

Revived collaborative workspaces and the local youth: a spatial approach to case studies from Spain, Italy, Denmark, and Ireland

The proposed presentation will attempt to intertwine three research topics that are often explored in the multidisciplinary fields of Regional Development and Cultural Studies: collaborative workspaces, youth, and social innovation. Based on qualitative data (ethnographic observation, participatory observation and semi-structured interviews with managers and beneficiaries) collected in the regions of Extremadura (Spain), Licata (Italy), Aarhus (Denmark), and the Southill area of Limerick (Ireland), the research brings together these thematic aspects through a *spatial* and place-based methodological approach. The peripheral aspect of the processes in place will also be highlighted as all spaces constitute revived or rebranded initiatives.

Fieldwork conducted across four European regions explored diverse approaches to youth employment, social innovation, and local development. In **Badajoz, Extremadura** (Spain), FUNDECYT-PCTEX demonstrated its key role as a science and technology interface, bridging policymakers, entrepreneurs, and civil society. Through programs like “RAISE the Youth” and “Better Incubation,” the foundation helps NEETs and under-represented groups develop agri-business ideas and social entrepreneurship models. In **Licata, Sicily**, Make Hub operates as a private incubator mediating Italy’s *Resto al Sud* program, helping young entrepreneurs access funding and mentorship amid a regional NEET rate of 32.4%. In **Aarhus, Denmark**, the Institut for (X) exemplified a dynamic, youth-driven cultural and entrepreneurial ecosystem. Programs like FLUKHX, developed in collaboration with Frontløberne and UKH, promote creative and inclusive participation through minimal bureaucracy and a do-ocracy ethos. In **Limerick, Ireland**, the Southill Hub illustrated a community-centered strategy to support NEETs through programs like TYESI and the Junior Leader Program. Interviews with youth workers and participants emphasized the value of holistic support that combines employability initiatives with broader community development. Together, these case studies highlight context-specific strategies fostering youth empowerment and regional resilience.

Based on research findings by the Cowork4YOUTH EEA program and the REMAKING Horizon Project, the presentation explores three research questions: the role of the spaces in fostering social innovation, the impact on the local youth, and the transformative effects on the region. The PhD researcher visited each of the spaces for 3 weeks and collected data through semi-structured interviews and focus groups with either young beneficiaries and trainers or stakeholders. This data will be analyzed through a spatial approach that aspires to reveal the dynamics that support youth employment and community engagement while taking into consideration the evolution of these spaces in time and their connection with local regeneration efforts. The objective is a meta-evaluation of collaborative spaces as ‘learning middlegrounds’ and their policymaking role in fostering social and digital innovation.

Overall, the fieldwork demonstrated a shared commitment to tackling youth unemployment and promoting entrepreneurship, albeit in contexts with varying socio-economic challenges. Each organization’s activities, whether incubating businesses, engaging NEETs in social innovation, or creating inclusive cultural platforms, underscore the importance of tailored, context-specific strategies to empower young people and strengthen local communities.