Abstract

Coworking spaces are a phenomenon that has recently emerged as one of the means of supporting entrepreneurship ecosystem. This flexible model of work finds its application mainly in the business of individuals and small start-up companies. The aim of this article is to map the coworking spaces in Slovakia, in terms of an overview of coworking spaces currently operating in the country, as well as in terms of analysis of their members, while comparing the results with a global survey. The first part of the analysis was executed with publicly available secondary sources of information. The second part of the analysis was based on own survey instrument distributed to members of coworking spaces. Findings of the survey were analysed using descriptive statistics, interpreted and compared with the findings of a global survey. According to our results, there have been 24 active coworking spaces in Slovakia at the time of the study. Members of coworking spaces are mostly young professionals, predominantly men, who act as small businesses with the dominance of IT, creative and knowledge-intensive areas. The perceived benefits are often the reason for selecting specific coworking space, while general satisfaction rate among coworking members is very high. However, coworking members in Slovakia lack in ability to benefit from knowledge exchange and access to job/business opportunities.

Keywords: coworking spaces, mapping, members, Slovakia, Global Coworking Survey.

Introduction

Nowadays our lives are becoming very fast, and the same applies to the dynamically changing situation in the economy. Growing intensity of competition, informatization of all industries and especially the pressure to reduce costs are trends that imply a need for changes in the traditional approach to work organization and a shift to a more flexible model. Coworking is a trend that has spread all over the world, even though its beginnings are hardly 10 years in the past. Thanks to this flexible system of work, entrepreneurs that realize their ideas alone or in small companies, together with other professionals working outside the traditional office, found the ideal way to work effectively, avoid social isolation, find work-life balance and take advantage of trends that encourage the exchange of information and cooperation. The first coworking spaces in Slovakia have started only around four years ago. Nevertheless, they were able to relatively quickly establish themselves within the field of professional and commercial infrastructure (Holienka and Pílko, 2014) and become part of...
the entrepreneurship support ecosystem. Given the short existence, however, the concept of coworking is not yet sufficiently researched from an academic point of view.

The main research question of our article is to map the current state of coworking spaces in Slovakia, both through analysis of active coworking spaces as well as an analysis of their members, with comparison of the results with a global survey. In order to answer this research question, we performed secondary research and mapping of coworking environment in conjunction with the primary survey distributed to 108 members of coworking spaces throughout Slovakia. We analysed the findings of primary research and compared the obtained findings with results of the Global Coworking Survey.

1 Characterizing the concept of coworking spaces

The concept of coworking is still relatively new and constantly evolving so there does not exist an established definition. In general, it is a business model and system of work, in which individual members of diverse group of professionals (programmers, graphic designers, freelancers, small start-ups, telecommuters) rent a place in a common space, share technical facilities (internet access, printer, conference rooms) and form a cohesive community in which thrives networking, exchange of ideas and continuing education (Deguzman et al., 2011). Educational activities taking place in coworking spaces mainly consist of lectures and workshops on topics that have the potential to help internal members and public to develop their business. Focus may differentiate from general topics such as sales and presentation skills, online marketing, communication on social media, to advanced workshops on programming languages (Deguzman et al., 2011).

Frequent impulses to start membership in coworking space are negative aspects associated with working at home, such as isolation, lack of productivity and ubiquitous distraction (Deguzman et al., 2011). Up to 84% of respondents in the survey stated that interaction with other people is especially important for them (Foertsch, 2012). Unlike working from coffee shop, which primarily solves the lack of social contact, coworking eliminates additional problems such as reliability and speed of Internet connections, increased noise, security of personal belongings or lack of electrical outlets, which people working from coffee shops regularly encounter. Despite the fact that most coworking members have some experience with working from a coffee shop, prior to their membership they dominantly worked mainly from home (58%) or traditional office (22%) (Schuermann, 2014). To sum up, people come to coworking space in order to be productive, but stay because of the community, collaboration and networking (Fallon, 2015). Expansion of coworking is also boosted by global trends - technological changes (in particular the development of cloud computing solutions), demand for flexible working models caused by the increasing share of freelancers and women in the economically active population, and economic pressure on corporate real estate spending (The Economist 31 December 2011). If this trend continues in the future, according to US Bureau of Labor Statistics, there will be 65 million of freelancers, independent contractors and self-employed workers in the US. With a 40% share of the total workforce, they will form a strong target group for current and future coworking spaces (Lopez, 2013). Similar workforce development can be expected also in our country.
1.1 Coworking spaces in the entrepreneurship policy context

Based on the analysis of business and entrepreneurial environment in Slovakia, its weaknesses and development stage of the local economy, Holienka and Pilková (2014) suggest the following areas for policies aimed at supporting entrepreneurship:

- Funding and raising capital,
- Professional and commercial infrastructure,
- Entrepreneurial education and training,
- Cultural and social norms,
- Government policies and programmes.

In context of these specific areas, coworking spaces could be classified within the professional and commercial infrastructure. This category also includes business incubators and accelerators, one-stop-shops, online entrepreneurship portals, coaching and mentoring support.

In 2013, Greater London Authority has ordered a report with focus on mapping the status of coworking spaces, incubators and accelerators operating on its territory, their impact on the local economy and proposals for possible actions by the public sector (Brooke et al., 2014). Here are the latter, because despite smaller scale than in London, they are in our opinion generally applicable to the narrower context of coworkings in the local conditions:

- Launch of online mapping and database of coworking spaces and regular updates by local municipality, together with an assessment of its effectiveness and value that coworking spaces add to SMEs in the region.
- Supporting research and monitoring of coworking spaces.
- Networking forum for coworking space owners, created by local municipality.
- Facilitating the best practice exchange in launching and management of coworking spaces and reaching impact on planning policy.
- Creating programs for public sector investment into coworking activities and facilities that would solve the market failure issues.

1.2 Values of coworkings

Although every coworking is unique for its location, culture or facilities, they all share common values first introduced by Citizen Space coworking in San Francisco (Hillman, 2011). Below we briefly characterize these values.

1.2.1 Collaboration

Various occupations, skills and experience of individual members of coworking can be effectively used for collaboration, whether in relationship owners - member (e.g. Washington-based coworking Affinity Lab used the services of two members, a graphic designer and a branding expert, to design and modify its logo and create unconventional business cards) or member - member (member of female-only coworking Hera HUB working on women's golf clothing found a consultant with 20 years of experience in the clothing industry). Real added
value, however, is the possibility to get to know people personally before deciding whether to start their professional collaboration with them (Deguzman et al., 2011).

Cooperation also includes knowledge exchange. Members have access to valuable advice and assistance that coworking can provide without increased financial costs. It works on three levels (Schuermann, 2014):

- Informal - random conversation during work breaks.
- Formal - agreed cooperation.
- Systematical - lectures, workshops and continuing education and training.

1.2.2 Community

“Coworking space is exactly what the word implies - a space. It is not a community as long as there are no people in it” (Hillman, 2011). Community character of coworking is visible in the willingness of members to help each other within their expertise, be it technical issue or a draft of commercial agreement (Deguzman et al., 2011). Even after leaving the specific coworking space, people maintain in the network of affiliated people and can act as mentors or consultants, which contributes to the knowledge exchange and building a large network of contacts (Schuermann, 2014). Relationships are demonstrated by the fact that 62% of respondents in coworking survey stated they knew majority of members on first name basis (Foertsch, 2012).

Since coworking spaces “sell” community to their potential members, it is important for owners to encourage the creation of social ties among members. Thanks to its concept, coworking space provides at least the three basic pillars for the development of community - space, resources and language. However, if owners want the community to thrive, they must further support the other pillars, such as shared experiences, community events, knowledge exchange and both shared values and interests between members (Schabsky and Schabsky, 2013).

1.2.3 Openness

When working in a coworking space, members can overhear confidential information relating to the business of other members. For example, Citizespace in its Terms of use directly calls for mutual respect in regard to privacy, but at the same time does not allow any non-disclosure agreements. Openness, however, does not only exist in an open flow of information within the community of current and former members, but also in organizing events for the general public (lectures, workshops, film). Another affiliated activity is the rental of meeting spaces.

1.2.4 Accessibility

The essential features are the financial and physical accessibility, which helps particularly small businesses in start-up phase to save on costs related to basic infrastructure in working areas - internet access, printers and copiers, or cleaning services. Another factor in the affordability for individuals and small businesses is the flexibility of membership models and fee structures. In particular the possibility of short-term membership, together with low
starting costs. Physical accessibility, in many cases 24/7, is ensured in different ways, ranging from dedicated keys for permanent members to RFID door locks (Brooke et al., 2014).

1.2.5 Sustainability
The emphasis on environmental sustainability is close to coworking philosophy and some of them have environmental certification. They use motion detector lightning, LED light bulbs, fluorescent lamps or recycled paper (Deguzman, 2011). In financial terms, sustainability of coworking is reflected in the fact that even though the costs of membership at coworking are higher than working from home, they are still lower than renting a traditional office.

1.3 Typology of coworking spaces
Boom of coworking has also increased diversity of spaces. From a business perspective, 84% are operated as a private business and 13% like a non-profit organization. There are also differences in policies for admitting new members. 4 of 5 coworking spaces operate on open door policy. The rest maintain certain restraints - written applications, personal interviews or restriction to specific occupations. Currently we can divide them into the following categories:

- **Medium and large coworking spaces.** According to the 2nd Global Coworking Survey, these are spaces with capacity of 40+ members. In this category we can find examples with multiple branches in different countries such as betahaus, which expanded from Berlin to Hamburg, Barcelona and Sofia. However, coworking spaces that belong to a network only make up around 5%.

- **Small coworking spaces.** With a small group of people working together, it can be difficult to determine whether it is a coworking or just a way for sharing costs. In these cases, it is possible to check whether the space shares the values of coworking.

- **Corporate coworking spaces.** Large corporations have discovered the concept of coworking and use it as innovation in the areas of work organization and R&D. In these cases, internal staff is working alongside people from partner companies and freelancers. For example, Network Orange Coworking in Toronto is sponsored by ING Direct Bank (Schuermann, 2014).

- **University coworking spaces.** With the capability to connect academic knowledge with hands-on experience, coworking spaces are also interesting for universities, whether acting as operators or partners. Coworking space and accelerator Startup Sauna in Helsinki was founded by students from Aalto University.

- **Pop-up coworking space.** These are temporarily operating communities created either due to a specific project or as a test before launching a permanent coworking (Schuermann, 2014). Swiss Federal Railways (SBB) founded a coworking in Zurich, which is a part of the Railway plus Startups programme and its goal is to provide space for development of innovations applicable to their operations.

1.4 Key success factors of coworkings
For every nine coworking spaces that start operating successfully, there is one that is forced to close its premises for different reasons. This estimation is based on the global
coworking database run by online magazine Deskmag. Given that it is still relatively young and dynamically developing sector, just searching for the right business model, 15% attrition rate would not be surprising. These findings are the result of the analysis and experience of two former coworking space operators, who have tried to identify the primary factors leading to coworking space failure:

- Coworking as a side project. Many small business owners are trying to start a coworking space as an additional source of income beside their primary business. However, experience shows that a prosperous coworking space requires attention of a full time manager.
- Target group’s low willingness to pay. As a concept coworking raises a lot of excitement, but not enough commitment in financial terms. It happens that many freelancers and other potential members show interest in coworking, but in the final phase a common mindset takes place that their presence in coworking is not so costly to the administrator and therefore they should not pay for the membership.
- Inflexible business model. The problem with the absence of a flexible membership model on ad-hoc basis was mostly visible in the beginnings of coworking movement. Nowadays, virtually every coworking space offers this option and fixed-membership-only model works only in small private coworking spaces, where flexible membership would not be possible.
- Starting with premises without community. Despite the great buzz on social media, many coworking spaces have problems to quickly fill the minimal capacity needed to cover the costs (Dullroy, 2010). One of coworking pioneers, Angel Kwiatkovski, stated that she often sees coworking operators fail to build a community with support and interest in the space, before preparing the premises. They are the ones, who are then forced to close down before the space can bloom to the full potential (Kwiatkovski, 2011).

2 Materials and methods

To answer the research questions set out in our article we conducted two investigations - a secondary research to map the coworking environment, and a primary research focused on coworking spaces members in Slovakia.

2.1 Mapping the coworking ecosystem

The survey focused on mapping the coworking environment was carried out almost exclusively with secondary sources of information available on the Internet, using various news portals and official websites of coworking spaces. These resources have proved to provide enough relevant information. The main objective of the survey was to map the number and regional distribution of actively operating coworking spaces in Slovakia. Partial goals were aimed at determining different membership models they use and degree to which they can provide flexibility and accessibility, that belong to the common values of coworking.

2.2 Survey on coworking members in Slovakia

Primary research focused on members of coworking spaces in Slovakia was executed during April 2015 using own survey instrument - an online questionnaire. The sample
consisted of active members of any coworking space in Slovakia without limitation of age or gender. A total of 108 relevant respondents with functioning contact details were contacted. With 46 fully completed questionnaires, we achieved the response rate of 42%. The main objective of the survey was to identify the characteristics of coworking spaces’ members in Slovakia, with comparison to the situation abroad in order to identify the common features as well as distinctive specifics. We analysed the demographics of coworking members, their professional domain, work status and effects of coworking space on their work. Our intention was also to compare the obtained findings with the results of 2012 Global Coworking Survey, which is to the date of our study the most comprehensive survey of its kind in the world.

The survey was executed with Czech online service Survio, which is a start-up project. The questionnaire consisted of a total of ten items. Eight questions were adapted from 2012 Global Coworking Survey and two were optional demographic questions (age and income). Questions were formulated in clear and comprehensive form and consisted of pre-defined options (with comments section where necessary). Questionnaire is presented in Appendix 1. Web link to the questionnaire, together with an accompanying request, was sent to 108 relevant contact e-mail addresses of coworking space operators and members, or their personal Facebook accounts (when other forms of communication were absent).

For initial data analysis, we used the internal analytical engine of Survio service that generated a summary report in .pdf format containing a graphical and numerical representation of each question. Further, we analysed the raw data using descriptive statistics methods in Microsoft Excel.

3 Results and discussion

In the next part of our article we present and discuss the results of our study. First, we focus on the analysis of the coworking ecosystem, and afterwards we analyse the findings about members of coworking spaces in Slovakia.

3.1 Coworking ecosystem in Slovakia

According to our research, the coworking scene in Slovakia consists of 24 active and operating coworking spaces that differ in size, focus, location, legal form and membership structure.

3.1.1 Regional distribution

From the regional distribution perspective, coworking spaces in Slovakia are concentrated mostly in Bratislava, with ten currently operating spaces. More than one coworking space can be also found in Košice (3), Nitra (2) and Žilina (2). Remaining cities or towns have one coworking space each. In comparison with Bratislava, Prague has currently 22 active coworking spaces. Brno, which is more similar in terms of area and population, has currently in total eight spaces. Table 1 provides an overview of active coworking spaces in Slovakia at the time of our research.
Table 1. Active coworkings in Slovakia (as of April 2015)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>City</th>
<th>Space</th>
<th>City</th>
<th>Space</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bratislava</td>
<td>Brainhouse</td>
<td>Košice</td>
<td>co-Šicke Coworking Košice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Clusterhaus</td>
<td></td>
<td>Eastcubator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Connect Coworking</td>
<td>Žilina</td>
<td>Banka Žilina</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dvojbodka Cowork</td>
<td></td>
<td>VTP Žilina</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>HUB Bratislava</td>
<td>Poprad</td>
<td>Kreativo coworking Poprad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Na Riviére</td>
<td>Šaľa</td>
<td>Coworking Šaľa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Offis</td>
<td>Martin</td>
<td>Cancel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Spot</td>
<td>Banská Bystrica</td>
<td>Business Innovation Center</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>UniCare Coworking</td>
<td>Trnava</td>
<td>Modrians house</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nitra</td>
<td>Ponk</td>
<td>Prešov</td>
<td>Coworkingové centrum</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: own analysis*

Networking within the Slovakian coworking ecosystem can be observed in mutual promotion and partnerships. Eastcubator in Košice for example has a tab on their website which provides brief description and contact details of four other coworking spaces - The Spot Connect Coworking (Bratislava), VTP Žilina and HIVe5 Coworking Nitra.

Most active connection to international coworking network has Impact Hub Bratislava, being a part of global Impact Hub network. Its membership system allows visit and use of more than 50 Impact Hubs worldwide. Connect Coworking in Bratislava is the most globally accessible one among independent coworking spaces. It is the only one with profile on international platform “Desksurfing”, which allows to find nearby coworking space in any given location over the world. Search on “Sharedesk”, another similar portal, does not offer any results for Slovakia. Specific regional coverage has Clusterhaus as a part of the five-tech hubs in central Europe sponsored by property development company IMMOFINANZ Group. Due to the more office-oriented nature it brings benefits of international network rather than global mobility.

3.1.2 Membership - flexibility and fee structure

In way of meeting the coworking values of flexibility and availability, coworking spaces offer a variety of membership packages. In most cases their diversity is directly proportional to the size of the space. Flexibility is ensured in monthly basis of membership, which can change on the base of needs of particular member. Most widely used metrics are the number of entries (days) or hours. Packages can range from one entry with a limited time up to 24/7 access with own key. Although professional services are merely domain of incubators or accelerators, bigger coworking spaces offer also these services as a part of membership. Most frequent support services are mentoring program or tax / legal advisory. One day free trial is a standard, and in some cases the trial period lasts even a whole week. Access to educational activities and professional services starts with a single entry per given month.
In Table 2 below, we can see the average price for each kind of the common membership package. We separated Bratislava from the rest of Slovakia, to account for different economic power and price level of the capital city in our results. For example, in case of a fix desk, which is a standard for long-term members, prices in Bratislava are almost double (85 € vs. 156 €).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Membership package (average)</th>
<th>1 entry</th>
<th>5 - 7 entries</th>
<th>10 - 15 entries</th>
<th>Unlimited</th>
<th>Fix desk</th>
<th>Team - 3 persons</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bratislava</td>
<td>14 €</td>
<td>45 €</td>
<td>68 €</td>
<td>107 €</td>
<td>156 €</td>
<td>239 €</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rest of country</td>
<td>10 €</td>
<td>26 €</td>
<td>39 €</td>
<td>66 €</td>
<td>85 €</td>
<td>190 €</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: own analysis and calculations

Coworking also makes working in attractive locations more affordable. This can be illustrated by an example that in Bratislava 1 (Old Town), where The Spot, Impact Hub, Offis and Dvojboďka are located, fix desk is available on average for 142 euros. Meanwhile, the monthly cost of a small office with an area of 39 square meters is 350 euros plus utilities. The monthly cost would be higher than coworking even with two persons in the office, plus the missed opportunity of using the professional services, educational activities, and especially the diverse community. Thus, we can conclude that coworking value of availability is also reflected in practice, in terms of price affordability.

Majority of coworking spaces in Slovakia have an open door policy in terms of accepting new members, mostly due to free capacity, and as a whole are publicly available. The exceptions are two private coworking spaces in Bratislava - Offis and Na rivére. Both have a limited capacity of eight members, each of whom has a fix desk, and pursue occupation diversity. For this reason, they specify their preferred occupations in order to form a diverse community with an interesting knowledge exchange and synergy effect. A specific case in the Slovak context is the UniCare Coworking in Bratislava, which is a complementary service to kindergarten and children's centre. Directed to a different target group than rest of coworking spaces, it consists primarily of people on maternity leave who need to work while having a child nearby. Babysitting a child under 2 years is directly included in the price. This confirms the competitiveness of Bratislava, because similar spaces are common abroad. In Prague, there are 5 coworking spaces with some sort of combination of playground, childcare or nursery.

Regarding the use of legal forms, we can divide them into two categories according to their focus. Profit oriented spaces use a form of limited liability company (s.r.o) and non-profit civil association (o.z.). According to our research, the ratio is roughly 50:50. Comparing to global figures, there is a difference compared with only 13% operating on non-profit basis. This difference could be explained by the fact that the coworking concept is relatively new and not yet established in Slovakia and with smaller target group, it is difficult to operate it as profit-oriented business. However, we would need more comprehensive research to obtain accurate data, because many coworking spaces do not state their legal form in the contact details. Moreover, it is difficult to find them in official registers if they do not provide the name of the umbrella company or a civic association besides the name of the...
space. Special case is VTP Žilina (science and technology park), with a special status as association of legal entities.

3.2 Analysing coworking members in Slovakia

The analysis of coworking members in Slovakia was mainly focused on evaluation of their basic characteristics (demographic and professional), as well as effects of coworking membership and community on their work. The obtained results were further compared with the 2012 Global Coworking Survey.

3.2.1 Profile of coworking members

The average member of coworking in Slovakia is 30 years old. It is two years less than the global age average of 32. This finding fits with the results of Startup Survey carried out by consulting firm KPMG, where 79% percent of respondents fell to the age group of 25-34 (KPMG, 2015). On contrary, Slovakia substantially differs from the world average in the gender ratio, since women make up only 20% of coworking members, while European average (the highest regional average in the world) being 42%, and Asian average being 25%. This finding correlates with the Startup Survey finding that 76% of Slovak start-ups do not have a female founder or co-founder (KPMG, 2015). Average annual income of coworking members in Slovakia is 26 000 euros. On average, coworking members show a high average level of satisfaction with their coworking space - 8.2 out of 10 points, with 31% of respondents indicating the highest satisfaction rate of 10 points. In this case, the results for Slovakia are similar with the European average.

In terms of professional domain (Figure 1), IT dominates slightly more among Slovak coworking members than in the global average (40% vs. 34%). The second strongest group is made up by professionals in the field of PR and marketing with 16% - almost twice the global average. We expected a higher number of graphic designers since it is an occupation strongly represented among freelancers and that makes it an interesting target group. The “Other” category contained various combinations and interesting occupations such as data analysis or video editing.

Regarding employment status, up to 75% of members are entrepreneurs, with an even distribution between freelancers and entrepreneurs with employees. The remaining 25% represent employees working mostly for small companies with up to 5 people (11.1%). For start-ups, coworking space fulfils the function of entrepreneurship support, providing an option to set up a company headquarters with official address (optional service) and the space for the founder and initial team of employees.
3.2.2 Community and benefits for work

Since the primary purpose of coworking is to provide a place to work, we investigated the perception of positive and negative impact on the work from the perspective of coworking members. In Figure 2 below we can see the results for different aspects of the work.

Our findings confirm that coworking is perceived as an inspiring place, because 58% of respondents said that coworking had a positive effect on their creativity and business ideas. An interesting finding was about impact of coworking on the ability to concentrate on work.
Only 24% of respondents confirmed positive effect, while 53% indicated the negative impact. Global results indicate the opposite, with ratio 68% to 12% (positive / negative impact). Prior to conduction the analysis we assumed that the results for this question to be opposite, since the inability to concentrate on work at home or in a coffee shop is regularly cited as one of the main reasons why people choose membership at coworking space. Also, it is backed up by the results of global survey.

When evaluating the questions related to the coworking community, we focused on reasons for choosing the particular coworking, type and intensity of social interactions, and the rate of attending events organized at coworking space.

Regarding the factors relevant to members for selecting a particular coworking (Figure 3), the most important was enjoyable atmosphere (60%), followed by community and interactions with others (53% both), i.e. factors directly related to coworking community. In this case, Slovak coworking members are similar to the global average, where the three above mentioned factors were also identified as most important reasons for choosing a particular coworking space. On contrary, Slovak respondents consider good office infrastructure less important than their global counterparts (31% vs. 54%), but they indicate greater importance of good transport connection (31% vs. 18%).

Social interaction between members (Table 3) was dominated both in our survey and globally by regular brief communication between members, which is an equivalent of communication by the coffee machine that is normal on daily basis also in traditional offices. It may seem unimportant, but even such simple social interactions are important for mental hygiene during work. Its lack because of working at home can lead to feelings of social isolation, bringing us back to main reason why people start coworking membership.

Figure 3. Reasons for choosing a particular coworking space (source: own elaboration)
Table 3. Social interaction and its intensity between coworking members

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of social interaction</th>
<th>Slovakia</th>
<th>Global Coworking Survey</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Often</td>
<td>Sometimes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Casual small talks</td>
<td>67 %</td>
<td>31 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Common meals</td>
<td>40 %</td>
<td>51 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feedback</td>
<td>40 %</td>
<td>51 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moral support</td>
<td>27 %</td>
<td>53 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brainstorming, sharing ideas</td>
<td>24 %</td>
<td>47 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sharing knowledge &amp; advice</td>
<td>24 %</td>
<td>69 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quick help (e.g. fixing sth)</td>
<td>18 %</td>
<td>53 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working in a common firm</td>
<td>18 %</td>
<td>29 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working on common projects</td>
<td>13 %</td>
<td>49 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sharing job &amp; project opportunities</td>
<td>15 %</td>
<td>67 %</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: own analysis

Working in the same company was the least frequent case of social interaction, despite the fact that coworking is commonly used by start-up teams. Striking difference was identified in the knowledge exchange or a mutual advice. In Slovakia, only 24% respondents marked it as often, compared with 62% in the global survey. This is a paradox, given that 42% coworking members stated knowledge exchange as the reason why they chose membership in a particular coworking. It could therefore mean that people become members, expecting the knowledge exchange, but in the reality it does not happen too often. This finding could be influenced by start-up teams that may have most of the areas covered internally. Thus, for example an IT person does not need to ask another independent coworking member for quick consultation on design or marketing, but has an internal team member available. According to the survey, knowledge exchange works on occasional basis and vary depending on the specific coworking spaces.

A similar difference also occurred in sharing job offers - 16% (Slovakia) versus 42% (world). Type of a job offer was not specified in the question, i.e. whether it should be a permanent job offer or a project for a client with specific requirements. Since our survey was dominated by entrepreneurs, we can assume that it was the second option. This finding is also unexpected, because mutual references between members (if they know of mutual professional qualities) with different occupations among their clients can be of great benefit and work reciprocally. It can be assumed that diverse community is a good starting point, so there does not occur a competition in getting clients due to providing similar services.

Events in coworking spaces prove that activity and interactions between members do not take place only during standard business hours. The most popular events held in the coworking spaces are parties, with 47% of members attending them regularly. These can be organized for members only, or open to the public as an opportunity to meet community members in an informal atmosphere. It should be noted that regular public events are held primarily in larger coworking spaces, which could skew results since in case of smaller coworkings, the parties were frequently the only type of events. Following in the popularity are lectures and workshops, i.e. educational and training activities on various topics.
Conclusion

First coworking spaces in Slovakia were founded only around four years ago, but even in this time they already managed to establish themselves as an important space for work and business development. Achievements of innovative companies founded and developed in coworking spaces are the clear evidence. These companies now have a chance reach global impact and further strengthen the position of technology companies as a promising sector of the Slovak economy. Thanks to communication on social media, interesting events and appealing designer spaces, information about coworking spaces are reaching broader public, which further supports their development.

The aim of our paper was to map the current state of coworking spaces in Slovakia, both through analysis of operating coworking spaces as well as an analysis of their members, and comparing the results with a global survey. At the time of preparing our analysis we identified 24 active coworking spaces in Slovakia, mostly located in the capital - Bratislava (10 coworking spaces) that offer an open, attractive and affordable alternative to traditional rented office spaces. Slovak members of coworking are mostly young entrepreneurs, predominantly men, working mostly in the field of IT and a variety of creative and knowledge-intensive areas. Coworking spaces are perceived mainly as inspiring places with a pleasant atmosphere, interesting community, creative interactions and rather paradoxically, having negative impact on the ability to concentrate at work. Frequently used benefits are also different possibilities of social interactions with other members and attending events. Slovak coworking members, compared to the global average, show lower ability to benefit from knowledge exchange and job/business opportunities offers.

Our results indicate the important position of coworking spaces in the entrepreneurship ecosystem and diverse benefits they bring to members and the wider business community. It remains only to hope that the current coworking spaces in Slovakia will survive and their number will increase both in county towns and smaller regional towns, where they absent so far. This growth might be driven by great potential in the population to change the current model of work and self-realization in many occupations from employment status to self-employed or small businesses. Coworking spaces would be an ideal springboard for these new entities in terms of input costs, building business network, and opportunities for personal, professional and business development.

References


Appendix

Questionnaire: Coworking members’ survey (summary of question wording)

1. What aspects of your work are positively influenced by coworking membership?
2. What aspects of your work are negatively influenced by coworking membership?
3. Why have you chosen the particular coworking where you work?
4. What kind of events do you attend in your coworking?
5. What kind of interactions with other members do you experience? (often/sometimes/never)
6. What is your employment status?
7. How do you evaluate your coworking? (0=min, 10=max)
8. What is your professional domain?
9. How old are you?
10. What is your annual income?