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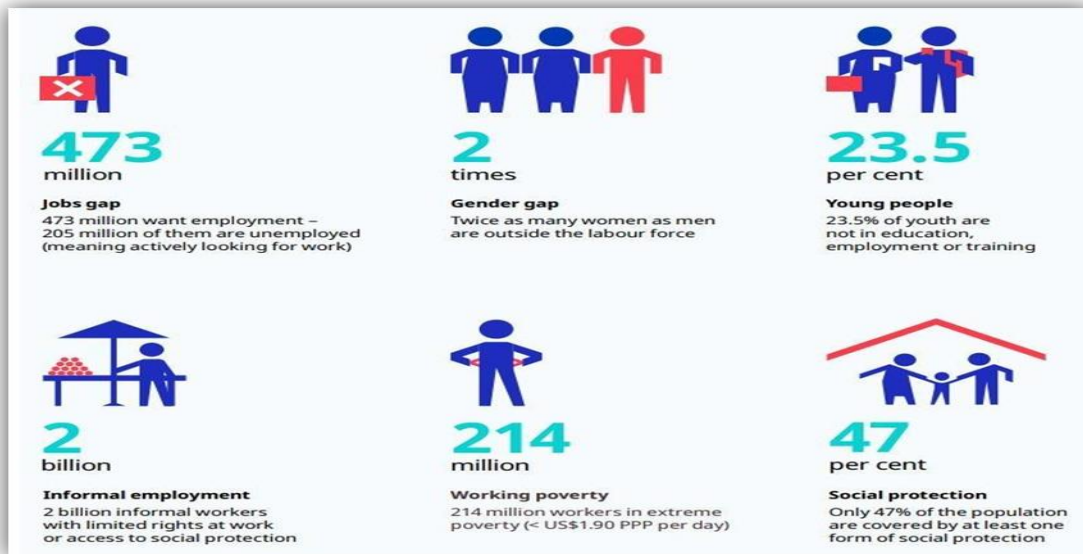
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Promoting sustainable rural economic development: how to embrace new knowledge and innovation through the coworking space model

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Abstract

Rural areas usually have a spatial-organizational structure that is very different compared to urban centers. Rural settlements to a greater or lesser extent significantly lag behind the urban core (as in developed and underdeveloped countries), especially in terms of infrastructure, equipment, benefits in the health, educational, cultural sector, which makes them unequal functional entities that are necessary for the population in these environments. The importance of rural areas for every country is of great importance, especially in areas with active agrarian activity, which greatly affects the economic transformation of the area, provision of basic agricultural products, necessary for nutrition, industry, tourism, etc. Starting first of all from the economic aspect, while also respecting the environmental aspect (environmental protection, tourist potentials, especially eco-tourism, etc.), significant initiatives are necessary that will influence the increasing affirmation of the rural environmental space. The pandemic with Covid 19 significantly influenced the population from urban centers to change their habits and seek a certain harmony of life in the rural environmental space. But now that the Covid-19 pandemic is behind us, the transformed life habits of the city population remain as a positive signal. We have more and more examples of partial or permanent migration of city families to quiet, ambient forms of rural environments. In addition to all of this, the development of information technology, digitalization, which encourages such opportunities for work, living and longer stays. The co-working models of work that have opened up a completely new dimension for the transformation of work "offices" that represent permanent forms of transformation of rural environments are becoming more and more noticeable.

Co-working centers today are a unique status symbol that will bring back the "life in the village" into game, and moreover, to make a complete transformation of the infrastructural, economic, social and cultural aspect of the rural environmental space.

Keywords: rural environment, promotion coworking models, job creation, business opportunities, information technology

1. Introduction

The end of the 20th and the beginning of the 21st century is characterized by significant global changes. The world is passing through a stage of large and extremely significant quantitative and qualitative structural changes, expressed in the competitive competition in the industrial, cultural and social dimension. The complex process of population development was directly dictated by the dynamics and character of the demographic situation, social, economic and generally socio-political movements and changes. Apart from these factors, the interactive connection and the influence of historical cultural and traditional values, the ethno-religious mosaic and, in connection with them, the slower or faster process of penetration of psychological-social concepts in the reproductive behavior of the family and the individual.

According to Daskalovski V. [1], such tendencies are directly opposed to the scientific interpretation that demographic development and in general the rational and planned distribution of population resources are the basic goal of socioeconomic development. It is quite evident that it is not in accordance with the contemporary population-geographical situation in the country. Namely, the gap between the opportunities and needs for economic activation and utilization of natural potentials in demographically depressed areas, as opposed to zones and especially urban agglomerations, where the most diverse problems of environmental degradation, overpopulation and, in connection with them, difficult to overcome social issues such as unemployment, are already visible, housing, social stratification and others.

A few decades ago, the dynamic development of industry was a kind of excuse for population migration to rural areas. The constant development and expansion of industrial zones, accompanied by the construction and modernization of traffic technology, as the main actors of progressive urbanization, constitute the core of the fundamental disruption of the structure of the spatial environment, imposing new models and elements of industrial civilization.

The underlying problem in most cities is that the inherited condition of the street network does not meet the transverse profile, route, or built-up. Therefore, the primary network does not have sufficient capacity to accept streams from the secondary network at critical times, especially when it comes to transport of dangerous goods. Negative impacts caused by traffic are called negative external effects: traffic accidents, congestion in traffic, surface occupation, noise, exhaust gases, uncontrolled release of harmful and dangerous substances, especially in accidental situations.[2]

As K. Davies once pointed out, returning to rural life today is almost impossible. But as long as the "village hearth and core" exists, in the pious sense, as an essential characteristic of a family, the last connection with the village is not severed.

The European Union, as a complex system organism of a community of 27 states, actively focuses its attention on the development of rural areas. Of course, there are several reasons for that. One of the reasons is the large territorial representation of rural areas and the number of people who have permanent residence in these areas. Such representation affects not only the territorial expansion of the community but also the economic growth and development of the European Union. The next reason is the need for motivation for increasing the appeal and attractiveness of rural areas as a permanent form of living for the population that lives in urban areas for most of the year or permanently.

To provide these amenities, the efforts of the community to prepare and implement programs targeting rural areas are notable. The purpose of adopting these programs is to influence the development of rural areas, in terms of their infrastructure, the quality of life in them and of course the impact on agricultural production, as the primary business branch in these areas. The emergence of these programs in the European Union has been noted for a long time, in its current member states, which indicates the success of these programs. [3] The content and structure of such programs are different, but the

essence and purpose of the programs intended for rural development are aimed at the development of these environments, as well as raising the level of competitiveness and approaching European standards and legislation.

The need and attractiveness of the "rural" environment especially came to the fore due to the great social changes that occurred when entire cities and regions were in complete isolation due to the Covid 19 pandemic. But it seems that if, due to health and social needs, a large part of the population was forced to choose the village environment, now the attraction of nature has kept the people in that environment, and it attracts even more devotees.

In this way, the need arose for the discussion of this matter in order to develop a greater understanding of this important issue, especially the five years ago, since the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic and the consequences it left for changing the urban lifestyle and returning to the rural environment.

For that, the possibilities and conveniences offered by the coworking space concept of this new modern "non-office" phenomenon are especially important. A huge mass of freelancers, from different fields practice this concept of remote work, yet in a different beautiful ambient environment.

2. How and why it began with Coworking

The term 'coworking' in its current meaning began in 2005 in San Francisco when computer programmer and open-source enthusiast Brad Neuberg "decided to create a new kind of space to support the community and structure that I hungered for and gave it a new name: coworking" [4]. He rented a small space to work from and published an open invitation on his blog for others to join him: "In coworking, independent writers, programmers, and creators come together in community a few days a week. Coworking provides the "office of a traditional corporate job, but in a very unique way" (Neuberg 2005).

Although Neuberg began the first official coworking space, similar ideas had been percolating for years. C-base, founded in Berlin in 1995, was among the first hackerspaces around the world. Many now consider these hackerspaces to be precursors of today's coworking spaces. A few years later, in 1999, 42 West 24 arrived in New York City, which had flexible desks for teams and individuals. It was certainly a precursor to coworking spaces, but without the crucial aspect of community that coworking offers now.[5]

Neuberg first envisioned a coworking space in 2005, when he was going through tough financial times. He was working at a startup but felt conflicted: He wanted to find a way to combine the feeling of independence and freedom of working by himself with the community feel and structure of working with others. Neuberg worked with a life coach, which resulted in him creating a three-part plan, which included making a new type of space that delivered both the structure and community feel he wanted. At this moment, the concept of coworking as we know it today was conceived.

3. Coworking space as well as strong company culture

Coworking spaces have enormous and different advantages: freedom and flexibility of job location, working time management, inclusive services and design, working independently or with already proven business partners, additional ideas that can suddenly appear in the common space, and which can be a challenge in building a coherent team culture.

For many individuals, young people and companies, large and small, workspaces represent a real solution for starting a new business, or significantly reducing the costs of renting independent offices.

Cost-effective prices and pre-arranged modern and design facilities make managed offices an extremely viable option for many organizations looking for state-of-the-art office spaces without financial difficulties for investment in real estate, but also for maintenance and use over a longer period of time.

For many individuals, young people and companies, large and small, workspaces represent a real solution for starting a new business, or significantly reducing the costs of renting independent offices. Just as the idea of hybrid workspaces has taken popularity for many professionals—so has flexibility. The concept that every team member needs to be in the same office at the same time is no longer necessary with today's technology. Cost-effective prices and pre-arranged modern and design facilities make managed offices an extremely viable option for many organizations looking for state-of-the-art office spaces without financial difficulties for investment in real estate, but also for maintenance and use over a longer period of time.[6]

One of the best ways to enhance culture in a hybrid space is to create, teach, and embody your core values. Make sure each member understands the significance of values and adopts them in order to maintain a consistent, confident culture. Educating on these values and getting your team to adopt them is a tried and true way to materialize a great culture—whether it be through working remotely or from one of the best coworking spaces.[7]

Certainly, in this context, it is worth mentioning the corporate concept of co-working. In 2016, Microsoft became the first to publicly introduce the concept, when they announced they would have staff working from WeWork locations in several cities. Now, WeWork boasts clients from all over the Forbes 500 list. HSBC, Salesforce, Facebook, IBM, Bank of America are among the many corporations who are 'enterprise partners' of WeWork.[8]

Defined as companies with over 1,000 employees, enterprise clients now make up over 25% of WeWork's annual revenue. And its not just WeWork. UK flexible workspace marketplace, Hubble, has had huge corporations approach them for several different purposes. Some want to use Coworking space for a specific branch of their company, others may want to set up some sort of innovation lab. Companies such as EY, Shell, and Jaguar Land Rover are among those who have partnered with Hubble.

Considering that a person spends almost a third of his day in a working atmosphere, it is no surprise that the space in which we spend a large part of our time has a significant impact on our behavior at home as well. What kind of energy we take home after working hours and the working atmosphere depends to a large extent on the atmosphere at the workplace. The work environment can evoke excitement or fear, deep focus or distraction, cooperation or isolation.

That's why it's so important to design workspaces that inspire the workflow and culture set by the company. Without a strong plan, the work environment will become ineffective over time and employee retention will suffer.[9]

4. Coworking space: meaning and allocation in Republic of North Macedonia

According to Öğr. Üyesi Onur Bağar Özbozkurt,[10] Coworking business model alludes to "a different type of working in which individuals come together within an organization for promoting value while sharing knowledge and wisdom in terms of interaction and collaboration under the circumstances of users" or members" preferences.

Country ID profile for Coworking spaces. The total number of coworking spaces in our country, including collaborative and creative working spaces (coworking spaces and smart working centers) are 9. The names of coworking spaces in Republic of North Macedonia are:

Table 1 Name and Location of coworking spaces in North Macedonia

	NAME of Coworking spaces	CITY
1	Kasarna Hub - Ohrid	Ohrid
2	Qworkingo - Coworking space at Bonde Skerlevski - Bitola	Bitola
3	Coffice - Skopje	Skopje
4	iSolve Coworking Spaces - Coworking space at 330 Ilindenska - Tetovo	Tetovo
5	Public Room - Skopje	Skopje
6	NewMan’s BA - Skopje	Skopje
7	Seavus Incubator - Skopje	Skopje
8	GSI Serviced Offices - Skopje	Skopje
9	CoWorkOhrid - Ohrid	Ohrid
10	Soravia Invest Dooel - Skopje	Skopje
11	Ceed Hub - Coworking space on Rugjer Boshkovikj - Skopje	Skopje
12	Coworking space Co&Work (on Shumadiska A) - Skopje	Skopje

Out of a total of 12 coworking spaces, 8 are located in the capital Skopje, and 2 in Ohrid and 1 in Tetovo and Bitola. Unfortunately, there is no such center in the suburbs or rural areas. Located in city and urban areas, those coworking spaces offer the ultimate shared workspace environment for professional independents looking for a likeminded community, viable platform for growth and productive work ambience. Those coworking spaces act as a central root of a fast-moving community and actively boosts and inspire idea generation, creation, innovation and cooperation for startups and business in favor of promoting their rapid growth and accelerate the progress through education, creative solutions & valuable resources.

SPATIAL DISTRIBUTION OF NEW COWORKING SPACES IN REPUBLIC OF NORTH MACEDONIA

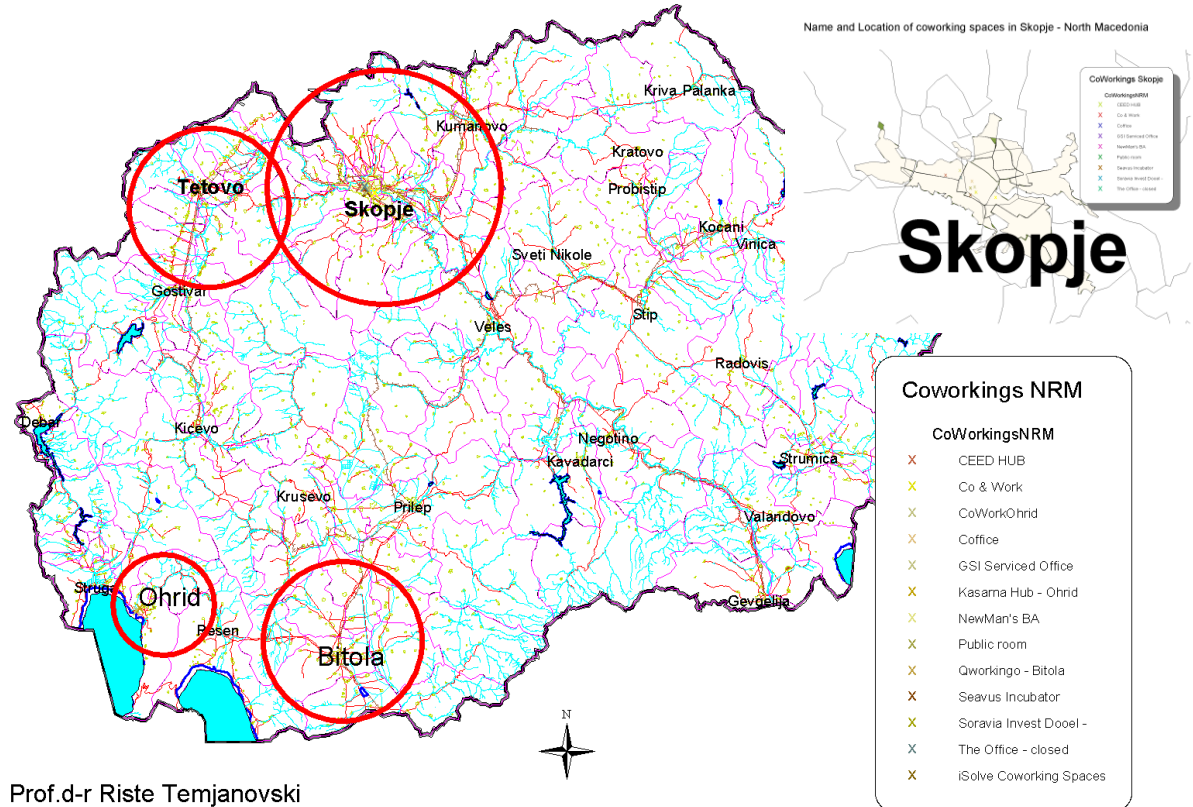


Figure 1 Spatial distribution of coworking spaces in North Macedonia

Source: authors

This Coworking Spaces provide access to office space, workstations, internet access, office equipment, conference space, knowledge resources, office assistance and other services. The vision of these Coworking Spaces is to improve the business climate; public-private dialogue; entrepreneurial awareness; SMEs development. Work in a productive and creative co-working community consisted of students, freelancers, entrepreneurs, startups and even corporates, striving for inspiration and empowerment from a vivid community of like-minded professionals. To be part of life-changing tech and business events where everyone learns from everyone is really inspirative and challenging.

5. Potential of rural coworking

The main question that needs to be clarified as the main determinant of labor is what it represents rural coworking. According to Business Chief [11] Rural coworking is an unofficial term that encompasses coworking spaces located in small towns, suburban neighborhoods, or anywhere outside of a city center with a relatively small population.

Undoubtedly, that in such complex and turbulent living conditions, especially those created by the urban lifestyle, rural coworking spaces represent the new and emerging trend of existing and new businesses. These spaces are typically located in nature or outside of highly traveled areas and thus, may have a bit of a different clientele.

Coworking in rural places is becoming more popular in the age of remote work for a couple of reasons:

- More people moving outside of cities: there's been an uptick in the population of rural areas as people are no longer required to live where they work, leading to a rise in rural coworking according to [allwork.space](#)
- Rise of "destination coworking": people are taking workations or seeking out destination coworking spaces, where they travel to a new place to work.

Bertović, Košir & Timo-Huhtala [12] made some research on primary business conditions in rural areas, and indicates the following characteristics

- Rural coworking spaces – are mainly used for networking, socializing and education of entrepreneurs, less for traditional distant work to avoid commuting
- Physical visit to location is important due to a better understanding of benefits for users;
- Promotion and prompt PR in the local community is vital (digital channels and word of mouth);
- Multifunctional space in rural areas – combining with some other services (Caffe, drop off point, on-line market place, pop-up store...);
- Further equipping of coworking spaces with some smaller items (e.g. 3D printer, the Laser engraver, software...) – reaching a higher position on technology readiness level (TRL) scale;
- Creation of rural-rural and rural-urban connections;
- Local municipalities get the body who can help to grow micro-businesses and start-uppers;
- Local public sector (municipalities, county, library, schools etc.) can generate some demand for products produced by the members in coworking spaces;
- Public support for rural coworking is needed for starting and working in the first 3-5 years period.

The impact of rural workplaces is also well described by Kate Schwarzler, founder of Indy Commons through several reasons:[13]

- Coworking spaces improve the local business community and make Main Street vibrant
- Coworking spaces can create community, especially in a post-COVID environment for remote workers
- Coworking spaces create new kinds of opportunities in rural areas that improve quality of life
- Coworking spaces can elevate a culture of entrepreneurship to the next level

Today, ICTs have enabled complete freedom in running businesses. In this regard, we see rural coworking spaces as essential forms of collaboration and entrepreneurship, and as part of the necessary infrastructure" of a community - the components that enable a place to compete within the digital economy.

Coworking spaces provide much more than just a place to work. A rural environment can offer significant resources to the business community, establish connections that enhance the local business environment and host events that foster a stronger business climate. In that regard, business networks become a significant driver of the rural coworking community. Many remote workers, freelancers, or sole proprietors may work from home or in cheaper locations outside the city center because paying higher rent does not make business sense.

6. Rural ambient areas as well as potential coworking space in Republic North Macedonia

Modern rural economic activities depend on quality infrastructure, effective logistics for supplying materials to industry and moving products along the supply chain and eventually to the end consumer.

Rural development includes a series of activities, and if our country wants to develop and implement the future of modern rural settlements, as complex and attractive areas, it is necessary to design policies that will facilitate living and working in such spaces.

There are many options, and hence considerable scope, for improving the sustainability of rural living and working. Many successful European cities see the culture of living in rural areas as providing a competitive advantage over large urban centers, burdened with heavy traffic congestion and pollution. ICT has made it possible to attract new businesses, freed from the dependence on offices in urban areas.

Most research shows that adequate transport infrastructure is an important factor for spatial planning and management of most activities for finding solutions for alternative ways and improving the health of the population and encouraging the rural way as a modern model of permanent living. These spatial aspects can only supplement and improve the spatial contents in rural areas, especially due to a series of decade-long omissions: the poor dimensioning and quality of the condition of the street network, and inadequate organization of public transportation and transport.

Individual entrepreneurs invest in various programs to improve the conditions for the physical and mental health of employees, to create an attractive identity and to accumulate economic benefits precisely in rural areas. Many business programs, especially in the field of entrepreneurship and ICT recognize the efforts of companies to promote working in coworking conditions - and the results of such analyzes are really impressive.

Coworkings are traditionally created in urban environments but are increasingly being implanted and rooted in rural areas. On the one hand, teleworking has made it easier for professionals to keep their jobs in the city, while living in a rural area. **[14]**

Rural coworking has many advantages:

- It can offer more competitive prices
- It is more intimate and personal
- It offers events at a local level
- By building smaller communities, it is more likely that common synergies and projects will be generated

As one of the fastest growing economic sectors in the world, entrepreneurial coworking is increasingly recognized rural areas as a vital contributor to job and business creation and innovation, environmental protection, cultural preservation and poverty alleviation. A well-designed and managed rural coworking sector can help preserve the natural and cultural heritage assets upon which it depends, empower host communities, generate job opportunities, and foster peace and intercultural understanding.

The experience in the new entrepreneurial and innovative possibilities, once again shows that rural settlements are increasingly in demand in the coworking market. The correctly conceived business model of the village can be of great importance for the economic and social development of many rural settlements in our country. Coworking opportunities in the village are of great importance both for the permanent population and for people who are looking for jobs and jobs in rural settlements.

The development of new business opportunities, primarily as a result of new tools and innovations of entrepreneurs, would greatly affect the reduction of the rural population. The numerous negative effects of the depopulation of rural settlements are known. The same applies to underdeveloped areas in which agriculture and tourism or some other activities have not had a sufficient effect on the improvement of the living standard of the population.

In contrast to these areas, the experience of the development of tourism in some parts of our country (the settlements in the Skopje tourist region, the Ohrid-Struga region, the areas of Bistra, Lazaropole, the Osogovo mountain settlements and other tourist village settlements) indicates that the attractiveness of these natural regions has positive effects on greater economic development in the wider regional environment.

Significant benefits for residents in a particular rural settlement can be realized when these developments combine the model of a friendly environment and innovative business ideas. Coworking places as a friendly new development are considered a place where people want to live: safe, family-friendly, accessible with all the amenities, and peaceful surroundings. The attractiveness and quiet environment are significant points of living and working over the competitive events compared with the polluted city cores.

The increasing recognition of the role of coworking business activities in rural areas, as well as the sustainable development business model provides a unique opportunity for all governments to create a sound and favorable economic policy foundation. In particular, it should empower economic and environmental policymakers to become actively involved in national planning for the society's future.

7. Conclusion

Coworking spaces can be identified as strengthening as a globally rising and shining trend in a network business environment where the term of competitiveness is related to knowledge and sustainable innovation. In this respect, coworking spaces refer to localized places in which professionals that require autonomy, work with common resources, and are free to interact and share their knowledge with other professionals. Coworking spaces mean common workplaces benefitted by various kinds of professional knowledge workers, generally self-employed individuals, working in assorted levels of specialization in the vast domain of the knowledge industry.

North Macedonia is an upper-middle-income country that has made great strides in reforming its economy over the past decade. In this regard, significant steps are taken in the acceptance and application of new forms of doing business, especially accepting the modern concept of Coworking spaces. The total number of coworking spaces in our country, including collaborative and creative working spaces (coworking spaces and smart working centers) are nine. Out of a total of 12 coworking spaces, 8 are located in the capital Skopje, and 2 in Ohrid and 1 in Tetovo and Bitola. Unfortunately, there is no such center in the suburbs or rural areas. Located in urban centers, those coworking spaces offer the ultimate shared workspace environment for professional independents looking for a likeminded community, viable platform for growth and productive work ambience.

Considering the numerous advantages and benefits of this Coworking Spaces as well as provide access to office space, workstations, internet access, office equipment, conference space, knowledge resources, office assistance and other services, furthermore the vision of these Coworking Spaces is to improve the business climate; public-private dialogue; entrepreneurial awareness; SMEs development etc. In the future, such forms are expected to be more widespread in the Republic of Northern Macedonia, to find even more appropriate representation in the peripheral areas of the country.

As one of the fastest growing economic sectors in the world, entrepreneurial coworking is increasingly recognized rural areas as a vital contributor to job and business creation and innovation, environmental protection, cultural preservation and poverty alleviation. A well-designed and managed rural coworking sector can help preserve the natural and cultural heritage assets upon which it depends, empower host communities, generate job opportunities, and foster peace and intercultural understanding.

As one of the fastest growing economic sectors in the world, entrepreneurial coworking is increasingly recognized rural areas as a vital contributor to job and business creation and innovation, environmental protection, cultural preservation and poverty alleviation. A well-designed and managed rural coworking sector can help preserve the natural and cultural heritage assets upon which it depends, empower host communities, generate job opportunities, and foster peace and intercultural understanding.

It should be noted that the significant benefits of encouraging coworking business opportunities in rural areas can only be realized when these benefits are combined with the model of improved infrastructure and the encouragement of innovative business ideas offered by ICT and entrepreneurial skills.

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