

Research Group on Collaborative Spaces (RGCS)

RGCS Symposium 2026

March 5th - 6th, 2026

Technische Universität Berlin, Germany

CALL FOR PAPERS

‘Bringing Work Back In’: Coworking as Practices, Atmospheres, and Organizational Transformation

The upcoming RGCS Symposium is organized by the Chair of Urban and Regional Economics at the Institute for Urban and Regional Planning (ISR) at Technische Universität Berlin and the project ZETT – Zentrum Digitale Transformation Thüringen (Centre for Digital Transformation Thuringia) in Jena.

Collaborative spaces (CS)—such as incubators, makerspaces, and coworking spaces—have emerged as emblematic infrastructures of flexible, digital and post-industrial work. So far, the literature has emphasized, for example, coworking spaces as sites where self-employment, remote work, entrepreneurship, and creative labor intersect in novel social and spatial forms. However, despite a growing body of empirical research, coworking research continues to privilege *spaces* over *work*, *community* over *labour*, and *innovation* over *inequality*. This call proposes a shift in emphasis: to place work—its diverse practices, conditions, and contradictions—at the center of coworking research.

Taking inspiration from Barley and Kunda's (2001) call to “bring work back in” to organizational analysis, we ask: What emerges when the work practices are placed at the center of coworking research? What might collaborative spaces reveal about the broader reconfiguration of labor in digitalized, post-industrial, and increasingly precarious economies?

We invite contributions that examine coworking not merely as a spatial form but as an assemblage of practices, relations, technologies, and affects—a site where transformations of labour and capitalism are negotiated, reproduced, and contested. In this framing, coworking becomes a prism through which to analyse shifting geographies, subjectivities, and economies of work.

We invite papers engaging with (but not limited to) the following themes:

1. Work in Coworking

- Labour processes, everyday rhythms, and modes of organising work in coworking (Berdicchia et al., 2024; Yacoub & Haeffliger, 2021)
- Platformisation, datafication, and AI reshaping coworking experiences and practices
- Subjectivities and labour practices across diverse coworking participants (e.g., gig workers, freelancers, digital nomads, entrepreneurs, salaried employees)
- Ambiguities and contradictions of coworking: open/exclusive, emancipatory/exploitative, collaborative/competitive, meaningful vs. passionate work; autonomy vs. obligation; freedom vs. precarity
- Identity work and subject formation in flexible and insecure work regimes (Bacevice & Spreitzer, 2022; Bandinelli, 2020; Garrett et al., 2017; Grazian, 2020; Hong, 2022)
- Digital and platform-mediated work in coworking (Oechslen et al., 2025; Richardson, 2021)
- The role of non-work activities (e.g. wellness, leisure) in shaping work practices and experiences in coworking (Gruen & Bardhi, 2025)
- Inequalities and intersectional inequalities in and through coworking (Fast, 2024; Johns et al., 2024; Lorne, 2020; Sargent et al., 2021)
- Coworking as a site of emancipation (Avdikos & Pettas, 2021; de Peuter et al., 2017; Merkel et al., 2023; Vidaillet & Bousalham, 2020)

2. Atmospheres, Affects, and Embodied Work

- Phenomenology of coworking (Dey et al., 2025)
- Atmospheres (Bernhardt, 2023) and affective assemblages (Jakonen et al., 2017) that sustain or discipline working selves in coworking
- Aesthetic labour in space design and maintenance

3. Reproductive, Relational, and Care Work

- The (often gendered, exhausting and invisible) labour of hosting, curating, and sustaining communities in coworking (Bernhardt, 2023; Papageorgiou & Michailidou, 2023, (Bernhardt, 2023; Crovara, 2023; Papageorgiou & Michailidou, 2023)
- Coworking through the lens of care, maintenance, and articulation work (Gatsinos, 2025; Merkel, 2023; Nash et al., 2021)
- The management of affect, identity, and sociality (Waters-Lynch & Duff, 2019)

4. Coworking Beyond the Space

- Coworking as a relational and mobile organising practice
- Relational geographies of digital labour and hybrid work practices
- Comparative studies (urban/rural, Global North/South)
- Coworking in mobile, nomadic or hybrid work regimes
- Coworking's role in urban regeneration, gentrification, and entrepreneurial city strategies

5. Political Economy of Coworking

- Political and economic conditions of coworking
- The future of coworking under AI
- Coworking as cultural political economy: how are concepts such as “community”, “creativity”, and “independence” mobilised within capitalist logics (Greenfield et al., 2024)

Our goal is to assemble a conversation that is:

- **Empirically grounded**, attentive to situated practices and contexts
- **Theoretically diverse**, embracing multi-paradigmatic approaches across sociology, geography, organization studies, and political economy
- **Critically engaged**, foregrounding inequalities, exclusions, and power relations shaping coworking and the future of work

We are especially interested in interdisciplinary approaches that draw from sociology, geography, organizational studies, feminist theory, critical management studies, and beyond. We encourage submissions that push methodological boundaries and reflect diverse voices and contexts. And we welcome contributions grounded in decolonial, Indigenous, and pluriversal epistemologies that question dominant narratives of innovation, flexibility, and community. These perspectives help illuminate how coworking intersects with broader dynamics of coloniality, racial capitalism, and epistemic injustice, and can offer alternative ways of knowing and organizing labor, space, and community beyond Eurocentric paradigms.

Submissions will be considered for a special issue to be published in the Journal of Openness, Commons & Organizing (JOCO): <https://rgcs-owee.org/joco/>.

1. Submission process and organization

You are invited to submit **extended abstracts** (1000 words, about 3 pages), via [THIS FORM](#) by **November 23th, 2025**. (To access the form, you need to have a Google account. Should you not have one, please email your extended abstract to rgcs.berlin@gmail.com).

Notification of acceptance or rejection will be sent by **December 5th, 2025**.

Registration for presenters and auditors (free of charge): **January 30th, 2026**, Link for registration will be shared on December 5th, 2025, on RGCS website

As an international association, inclusivity is a core value of the RGCS community. We do offer the option of online attendance and presentations for those unable to travel, but we warmly encourage in-person participation wherever possible, as we believe it enriches the shared experience.

We are looking forward to your submission and/or registration for the Symposium!

If you have questions or comments, please contact us at: rgcs.berlin@gmail.com

2. Dates and Venue

The RGCS 2025 Symposium will take place in Berlin, Germany.

The programme includes two conference days on March 5 and 6, 2026, followed by a third day (March 7, 2026) dedicated to exploring the city through the OWEE method (Open Walked Event-Based Experimentations).

Main venue: **Technische Universität Berlin, Institute for Urban and Regional Planning (Berlin City-West, Ernst-Reuter-Platz)**

3. RGCS in a nutshell

The Research Group on Collaborative Spaces (RGCS) is both an alternative learned society, a think tank and an immaterial maker space about and for new work practices. Collaborative communities and collaborative movements (coworkers, makers, hackers, DIY) are both a research object and a lever to transform work practices.

Since late 2016, the network co-produces a new research method OWEE ([Open Walked Event-Based Experimentations](#)) aiming at transforming jointly academic and entrepreneurial work practices. This method aims at becoming a commons for academics and entrepreneurs involved in it (e.g. with a sharing of the symbolic capital of impact and citations).

Since 2025 we are focusing on four Research perspectives:

- The time-space of new ways of working & organizing

- Sustainability and new ways of working
- Collaboration and Leadership from the Human-Machine Interface
- Democratic organizing and new ways of working

For more details about RGCS: <http://rgcs-owee.org>

4. Local organizing committee

- **Janet Merkel** (Institute for Urban and Regional Planning (ISR), TU Berlin)
- **Alexandra Bernhardt** (ZeTT - Centre Digital Transformation Thuringia, Department of Sociology of Work and Economic Sociology, Institute of Sociology at Friedrich Schiller University Jena)

5. Scientific Committee

Adele Gruen (Paris Dauphine-PSL),
 Albane Grandazzi (Grenoble Ecole de Management),
 Alessandra Migliore (Politecnico di Milano),
 Alexandra Bernhardt (Friedrich Schiller University Jena),
 Amadou Lô (Toulouse Business School),
 Anna Glaser (ESCP Business School),
 Camille Pfeffer (IFROSS, Jean Moulin Lyon 3 University)
 David Vallat (Sciences-Po Lyon)
 Emmanuel Costa (Bloom Consulting)
 Federica Maria Rossi (Politecnico di Milano)
 François-Xavier de Vaujany (UPD),
 Fiza Brakel-Ahmed (Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam)
 Gislene Feiten Haubrich (Stockholm School of Economics),
 Janet Merkel (TU Berlin)
 Michaël Laviolette (Toulouse Business School),
 Mickael Peiro (IUT Paul Sabatier),
 Olivier Irrmann (Junia Lille)
 Sabine Carton (Université Grenoble Alpes),
 Stefan Haefliger (Stockholm School of Economics & Bayes Business School)

6. Contacts

Email: rgcs.berlin@gmail.com

RGCS contacts:

Website: <http://rgcs-owee.org/>

LinkedIn: [Research Group on Collaborative Spaces \(RGCS\)](#)

Instagram: @rgcs_owee

Bluesky: 16rgcs.bsky.social

7. References

- Avdikos, V., & Pettas, D. (2021). The new topologies of collaborative workspace assemblages between the market and the commons. *Geoforum*, 121, 44-52.
- Bacevice, P. A., & Spreitzer, G. M. (2022). 'It's like, instant respect': Coworking spaces as identity anchoring environments in the new economy. *New Technology, Work and Employment*, 38(1), 59-81.
- Bandinelli, C. (2020). The production of subjectivity in neoliberal culture industries: the case of coworking spaces. *International Journal of Cultural Studies*, 23(1), 3-19.
- Barley, S. R., & Kunda, G. (2001). Bringing work back in. *Organization Science*, 12(1), 76-95.
- Berdicchia, D., Masino, G., & Fortezza, F. (2024). Job crafting as a key ingredient for higher creative performance in coworking spaces. *Management Research Review*, 47(11), 1873-1897.
- Bernhardt, A. (2023). *Coworking Atmospheres. On the Interplay of Curated Spaces and the View of Coworkers as Space-acting Subjects*. Springer.
- Crovara, E. (2023). Working with care: embodying feminist care ethics in regional coworking spaces. *Geoforum*, 140, OnlineFirst.
- de Peuter, G., Cohen, N. S., & Saraco, F. (2017). The ambivalence of coworking: On the politics of an emerging work practice. *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, 20(6), 687-706.
- Dey, P., Lo, A., & Fatien, P. (2025). Collaborative spaces as places-of-entrepreneurship: A phenomenological investigation of entrepreneurs' place-making experiences and practices. *Human Relations*, 78(6), 753-790.
- Fast, K. (2024). Who Has the Right to the Coworking Space? Reframing Platformed Workspaces as Elite Territory in the Geomedia City. *Space and Culture*, 27(1), 48-62.
- Garrett, L. E., Spreitzer, G. M., & Bacevice, P. A. (2017). Co-constructing a sense of community at work: The emergence of community in coworking spaces. *Organization Studies*, 38(6), 821-842.
- Gatsinos, N. (2025). Blurring the lines: precarious lives and social reproduction in labour geography. *Geografiska Annaler: Series B, Human Geography*, 1-20.

- Grazian, D. (2020). Thank God it's Monday: Manhattan coworking spaces in the new economy. *Theory and Society*, 45, 991–1019.
- Greenfield, C., Ch'ng, H.-Y., Cooper, V., Arnoldi, E., & Bosua, R. (2024). The politics of transforming social relations of work: making sense of a coworking hub in an outer-urban region. *Culture and Organization*, 30(6), 624-641.
- Gruen, A., & Bardhi, F. (2025). Consumptive Work in Coworking: Using Consumption Strategically for Work. *Journal of Consumer Research*
- Hong, R. (2022). *Passionate Work: Endurance after the Good Life*. Duke University Press.
- Jakonen, M., Kivinen, N., Salovaara, P., & Hirkman, P. (2017). Towards an Economy of Encounters? A critical study of affectual assemblages in coworking. *Scandinavian Journal of Management*, 33(4), 235-242.
- Johns, J., Yates, E., Charnock, G., Pitts, F. H., Bozkurt, Ö., & Ozdemir Kaya, D. D. (2024). Coworking spaces and workplaces of the future: Critical perspectives on community, context and change. *European Management Review*, n/a(n/a)
- Lorne, C. (2020). The limits to openness: Co-working, design and social innovation in the neoliberal city. *Environment and Planning A: Economy and Space*, 52(45), 747-765.
- Merkel, J. (2023). Coworking spaces as social infrastructures of care. In J. Merkel, D. Pettas, & V. Avdikos (Eds.), *Coworking Spaces: Alternative Topologies and Transformative Potentials* (pp. 83-95). Springer.
- Merkel, J., Pettas, D., & Avdikos, V. (Eds.). (2023). *Coworking Spaces. Alternative Topologies and Transformative Potentials*. Springer. <https://link.springer.com/book/10.1007/978-3-031-42268-3>.
- Nash, C., Jarrahi, M. H., & Sutherland, W. (2021). Nomadic work and location independence: The role of space in shaping the work of digital nomads. *Human Behavior and Emerging Technologies*, 3(2), 271-282.
- Oechslen, A., Mao, Y., & Repenning, A. (2025). Studying digitally mediated sites of work through visual methods: the cases of coworking, gig work and creative entrepreneurship. *Journal of Organizational Ethnography*, 1-16.
- Papageorgiou, A., & Michailidou, M. (2023). You know that you've succeeded in your role when your work renders you invisible: the invisible work of community management. In J. Merkel, D. Pettas, & V. Avdikos (Eds.), *Coworking Spaces: Alternative Topologies and Transformative Potentials* (pp. 111-124). Springer.
- Richardson, L. (2021). Coordinating office space: Digital technologies and the platformization of work. *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 39(2), 347-365.
- Sargent, A. C., Yavorsky, J. E., & Sandoval, R. G. (2021). Organizational Logic in Coworking Spaces: Inequality Regimes in the New Economy. *Gender & Society*, 35(1), 5-31.
- Vidaillet, B., & Bousalham, Y. (2020). Coworking spaces as places where economic diversity can be articulated: towards a theory of syntopia. *Organization*, 27(1), 60-87.
- Waters-Lynch, J., & Duff, C. (2019). The affective commons of Coworking. *Human Relations*, 74, 383–404.
- Yacoub, G., & Haefliger, S. (2021). Coworking spaces and collaborative practices. *Organization*, 13505084221074037.