, cultural events, community gardens, etc). In some cases, it even comprises a project of shared housing. Those projects are developed in buildings bearing a particular identity or image, often a wide and more or less abandoned premise that is part of the local architectural heritage such as an ancient factory, mill or convent. Part of the project is directed towards restoration, similarly to what has been described in city centres (see, for example [Mariotti et al. 2017](#)). As Cécile, the founder of a third-place in Drôme explains:

When we saw the [abandoned] factory, we sort of fell in love with the place. We thought: Wow, there is so much to do here. We instantly thought about workshops, about a wide diversity of activities, a café, a place that would be . . . alive, opened, melting a maximum of public and of different people.

Those ambitious projects are thus very different in terms of budget from the small shared offices, and are very more likely to be managed by skilled cultural entrepreneurs, for which they represent a both professional and personal project. In those cases, the coworking activity is designed to complement other activities, provide funding and use the space. Those places mix more diverse actors and lie on a larger base of volunteers and supporters. They are based on the will of providing a “hub” for social, cultural and territorial innovation, which allow them to have access to bigger and more diverse sources of funding (such as the “Fabriques de territoire” funding scheme, which implied explicitly the necessity of having a strategy towards local development). In our study, 3 places belong to this category.

The third model is the heir of telecottages: places that have been entirely created by local development actors, or telecottages that have been transformed in coworking spaces by a change of scenography or visual identity. Those places usually lack a solid base of coworkers and are rather used for punctual needs, by mobile professionals or tourists in need of an internet connection. Indeed, when they are not led and actively animated by users themselves, those places lack a real community and fail to attract users. In our sample this category is fairly rare (1 case only) but could be expanding with the increase appeal for municipalities and intermunicipalities to “have their own third place”.

4.3 *The creative class in the countryside: portraits of users*

The data from our quantitative study based on a sample of 377 users in the Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes region shows that while places vary, their users remain very homogeneous and more importantly, their profiles are not very different from the ones attending the coworking spaces located in the big metropolitan areas. As a matter of fact, our study shows that family status aside, city centres’ coworkers and rural coworkers are very similar. Within founders’ narratives, we also find a lot of previous experiences of coworking in urban areas, like Benoît, a 43 years-old entrepreneur, explains:

I knew about coworking already, because I used to live in Paris where I tried a few ones, and also because I’m interested in the managerial literature, innovation etc.

On average, rural users are indeed slightly older and more frequently live in couple with children, while urban coworkers are younger and more often single. They are, however, both characterized by a very high skill level. In our quantitative sample, 91 % of them have a university degree, 66 % a graduate degree (74 % in the city centres). The type of occupations is also similar in the wide majority of cases: our study confirms the importance of what has been labelled by Florida ([Florida 2004](#)) the “creative classes” (photographers, graphic designers, architects, writers and translators) and of occupations connected with the digital economy (web developers, web designers, community managers, computer programmers. . .), that has been underlined in the literature on coworking spaces ([Gandini](#)

Table 5: Sociodemographics of coworkers

	Rural environment (N=79)	Total sample (N=377)
Gender		
Men	51%	54%
Women	49%	46%
Age		
18-25 years-old	3%	7%
26-35 years-old	49%	44%
36-55 years-old	47%	47%
56 and over	1%	2%
Professional status		
Wage-earner	53%	48%
Independent	47%	52%
Level of qualification		
Primary and secondary school	8%	5%
Undergraduates	25%	29%
Graduates and postgraduates	66%	65%

Source: based on authors' own study (N=377)

2015, Gill, Pratt 2008, among others). It also confirms the importance among those highly qualified office-users of a wide “consulting” sector, from life coaches to engineering consultants, including newest occupations such as “facilitator in collective intelligence”. Some occupations, however, are specific to the rural areas: forest managers, botanists and nature guides can have a use of a coworking space for the administrative part of their jobs, as well as diverse small companies connected with nature and tourism. Finally, rural coworking spaces and third places are also frequently hosts for local associations' employees, who use those places as their registered office.

Status-wise, our data (Table 5) shows that rural coworking spaces distinguish themselves from urban ones by a slight majority of wage-earners (53%) versus independent workers, while the ratio is reverse in the city (52% of independent workers). Among those, more than half (29%) is made of local small businesses and associations employees, while the rest (20%) is made of long-distance teleworkers whose employers are in the main cities of France, Europe and even the world as we discussed earlier.

We can notice that the rural coworkers profile is fairly different from the “traditional” rural home teleworker, who has been described as mostly in the second half of their career and in a “nest-emptying phase” (Sajous 2015). Coworkers are younger and frequently have young children at home, which is one of the reasons why they need a separate space to work (Flipo, Ortar 2020).

5 Expected benefits and limits of third-places for rural renewals

5.1 Managing residential mobility and professional transitions

Our study reveals that the public of rural coworking space and third-places is overwhelmingly made of new residents that arrived recently from the big cities of the region (Lyon, Marseille, Grenoble), but also from Paris and even from expatriation abroad. Although in some cases it is motivated by a desire to return to the region where they grew up, more frequently it is a result of a multidimensional life project including professional, residential and even educational strategies. Indeed, the presence of numerous alternative schools around the coworking spaces is no coincidence. Those families are frequently looking for a place to “land” and to reinvent their lives, and coworking spaces give them the opportunity to secure their access to a professional network. In this respect, the presence of a coworking space can be decisive in the choice of a place to live, as Maëlle, 35 years old, a photographer who was back from 10 years in the Middle-East, explains:

I had sort of a life-changing event in my life last year, and I decided to stop living out of a suitcase, to stop this nomadism that was burdensome. (...) I decided I had to look where to settle down and [this area] was already in my top 3. I came for whoofing, for holidays, with the perspective of snooping around already. So I just looked up the internet for shared places of work, coworking spaces. I had already visited one before coming here. I had the plan to visit another one too, but when I visited here I thought “OK, this is what I need”. I felt like it was very much like me, in the spirit, the values... I didn’t know [City] and I had never stepped a foot in there before. (...) So I took an appointment in the coworking space (...) and I travelled here especially for the visit. (...) There was one free spot and I said right away “OK, I want it. It’s here”. Then I visited [City] and two hours later it was decided: “This is it. This is where I am going to settle”.

Indeed, coworking space managers we have met have reported being called regularly by prospecting new residents looking for a place to land in a more or less wide area. Jeanne has arrived from the North of France and left a “very urban life” to reconnect with nature. She and her husband were prospecting in a wide southern France to enjoy the dry and sunny weather. Although their choice of localisation has been primarily determined by the presence of a renowned alternative school, the presence of a coworking space in a neighbouring village has also been determinant. As Jeanne explains,

When I first came here I thought: “Oh my god, what am I going to do here?” So this coworking space, it gave me a project.

While the coworking space can be a place of familiarity and an easy way to make new friends in a new environment like Maëlle underlined, it can also support professional transitions, in particular the change from wage-earner to independent worker that many new residents make. For those “lifestyle entrepreneurs” (Gomez-Breyse 2016, Saleilles 2010), coworking spaces bring crucial resources: a network that is professional, but even more importantly spatial and local. Indeed, the projects of “lifestyle entrepreneurs” are frequently based on some valorisation of the concept of “being local”. Having access to local social resources is thus particularly important, and coworking space make those resources available way more easily and quickly than it used to be. For teleworkers, the main benefits of CSs are the possibility to maintain a daily sociality and avoid isolation, while promoting a better balance between personal and professional lives by creating a spatial differentiation between home and work (Flipo, Ortar 2020).

5.2 Cosmopolitan and anchored: the tertiarization of neorural migrations

Being crossing points, sometimes included in international networks, coworking spaces and third places also provide an answer to the desire of many new residents to “reconcile a local identity with a global citizenship” (Tommasi 2014, p. 62). This desire is visible in the persisting interest that is put into travelling, testified by the affluence of travel guides in the common bookshelves. Being urban and highly educated, coworkers often share a cosmopolitan socialisation. They have travelled a lot, sometimes since childhood, and frequently have maintained cross-national ties. As Jeanne puts it, “what we offer is a more gentle life, while remaining connected to the world”.

This remaining connexion with big cities and foreign countries participates in the redefinition of the frontiers between urbanity and rurality. On one hand, they embody the “landscape idyll and desire to live in “human-size” units with associated social practices, meaning the friendliness attributed to small communities because of generalised mutual acquaintance” that Poulot (2015) labelled “urban ruralisation”. But on the other hand, they also participate to a soft rural urbanisation by importing urban lifestyles, practices and references in the countryside. Their interest and participation in city centres’ renewals is typical of this will of finding (or bringing back) some urbanity in their daily lives.

Although pertaining to very different sectors than the traditional “neopeasantry” that is traditionally associated with neorurality (Sallustio 2018), rural coworking space and third-places adopt a number of concepts in common. Being grass-roots, sometimes associated with a local symbolic architectural premise, they correspond with the idea of a

“concrete local utopia” that is typical of the “fifth wave of neorurality” (Rouvière 2016). They also embody the ideal of “relocation” of activity (Sencébé, Lepicier 2007) – though it is by means of telework. Indeed, coworking space managers and users often use the concept of “short circuit” as both a model and a metaphor, with the idea that coworking spaces contribute to the fact that “things are being made locally”.

5.3 *Are third-places levers for rural renewals or gentrification forefronts?*

While it seems clear that coworking space participates in creating a rural renewal dynamic, several limits have to be pointed out.

First, it appears that coworking space and third-places have met an existing demand that is the first reason of their success. Unlike telecottages that have been implemented top-down, the public support to those places has been mainly indirect and based on grass-roots initiatives. From our study in the Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes region, we have found that when local authorities have decided to “set up their own coworking space” without leaving the initiative to local entrepreneurs and remote workers, those places did not succeed, either because they have been ignored by the local demand that has preferred other places, or because there was no demand to meet. This tends to prove that although coworking spaces reinforce local dynamism, it cannot create one from scratch. Therefore, our study has shown that coworking spaces have spread in areas that were already benefiting from a favourable demography, not the other way round. Their development, however, also confirms that the existence of varied equipment and services foster the attractivity of rural areas (Talandier, Jousseume 2013) and create positive dynamics of attractivity. Founders of CSs chose a village over another because of the presence of such equipment and services such as: general stores, bakeries, cafés, schools, post offices etc. Third-places often come with new services (such as cafés and restaurants, exhibition spaces and concert halls...) to add to those already existing, while coworkers are keen on consuming the local services and goods. As a result, coworking spaces and third-places participate in the presential economy and the revitalisation of small cities centres, that have been almost totally deprived of economic activity since the expansion of hyperstores and peripheral commercial areas in the 1970s. This positive effect is likely to benefit the whole local population.

The second main limit is the lack of social diversity that can be found in those places (Krauss, Tremblay 2019). Indeed, the identity of those places is to be found in their values, scenography, cultural references and lifestyles that are both urban, educated and millennial. Because they are predominantly places of work, designed by and for certain occupations and for certain generations, they share cultural and social references that are far from being widespread. The lack of diversity is also explained by their functioning, based on acquaintances and co-optation, leading to social homogamy (Berrebi-Hoffmann et al. 2018). In this respect, CSs do not provide social diversity but rather strengthens the networks of like-minded individuals, bearing the risk of estranging themselves from the rest of the population. In this context, spatial marginality may be doubled with social marginality, with those newly arrived social groups not sharing the same places of work, of shopping or even of education than the rest of the population (the bloom of alternative private schooling also being a distinctive feature in those areas). Indeed, as described elsewhere, spatial marginality is often seen as a resource for new communities (Léger, Hervieu 1983). However, this aspect should not be overstated nor the opposition between “neos” and “locals” caricatured. Indeed, among the places we have researched during fieldwork, we have also noticed that some of those that we have labelled “multifunctional third-places” have developed active strategies to encourage their appropriation by a wider range of inhabitants, like the provision of services (printing and photocopy, distribution site for local newspapers and informations...) or the provision of workshops, that attract a wider diversity of users. However, this often relies on the energy and willingness of voluntaries and many places reckon they lack such energy and time for unpaid work. The main limit here is thus the lack of social and cultural mediation that is needed to ensure the appropriation by a wider range of inhabitants.

Finally, attractiveness also creates tensions on the housing market, that appear affordable for those coming from the city and teleworkers who keep their urban salary

while moving to the countryside. Until the pandemic, those migrations have remained too anecdotal to have an impact on local housing markets. Indeed, coworkers remain very few compared to the wide range of other places of work that make most of the rural economies. But the expansion of telework during the Covid-19 has increased the tensions not so much because of actual massive flows (Milet et al. 2022), than because of the creation of a housing bubble caused by the novel interest of investors for those places (Delage, Rousseau 2021). In places where the housing market was already tense because of the abundance of secondary homes, telework has worsen the situation. Would it be generalized, telework would probably create new forms of spatial segregation, less determined by the distance to city centres than by quality of life and amenities.

6 Conclusion and discussion

Our study has shown that while CSs seem to have undoubtable positive impacts for their users, their impact on the territory is not so clear and easy to evaluate. Their location patterns tend to show that CSs and third-places reveal the wider evolutions of contemporary rural areas, both socially, demographically, and also culturally in the way rurality is defined, inhabited and imagined. While a massive “urban exodus” has not happened, the pandemic has revealed – and maybe accelerated – a quiet and mild alteration that was already ongoing, with the spread of remote labour allowing an increased number of workers to access lifestyle migration – whether it be in the countryside, or elsewhere. The power of those narratives of “life change” has been unveiled at the occasion of the COVID-19 lockdown, during which those romanticized and idealized visions of the countryside have been described as “the new Eldorado”.

The fact that places that are remote and were previously described as mostly marginal are now pictured as the new “places to be” interrogates. Indeed, there is an obvious contradiction between the numerous empirical evidence of a growing marginalisation of rural areas in France (see for example the report by Dufrégne, Mattei 2019), and their increased desirability (including in public policy narratives). In this article, we have argued that not only the diversity of rural areas and their uneven dynamism is frequently underestimated, but also that the same territories can be dwelled on differently by various social groups, with very different experiences of marginality. The example of coworking shows that marginality can be accommodated, and even yearned for, when high connectivity, multilocality and reversibility of anchorages provides resources for individuals to cope with or even circumvent the constraints of marginality, and keep only the positive aspects of it. We thus argue that there is a need to better take into consideration the social dimensions of marginality in public policy making. Favouring local development through business and social innovation-oriented strategies may not benefit the most precarious local populations nor the most marginalised territories. Instead of reducing inequalities between rural and urban areas, it may increase the inequalities between desirable and less desirable areas – whether they be urban and rural. Indeed, we have seen from our study that those places were unevenly distributed – even at the scale of the region – and way more developed in the most attractive areas of the region. Reversely, the attempts at implementing such places in locations where there was no local demand have been failing. In addition, within the considered areas those places are likely to benefit first and foremost to populations that are not generally lacking social networks nor professional opportunities. As a result, there is a need of thinking about such places as not only responding to the needs of the most qualified and mobile workforce territories often wish to attract, but also responding to the needs of the local population (for example, with coupling it with employment and training services, or providing more general public services that are lacking in many rural areas).

The geography of coworking spaces also confirms the factors of attractivity for residential migration, in particular local services and landscape amenities, but also cultural dynamism. This attractivity for lifestyle migrations has fostered the development of CSs and allowed for their success. The touristic dimension appears particularly important, both as a factor of discovery for potential new residents, but also as a way of offering a high number of local businesses despite the relatively low size of the local

markets. They also echo the processes of gentrification described in the literature about city centres, with the presence of CSs following the quest for a certain local “identity” (Mariotti et al. 2017), that we have here referred to as a mix of rural and urban features. And similarly to the urban context, the rise of housing prices are not so much driven by the behaviour of individual households relocating, than by investors looking for a good opportunity (Delage, Rousseau 2021). Finally, we have shown that the habits and uses of mobility made by coworkers, being closer to those of tourists than of the more “classical” rural workforce, is likely to distort the definition of accessibility and marginality in their narratives. Because they don’t commute every day and because when they use remote activities to avoid unwanted mobilities, many coworkers are likely to consider a 2-hour drive to the train station as “close enough” and not interpret marginality as a problem, but rather as an “appropriate distance” to the city.

However, those places also participate in the rural renewals by facilitating the spatial and professional transitions of newcomers. CSs provide crucial resources to lifestyle entrepreneurs, by offering networks that are both professional-like and peer group-like. They also undoubtedly enhance the quality of work life of teleworkers and help prevent some of the main psychosocial risks associated with telework. Nevertheless, despite their project of social mixing, the anchorage of those places in creative labour creates mechanically a lack of social diversity and a difficulty to reach a wider audience in the absence of dedicated human resources to manage them. Then, the question of their social impact remains an open question: should places of work be subsidised by public funding? This question is even more important after the pandemic, when many firms have decided to reduce their office surface and save on their buildings’ expenses.

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