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THE MAKING OF COWORKING SPACES IN SLOVENIA: SPATIALIZATION BY AND OF YOUTH AS (NOT) TRUSTING THEM

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This paper explores the emergence of coworking spaces in Slovenia in the 2010s as a response to economic pressures and youth culture fads and explores the distinction between self-generated and top-down developed coworking spaces. While the former were created by young activists, whose endeavours were rooted in identifying with particular modes of sociality, work, and local belonging, the latter point to a new systemic interest in youth. This interest – alongside other shifts in spatialization *by* young people and *of* them – indicates a historical change in social value ascribed to the youth. This value is founded on an ascribed entrepreneurial ability.

Keywords: *youth, youth space, coworking space, spatializing by and of youth, youth entrepreneurship, Slovenia*

SPATIALIZING WORK

According to Henri Lefebvre (1991 [1974]), a society's endurance depends on its production of its own space where subjects embody proper relationships and internalize fitting meanings and thus engage in the society's reproduction spontaneously. His theory on space concerns all spaces vital to a society – home, work, entertainment, contemplation, etc. Nonetheless, working spaces deserve special attention. Throughout the history of capitalism, they are a prime example of the transition from the domination of hierarchy to flexibility and project networks (Boltanski and Chiapello 2018 [1999];

Vodopivec 2012). Contemporary working spaces are often designed as interactively processual with workers' agency playing a considerable role in their dynamicity. Workers are encouraged to proactively generate the atmosphere and working conditions (see, e.g., Irani 2013; Pfeilstetter 2017a). The coworking space (CW) is an example of this. The idea behind it is simple: workers bring their own personalities and skills into a shared room where their teamwork somehow inevitably leads to innovation (on whatever level), which is the core value of modern-day capitalism (Thompson 2019; Wilf 2015). Capitalism, therefore, successfully produces its own space in line with Lefebvre.

Lefebvre's space functions ideologically: workers do not reflect on how space shapes their way of life and social role; the knowledge of space in Lefebvre's era belongs to experts (architects, urbanists, engineers, etc.). By contrast, among the middle-class self-employed "creative workers" or "creatives" of present-day capitalism space is a condition of work much reflected on and discussed by workers themselves (Bajič 2015). Moreover, highly educated workers possess knowledge about spatial effects, which has become part of popular culture (cf. Ličen 2019). Thereby, workers do not take space for granted, but rather reflect on it alongside physical, social, symbolic, and affective traits and how these shape working experience, relationships and work results. Nonetheless, it is precisely as such that space is ideological. When subjects reflect on the potentialities of workspace, when they engage with its design, when they proactively connect with co-workers to set up a "friendly space" etc., they accomplish that which capitalism now values the most: creativity (Bajič 2017). In other words, "creative white collars" identify with a constantly emerging space, which they actively (re)produce, while their production of space engenders their (further) identification with it. Policy makers find such a concept of space valuable.

My focus is the emergence of CWs in Slovenia. I propose that in the specific historical circumstances, which influenced personal, social, and cultural choices, some young people identified with the principles of CW. They viewed CW as a means of achieving something both personally and socially. Later on, however, CW became a part of developmental and administrative institutions' youth policy toolkit. Rather than an ideal (as it was for some young people), it became a systemic means of identity formation, an apparatus for shaping young people's visions and personalities. In broad terms, CWs emerged either spontaneously as part of youth culture and the youth's practical needs, which necessitated a certain autonomy in the production of space, or as an orchestrated endeavour, where the youth was considered a valuable commodity in need of management. This begs a consideration of which goals were pursued in addition to economic ones. As I will closely examine below, CWs evolved beyond their role as facilitators of work to generate identitarian and ideological goals. My main focus here will be on the initiators of CWs as agents contributing to the creation (or failure) of CWs rather

than those who work in them. In other words, I will prioritise the question whose and which aspirations were involved in the making of CWs from their emergence onwards.

CW IN A SMALL COUNTRY

CW is a working environment, usually a spacious office, shared by individually-operating self-employees, e.g. computer programmers, designers, advertisers, writers, sketchers, translators, etc. Sharing space, at least in theory, leads to communication and collaboration; the resulting meshing of skills and virtues instigates various kinds of innovations (products, working methods, advertising, etc.). CWs first emerged in cities of the world (but see Siregar and Sudrajat 2017) where – so the story goes – office sharing started with individual "freelancers",[1] who were yearning for proximity and struggling to reduce operating costs (Arch 2018:1–3; Hunt 2015). They are now a global phenomenon (cf. Bandinelli and Gandini 2019; Jamal 2018; Mayangsari and Setiawan 2017).

CWs in Slovenia, which are the subject of this paper, arose in two contrasting ways; some were autonomously generated while (later) others were organised and systemically promoted from the top down. To discern the ramifications of this, it is necessary to first establish why individual people initiated CWs as part of their careers, who and where they were, what were their intentions, and which imaginaries they relied on. Most of the collected stories indicate that these projects were highly identity-led and social. They were identity-led in the sense that initiators intentionally designed them to contribute to their own identity formation and to that of their others, and they were social because initiators imagined them as beneficial to society, often conceiving the latter as local (place-bound) society.

Nevertheless, CW is a business enterprise. Besides, being an entrepreneur became a fashionable generational identity, which CWs helped accomplish. Thus, some of the initiators were also among those who tested their mettle as entrepreneurs by selling workspace to coworkers. However, considering the size of Slovenia's population (approx. 2 million) this was a dubious enterprise. Numbers matter: although some proponents claim that a CW can be made sustainable in underpopulated areas (Fuzi 2015; Jamal 2018), e.g. by attracting "digital nomads" (cf. McElroy 2020), their sustainability is quite dependent on the number and cultural capital of the residents as well as on local economic power, which classifies Slovenia – and especially its countryside (cf. Kozorog 2018) – as a disadvantageous area. When Juan,[2] a Peruvian, working as a vendor for Microsoft Lima, decided to quit his job and follow love to a small Slovenian town where

[1] A freelancer is "an individual who earns money on a per-job or per-task basis, usually for short-term work" (Freelancer 2021).

[2] In accordance with anthropological standards, I use nicknames.

he eventually founded a CW, his colleague and advisor from the global CW network Impact Hub (cf. Long and Naudin 2019) expressed concerns that Slovenia's population was too small to sustain a CW. Juan however launched a CW, maintaining that it was possible to sustain it in an economically unprosperous area with a small number of residents (more on that later). Yet, most CWs across Slovenia depended on public funding as well as initiators' and coworkers' own investment (in working hours, finance, goods, etc.). CW was therefore a contradictory enterprise: rather than sustainable on the market, this paragon of new capitalism was dependent on the state and personal efforts (cf. Pfeilstetter 2017a, 2017b).

Yet the CW concept was useful to developmental and administrative institutions, which used it to construct a fictional narrative of entrepreneurship. They promoted CWs as the "architecture of millennial development", a term coined by Andrea Pollio (2019) to denote systemic spatial experiments aimed at solving social problems in marginal areas with comparatively low market opportunities; these experiments were designed to stimulate local struggles for social improvement all the while spreading the message that progress is won on the free market. This led to the paradox of applying the profit imperative in an environment in which it was not feasible. In an "uneven geographical development" (Harvey 2006), the Slovenian countryside proved especially problematic.

The other relevant factors in the specific historical era of emerging Slovenian CWs are the agency of the youth on one hand and their biopolitics on the other, specifically in what way they are both reflected in the transformation of youth-related space. In the contemporary era of rapidly changing natural-material-digital-sociocultural environment, (inter)national policies (see Bajuk Senčar 2021) address young people as valuable subjects because of their familiarity with digital technologies, openness for new developments, and ability of adjusting to precarious conditions. In this respect, youth has been declared an entrepreneurial age (Kozorog 2019; cf. Rebernik et al. 2014), stimulated to be such through education and practical aids (Benak Cvijanović and Dopler 2020; Honeyman 2016; Poljak Istenič 2021). Space is an important facilitator in promoting this conception of youth. Millennial workspaces – CWs, incubators, makerspaces, creative hubs, labfabs, etc. – function as exemplars of modern-day capitalism (Bandinelli and Gandini 2019); they are designed to speed up the creation of new niche markets while simultaneously performing a pedagogical function. Furthermore, they represent the alluring aspects of capitalism: creativity, networking, flexibility, teamwork, responsibility, comradeship, rebellion against big business, forward-looking projects, openness to differences, etc. As such, CWs attract young people (Orel 2014). All the more so, because they (supposedly) benefit the society by rendering individuals and local environments more creative. Behind this spatial ideology, however, they often behave as straightjackets depriving the youth of a certain spatial autonomy. I will return to this issue in the last chapter.

RESEARCHING CW

Anthropological and critical literature on CWs is scarce (for exceptions see Avdikos and Kalogeresis 2017; Bandinelli and Gandini 2019; McElroy 2020; Pfeilstetter 2017a, 2017b; Pollio 2019; Thompson 2019); most policy papers and think-tank reports expose their positive effects. Interpretations of CWs vary remarkably: while I view them as the epitome of neoliberalism: representing and encouraging flexibility, project work, precarious careers, an endless race to catch the next ever-changing mode of production etc., some authors argue the opposite, describing them as "an emancipatory practice challenging the current neoliberal politics of individualisation", prompting values of "community, collaboration, openness, diversity, and sustainability" (Merkel 2015:124). This was also the view of most of my interlocutors in Slovenia.

One of the questions addressed in the literature is whether CWs belong exclusively in large cities or whether they could also be an engine of development in small and midsized cities and in rural areas (Fuzi 2015; Jamal 2018). Some practitioners in Slovenia foresaw their CWs would drive small-town regeneration. However, what is rarely scrutinized in the literature are the motives behind the making of a CW beyond economic conditions and gains. Loyalty and commitment to a place (a city, a town, an area), for example, could be an important motivating factor in the creation of CW (see Long and Naudin 2019), which was the case in quite a few Slovenian instances. I will return to this issue below.

There exists some literature on Slovenian CWs. Sociologist Marko Orel, who was among the founders of Poligon – the most influential CW in the country, published extensively on the phenomenon of coworking in general and specifically in Slovenia (Orel 2014; Rus and Orel 2015). The founders of Poligon also provided a thorough analysis of the first CWs in the country for policy use (Perčič et al. 2015). Rus and Orel (2015) interpret the rise of CWs – globally and in Slovenia's capital Ljubljana – as an epiphenomenon of the rise of a networking "creative class" (cf. Bajič 2017), integrated through a collaborative "knowledge economy", whose members pursue a community that shares ideas, information, values and knowledge. Yet I will demonstrate that the story was more complex.

Due to the scarcity of relevant local literature this paper is predominately based on empirical research.[3] In contrast to the anthropological standard of focusing on a particular case or conducting participant observation in one or a few selected places, I

[3] The research was carried out in 2019 and 2020 within the scope of the research project *Young Entrepreneurs in Times of Uncertainty and Accelerated Optimism: An Ethnological Study of Entrepreneurship and Ethics of Young People in Modern-Day Slovenia* (J6-1804), funded by the Slovenian Research Agency.

decided to conduct my analysis on a national scale. I opted for this because my focus, the emergence and transformation of CWs, means researching the past is needed. Consequently, my main method was a narrative (sometimes repetitive) interview,[4] although, in three cases, I also conducted a short-term participant observation.[5] I conducted interviews with a considerable number of initiators of CWs, a few users, as well as other relevant agents, especially people generating policy in regional developmental agencies. I interviewed three persons in Ljubljana, and three in Kranj and Trebnje, five in Ajdovščina, nine in Tolmin, two in Črnomelj and in Nova Gorica, and one in Murska Sobota, Trbovlje, Novo Mesto, Sevnica, Brežice and Krško respectively.[6] I spoke with the sum of 33 relevant informants, 13 of whom were initiators of CWs, meaning that they gave the initiative, stimulated, and were active in the making of a CW. Thus, I could trace various motives behind the making of CWs in Slovenia as well as reflections on their growth (or decline).

TRENDSETTERS DURING THE CRISIS

Like in other countries, the first CWs in Slovenia emerged during the economic crisis of 2008–2013 and its aftermath (Merkel 2015:121). Orel (2014) points at the severe impact the crisis had on the European youth, who responded to unemployment with self-employment. According to Orel, the increase in the number of freelancing youth in Ljubljana resulted in a growing demand for coworking, which led to the rise of CWs.

I would like to make two points here that may disturb this linear causality proposed by Orel. Indeed, the crisis caused mass youth unemployment in the country peaking at 25 % in April 2013 (SYUR 2018), which accelerated brain-drain. Consequently, the youth gained considerable public attention. Journalists urged the government to stop youth emigration by creating new job opportunities while simultaneously disseminating

[4] The language of communication was Slovene, with the exception of one interview (with Juan), which was conducted in English.

[5] Participant observation was carried out in Novo Mesto (four days), Ajdovščina (four days), and Tolmin (three weeks). In Tolmin, I have been researching youth-related phenomena (e.g. popular music festivals) for years and was previously also personally involved in the local youth scene, which makes my research partly native. While staying in the three towns, I was attentive to youth venues in general (including CWs). I socialized with relevant agents (some of whom I knew from before) and observed the venues. My goal was to acquire a general understanding of the transformation of youth space in individual areas and how this was interpreted by the interested public, which I incorporated in the interviews.

[6] Thirteen interviews and participant observation in Novo Mesto and Ajdovščina were carried out in collaboration with anthropologist Boštjan Kravanja, whom I thank for a wonderful collaboration.

life stories of successful young entrepreneurs as role models for young people. National and local job-seeking institutions adjusted by assisting young people to identify as entrepreneurial subjects. Moreover, the Ministry of Economic Development and Technology endorsed CW as an option suitable for the time (Perčič et al. 2015:13–14). In sum, self-employment was not exclusively presented as an urgent career option (which, for many, it certainly was), but also promoted as an attractive prospect. In other words, entrepreneurship was gaining trendy connotations.

Furthermore, it was precisely trends in youth culture that were a relevant stimulant for the emergence of CWs. Although the scarcity of permanent jobs was integral to the crisis, I doubt we can causally link CWs with the crisis and simply claim that self-employment pushed for the creation of a specific workspace. I guess CWs would emerge anyway, as a globally spreading fashionable model of work with which many young people identified. Still, the crisis was not a negligible factor: it shaped public discourse on youth and prompted its recognition as an entrepreneurial age. Hence, CWs should primarily be considered a trendy concept, whereas the crisis was a background that created a specific context for its implementation.

Who were the initiators of the first CWs in Ljubljana? In 2011, a crew of freelancing industrial and graphic designers hired an apartment for collaborative work. They, however, were not only professionals, but also young people, eager to party and co-create the capital's electronic music scene. Their first project, before CW, was actually the interior design of a coffee shop that functioned as an electronic music venue and a "hipster" hub. As Jani, a member of the team, recalled: "Around [our] group there were many musicians, mainly electronic, DJs, producers, who were organizing events in Ljubljana's clubs. And so, all this blended together." Jani was also fascinated with the emerging trend of the fixed-gear bicycle known as the "hipster bike" (McKenzie 2016); he invented a removable mudguard for the said bicycle, which he turned into his own enterprise (Orel 2014:133). He was not merely a freelancer, but a subcultures enthusiast. In 2012, Jani was attending "jellies" – trendy working events for freelancers, which took place at the new municipal "centre of urban culture". The events were organized by newly founded Slovenia Coworking initiative, which was led by Ela and a few others (including Marko Orel). Ela, too, frequented electronic music events. She discovered the concept of CW at the Design Week festival in Vienna and soon after began assessing Ljubljana's "creatives" at jelly events. She discovered that the local youth was familiar with novel concepts of work. In 2012, Jani's team joined forces with Ela's team; together, they organized a few visible "pop-up" design events and parties.[7] In 2014, Slovenia Coworking founded

[7] "Pop-up events are temporary events hosted at unique venues ranging from temporary fixtures in open public spaces to unused retail space" (Pop-up 2021).

Poligon, which gradually became an influential CW and came to serve as a role model for bottom-up or community-founded CWs (Orel and Rus 2015; Perčič et al. 2015).

What I aim to identify with this boiled-down presentation of the CW historical momentum in Ljubljana, is an eloquence of the crucial agents in contemporary youth culture trends: electronic music, hipster styling, fascination with design, eventization of life, hanging out in "urban" hubs, etc. These phenomena were sooner a reflection of international fashion fads than of the crisis. Jani in fact denied that the crisis had any influence: "I've been thinking about this. On us, this crisis did not [have an impact]. We were young, and we were fully positive, and all we saw were opportunities, all we had was will, working enormous, enormous amounts, really working hard, burning out, but it was fine, we loved doing it all." Above all, CW was therefore something new with which youth identified because it was "cool".

Not only did a few young people have to adopt entrepreneurship to survive, the label of entrepreneurship itself was gaining popularity among the youth. As Jani (and others) commented, their generation (born in the 1980s, coming of age in the 2000s), came to view the label of 'entrepreneur' as a positive identification trait. Another interlocutor, a coworker at Poligon, remembered that during her entrepreneurial beginnings there, quite a few young people hired a desk for work simply because it was fancy to hang out as a "hipster entrepreneur", with many of them not really running a serious business. Entrepreneurship, therefore, became a hip thing with many perceiving joining a CW as a social rather than a working experience.

DECENTRALIZED URBAN REVITALIZATION

The concept of CW embodies an ideal of "community" (cf. Arch 2018; Avdikos and Kalogeresis 2017; Perčič et al. 2015:94–109; Rus and Orel 2015; for critical comments, see Bandinelli and Gandini 2019; Perčič et al. 2015:34–35; Pfeilstetter 2017b). According to literature, CW creates close ties, because workers share space, devices, and especially knowledge. In contrast with competitiveness, which is ascribed to classical capitalism, CW represents collaboration, which morally attracts young people. In other words, if many young people grew to view participation in the market with their own skills and persona as self-evident, CW at least gave them a sense that they were opposing individualism and cultivating community (cf. Merkel 2015:124; Muehlebach 2012).

However in Slovenia, the notion of community was understood as wider than just a community of workers (cf. Long and Naudin 2019). In the case of Ljubljana, presented above, activists were eager to create connections between crews, hubs, activities, and events that would stretch beyond coworking. Moreover, outside Ljubljana, in smaller

urban centres, community was understood in an even broader sense, namely, as a local community. Analysing the programmes of early CW initiatives in the country (Perčič et al. 2015), I noticed a contrast between Ljubljana and other towns. While empowering self-employed youth was high on the agenda in the capital, in most other cases, the focus seemed to be on empowering the local community (Perčič et al. 2015:80–86). In other words, while, in Ljubljana, Slovenia Coworking and Poligon promoted "creative industries" as a "platform" for the collaboration of "creatives", elsewhere around the country these industries (CWs included) were seen as the hope for the revitalization of brain-drained sleepy towns.

A noteworthy example of this was Punkt, a CW in the Zasavje region. During socialism, this mining and industrial region was a melting pot of workers from different parts of Yugoslavia. Proletarian consciousness was strong there as was intellectual atmosphere (e.g., the world-famous controversial band Laibach was formed there). In 2000, the government passed a law to gradually abandon mining there, which was a blow to the local economy and pride. Population was declining too; between 2008 and 2017, this was "one of the most distinct areas of emigration in Slovenia" with "some of the lowest" fertility rates (Nared 2019:84). Punkt was primarily inspired by a sense of local belonging as an optimistic intervention to counter the gloomy local trends. Taja, the godmother of Punkt, was working as a freelancing copywriter when she received an offer in 2010 to move to Berlin for a while. A Zasavje native, she felt an attachment to the region even though she hadn't lived there for years: "I felt a deep pain about the downfall of Zasavje […] and so I regularly returned to Zasavje […] and yes, that actually pained me because I felt that it had such huge potential, that everything was possible, why is there nothing, why does nothing happen?" While she was in Berlin, she was haunted by her hometown at every corner; she saw industrial past everywhere just like at home, yet unlike at home, it was repurposed here. These encounters with Berlin through the eyes of Zasavje stimulated her to imagine her native region revitalized with "creative industries", a popular concept in Berlin at that time. CW gained particular momentum in Berlin and she thought that it could also function as a junction for existing grass-roots initiatives in Zasavje. Thus she traced down a local activist via social media and proposed they collaborate on setting up a CW and building a community of like-minded locals. They joined forces in 2012, looking to promote regional development rather than just coworking. They thought it important to intervene in the urban fabric, rather than being content with a simple office and immaterial networking. Thus, they implemented several dispersed operations in public space in order to disrupt the local resignation to the present downturn. In the interview, Taja repeatedly mentioned her obsession with empty industrial and residential buildings and with ideas about what could be created there because "finally, what's more beautiful than bringing essentially socially responsible

and indeed activist creative approaches to such an environment?"

This is just one of many stories about CWs motivated by a sense of local belonging, grief about the state of local environments, and hope vested in the local spatial and social prospects. The sense of belonging also played a considerable role in the town of Trebnje. Trebnje is economically and demographically stable (Nared 2019:90), yet some of its young residents thought its potentials were unfulfilled. Andraž, a son of a local innkeeper, did not follow in his father's footsteps, but became an architect. In his spare time, he was a DJ and a member of a local electronic music crew. In line with his profession and interests, he too became excited about the idea of creative industries: "In 2008, 2009, the Slovenian, let's say, creative scene and policies began doing a lot of research into the basics of the creative industries and creative economies, and in how to transfer one into another." Influenced by this trend, he started to develop a local network of young activists (officially entitled the Commission on Youth Affairs) on the one hand, and on the other, launching what he called "urbanity-making programmes", i.e. activities enacting and giving meaning to urban space. "The idea was to set dislocated points around Trebnje, in collaboration with REM – the [Trebnje-based] manufacturer of containers, and therefore, to set some three containers around Trebnje, […] so that there is a sound studio in one spot, a kind of a painting studio in another, and whatever else in a third […]" The basic idea, therefore, was, like in Zasavje, to stimulate a reconceptualization and awakening of the hometown. Finally, instead of supporting the idea with containers, the municipality gave his crew the use of an apartment, where they started to build a "creative-artistic incubator" in 2010, which comprised a sound studio and a CW. Even after, Andraž and his friends did not limit themselves to these four walls, but remained active in their broader environment.

In the east of the country, in the Posavje region, Maja, again, described her fight against local stagnation as simultaneously subcultural and entrepreneurial: "We started, yes, as a group of friends who returned to our small town from university and said: 'Now we would like something to start happening here' so that we don't all go out to some big city but really do [something] with this environment. […] And then we organized various things, concerts and art shows, we made a movie about piercings and so on. Our first members were metalheads, one such subculture, 30 young people…" Via the Erasmus program, their association KNOF[8] hosted international volunteers. In 2011, a Frenchman they hosted enthusiastically talked about "social entrepreneurship" as the hype thing in France. KNOF, in collaboration with the said Frenchman, opened a reuse store and started to reconceptualise their mission in their hometown area as a socially-responsible entrepreneurial one. In 2011, the Slovenian government passed a

[8] Slovene for 'button'; as an acronym it stands for "creativity keeps our fantasy alive".

law on social entrepreneurship which enabled KNOF to register as a social enterprise and extract financial means from the Ministry of Labour, Family, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities under whose domain such an entrepreneurship fell. In the next two years, new frameworks developed within KNOF, which resulted in a "mesh" combining an entrepreneurial incubator for socially vulnerable people, a CW, a fablab, and a reuse store. In the region counting few unemployed people, Maja perceived KNOF as a "bridge between economy and social service", as a space where individuals who have difficulty working in the "classical" sense develop their skills and new niche products. To her, it therefore represented the cradle of small-scale entrepreneurship and an "open structure" that has "a connective effect, positive for the environment."

And so this leads me to conclude here that in all the thus-far presented cases (including Ljubljana), CW initiators' identification with contemporary youth cultural trends played a significant role. However, in Zasavje, Trebnje, and Posavje (and a few other places), agents were also motivated by their sense of belonging and the need to influence the local future in line with their values, needs, and aesthetics (cf. Kozorog 2016). Moreover, all the activists (in the countryside and Ljubljana alike) claimed their own space, where they could perform activities specific to their age and interest group. Below, I will further discuss their claim for space and compare it with a previous form of youth's spatialization – so-called alternative culture youth venues (cf. Muršič et al. 2012).

ECONOMIC (UN)SUSTAINABILITY

CW stimulates businesses and is a business in itself. In the latter sense, CW is ideally sustained through monetising workspace use: a worker pays a sum for using a desk and accessories in an office for a period of time. The above-presented cases were concerned with sustainability too (as I will discuss below), yet for most (except, to a degree, Poligon), earning money was not the primary goal – their primary goal was creating sociality among co-minded and/or effecting local change. A few CWs in the country, however, were created purely as a business venture. In one such case an entrepreneur opened a CW in Trebnje (primarily to fill up space in a newly-built office that was too big); as it turned out, the CW flopped because Trebnje's population was too small for such a trade. In most cases I know of (especially outside Ljubljana), running a CW as a business is virtually impossible.

I already mentioned Juan, the love immigrant from Lima. He was confident, came with his own savings from having worked in IT, and ready to start a new life. He was not really too concerned about which part of Europe he was moving to, because, according to his South American standards, all parts of Europe are reasonably near each other,

which he saw as an advantage to whatever business he would start. He began by launching an IT project, yet after initial success, he fell victim to a fraud and his company went bankrupt. He decided to take his family and move to New York. However, after two years, he decided that he preferred his kids growing up in a different environment, so they returned and settled down in Murska Sobota. Sympathizing with the idea of social entrepreneurship, specifically with the idea that a solid "entrepreneurial ecosystem" can lead to the advancement of a larger society (cf. Kozorog 2018; Pfeilstetter 2017b), he thought that a CW could be an opportunity for both his business career and the town of Murska Sobota. Namely, in the socialist era, the town was a centre of development for an entire agrarian region, with food and textile industries at the forefront, however, after socialism (and especially after 2009, with the collapse of the textile factory, which was a huge employer) it was economically and socially breaking down (Vodopivec 2019). In 2015, Juan invested in a CW "in the hope that I will find a community of entrepreneurs in [the region] and in the hope that we could […] become an inspiration for having more entrepreneurs in the region. It didn't happen as I expected at all!" He named his CW Aurora, meaning 'rising light', referring to his vision of a rising local entrepreneurship. Yet this vision was not fully realized. He discovered that the locality was too "small" with too few freelancers willing to pay for a desk. There were, nevertheless, a few people who wanted to work as a CW. So he proposed a change in the management of CW; instead of him as manager and them as users, they all became equally involved in the management of CW (including equal sharing of expenses and equal distribution of duties). In other words, they established a cooperative (cf. Simonič 2021) where everyone payed an equal share for the sustainability of the workplace and nobody was earning from selling it on the market.

Juan's act directly targeted the economic (un)viability of certain accelerated working models under the condition of smallness (cf. Fuzi 2015; Kozorog 2018). Besides, his experience urged him to build a network of "micro-CWs" in rural areas to impact policy makers. Economic unviability of CWs and thus the need of public support in an environment like Slovenia was also emphasized by Punkt, KNOF, etc., and especially by Slovenia Coworking and Poligon. In the struggle for public funds, the latter's representative Ela was often publicly exposed, embracing – in Richard Pfeilstetter's words – different roles simultaneously: "the charismatic community organizer, the successful businessman and the solemn government advisor" (Pfeilstetter 2017b:98). However, unlike Pfeilstetter's agents in Manchester, who were also demanding public support for CWs and similar facilities in an economically underprivileged environment, the above-presented agents were much less concerned with earning money than with simply making their activities sustainable. As I will demonstrate in the next section, administrative and developmental agents were ready to listen to them (although ignoring

their message about the preference of bottom-up CWs), because the mission of CW corresponded with their vision of the youth.

ENTERPRISING YOUTH

In 2015, partly in response to the crisis and partly following contemporary governing trends, the Ministry of Economic Development and Technology hired Poligon to do an analysis of CWs. The Ministry became interested in CWs within its vision to strengthen "social entrepreneurship […] as a sector that supports innovation and creativity, develops and implements innovative services and products which represent social innovation, and strengthens social capital and creates new jobs for different population groups in local environments" (see Perčič et al. 2015:13). The Ministry believed CWs to be an important infrastructure of the so-defined social entrepreneurship,[9] with "creative industries" as their integral part.[10] They found these industries important as a way of "creating a greater added value in the case of start-up companies or those individuals who decide for an independent entrepreneurial career and to whom coworking spaces can represent a way to develop entrepreneurial skills, entrepreneurial and creative thinking, and makes it easier for them to decide to enter an entrepreneurial activity" (ibid.).

The analysis (Perčič et al. 2015) suggested that the systemic support should target those CWs that developed a strong community of coworkers from the bottom up. Poligon, Punkt, Aurora, and a few others were presented as models for such a policy. However, further development of CWs took a different course. Regional developmental agencies, municipalities and local "entrepreneurial incubators" (some dating into the 1990s) began to organize their own CWs, sometimes without consideration for the existing bottom-up initiatives (Perčič et al. 2015:44). At the core of this development was the idea of enterprising youth, of providing an infrastructure that could stimulate individuals "to decide to enter an entrepreneurial activity", as the Ministry argued. No wonder that, in our conversation, a lady working at the House of Youth built by the Municipality of Ajdovščina for the advancement of local youth, which also includes a youth venue, a CW, a youth policy office, and a youth hostel, was critical of the ideas

[9] Note that this concept was first introduced by the Ministry of Labour (see the segment on KNOF above), which understood it differently from this ministry. While the first defined a socially responsible economy, the latter defined a collaborative economy.

[10] The term "cultural and creative industries" was introduced into the Slovenian policy vocabulary already in 2008 by the Ministry of Culture, which stimulated a market-orientation of Slovenian artists. This policy strengthened during the crisis (around 2011), when the term's semantic scope also widened from arts to entrepreneurship (Bajič 2015:194–195).

promoted by her own institution and increasingly adopted by the wider society: "Today, everything is about entrepreneurship, yet not all young people are entrepreneurial, and this is not the only solution to their problems."

Ajdovščina (population circa 6.500) is one of the towns that established a specific youth policy, which – with the help of CW – proactively stimulates the formation of an entrepreneurial youth identity. Another municipality I find suggestive is Tolmin, which has recently endorsed various contemporary developmental trends (e.g., in tourism, ecology, mobility, etc.).[11] The same openness to novelties was also demonstrated in relation to youth. Among the strategic goals for 2017–2022 of the policy document on the future of youth in this mountainous, geographically peripheral municipality counting around 12.000 inhabitants, whose largest settlement counts around 3.500 inhabitants, is youth employment, which is also to be activated by providing a CW:

> "Modern entrepreneurship places a great emphasis on exchanging ideas and creating a creative, open community. Such a community allows users their own development, yet to the wider community it provides good business practices, implementation of developmental projects, innovation and participation of smaller innovative clusters in the development of other organizations. The measure [of this plan for the youth] envisages the provision of spatial conditions and equipment for the implementation of coworking." (We 2017:39)

CW, in sum, became a hot concept in developmental discourse with the status of responding to many issues and solving many problems at once. It represented a "proper", i.e. productive, way for young people to socialize, a safe and creative environment, a tool for self-empowerment, a generator of new jobs, a transgenerational transfer of knowledge and skills, a producer of positive economic effects that would spill into a wider local community, a source of greater open-mindedness and creativity in the local environment, and more.

In Bela Krajina (sometimes referred to as White Carniola), a southern Slovenian region neighbouring Croatia, experts in regional development also addressed the youth and established a CW as a means of their and wider local progress. In 2015, the regional developmental agency received a mandate from the three municipalities that make up the region to organize an entrepreneurial incubator with a CW. In collaboration with the local student organization, they first organized a workshop for young people entitled Let's Make an Entrepreneurial Environment. In the introduction to the workshop, they presented the region as economically backward periphery with a high

[11] I am a resident of this municipality and my observations in this case are also personal.

rate of unemployment, a condition they should overcome through entrepreneurship. On this occasion, they also invited the "guru" of an emerging youth entrepreneurship scene, Matija Goljar (see Poljak Istenič 2021). According to my interlocutor his role was "to create hype, to motivate the listeners there, to tell them that it's possible if you embark on your own entrepreneurial path, and that being in a problematic region or far from the centre is not restrictive, that this is not an obstacle, because he also comes from a similar region, where they have had many success stories too." After the hype was created, in 2016, an entrepreneurial incubator with a CW was founded (with the support of the Ministry of Economic Development and Technology's agency for the promotion of entrepreneurship called Spirit). My interlocutor, who was previously the head of the local student organization, became the leader of and "community manager" at the newly founded institution. In subsequent years, he has been organizing entrepreneurial workshops in local primary schools and inviting successful young entrepreneurs to share their career stories with the local youth, as well as addressing students in the local student magazine (he wrote articles about the successes of the incubator, entrepreneurial ideas and their realization, generation Z as a distinctive but entrepreneurial generation, etc.). He believed that the incubator was bringing change to the locality, yet should find a way to set itself apart from other Slovenian incubators, also because the locality proved too "small" for the CW's sustainability: "But now we want to become special in some way and for everyone else, from elsewhere, from all over Slovenia, to come to us." He was thinking about moving it (and other regional capacities) into the gaming industry, because it attracts young people. In this calculation, youth was indeed imagined as an entrepreneurial force pulling the periphery into another, more entrepreneurial era.

TOWARDS A NEW KIND OF A YOUTH SPACE?

My research on the making of CWs in Slovenia shows a variety of formative impulses: fashion fads in youth culture; the existential situation of the youth during and after the economic crisis; the market as the main frame of considering the future of the youth; a sense of local belonging; (inter)national-turned-regional developmental recipes. Alongside this variety, it also shows a contrast between CWs that were created by (more or less) young individuals (or groups) who dreamed about affecting social change, and those created as means of development. In conclusion, I will – in somewhat *ideal types* manner – consider the first as spatialization *by* young people and the second as spatialization *of* young people.

The ambiguity of youth, its neither child- nor adult- status, allows young people

a certain autonomy in carving out a space for themselves, yet at the same time also subjects them "to various adult regulatory regimes" (Valentine et al. 1998:7). Hence the distinction spatialization *by*, which refers to youth's autonomy, and *of*, which refers to external authority. If I may put it in Lefebvre's terms, the first is "the project of a different space (either a space of a counter-culture, or a counter-space in the sense of an initially utopian alternative to actually existing 'real' space)", whereas the second "shows itself to be *politically instrumental* in that it facilitates the control of society, while at the same time being a *means of production* by virtue of the way it is developed" (Lefebvre 1991 [1974]:349; original emphases).

Youth space, which is academically very much neglected (Valentine 2018), has a specific connotation in the Slovenian context concerning precisely its autonomous production by young people. The so-called "fight for space" (Bibič 2003:15–16) in the socialist 1980s and post-socialist 1990s with musical, artistic, and emancipatory practices, when young people publicly engaged and demanded venues for their own – often defined as "alternative" – cultural activities, was present in big and small towns and even villages (Muršič 2000), and won public recognition in the so-called "youth clubs" as autonomously run venues (above described as "alternative culture youth venues").[12] Anthropologist Rajko Muršič and his "native collaborators" (activists in such venues), defined it as "self-generated venues", belonging to "spontaneously self-organized young people in a certain town," who "build organizational structures from the bottom up" and cultivate "non-institutional, non-hierarchical principles" and stimulate new forms of youth's creativity and collaboration (Muršič et al. 2012:14–15). Such a space was usually not simply given by the authorities, but demanded by activists on the ground of specific local needs (e.g., rehearsals of bands, organizing concerts and other events, etc.). When such a venue was "won" (i.e. given to the youth by the authorities), activists possessed a reasonably high level of organizational, moral, aesthetic, and content-related autonomy (i.e. the authorities were kept at a distance).

Although such a space is historically embedded and thus closely tied to specific practices (especially alternative music), it nevertheless provides a useful base for comparison with CW. I find two features worth comparing: firstly, certain CWs, just like historical youth clubs, show traits of "self-generated" venues; secondly, both youth clubs and CWs were gradually subordinated by powerful institutions.

My cases from Ljubljana, Trbovlje, Krško, Trebnje, etc. show that as regards claiming and utilizing spatial autonomy in some aspects initiators of CWs were similar to activists in youth clubs that came before them. The main differences were historical circumstances and content. Namely, for CW activists, the crucial circumstance was

[12] ŠKUC in Ljubljana was the first and very influential such venue, formed in 1972.

the economic crisis (and broader neoliberal conditions), urging young people to reflect on their future in relation to job security as well as constraints and opportunities in various markets. At the same time, they were (like the youth before) influenced by youth cultural fads, which, unlike before, also fostered an entrepreneurial identity. In addition, modern-day youth highly valued spatial autonomy. Jani, for example, talked about an eruption of creative space-making in a specific time, when youth had to be entrepreneurial: "We knew that we have to take our fate into our own hands, to contribute something, to do something, because nobody was going to do it for us. […] Because we were so naïve, we started to do these things on our own." He called this period of life "romantic", because they were discovering something new, creating a "scene" together and carving out their own space in Ljubljana. Andraž in Trebnje also clarified that "grassroots, entirely alternative spaces have to exist. In such spaces someone starts creating, creating value, if she or he finds it on the market – I don't mean on the economic [market] only, already on the market of ideas…" It is evident that these young people were autonomously using space as a means of creating a change in their environment (just like the youth in previous generations did with youth clubs), yet they were doing it in an era when youth entrepreneurship, value-making, and self-reliance were considered "cool" among the youth as well as expected by the wider society.

How sustainable is the proposed analogy between CWs and historical youth clubs? In the initial stage of CWs, one indeed comes across the will to create a space by and for themselves with aspirations for a broader transformation of their environment, which was integral to youth clubs too. However, one difference proves crucial: unlike youth clubs, CW is a workplace. Although a CW in theory stimulates workers to co-create a workspace (as I mentioned in the introduction above), workers often prefer that someone host them and "curate" internal social interactions (Merkel 2015). Ethnographically, I learned this in Kranj, where CW was initiated from the bottom up, but it gradually became clear that the workers felt much better with someone being responsible for organizational, community-wise, aesthetic, etc. aspects of CW, because workers simply prefer working without spending their time thinking about how to make an environment more vibrant. The recollection of a coworker in Kranj of her experience at Poligon seems to support this supposition: even though it was an exemplar of a bottom-up community, for many of its workers its crucial point of attraction was, in fact, strong leadership. Therefore, in contrast to youth club users, workers come to their space to work and not to hang out, even if the latter is sometimes organized by their hosts.

So the first part of my comparison leads me to conclude that the value of autonomous spatialization by young people is that activists know best what kind of

space suits youth's needs and aspirations in a specific historical time. These needs and aspirations, however, demand an adequate organizational structure, which is rather loose in the case of youth clubs and rather stringent in the case of CW.

Further comparison will demonstrate that, in the last two decades, municipal and developmental institutions have considerably taken over youth space. The right to space, which was historically won by young people, as is epitomized in youth clubs, has recently been banished by the powers that be. Since these now have bigger plans for the youth, they are more concerned with them than they used to be, e.g. in the 1990s. The previously mentioned research of "self-generated" venues (Muršič et al. 2012) was executed precisely as a reaction to an attack on the autonomy of these venues perpetrated by administrative and developmental institutions. The latter found a new interest in executing control over their programs and institutionalized them in a one-form-fits-all manner. In many cases, municipalities turned these venues into uniform institutions, led by so-called "youth workers" (i.e. a newly introduced institution of an expert in youth), who organize fairly instrumental forms of sociality (e.g., creative workshops, lectures on youth-related topics, self-help programs, etc.). According to my observation of such spaces (e.g. in Sevnica, Brežice, Novo Mesto, Ajdovščina), they presently often host children because kids are less critical about their methods than the youth are.

The study by Muršič and others (2012) I am referring to was published in Tolmin. The choice of location was a symbolical gesture aimed at a local youth venue, which the municipality was striving to take over. Above, I noted that the Municipality of Tolmin can be considered a good student, who promptly imports trendy developmental concepts. Just as it was relatively swift at introducing the need of CW (see above), so it also easily abandoned a long and fruitful tradition of an autonomously run youth club, substituting it with a uniform institution for hosting youth. Some of the activists at the youth club that was taken over, practiced coworking; namely, a group of young people who were active in the club and were faced with the scarcity of jobs, flirted with entrepreneurship and self-organized a CW. Ironically, a project declaratively addressing and stimulating youth entrepreneurship through a CW independently built in Tolmin by three entrepreneurs gained municipal support. The case of Tolmin bluntly shows how certain youth practices which develop spontaneously are overlooked by the authorities because they do not fit squarely into their developmental concepts.

The present-day cases of top-down organization of youth space demonstrate how Slovenian authorities imagine the future of youth. Firstly, they do not view them as capable of organizing (the conditions of) their activities autonomously, but as in needed of guidance from experts. Spatialization *of* is intensively supplanting spatialization *by* young people. Second, they do imagine them as entrepreneurial in the sense of having

the ability to learn new skills, use new technologies (for self-branding), create some kind of a "solution" that might sell on the market, etc., in short, their ability to make themselves more entrepreneurial. CWs and other millennial youth-related architecture act as a safe environment in which the thus-perceived youth is expected to flourish. This perception is less than constructive because it narrows down both the youth and youth space according to predefined functions (cf. Lefebvre 1991 [1974]) eradicating all spontaneity and local flavour and thus diversity of youth's own space-making.

In the very conclusion, I propose that the distinction between spatializing *by* and *of* youth provides an insight into something larger than space. It is about seeing an age group as beneficial to history. Though I have considered youth's own agency in the course of this paper, I am not referring to the history made by the youth on its own (cf. Gillis 1974), rather, I mean a kind of hegemonic history, whose trajectories are orchestrated by the powerful. Going back to where this paper started, contemporary capitalism assigns the youth a considerable role, ideologically addressing it as the innovator of the conditions and content of work and living. The thus perceived valuable subject can therefore not be left to its own devices, but should instead be (spatially and otherwise) oriented towards "proper" goals. In the 1990s Slovenia, youth was fairly marginalized (Ule 2010); the youth was not regarded as important where other important issues of the new state were concerned. Perhaps, however, this "uselessness" in the making of history provided them with more freedom to engage with space and occupy it autonomously. But later on, youth became recognized as beneficial to the envisioned history, an age that gives (or should give) a pulse to contemporary times. Consequently, in this vision, entrepreneurial youth should be locally tamed in proper spatial conditions, like CWs, by which they will gain the skill to innovate both locally and globally. Although it is existentially significant for individuals and groups to gain recognition and respect in society, I nevertheless believe that the neglected youth of the previous era, though it had to fight to carve out its space under the sun, lived through better times than current, particularly because the burden of history on their shoulders was not as heavy as it is now.

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Stvaranje suradničkih radnih prostora u Sloveniji: Oprostorivanje mladih kao (ne)povjerenje u mlade

Miha Kozorog

U radu se propituje rastuća pojava suradničkih radnih prostora u Sloveniji nakon 2010. godine kao odgovora na gospodarske pritiske i kao odjek određene kulture mladih. Propituje se razlika između autonomno pokrenutih suradničkih prostora te onih koji su inicirani "odozgo". Dok su prve stvarali mladi aktivisti čiji su pothvati ukorijenjeni u identifikaciji s određenim oblicima društvenosti, rada i lokalne identifikacije, drugi ukazuju na novi interes upravljačkih sustava „odozgo", za mlade. Pokazuje se da je drugi oblik prevladao. Taj interes - uz ostale promjene u promicanju i oprostorivanju mladih - ukazuje na povijesnu promjenu društvenih vrijednosti koje se upisuju u mladost. Te se vrijednosti temelje na konstruiranoj i pripisanoj poduzetničkoj sposobnosti mladih. Organizacije mladih odozgo prema dolje pokazuju kako slovenske vlasti zamišljaju mlade. Prvo,

ne smatraju ih sposobnima za samostalno organiziranje svojih aktivnosti, već su im potrebne smjernice stručnjaka. Drugo, oni ih zamišljaju kao poduzetnike u smislu da imaju sposobnost naučiti nove vještine, upotrebljavati nove tehnologije, stvoriti neku vrstu "rješenja" koje bi se moglo prodati na tržištu. Riječju, sposobnost da izgrade sami sebe u poduzetničkom smjeru. Suradnički radni prostori i druga milenijska arhitektura vezana uz mlade, djeluju kao sigurno okruženje u kojem se očekuje procvat tako shvaćene mladeži. Ta percepcija nije konstruktivna jer sužava i mlade i prostor mladih prema unaprijed oblikovanim funkcijama, iskorjenjujući spontanost i lokalni okus, a time i raznolikost oblikovanja prostora za mlade.

Ključne riječi: *mladi, prostor za mlade, suradnički radni prostor, oprostorivanje mladih i za mlade, poduzetništvo mladih, Slovenija*