COWORKING HYBRID ACTIVITIES
BETWEEN PLURAL OBJECTS
AND SHARING THICKNESS

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In this paper, we explain that coworking today represents a new form of work and organization involving different organizational configurations and processes of sharing. This is significant because coworking is expanding all over the world and is affecting the way in which professionals relate with their work. Reflecting on the characteristics and functioning of this phenomenon permits also to understand how work, organizations, and management have been (positively and negatively) changing over the years. Through the presentation of an extensive qualitative study realized in Italy, we discuss the collective and collaborative endeavor of coworking that is characterized by multiple and often contrasting manifestations. The paper focuses on the concept of sharing, referring to its theoretical foundation and pointing out the multifaceted articulation (sharing thickness) of its application in coworking. We adopt the activity theory approach to describe and figure out the main relevant features of coworking and its dynamic evolution. A qualitative empirical study is presented seeking for the identification of a typology of coworking based on the analysis of the object in its current state. For the analysis, 24 qualitative interviews were conducted with founders of coworking spaces. The results present a classification of coworking through the identification of four main coworking activities that show how coworking cannot be considered a unified phenomenon, but a hybrid one that promotes different logics connected to work. The results can constitute a conceptual anchorage and a reference point for further explorations in different contexts and workplaces. They also enhance the debate around the conceptualization of sharing inside the new forms of work and organization.

Key words: Coworking; Coworking space; Sharing; Activity theory; Hybridization.

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In recent decades, globalization and technological changes have brought about important transformations in the labor market. These transformations have occurred on various levels with the introduction of new forms of organizations characterized by simultaneous, multidirectional, and reciprocal work, as opposed to forms that take place in organizations with an established division of labor, demarcated communities, and formal and informal sets of rules. Inside this framework, coworking has been emerging as one of the main manifestations of such unfolding transformations. Coworking officially started in the early 2000s, emphasizing its collaborative potential in promoting social changes in the labor market and the introduction of the values of "accessibility, openness, sustainability, community, and collaboration" (Kwiatkowski & Buczynski, 2011) as the main elements of work. Coworking is based on the increase and diffusion worldwide over the years of so-called coworking spaces and is rapidly becoming a global, predomi-

nantly urban phenomenon, particularly among autonomous creative workers, freelancers, and microbusinesses (Brown, 2017).

Coworking has attracted the interest of both professionals and academics. It is creating high expectations regarding its positive effects on social and economic development and is receiving attention for its potential to promote change in the labor market (Butcher, 2016; Gandini, 2015, 2016).

In addition to the diffusion of coworking spaces around the world, the number of academic studies dealing with this topic has increased significantly. Coworking has been studied in different countries, continents, and social environments from the perspectives of various disciplines, including psychology (Gerdenitsch, Scheel, Andorfer, & Korunka 2016), sociology (Gandini, 2015), economic planning (Avdikos & Kalogeresis, 2013), urban informatics (Bilandzic, 2013), management (Butcher, 2013b; Capdevila, 2013; Leclercq-Vandelannoitte & Isaac, 2016), design (Parrino, 2013), real estate (Green, 2014), urban studies (Groot, 2013), and engineering (Kojo & Neonen, 2016; Liimatainen, 2015).

The potential of coworking has been identified at different levels in terms of its facilitation of social processes (Parrino, 2013; Rus & Orel, 2015; Spinuzzi, 2012), innovation and entrepreneurship (Capdevila, 2013, 2014), and its potential for promoting social change (Merkel, 2015).

Coworking is generally described as a coherent, linear, and uniform phenomenon, that can enhance the promotion of social change (Merkel, 2015). Some other authors describe coworking as a "buzzword" (Gandini, 2015) or a "trendy word" (Moriset, 2013) emphasizing the risk that some academics and scholars might define coworking as inevitably positive. Following this perspective, the paper seeks to analyze in which sense coworking could be considered an innovative phenomenon that introduces new forms and collaborative logics of work, by claiming that coworking activity should be considered as heterogeneous in its object and processes. At stake is the possibility to question and critically discuss the potential and various benefits of coworking, better defining its articulate structure as an activity system (with objects, subject, rules, division of labor, tools, and community — as highlighted by the activity theory approach) and the sharing processes which constitute one of the fundamental pillars of this phenomenon.

The paper unfolds as follows: In the first section, we discuss the theoretical framework of coworking and how we position our study in the literature, addressing a threefold perspective to define the research questions. One refers to the studies arising from the issue of coworking and coworking spaces; the second concerns the CHAT approach, adopted as a proper lens for understanding the coworking phenomenon; the last is about the sharing feature that constitutes a key pillar of the coworking perspective. In the second section, we present the methodological approach (selection of participants, data collection, and data analysis) and the results of the empirical study. Finally, we discuss the results present in the existing literature, the potential, and limits of the study.

THE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

A Literature Review of Coworking

Coworking originated with a political connotation: The first coworking space appeared in 2005 in San Francisco and the initiators underlined that the proliferation of coworking spaces was based on the intent to create a *movement* of independent, self-employed, and freelance workers, in order to improve their working conditions. It was considered a way of organizing independent professionals and giving them back a social and organizational structure (e.g., Jones, Sundsted, & Bacigalupo, 2009). The intention of the initiators was that of aggregating people and creating, in a bottom-up dynamic, the best working conditions de-

spite the predominant paradigm of the labor market, thus trying to reduce the negative effects of the flexibility that characterizes independent and freelance work. Following this perspective, at the beginning, the coworking spaces were conceived mostly as bottom-up organizations, largely decentralized, with a simple system of shared behavioral rules based on declared and shared values. The structure was based on the absence of hierarchy and differences between people. Organized in a horizontal division of labor (flat organizational structure), there was little distance between the founders and the other coworking participants, who are involved in the funding, design, and construction of the space (Lange, 2011; Wathers-Lynch, Potts, Butcher, Dodson, & Hurley, 2016). However, coworking has evolved over the years by expanding the objectives, subjects, and structures involved in coworking. Today from being singlepurpose, coworking has become a multipurpose phenomenon with a variety of models of coworking spaces. The widespread diffusion of the spaces brought about a progressive reinterpretation and differentiation of coworking itself. In particular what have expanded over the years are: the *motivations* at the basis of coworking for both the founders and the coworkers (besides the intent to create social and organizational conditions for workers, motivations related to the opportunity to create profit or to develop business opportunities have also emerged); the *users* of coworking (from freelance and independent workers to entrepreneurs, employees, startups); the *territory* on which coworking spaces are established (from large and creative cities to small and rural territories); the *internal organization* of coworking spaces (from small independent spaces to large spaces with defined rules, roles, structure and activities); the *organizational forms* of coworking spaces (from single spaces to networks, franchises, associations, and spaces within already established companies).

The coworking spaces are described in the academic literature as new organizations (Capdevila, 2014; Merkel, 2015; Spinuzzi, 2012), which freelancers and knowledge workers access with the purpose of fostering networking practices and social interactions (Capdevila, 2015; Parrino, 2015). They are also described as new concepts of workplaces where different sorts of professionals (Gandini, 2015; Kojo & Nenonen, 2016) who are heterogeneous by occupation and/or sector of work, organizational status, and affiliation (Parrino, 2015), are colocated and share the same working environment by working alongside others, not necessarily on the same task, in the same space (Kojo & Nenonen, 2016; Parrino, 2015; Spinuzzi, 2012).

In particular it is possible to find two main trends in the evolution of coworking. The first one is the *institutionalization* of coworking by which the spaces have developed over the years toward more structured organizations with defined roles and tasks, and have expanded the provision of services and activities to respond to specific needs and purposes; various organizational models have arisen (e.g., spaces integrated inside already established organizations, small spaces established and managed by freelance workers or entrepreneurs, coworking spaces organized in networks and franchises, etc.). The other trend is what Moriset (2013) has already defined as *hybridization* between coworking spaces and other different types of spaces, for example, telecenters (drop-in offices where the interactions between professionals are low and not facilitated), flexible offices (that are based on the offer of rental solutions but are not oriented to the promotion of collaboration), and incubators (spaces mostly intended to facilitate the development of business and innovative projects) (Ivaldi, Pais, & Scaratti, 2018).

Although coworking has been described in the literature as variegated and differentiated, much attention has been devoted to the social dynamics that have been described as the main input, medium, and output of coworking and, as underlined by Jakonen, Kivinen, Salovaara, and Hirkman (2017), as the *raison d'être* of coworking and the *fil rouge* of its evolution over the years. The main interest of the scholars to date is how sociality is constructed through and in coworking (Butcher, 2018). However, different authors talk about a bubble (Gandini, 2015) and enhance the individualistic orientation at the basis of the same

processes, by which coworking spaces are used as a means through which professionals try to increase their business opportunities, reputation, and networks (Butcher, 2013a; Gandini, 2016; Jakonen et al., 2017).

The framework presented above solicits plural considerations related to the conceptualization of coworking, since it can be described through a polarized description (Castilho & Quandt, 2017); on one hand as a uniform phenomenon (more or less oversimplified) and, on the other hand, as a multifaceted phenomenon, due to the collective orientation that guides and orients relationships, collaboration, and community.

Our hypothesis is that coworking is a complex phenomenon with plural and hybrid organizational forms (Spinuzzi, Bodrozic, Scaratti, & Ivaldi, 2019). The relevance of the collective and collaborative endeavor that characterizes coworking spaces is not taken for granted, and assumes multiple and often contrasting manifestations. In order to deal with the complexity and historically dynamic manifestation of the coworking phenomenon, we address the activity theory approach as a theoretical lens which provides proper and useful hints for understanding such an emergent object.

Coworking as a Collective Activity

We refer to the theoretical framework of cultural historical activity theory (CHAT; Engeström, 1987/2015; Engeström, Kajamaa, Lahtinen, & Sannino, 2015; Ivaldi & Scaratti, 2016; Sannino, Daniels, & Gutierrez, 2009) in order to consider coworking as a collective activity, in which the concrete and situated manifestations of sharing are strictly connected to the object of the activity.

CHAT is a theory with a long tradition that has been influenced by numerous disciplines. It is possible to trace three generations of CHAT (Engeström, 1999; see Figure 1).
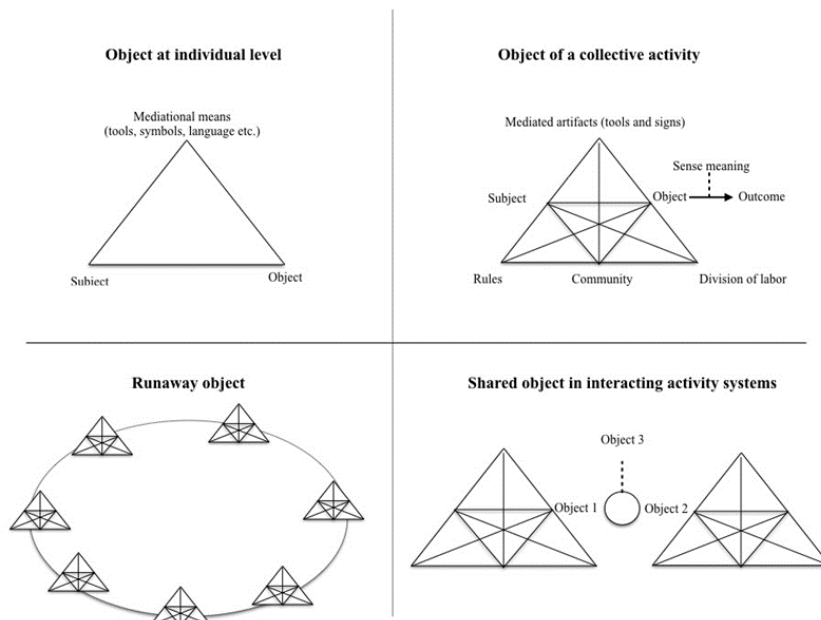

FIGURE 1
CHAT models.

The first generation is connected to Vygotsky's concept of mediation and elaboration of the mediated action triangle (Vygotsky, 1993). This conceptualization has its origins in the idea of Russian psychologists who in the 1920s sought to develop an understanding of mind and society that, in their vision, was not based on the dichotomy of individuals and society that had characterized mainstream Western thought (Blackler, 1995). The first generation of CHAT is connected to the studies by Vygotsky who considered individuals and the environment as parts of a unified complex system representing the essential relationship between an individual's consciousness and the person's interaction with cultural, historical, and institutional settings (Cole, 1996). In this sense he introduced the idea that it was no longer possible to understand individuals without considering their cultural means, and at the same time that it was impossible to study society without understanding the individual's agency. The second generation of CHAT tried to overcome the limitation by differentiating between individual actions and collective activity. This phase is attributed to Leont'ev (1978), who proposed a classification of activity based on three levels: activity, actions, and operations. Activity is collective and socially constructed during time, oriented to a motive, and each motive is an object (material or ideal) that responds to a need. Actions are individual processes, consciously planned, that occur in a limited time span, subordinated to the activity, and governed by specific goals. Finally, actions are realized through operations that are not oriented by goals but that provide means for the realization and adjustment of actions in specific situations and under particular conditions. The third generation is connected to the work of Engeström (1987) who proposed his activity system model as the basic unit of analysis, starting from the classification proposed by Leont'ev and expanding Vygotsky's model. In this model, activity is considered at a collective level and other components are introduced: rules, community, and division of labor (Engeström, 1999). This model provides hints for understanding how collective subjects (groups, organizations, societies, etc.) are embedded in their sociocultural contexts.

A collective activity is a system in which the subject (collective individuals, groups, organizations, or societies) acts on an object and transforms it, through the use of mediating artifacts, in order to achieve a specific outcome. Rules, community, and division of labor are the socio/historical aspects that mediate the activity. The community corresponds to the social group with which the subject identifies itself while participating in the activity, using specific language and meaning. The rules are formal and informal regulations that influence the activity by regulating the interactions with other community members. Division of labor regulates the way in which the community relates to the object, defining roles and plural tasks. The object is what gives sense and meaning to the activity system. In this theoretical approach, object is not a general term to name material things. It refers to a historically and socially constructed dimension that orients the activity. The object is the element of the activity system that explains the reciprocal interdependence between individuals and the external world. The object is characterized by a double nature, well expressed by Leont'ev with the distinction between "object" and "predmet" (Kaptelinin, 2005). The first one denotes the material reality, a thing that has an independent existence. The second is used to indicate the content or target of a thought. In this sense "the object [of an activity] is simultaneously an independently existing, recalcitrant, material reality and a goal or purpose or ideas that (individuals) have in mind" (Adler, 2005, p.404). The twofold nature integrates the practical activity object and the object of thought. This dual essence of the object, that is at the same time the raw material that the subject transforms and the sense-maker that gives meaning to the various entities and phenomena, also sheds light on the dynamic and contradictory nature of the phenomena under investigation (Kaptelinin, 2005). Different authors (Engeström, 2009; Engeström, Engeström, & Vähääho, 1999; Kaptelinin, 2005; Spinuzzi, 2017) underline the importance of the analysis of the object in order to understand the complex social phenomena, by tracing the voices and multiple perspectives that contribute to the formation and development of the object it-

self. An activity system is defined by its object, and the object attempts to cyclically pulse and transform the activity (Spinuzzi, 2015, 2017).

CHAT theorists have underlined how in the new forms of production, work, and organization "the boundaries and structures of activity systems seem to fade away. Processes become simultaneous, multidirectional, and often reciprocal and the density and crisscrossing of processes makes the distinction between processes and structure somewhat obsolete" (Engeström, 2009, p. 309). In this sense, in the analysis of coworking as a new form of production, it becomes fundamental to understand how and what orients its activity, defining the structural elements of the activity. This is connected and interrelated with specific interpretations that guide and influence the processes and relationships among the elements themselves. Following this perspective, in the case of the coworking activity, sharing represents the unfolding condition and outcome of hybrid combinations and plural articulations of processes.

"Sharing Thickness": Overcoming the Dualistic Vision of Coworking

Since the sharing dimension is a key feature of coworking, in this paper we focus specific attention on the sharing concept, relying on its theoretical foundation and pointing out the multifaceted articulation of its application in the context of coworking (sharing thickness). As previously noted, coworking is considered one of the main expressions of the so-called sharing economy (Bouncken & Reuschl, 2018; Gandini, 2015; Jamal, 2018; Moriset, 2013; Pais & Provasi, 2015): the label conveys a very vast array of phenomena which have been growing since the 2008 crisis. They refer to multiple forms of transactions, relationships, consumption, and production (loaning objects, using platforms, using barter instead of money, enhancing open source software, . . .) which are based on the principle of sharing.

The concept refers to a diversified and pluralistic theoretical framework which underpins its understanding and description as a key dimension for innovative forms of economy and society. Benkler (2004) talked about shareable goods related to collaboration among peers, claiming *social sharing* as a third way (in addition to market and hierarchy) to allocate and exchange goods. Such a means of doing so is based on trust and reciprocity, raising the question of the possible different motives that support sharing and collaborative transactions.

Polanyi & MacIver (1944) and Polanyi (1957), analyzing reciprocity as one of the three forms of integration (together with exchange and redistribution) between economy and society, underlined its structural components of proximity and cooperation. These can vary from more instrumental motivations to a huge sense of belonging and reciprocal identification. Similarly, Fiske (1991) argued for communal sharing, which he identified as one of the four basic types of social relationship (the others being authority ranking, equality matching, and market pricing): it pursues goals of solidarity and unity.

Sharing is also generally defined as "the act and process of distributing what is ours to others and their use and/or the act and process of receiving or taking something from others for our use" (Belk, 2007, p. 126). Following these definitions, we can identify both forms of weak and strong sharing as a mixture of mutuality, identity, relationship, and commitment. Particularly for the analysis of coworking, we propose the concept of sharing thickness to analyze the representations that the founders/owners of the space have about sharing in coworking. More specifically, in the empirical analysis presented in the following paragraphs, coworking activities were analyzed on the basis of different aspects of sharing: the locus of sharing (sharing as guided top-down vs. sharing as more situated and distributed), the motives of sharing (sharing based on separated individual objectives, temporarily shared objectives, and co-constructed objectives), the extent of sharing (sharing that involves the community inside the coworking space or that overcomes the

boundaries of the workspace). Indeed, in a macro scenario that can be described as "the sharing turn" (Grassmuck, 2012), we have to deal with semantic confusion in which a maze of terms and a plural and multifaceted sharing vocabulary are acknowledged under the banner of sharing. There is a vast array of labels that spread from the "share button" in the web 2.0 world, through sharing a common language or a set of experiences to the "virtual kumbaya of joy, communality and fellowship" (Belk, 2014a, p. 10) that covers enormously profitable transactions in online consumption. Since the boundaries between different forms of transaction (such as sharing, gift giving, and commodity exchange) are fuzzy and shifting, depending on contextual dimensions and situated features, Belk proposes both prototypes (Belk, 2009) and some criteria useful for analyzing sharing.

The author (2007, 2009) highlights two prototypes for sharing: mothering and pooling allocation and resources within the family. Giving birth or providing material and immaterial care are given voluntarily, freely, without expectations of reciprocity, and with an evident condition of joint possession. As a "communal act that links us to other people" (Belk, 2009, p. 717), sharing enhances feelings of solidarity, generates companionship (from the Latin "pannis," bread and shared meal), and creates trust and bonding. Belk (2014a) also provides examples and criteria for coping with a proper understanding of complex phenomena that can be judged as pseudo-sharing or sharing manifestations. We can summarize the features that characterize Belk's perspective of pseudo-sharing, that is, "business relationship masquerading as communal sharing" (Belk, 2014a, p .5); no sense of mutual ownership; utilitarian rather than communitarian reasons of belonging; and out of the realm of the social and into the realm of business. Another distinction is about demand sharing (as in the case in which a child asks to be fed, as it is taken for granted that it cannot be refused) and open sharing (when we tell a guest "my house is your house," implying that he/she can use it, but this is not taken for granted). Belk (2013; 2014b) also highlights different features (the characteristics of sharable things as lumpy, only available in discrete bundles; granular, too expensive to be affordable except through sharing; in the form of utility to be provided for being sharable — transaction, storage, anti-industry, environmental, social utility; the intention in sharing, helping and making human connections) that enable an emerging and even more complex manifestation of plural forms of sharing. Other criteria underline the true forms of sharing: intentionality; voluntary; without compensation; no obligations of reciprocity; feeling and sense of community; and person to person dimension.

It is worthwhile to underline that Belk's (2014a) perspective provides heuristic cues and clues for detecting multiple and newly created ways of sharing, rather than narrow and neatly defined indicators for classifying sharing. Such articulated reflections shed light on sharing as a multifaceted and hybrid practice, with plural and often intertwined forms and manifestations. It is worth noting that the words hospitality (as one of the main fields in which sharing is practiced) and hostile (referring to the danger of hosting strangers) have the same root, suggesting the structural ambiguity that inhabits sharing. As an interpersonal process embedded in cultural prescriptions, sharing can both create feeling of community, strong ties and relationships, and collaboration, or it can generate dependency, resentment, and inferiority; it can be perceived as sincere or insincere; it conveys conditions of excess or insufficiency, with broad or narrow extension (Belk, 2007). Starting from these considerations, we can conceive sharing in a broader versus stricter sense, as a continuum in which the combinations of self-interest and altruism, stinginess and generosity, and impersonality-personality can be found among different work activities.

We consider the contribution of Belk as particularly articulated and suitable for connecting the theoretical framework about the sharing concept with the key role it plays in shaping the object of coworking as an activity system. Coworking in fact is primarily based on the sharing of a space, by which no one has the clear right to possess the space (with the exception of the founder/owner), and when professionals

rent the desk and use the space, coworking requires them to share at least material dimensions (rooms, instruments of work, facilities, etc.), and in some cases coworking implies and is oriented to the sharing of immaterial dimensions (knowledge, resources, networks etc.) (Capdevila, 2014; Gandini, 2015). Thus, coworking is based on sharing, and sharing is the lever for the promotion of relationships (e.g., social support; Parrino, 2015), collaboration (Capdevila, 2014; Spinuzzi, 2012), and community (Garrett, Gretchen, & Bacevice, 2014).

Nevertheless, different authors underline that sharing material resources is not enough. While sharing immateriality facilitates the promotion of communication, relationships, collaboration, and community, sharing only material resources, such as the workspace, is identified as bringing little sociality. This distinction is often proposed to underline that the source of the added value of coworking lies in the promotion of social interactions and recurrent collaborations among coworkers (Brown, 2017). In our vision, coworking is a more articulated phenomenon where different configurations of sharing emerge.

As stated by Griffiths and Gilly (2012), the behaviors and the practices by which the space is shared are a function of the meanings that people give to the space itself, and the meanings differ between individuals and groups. The way in which people interpret and share the space influences whether and how people share other immaterial resources (ideas, projects, experiences, competences, knowledge, etc.). Furthermore, the way in which the coworkers share the space, and consequently the immaterial dimensions, is strongly influenced by the interpretations of the founders/owners of the coworking spaces and on how they interpret and orient sharing practices. Different philosophies will attract different kind of workers and will be reflected in different sets of operating rules, organizational structures, the instruments, facilities, and activities proposed.

Aims of the Research

The theoretical framework conveys knowledge interests that can contribute to better detect and understand some key features of the coworking phenomenon: the first refers to its historical and phenomenological plural forms. The possibility offered by CHAT to conceive coworking as a collective activity provides relevant dimensions to figure out the complexity of its manifestations. The second relies on the sharing as a crucial and critical feature which can settle different and plural types of coworking spaces.

From these considerations, we elaborated the research questions that have guided the present work: 1) What are the concrete manifestations of the complexity that characterizes coworking? 2) How can sharing be associated with this phenomenon?

Through the research presented in the paper, our intention is to understand if coworking can be effectively considered a new way of interpreting and organizing work and if it introduces new logics and the basis of the working practices. In particular, by following the focus presented in literature about the potential of coworking in fostering relational and sharing practices connected to work, we investigate which are the declinations and connected effects of different interpretations of sharing inside coworking spaces.

Applying this view to coworking means investigating hybrid activities (Spinuzzi, 2017) that are positioned in different ways in a continuum between economic and social realms, with possible multiple manifestations and different configurations of its specific elements.

To this aim, we conducted an empirical study in Italy, based on qualitative interviews with founders of coworking spaces in different regions, to highlight how the founders understand, act, and give sense to coworking concerning both the structure and processes, and how they shape different forms of organizing. Through the analysis of the collected data, we identify a typology of coworking composed of four

coworking activity systems that present different components of the activity system triangle and reflect different interpretations of sharing by the founders. We suggest a twofold reading of the coworking types: both in its articulate structure of activity system (with objects, subject, rules, division of labor, tools, and community — as highlighted by the activity theory approach) and in its sharing processes that emerged from the interpretations of the founders.

METHODOLOGY

The study presented in the paper is based on a qualitative study that involved founders and managers of 24 coworking spaces in Italy (see Table 1). The aim of the research is in fact that of investigating and understanding the representations that the founders of the coworking spaces have about the object of the coworking activity and how the activity itself is guided and based on a specific interpretation of sharing.

The decision to interview founders and owners of coworking spaces depends both on the meaning they give to such an object and in general to a relevance attributed to a managerial vision of the field (Ripamonti & Scaratti, 2012; Scaratti & Ivaldi, 2015). Since they provide the original idea which inspired their investment on the coworking space, it becomes interesting to explore in depth the sense that underpins their project. Hence the need to adopt a qualitative approach in order to get close to people's sense-making and conversing with them in their own terms (Gellner & Hirsch, 2001). Specifically, we adopted qualitative interviews in order to detect the participants' perspectives and explore their thoughts, motivations, and the meaning at the basis of their decision to open a coworking space as well as their own experiences.

TABLE 1
Information about space and interviewees

	Size	Area	Organization	Information about the interviewee
CW1	200 m^2	Northwest	Social enterprise	Male, president of the enterprise, in 2011 opened a space inside the company, by renting the space to other people
CW2	220 m^2	South	Not for profit association	Male, freelance, architect, opened the space and a connected not for profit association in 2012
CW3	110 m^2	Northwest	Small business	Female, entrepreneur, architect, opened the space in 2008 and also uses it as her own office
CW4	400 m^2	Northeast	Medium business	Male, entrepreneur in the field of interior design. Opened a coworking space in 2011, with the declared intent to introduce a new model of collaborative work by which coworkers will share projects that they get from their clients
CW5	180 m^2	Northwest	Medium business	Female, entrepreneur in the field of communication, opened the space in 2010 inside the office
CW6	40 m^2	Central	Association of social enterprises	Male, member of the association, founded the space in 2013 to open the space to affiliates and other people (in particular young people)
CW7	120 m^2	Central	Small business	Male, entrepreneur, architect, opened the space in 2012 after the renovation of the offices

(Table 1 continues)

Table 1 (continued)

	Size	Area	Organization	Information about the interviewee
CW8	150 m²	Northwest	University	Male, community manager from 2015, the space has been opened by a professor and the director of the university in order to support students in the development of projects
CW9	140 m²	South	Small business	Male, financial consultant, freelance, opened the space in 2009 to use the infrastructures he had at disposal
CW10	500 m²	Northeast	Coworking franchise network	Female, community manager of the space that opened in 2012 to gather and select talents in the field of digital
CW11	350 m²	Northwest	Medium business	Male, entrepreneur, multimedia production company, opened the space in 2013 because of a change in the professional field, in which they had to collaborate and work with musicians in different places and cities
CW12	160 m²	Northwest	Small business	Male, entrepreneur, real estate company, opened the space in 2012 to share his spaces with other professionals
CW13	220 m²	Northwest	Medium business	Male, designer, entrepreneur, in 2013 founded a coworking space intended for professionals who work in the digital and creative fields
CW14	50 m²	South	Consortium of enterprises	Female, entrepreneur, decided to open the space inside the company in 2013 because she wanted to open for collaboration with other types of professionals
CW15	72 m²	Central	Small business	Male, architect, opened a coworking space in 2012 after having shared a rented office with other professionals in 2009
CW16	150 m²	Northwest	Not for profit association	Male, freelance, founded the space with a partner in 2012, the space is dedicated to women and parents
CW17	100 m²	Northeast	Medium business	Male, developer, entrepreneur, opened the space in 2012. It is integrated in the company
CW18	100 m²	Northwest	Medium business	Male, entrepreneur, opened the space in 2015 as part of the cultural association connected to the company
CW19	150 m²	Northwest	Small business	Female, architect, entrepreneur, founded the space in 2009 integrated in the company
CW20	280 m²	Central	Small business	Male, entrepreneur of a web agency, opened the space in 2012 to share space with people in the same field of work. The space is integrated into the company but the intention for the future is to separate the coworking space
CW21	80 m²	Central	Not for profit association	Male, president of the association, opened the space in 2013, integrated into the not for profit association
CW22	100 m²	Northwest	Not for profit association	Male, member of the board of the not for profit association in which in 2010 a coworking space was founded as part of the association
CW23	100 m²	Northwest	Small business	Male, entrepreneur, communication agency, opened the space in 2008 inspired by other coworking space in other countries
CW24	150 m²	Northwest	Small business	Female, entrepreneur, architect, opened the space inside her office in 2012

The research lasted more than one year, from the end of 2013 to April 2015, and resulted in the identification of a typology of coworking that has been validated in a public event that involved 100 people (coworking space founders/managers and coworkers). The research is constructed on three main phases: (1) the realization of the qualitative interviews; (2) validation of the results through group discussions with coworking founders and coworkers; and (3) finalization of the results and identification of coworking typology.

The research started from a partnership between our university and a network of coworking spaces in Italy. The network was established in early 2008 and now is composed of more than 120 affiliate coworking spaces in 66 cities, making it the largest network of coworking in the Italian territory.

The interviews were conducted with coworking founders in different regions of Italy. Interviews were semistructured and lasted an average of 40 minutes. They were audiotaped with participant consent, transcribed verbatim, read, reread, and analyzed throughout the study (Charmaz, 2006). During data collection, the interview guide became progressively focused and memos were written to illuminate data analysis. Demographic (gender, age) data of the participants and information about the structure of the coworking space (year of space foundation, size of the space, number of desks and offices) were also collected. These interviews permitted an investigation of the coworking founders' experience and perspective. In the interviews, the participants were asked for information about the structure, the organization, and the practices that characterized their spaces. The structure of the interview (Table 2) was followed with high flexibility. All interviews started with the same opening question: "Why and how did you open a coworking space?" The interview was conducted by integrating and adapting the questions through a conversational and dialogical stance.

TABLE 2
Interview guide for coworking space founders

Content area	Questions
Motivations and reasons to open a coworking space	1. How and why did you open a coworking space? 2. What are in your perspective the main events that have influenced your path in the activation of the space?
Aim to be reached through the coworking space	1. What were your main objectives when you opened the coworking spaces? 2. Which are now the main objectives that you want to reach with the coworking space?
Characteristics/features of the coworking space	1. Who are the coworkers of your space? Which rules characterize your space?
Structure/services and activities of the space	1. Which are the characteristics of your coworking space? 2. Which activities/services do you offer to your coworkers or to other stakeholders?
Processes	1. What and how do people share inside the space? 2. What kind of relationships are promoted? 3. Can you provide some examples of sharing practices that occur inside the space? (gaps between your expectations and representations and the concrete experience of coworkers)
Criticalities, strengths, and future perspective associated to the coworking space	1. Which are the main criticalities and successes that you faced as coworking founder?

RESULTS

The analysis of the interviews permitted identification of different objects around which coworking is constructed and that give rise to four coworking activities. Furthermore, we determined that coworking is interpreted by the managers based on different conceptions of coworking associated with the previously identified activities in different ways.

Four Coworking Activity Systems

The analysis of the needs and the motives around which the object of coworking is constructed and shaped by the founders allows categorization into four different activity systems. Here the systems represent different structures of coworking (including the community, rules, and division of labor). As previously indicated, the activity systems have been identified through selective coding by which for each interview the information provided by the coworking space owners was categorized, by identifying the element provided by the activity system triangle. Below, the different coworking activities are presented. The types have been labeled to summarize the main characteristics of the object and the other components of each activity system.

Activity 1: Infrastructure Coworking

This first type of activity system is represented in Figure 2. The figure shows that the object of the activity is constructed around the need of professionals to find a place, separated from the ones in their private life (e.g., home) and different from public spaces that are not dedicated to professionals, with the primary aim of doing their everyday work. According to the coworking space founders, the outcome of coworking is related to the economic benefit both for the owners and the coworkers. In the first case, the benefit derives from the renting of structures and facilities, and in the second case (for coworkers) the benefit is connected to the fact that coworking space is less expensive than other office space. Accordingly, the coworking activity seems to be constructed around the materiality of the space: the desks and the other facilities (e.g., kitchen and Wi-Fi connection) are considered the most important elements to accomplish their work. In addition, the community of the activity system consists mostly of independent professionals who come from different professional fields and have different expertise and competences. The rules are mostly implicit and consist of basic guidelines, established by the founder(s), that govern cohabitation inside the space. The division of labor follows the object: the founder recognizes her/himself as the owner and responsible for the economic and structural functioning of the space, while people inside the space feel responsible for their own work.

Activity 2: Relational Coworking

This type of coworking is depicted in Figure 3 where the object is constructed around interactions and relationships. The desired outcome is the promotion of reciprocal learning between professionals inside the space. In other words, the founder(s) are interested in the added value, which is not clearly defined

Objective and desired outcome. The object is constructed around the need of professionals to accomplish their job by using infrastructures, instruments, and tools of work. The founders consider the coworking space a place where independent professionals can find all they need ("*as in a real office*") to perform their work at a competitive price on the market. The space is also an opportunity to avoid isolation: in the interviews the founders said that most of the coworkers before using the coworking space used to work from home and after some time started to feel isolated. Thus, the desired outcome is related to the reduction of costs, both for the founders themselves and for the professionals. The founder(s) have an economic return from the renting of desks and facilities, while for coworkers the space enables them to save money by sharing an office.

> "*In 2009, I bought a very large apartment — too big for my needs. This apartment was definitely just a waste for me considering that I was only at the beginning of my professional career. At that time, I read articles and references on coworking. The idea of providing the rooms that were unused for other people and professionals stems from there. This is also because I know how hard it is to find an office space at a decent price for those who are at the beginning of their careers*" (CW14)

> "*In general, we say that the assessment to open a coworking is positive because I consider it as a good way to cover costs and recover a bit*" (CW3)

Tools and rules. The instruments that characterize this coworking activity system are mostly material tools of work (e.g., infrastructure, desks, rooms, computers, printers) that the founder made available for professionals. Other instruments that characterize coworking are social places such as meeting rooms or a kitchen where people take breaks and have the opportunity to socialize. These spaces are considered important by the founders and are compared to the coffee machines in traditional organizations. Finally, the typical rules are related to the regulation of cohabitation. Examples of rules are guidelines related to opening and closing times, ownership of keys, and respect for privacy.

> "*We provide everything people need for work: writing desks, WiFi connection, and there are also desktop computers for some desks*" (CW3)

> "*We have no particular rules, only that of good manners such as not speaking at an excessively high volume when talking on the phone [. . .] I am the one to have the keys, sometimes there are some that come out later and I leave a copy of the keys with them. But basically it's up to me to open and close it*" (CW24)

Actors and community. The community of the activity is described in terms of the people that work in the space, and consists of the founder(s), usually entrepreneurs of small companies or self-employed individuals who have empty spaces/offices from other businesses to dedicate to coworking, and coworkers, typically freelance workers. Coworkers have diverse professional interests, competencies, and backgrounds; thus, the spaces in this type are horizontal coworking spaces since they are not characterized by a selection of coworkers on the basis of their professional field. The founder in fact is most concerned with economic benefits, and is therefore willing to rent out the desks without any restriction.

> "*We are very open, normally they are all professionals who . . . Now, for example, we have two architects, a professional who works independently in the finance sector, an IT startup with two stations. Over time, there was a lawyer, there have always been IT companies. We had graphics, more or less activities related to the world of creativity or freelancers. From an accountant to a lawyer and a small business. Even now, we have a small startup linked to a larger group*" (CW3)

Division of labor. Professionals inside the space tend to work independently in the same office. The interactions based on work or the activation of common projects are not so frequent and are a possible consequence of the informal interactions. The coworking founder(s) see social interactions as beneficial to the work environment and climate and conducive to the creation of business opportunities. However, they do not feel themselves responsible for making connections between people inside and outside the space: social relations do not have to be guided or promoted, since they occur automatically thanks to the physical proximity of professionals who share a space. However, they do feel responsible for the functioning and maintenance of the space and infrastructures.

> "*For sure a positive aspect is also the social dimension, like the possibility to find friends [. . .] this occurs because obviously everything is in the same place, comparisons and exchanges of ideas regarding the work are also inevitable*" (CW7)

FIGURE 2
Infrastructure coworking.

Objective and desired outcome. The object is social interactions that can be activated among coworkers inside the space. The desired outcome, according to the founders, is the promotion of reciprocal learning: The space is where coworkers have the opportunity to interact and learn from each other. These interactions are not a natural consequence of physical proximity (as in the case of the activity system previously described), but they have to be oriented and facilitated by the founders and supported by all the members inside the space.

> *"My idea was to create a space where sharing can be easily organized. In the sense that my idea was to create events where it was possible for coworkers to exchange information as part of their work, but not only that [. . .] I wanted a place where people could create synergies in a simple way"* (CW20)

> *"The greatest stimulus that all of us have is to be influenced by each other [. . .] The greatest satisfaction is that I have had the opportunity to learn about work that I didn't even know existed [. . .] It has really opened my mind to new worlds"* (CW4)

Tools and rules. Also in this case the space is usually equipped with desks, computers, a printer, and a WiFi connection. However, more attention is paid to the disposition of the working facilities, with open space offices and common areas, such as lounges or lunchrooms. The rules are focused on behavioral tips and suggestions to support relationships (e.g., "*be open and collaborative with the other people in the space*"). Another instrument adopted is the social events held inside the space. There are two categories of activities: (1) informal events and meetings dedicated to the sharing of personal life and professional experiences, opinions, anecdotes, and so forth; and (2) training events and formative sessions dedicated to the sharing of soft skills and cross professional competences. Both kinds of events are organized and implemented by the coworkers and supported and facilitated by the coworking operators.

> *"The space has folding chairs and tables with wheels. Because it is a coworking space during the day on weekdays until 18.30, while in the evening the tables can be moved. Other chairs and everything else is pulled out and the area becomes a space for small gatherings or meetings"* (CW15)

> *"The writing desk is perhaps the smallest thing. There are two fairly small meeting rooms that can host 5 and 3-4 people which can be closed and then become independent workplaces. Then, there is a very large 100 square meter room where we hold events. It is a very nice hall designed for events and also organized for group work"* (CW4)

Actors and community. The internal community is composed of the coworkers, the coworking founder(s), and often by a coworking operator who serves as community manager/facilitator. The latter promotes and supports interactions among coworkers. Even if the coworking experience is based on the personal and individual initiative of the coworkers, the interactions inside the space are supported by the operators/founders and facilitators of the social interactions through the creation of social events and initiatives where coworkers can informally exchange ideas and experiences. Inside this type of space, it is possible for the interactions among coworkers to lead to a homogenization of the coworkers and their professional interests. Often the community is also composed of other coworking spaces in the territory.

> *"My original idea was to fill the space with people, so much so that at the beginning we used the 'event room' space and we started building a community around these events [. . .] the coworkers are involved in the organization of the events"* (CW4)

> *"I consider myself a facilitator of the space: I only handle the traffic matching and bringing people together and making them work together. However, the initiative is absolutely personal"* (CW20)

Division of labor. Even if professionals have their own job and inside the space tend to perform their everyday work independently, coworking is characterized by moments and events where they share knowledge, experiences, competences, and ideas. The founder(s) are responsible for the functioning of the space and for establishing the rules and instilling a specific culture, climate, and approach inside the space. At the same time coworkers have a role in organizing activities and events.

> *"I believe that the creation of relationships and networks within the space is not something that happens by itself. I think it's a specific task of those who manage the space to organize different events that allow everyone to know each other"* (CW23)

FIGURE 3
Relational coworking.

but associated with learning and which can derive from the interactions. The community is composed mostly of freelance workers, but sometimes also by small businesses and startups. In this case the community is heterogeneous concerning the focus of work. This heterogeneity is a source of reciprocal learning: Coworkers can learn more from each other if they have different experiences and jobs. In terms of instruments and tools, particular attention is paid to the use of open space and open areas: Besides the desks and other basic instruments of work, the space is equipped with places where people can interact. The space is considered a site of social events and rituals, organized by the coworking founder(s) and sometimes by the coworkers. The rules reflect the nature of the object and are simple guidelines about how to behave inside the space. They are intended to support and facilitate interactions.

Activity 3: Network Coworking

The third activity system (depicted in Figure 4) is characterized by a focus on the development of the professional network of coworkers in order to develop and innovate a specific field of work. The community is composed of people, and in particular by startups and firms that work in the same field (the spaces inside this type are vertical coworking spaces), but also by organizations, firms, and subjects outside the space that are involved in the field/focus of the space. The coworking space is often a large space (more than 150 m^2) and is considered a nexus of professional connections and business opportunities, by gathering individuals and collective subjects. The space becomes a brand with a good reputation and it creates partnerships with organizations that are important stakeholders in the field of work. The activities focus on business and its development: workshops, business presentations, pitches, training sessions. Often these spaces have a team of coworking operators with different roles.

Activity 4: Welfare Coworking

The object of the activity is a cultural or social issue that affects society or the territory in which the space is located (as shown in Figure 5). The aim is to create conditions to resolve the problem at stake. The instruments are social projects implemented by the management team or the coworkers inside the space. The space is a gathering place for people who are involved at different levels in the issue, or because they are directly facing the problem or because they are interested in solving it. In this sense, the subjects involved in the activity are the coworkers inside the space, the coworking operator(s), but also individuals and organizations outside the space that participate in the projects. In this case, the space is often part of a not-for-profit association or social enterprise. Thus, the differences and boundaries between coworkers and coworking operators/founders are flexible, since the operator(s) consider themselves coworkers, and coworkers often become members/employees/volunteers of the association/social enterprise.

DISCUSSION: COWORKING AND SHARING THICKNESS

Through the analysis of the interviews it has been possible to understand that the different coworking activities previously described are characterized by what we have defined as different sharing thicknesses. The concept of thickness is defined on the basis of three main aspects. These are related to the locus of sharing, the motives of sharing, and the extent of sharing.

TPM

Objective and desired outcome. The object of this activity is a network that professionals can create with other subjects and organizations both inside and outside the coworking space. The idea at the basis of coworking is related to the promotion and development of the work opportunities of the coworkers, by facilitating useful and strategic contacts and professional collaborations. The desired outcome for the coworking founder(s) is to contribute to the development of a specific field of work (e.g., digital innovation or social entrepreneurship). The innovation of a specific field of work lies with the development of individuals/organizations, professional paths, and businesses. The network is supported inside and outside the space.

> *"What we try to do is to provide the students all possible contacts in order to develop their business and idea. We create external partnerships with different organizations and create networks with the people that are within the space"* (CW8)

> *"We give people the space, the community and the network to create and develop their work within a specific professional field [. . .] We also help companies and organizations develop their talents in the digital field"* (CW10)

Tools and rules. Tools are usually instruments connected to the work of the professionals inside the space: 3D printers for designers and architects, studios for musicians and photographers. Other important tools adopted inside the space are online instruments (e.g., social networks, chats, newsletter) created for the internal community and to activate the internal networking among coworkers. Inside these coworking spaces in fact the coworking operators are involved in the organization. Special attention is paid to the design and disposition of the space in order to reflect the nature and spirit of the specific field of work. In terms of the rules, explicit rules regulate the use of the space, while implicit rules cover relationships with other coworkers and the way people have to approach work in order to innovate and develop.

> *"We have a meeting room and a very large lounge with a projection screen because one of our special features is that of being a record and video production label. We have the screening room with the green background, for example. And we provide this both to coworkers, the band and outside groups. In this room, you can take pictures that are transferred and placed on the new backgrounds using the computer graphics that we have"* (CW11)

Actors and community. The managers are usually organized into a team of operators with different roles. The complexity of the team usually depends on the size of the space. The coworkers are people who work for different organizations, but are in the same field (e.g., digital work, architecture, design, university). Most of the coworkers are teams of small firms or startups who want to develop their business by working in an environment that provides useful contacts and incentives to grow. In addition, the community is composed of other organizations that represent interesting and important players in the field of work.

> *"We are professionals and small businesses in the creative and digital sector. As suggested by our name, in fact, we wanted to create an environment that was a reference point for the fanatics of the digital world [. . .] we thought of combining the digital and creative sector because we thought that together they can produce great things, projects and synergies"* (CW8)

Division of labor. The structure of these spaces is usually more complex than the previous two described activity systems. The most developed spaces are usually organized in franchise network organizations. The focus on a specific field of work and the development of some spaces in franchise networks makes the space into a brand (that guarantees the quality of networks) for professionals and organizations that work in the field. In these spaces the operator(s) have an important role in organizing and implementing activities to promote and facilitate relationships among coworkers but also between coworkers and outside organizations.

> *"We want to make it clear that in this place we can trigger a process of change [. . .] we are responsible for everything from the management of the functioning of the space, to the organization of the events, to the construction of internal community, etc."* (CW8)

FIGURE 4
Network coworking.

Objective and desired outcome. In this case, the objective of the activity is a cultural or social issue or problem that affects society or local communities. The issues that coworking addresses are aspects that, in the opinion of the founder(s), the government or the public administration, lack in managing. Examples are reintegration of people in the labor market; enhancement of the local culture and environment; or regeneration of urban areas. In this case, the coworking space is a place where it is possible to group people who are involved in the issues in different ways.

> *"The change that we want to bring is a cultural change. Often we talk about the digital divide, instead we believe that there is really a cultural divide. Here, we live in an area where people work in a black market. And our goal is just to generate new forms of economy, new jobs with a design phase and growth because a new business does not draw business suddenly"* (CW2)

Tools and rules. The instruments are represented by the social projects that are usually planned and implemented by the coworking operators and in which the coworkers participate. The explicit and implicit rules that characterize the space concern how to use the space, the relationship with coworkers, and especially the behavioral dispositions to approach the issue under investigation. In this case, the space is an instrument to gather people around a problem.

> *"We must guide and inspire change. The physical space has, therefore, a number of features that can be imperceptible to a person who comes here, but overall we think that change has to be also generated by material characteristics of the space that surrounds us [. . .]. For example, the colored doors of the rooms where we work are something that in our opinion boost people to think differently"* (CW22)

Actors and community. The community here is composed of the founder(s) and operators (usually members of the association/enterprise with which the space is associated) and people who use the coworking space (coworkers), and the services and projects implemented. Some of them are also involved in the planning and implementation of projects and events. In addition, the community consists of external actors (people who do not work in the space, but participate in the projects and events) in addition to the public or private institutions that take part in the planning and/or funding of the projects.

> *"The not for profit association manages the coworking space through its members: the governing board, and the president [. . .] our coworkers are usually members of the association and some of them actively participate in the implementation of our projects"* (CW21)

Division of labor. The coworking space is usually held by other associations/organizations that implement projects and initiatives related to a specific social issue. The founder(s) of the space, in addition to the coworking operators, are also members of the association/organizations, with various roles similar to those in network coworking (e.g., projects coordinator, fundraiser, community manager). There are few barriers between coworkers and coworking operator(s). However, the latter perceive themselves as more responsible and active in implementing the projects and events.

> *"We have C. working on project y, and then we have A. whose main task is handling the community of coworkers and promoting their relationships. R. is a little inspiration of space, 99% of ideas and things we do here come from it. I manage projects and external relations. R. is also the 'face' of our space and handles the communication"* (CW16)

FIGURE 5
Welfare coworking.

The Locus of Sharing

The first dimension that defines the thickness of sharing in coworking is related to the *locus of sharing*, which refers to the fact that sharing can be interpreted more as a structural aspect or a situated and processual one. This means that in the first case sharing can be constructed and oriented on the basis of the interpretations that the managers or founders have about the needs of the people who use the coworking space. In this sense, sharing is predefined and strongly oriented, as explained by one of the founders:

> *"Our role is to facilitate sharing, so what's nice is getting to know people well; this is important*

to us. So, maybe, I'll give you an example: when a new coworker arrives, initially you should say, 'Okay, this person here is a printer and he likes tennis; F. over there likes tennis,' so I tell him."

On the contrary, in other situations, sharing can be situated and constantly defined and redefined on the emergent needs of the subjects involved in the coworking activities. In this sense, what is shared and how it is shared is constantly defined, redefined, and negotiated by the various subjects involved in the coworking activity, who are characterized by different needs and desires:

"Every time that a new person enters the coworking space, we do an interview with the person in order to ask her/him which are her/his specific needs and the reasons why he/she has decided to use the space. In this way we can suggest who are the best people to talk with or the projects or programs they can be involved in."

The Motives of Sharing

The thickness of sharing is defined by a second dimension that refers to the motives that are the basis of sharing and reflect the type of commitment with which people are involved in sharing. Sharing in fact can assume different types of configurations and meanings if they are guided by different types and levels of motives. In this context, the first configuration that emerges from the interviews is the case in which the subjects who share are actually pursuing different individual objectives. In this sense, people share something while they are doing different activities and working separately. As explained by one founder in the interview, these motives usually orient the sharing of material factors that are the coworking space itself, the desk, computers, WiFi, and so forth, and the primary interests of the people involved are those of doing their everyday work:

"In my space, people share the same room, the same desk [. . .] the aim is that people can share the space and be concentrated on their own work and task, in order to accomplish the everyday work."

The second configuration is related to the situations in which two or more subjects temporarily share some contents to accomplish a temporary joint objective. With respect to the previously described configuration, in this case what people usually share is represented by immaterial dimensions, in particular knowledge and competences, and is oriented to the realization of a working project or a joint activity in general in order to respond to different but convergent needs. As stated by another founder:

"The idea is also that of developing some projects together or to share projects between coworkers. For example, with firm X we are developing some digital projects [. . .] with coworking we would like to share projects that can give work to coworkers."

Finally, a third configuration emerges. It refers to the situations in which sharing is not only considered an action in which people are temporarily involved, but the first meaning and essence of the coworking activity. In this sense, sharing is not only the means but also the outcome of coworking. In this case the founder speaks about the creation of a community that is constructed and based on the value of sharing:

"Sharing is not just the means for us but the purpose as well. First of all, with regard to the construction of the processes. It means that people get together, know each other, reason, and sort out what it means for them to collaborate. Later, based on that, you also get together to define what to work and take action on."

The Extent of Sharing

The third dimension that contributes to defining the thickness of sharing is what we have called the *extent of sharing*, which refers to the perimeter within which sharing is conceived and expressed.

Sharing, in fact, in some cases regards and involves two or more people who work inside the coworking space and is oriented to create added value for the community inside the space. This conception of sharing reflects the idea that the coworking space is the main expression and at the same time the result of the coworking activity. Sharing is conceived as the answer to the needs (pre-constructed or co-constructed) of the managers and the coworkers: Sharing is oriented to the individual needs of the people who act inside the space. As one coworking founder commented in the interview:

> *"We understand that people that are inside the coworking space, have specific needs usually con-nected to their work. Coworking should help them to find answers to these needs by sharing expe-riences, ideas and so on in the same space."*

It is possible to identify other situations in which sharing transcends the boundaries of the space and tends to involve collective subjects outside the space (e.g., organizations, institutions, citizens, etc.). In this case, the coworking activity is not interpreted as to be realized only through the use of the space, but can extend beyond the physical space. Thus, the needs on which sharing is constructed are those of a community that includes both the individuals who use the space but also other individuals or organizations outside the space but who are involved in the coworking activity. This is the case described by another founder interviewed:

> *"Our idea is to involve different organizations outside the space and try to understand shared (with coworkers inside the space) problems, issues, and questions. The intent is to help people inside the space and organizations to share ideas, knowledge, competences, projects."*

The concept of sharing thickness permits a better understanding of the complexity of the coworking activities and in particular the processes on which they are based. Coworking in fact cannot be simply described with a distinction, as proposed by Belk (2014a), between coworking activities that are based on true sharing (based on feelings of solidarity that generate companionship and create trust and bonding) and those based on pseudo-sharing (based on business relationships with no sense of mutual ownership; based on utilitarian reasons of belonging; and out of the realm of the social and into the realm of business). The thickness of sharing in fact sheds light on the complexity of the processes that characterize coworking. By not being simply true or pseudo, sharing is associated with coworking in plural and articulated ways.

IMPLICATIONS FOR COWORKING ACTIVITIES

Coworking can be conceived of as a complex phenomenon characterized by multiple hybrid activities with different configurations of structures and processes. Particularly, what emerged is a complex phenomenon that is characterized by different degrees of sharing. Table 3 shows an articulated representation of the implications which each configuration of coworking entails for people involved in that specific context. This complexity is explained with the identification of four main types of coworking activities that are constructed around different interpretations of the coworking object and of sharing at the basis of the coworking activity itself.

Infrastructure coworking is constructed around the need to produce economic benefit both for the founder of the space and the coworkers. The attention is oriented inside the space, with the response to the in-

dividual needs of the professionals who work inside the space. Thus, sharing is oriented by individual objectives that result in a working environment where the professionals work on separate tasks but in the same place.

TABLE 3
Space, activities, and sharing

Spaces	Coworking activities	Sharing thickness
Infrastructure coworking (CW1, CW3, CW6, CW7, CW12, CW19, CW24)	Object: infrastructure and facilities Outcome: economic benefit, reduction of costs Community: freelance workers Division of labor: individual separated work, owner responsible of the space functioning Rules: implicit norms of cohabitation Instruments: basic instruments of work	Locus: predefined Motives: individual separated objectives Extent: inward (inside the space)
Relational coworking (CW4, CW5, CW9, CW14, CW15, CW20, CW23)	Object: social interactions Outcome: promotion of reciprocal learning Community: freelance workers Division of labor: owner and coworkers responsible for the promotion of social interactions Rules: implicit and explicit norms of cohabitation Instruments: instruments of work, shared areas, informal events	Locus: co-constructed Motives: temporarily shared objectives Extent: inward (inside the space)
Network coworking (CW8, CW10, CW13, CW17)	Object: networking Outcome: development/innovation of business Community: startups, organizations (inside and outside the space) Division of labor: management team with roles Rules: explicit rules of cohabitation, use of the space, organization of events Instruments: equipped rooms, business focused events, internal social networks	Locus: predefined Motives: individual separated objectives Extent: outward (inside and outside the space)
Welfare coworking (CW2, CW18, CW21, CW22)	Object: cultural/social issue Outcome: resolution/answer to the issue Community: specific target of people/professionals in relation to the issue, organizations/institutions outside the space Division of labor: flexible boundaries between the management team and coworkers Rules: explicit rules of cohabitation, use of the space, organization of projects Instruments: social projects	Locus: co-constructed Motives: sharing as constitutive to coworking Extent: outward (inside and outside the space)

Relational coworking is an activity that has the primary aim of creating reciprocal learning among the professionals inside the space. The desired outcome of this activity is pursued through an interpretation of sharing as a process co-constructed by all the subjects involved in the activity and on the basis of situated and specific needs. The activity in this case is based on the creation of temporarily shared experiences (e.g., projects, training, parties, . . .).

Network coworking is primarily oriented to the improvement of businesses through the activation of networks between coworkers inside the space and the organizations in the territory. The activity is highly structured for what concern the implemented rules, roles, and tasks. Sharing is strongly influenced and oriented by the founder and the management team who, implement settings specifically dedicated to sharing of competences and knowledge, to respond to the different and separated business objectives of the professionals.

Welfare coworking has a social aim that consists in the resolution or management of cultural and social problems. In order to achieve this outcome the founders of the spaces characterized by the welfare activity interpret sharing as a process that is constantly constructed, reconstructed, and negotiated with the subjects involved, who are facing at different levels and in different ways the cultural issues at stake.

The classification provided shows that the coworking activities can be based on two main tensions (Figure 6). The first one is between an orientation to individual versus a collective one, while the second tension is between an inward versus outward orientation. This means that some activities (welfare coworking and relational coworking) seem to be more oriented and can be positioned in what Belk (2009; 2013) defines as the social realm, with an orientation to solidarity, companionship, bonding, and reciprocity; while other activity systems can be positioned in the profit/business realm, as they are characterized by utilitarian reasons aimed at a more individualistic business development and reduction of costs (infrastructure coworking and network coworking). In this sense, some activity systems aim at constructing mutual ownership and sense of community, while others aim at dividing or exchanging something between strangers who are in the same space without providing a sense of mutuality and community. In the same line, some coworking activities present a more collective orientation, by involving plural subjects both inside and outside the space (welfare coworking and network coworking), while other activities focus more on answering the needs of the individuals inside the coworking space (infrastructure coworking and relational coworking). The various coworking activities let emerge different focuses on aspects of work and the relationships between people and work. In particular the activities that are individual and inward oriented (infrastructure coworking) seem to give value to material aspects of work (provision of instruments, spaces, tools, . . .) for enhancing the individual performance and effectiveness and the improvement of individuals profit and clients. The activities based on individual and outward orientation (network coworking) are characterized by the focus on the improvement of the entrepreneurial competences of the people involved in particular by fostering the opportunities for training and network (Scaratti, Ivaldi, & Frassi, 2017). The relational coworking activity, that is oriented inward and collectively, could have effects on the exploration and exploitation of knowledge thanks to the attention that the founders put on the relational dimensions and the promotion of trust among coworkers. Finally, the welfare coworking with an outward and collective orientation could promote an interpretation of work that connects the individual needs with a broader vision that involves also the citizens. This interpretation can provide a vision of work as socially constructed where the criticalities related to work that affect some individuals are related, in terms of causes and effects, with society.

CONCLUSION

Coworking is a new phenomenon with social and political connotations (the coworking movement) with the intent to support independent, self-employed, and freelance workers in improving their working conditions by giving them back a social and organizational structure (e.g., Jones et al., 2009).
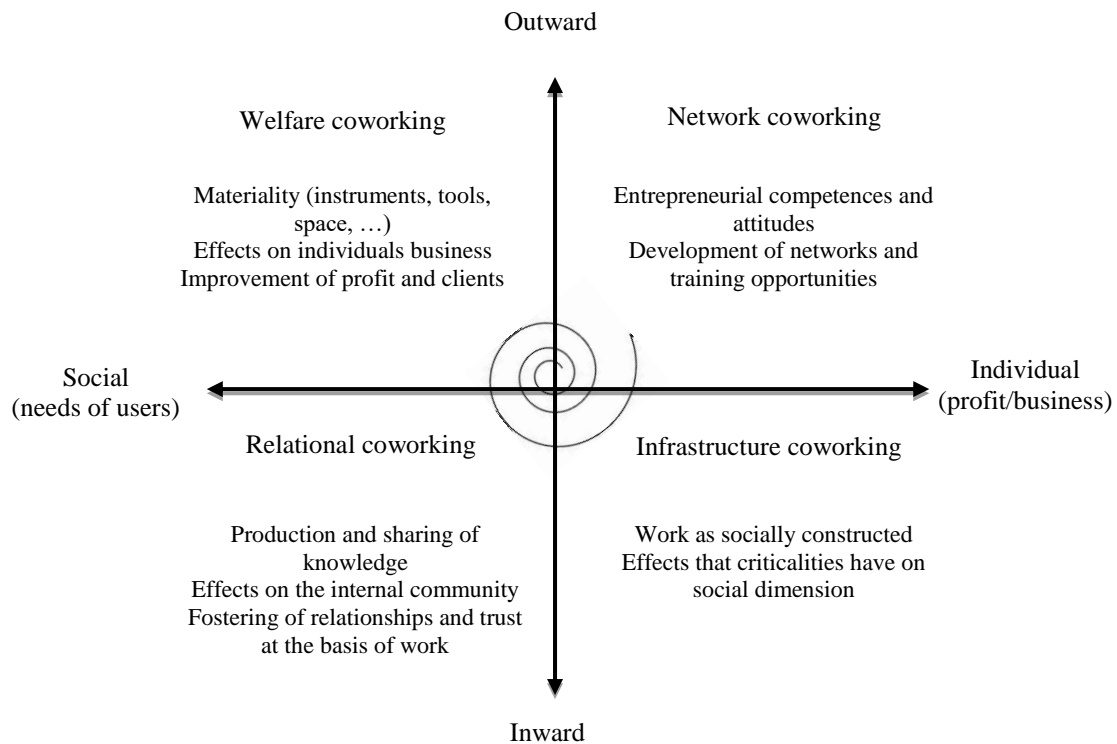
FIGURE 6
Tensions related to coworking activity.

Indeed, over the years, coworking has expanded through the proliferation of coworking spaces all over the world. This exponential expansion brought a differentiation of coworking that has become a complex, difficult to define phenomenon. In fact, under the label coworking it is possible to find coworking spaces that have different and sometimes opposite objectives, structures, and processes. Until now, in the literature coworking has been classified mostly on the basis of structural elements. The most widespread classifications of Spinuzzi (2012), Gandini (2015), Capdevila (2013), Ross and Ressia (2015) pertain to the distinction between vertical (or homogeneous) and generalistic (or heterogeneous) coworking spaces. Vertical coworking refers to spaces that are focused on a specific domain of work and the users of which have similar professional experiences. Generalistic coworking refers to spaces intended for people who come from various professional backgrounds. In this case the use of the space is not limited to a specific target, and the result is a multidisciplinary working environment. Other classifications are constructed on the basis of the business models, the type of access and affordances, and the target of the coworking spaces (Kojo & Nenonen, 2016) as well as on the interests that are at the basis of the collaborations that are activated inside the space (Capdevila, 2014; Spinuzzi, 2012). All these classifications do not provide a clear understanding of coworking, since they do not reflect the complexity of the structure and processes on which coworking is constructed. Our hypothesis is that the configuration of the coworking activity, which presents a strong interrelation between structure and processes, is oriented by the interpretations that the founders give to the coworking object and the connected understanding of sharing. Thus different interpretations of the coworking object and sharing give rise to plural coworking activities that are different in their principal elements

(community, rules, roles, division of labor, tools) and that contribute to shaping different coworking experiences for the subjects involved in the activity.

Inside this framework, the research questions that have guided the paper are: what are the concrete manifestations of coworking and in which way can sharing be associated to the phenomenon?

The empirical study was conducted by involving 24 coworking founders in Italy and permitted us to define a classification of coworking. More specifically, we presented a typology of four different types of coworking activities. The multiple activities described allow to understand that coworking cannot be considered a "buzzword" (Gandini, 2015) or a "trendy word" (Moriset, 2013), but is a concrete activity that is spreading in different forms and with different meanings. At the same time, coworking can no longer be considered as a uniform phenomenon characterized by bottom-up initiatives (Jakonen et al., 2017; Merkel, 2015), dedicated and oriented to promote change in the labor market (Johns & Gratton, 2013; Leclercq-Vandelannoitte & Isaac, 2016) and economic and social conditions for a particular target group of workers (independent and freelance workers). What emerges from the present study is that different new organizational configurations that go under the name of coworking have been growing and diffusing. The configurations emerged as plural and collective activities with different objects constructed around plural and hybrid interpretations of sharing. Coworking objects can be constructed around: the reduction of costs and provision of organizational structure to freelance workers, the identification of solutions to social or cultural problems, the innovation and development of businesses, and the promotion of reciprocal learning. Focusing on a specific object also means shaping and orienting diverse meanings associated with sharing, which is the main process around which coworking takes form.

In relation to the second knowledge question, starting from the perspective presented by Belk (2007; 2009), about the distinction between true sharing and pseudo sharing, the empirical analysis we discussed highlights that coworking cannot be associated with a dualistic interpretation of the process. In other words, the coworking activities identified cannot be reduced on one hand to individualistic, utilitarian, profit-based values or, on the other hand, to communal, collaborative, and reciprocity-based values. Coworking is always associated with sharing, but different interpretations of sharing support different kinds of activities. What emerged from the interviews is that the different objects of coworking are interrelated to diverse thicknesses of sharing. A high thickness of sharing means that it is interpreted as a constitutive element of coworking, a process that is constantly co-constructed, negotiated, and redefined by all the subjects involved in the coworking activity and with an outward orientation that involves other activities. A low thickness describes sharing as a predefined and strongly oriented (by the coworking founder) practice that is based on individually separated objectives of the subjects and with an inward orientation (sharing is realized among the people inside the coworking space). The empirical analysis shows that the diverse types of activities are not associated with pure interpretation of sharing (high or low, true or false) but with hybrid thicknesses of sharing. The typology presented in the paper can support critical comparisons and understanding across the different manifestations of coworking (different coworking sites), as well as a basis for analyzing the coworking experience from the perspective of the subjects involved (coworkers and other stakeholders) and the contradictions within specific coworking sites.

The typology shows that coworking is a label that refers not to a unified phenomenon but an articulated one and the logics that are at the basis of the coworking activities in some cases are the reproduction of already existent work practices and processes and do not correspond to the introduction of new paradigms. Thus, the present study improves the existent literature about coworking that generally describes coworking as an innovative interpretation of work (Merkel, 2015), based on collaborative activities (Spinuzzi, 2012), and provides a clearer understanding of the phenomenon. The study presents also some limi-

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tations, related to the extension of the context under exploration and to the choice to involve only founders and owners. A more ethnographic-oriented approach is needed in order to detect the situated activity the coworkers play inside the different typologies of coworking spaces,

Eventually, the findings provide relevant elements for understanding the differences of the managerial perspectives related to the coworking phenomenon and the connected possible effects, soliciting suggestions for further researches. In this perspective, future quantitative studies, both cross-sectional and longitudinal, could be aimed at identifying factors that can foster or prevent coworking activities, as well as their consequences, in terms of workers' well-being and performance (Benevene et al., 2018; Britt & Dawson, 2005; Falco et al., 2013; Girardi, et al., 2015; Lozza, Libreri, & Bosio, 2013). To reduce possible biases, these quantitative studies could investigate the hypothesized relationships using different measurement methods (Conway & Lance, 2010; Falco, Dal Corso, Girardi, De Carlo, & Comar, 2018; Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003).

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