

Fostering wellbeing and satisfaction for micro-entrepreneurs: the role of coworking spaces

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Abstract

Purpose – This study aims to examine the impact of coworking spaces (CWS) on the wellbeing and entrepreneurial satisfaction of remotely working micro-entrepreneurs, highlighting the role of these spaces beyond conventional work locations. It specifically investigates how CWS foster a supportive ecosystem for micro-entrepreneurs, supporting their professional journey.

Design/methodology/approach – Employing a mixed-methodological approach, this study uses nearest-neighbor matching and multiple regressions based on quantitative surveys from a representative sample of micro-entrepreneurs, including those working from CWS, and a qualitative focus group with frequent CWS users. This comprehensive approach allows for a nuanced exploration of the impacts of CWS on micro-entrepreneurs' wellbeing and satisfaction.

Findings – The study finds that micro-entrepreneurs experience significant benefits from utilizing CWS, most notably in terms of wellbeing and work–life balance. These spaces provide valuable support through community building, networking opportunities and structured work environments. The benefits of CWS are particularly pronounced for women and micro-entrepreneurs with young children, aiding in boundary management and mitigating the challenges of social isolation.

Practical implications – We provide clear implications for remotely working micro-entrepreneurs, especially women with young children at home, on why to use CWS as their primary locations. The findings also offer insights for policymakers and CWS providers, underlining the importance of designing CWS environments that meet micro-entrepreneurs' diverse needs.

Originality/value – This study contributes to the existing literature by providing a detailed examination of the utilization of CWS among micro-entrepreneurs and the impact of CWS on their wellbeing and entrepreneurial satisfaction.

Keywords Workplace, Coworking, Entrepreneurial satisfaction, Micro-entrepreneurship, Wellbeing, Work-family balance

Paper type Research paper

1. Introduction

Existence is no more than the precarious attainment of relevance in an intensely mobile flux of past, present and future.

— Susan Sontag

Sontag's (1966) comment on the nature of one-person-based micro-businesses positioned in the art and culture industry shows an intensifying sense of amenableness in which many



contemporary self-employed knowledge workers have found themselves, especially when coping with the ever-changing labor markets. Commonly referred to as micro-entrepreneurs or solopreneurs, these one-person owners of micro businesses commonly establish their work as service providers (Yoosuf and Premaratne, 2017) and are repeatedly faced with high economic pressure (Huang and Chen, 2021). That said, even highly skilled micro-entrepreneurs can routinely find themselves as precarious workers, mainly because they can be crowded out from the dependent labor markets and are generally driven by a spectrum of economic reasons (Bögenhold and Klinglmair, 2015).

The recent economic fluctuations and the COVID-19 pandemic have heightened their need for adaptive and agile strategies (Ducanes and Ramos, 2022). This adaptive nature often leads them to seek flexible work arrangements, yet home offices and other “third places” like cafes or libraries fall short of providing a conducive work environment, often leading to issues like work–family conflicts and cognitive employment insecurity (Antonucci *et al.*, 2021; Molina, 2021). CWS emerge as a novel solution, offering a physical workspace, a community and a support network (Aslam *et al.*, 2021). These spaces are not just about physical proximity; they are about creating a sense of community and collaborative spirit, which can be particularly beneficial for micro-entrepreneurs who often work in isolation (Bianchi *et al.*, 2018).

This study explores the multifaceted role of CWS for micro-entrepreneurs, providing social support, professional networking and a structured work environment crucial for discipline and work-life balance, while considering gender and family perspectives. Anchored in the “Sense of Place” theory (Dameria *et al.*, 2022; Materson *et al.*, 2017; Raymond *et al.*, 2017) and the “Sense of Community” theory (McMillan and Chavis, 1986; Garrett *et al.*, 2017), this study aims to rigorously understand the motivations driving micro-entrepreneurs to utilize CWS and critically assess the impact of such spaces on their wellbeing and entrepreneurial satisfaction, responding to the “call” for better understanding of social and contextual factors influencing entrepreneurs’ wellbeing (Stephan, 2018; Wiklund *et al.*, 2019) and filling a notable gap in existing literature.

Methodologically, the study employs a mixed-methods approach that combines quantitative surveys from a representative sample of micro-entrepreneurs and a convenience sample of those using CWS. The nearest-neighbor matching and multiple regression analyses based on quantitative data aim to systematically examine and compare the wellbeing and satisfaction levels of micro-entrepreneurs working in CWS versus those in other work settings, thereby providing an empirical basis for assessing the value and impact of CWS. In addition, a focus group consisting of frequent CWS users offers deeper, qualitative insights. This group allows for an exploration of subjective experiences and perceptions, thereby enriching the quantitative findings and providing a more holistic understanding of the role of CWS in enhancing the quality of life for micro-entrepreneurs. The study’s contribution lies in its exploration of CWS within the context of contemporary knowledge work. With the aim of examining both the tangible and intangible benefits of CWS, the research sheds light on micro-entrepreneurs’ motivations for seeking out these alternative work locations.

2. Literature review

2.1 *Micro-entrepreneurs’ wellbeing and satisfaction*

There is a growing interest in the entrepreneurs’ wellbeing (e.g. Stephan, 2018; Wiklund *et al.*, 2019; Zwan and Hessels, 2019; Stephan *et al.*, 2023). Wellbeing is essential for entrepreneurs’ satisfaction and productivity and influences entrepreneurial motivation and decision-making. There is a need to understand the dynamic, social and contextual factors influencing entrepreneurs’ wellbeing (Stephan, 2018; Wiklund *et al.*, 2019). Our study focuses on

motivations of micro-entrepreneurs – independent professionals - to utilize CWS as their primary work location and assess the impact of CWS on micro-entrepreneurs' wellbeing and satisfaction.

Studies acknowledge differences between employers and solo entrepreneurs, with the latter having lower satisfaction with income and being less optimistic about their entrepreneurial future (Zwan and Hessels, 2019; Bögenhold and Klingmair, 2015). These individuals do not aim to scale their businesses significantly but seek autonomy, personal wellbeing, self-reliance and flexibility (Bögenhold and Klingmair, 2015; Eveland and MacLennan, 2019; Ruiz-Alba *et al.*, 2020). Despite the appeal of independent work arrangements, micro-entrepreneurs face challenges related to precarity that impact their wellbeing and satisfaction (Sutherland *et al.*, 2020). The recent COVID-19 pandemic further exposed their vulnerability, as they were among the first affected by the economic slowdown and pandemic-induced restrictions (Blackburn *et al.*, 2021). Moreover, research indicates that self-employed women encounter greater challenges than their male counterparts (Caliendo *et al.*, 2023).

In the context of micro-entrepreneurship, entrepreneurial satisfaction is when individuals feel “satisfied if they prefer a self-employment option as opposed to reverting to paid employment, if the latter becomes a viable option” (Kautonen and Palmroos, 2010, p. 287). It is crucial to comprehend micro-entrepreneurs' satisfaction as it explains work-related attitudes and decisions and predominantly affects individuals' work-life strategy, performance and persistence (Lauto *et al.*, 2020). Entrepreneurial satisfaction corresponds with independent professional's actions that can result in rather drastic changes in an individual's work or life setting (Schjoedt, 2009). Micro-entrepreneurs' satisfaction levels, influenced by their cognitive evaluation of their situation (Kautonen and Palmroos, 2010) and self-perception (Costa *et al.*, 2016), consist of extrinsic factors (like career opportunities, job security, salary) and intrinsic factors (such as quality of work, work environment and social relations). Elevated intrinsic satisfaction leads to less stress and a better quality of life (Carree and Verheul, 2012). However, high-stress days can lead to fatigue, highlighting the importance of the work environment in stress recovery (Wach *et al.*, 2021). Thus, the place of work is one of crucial factors in balancing wellbeing, health and productivity for micro-entrepreneurs.

Micro-entrepreneurs, who are often sole operators of micro businesses across various sectors, play a pivotal role in both emerging and developed markets. Emerging markets typically encompass food vendors and rural farmers. In developed countries, there's a rising trend of self-employed professionals working through freelancer-focused platforms like *Fiverr*, *Upwork*, *Toptal* and *Catalant* (previously *HourlyNerd*) – to name a few examples (see Sutherland *et al.*, 2020). These platforms enable micro-entrepreneurs to offer their skills and services to a global client base, creating vibrant marketplaces with entrepreneurial dynamics. Individuals can bid on projects, set their own rates, communicate directly with clients and build their professional reputations through client reviews and portfolio showcases (Benson *et al.*, 2019). This model empowers them to operate as independent business entities (by offering, for example, web or graphic design, programming, consulting, digital marketing and other services). Importantly, the digital nature of this work allows micro-entrepreneurs significant locational flexibility, as they primarily require a laptop and reliable Internet connection to operate. This enables them to work from home offices or various other locations (Flanagan, 2019).

However, highly skilled professionals working from home are often deprived of the positive attributes that come with working in the social setting of a structured organizational environment. First, they can become subject to social isolation due to limited access to relevant professional and informal social networks. This isolation can impact their sense of cognitive security and negatively affect their overall wellbeing (Antonucci *et al.*, 2021;

Warren, 2015). Second, when working in isolating environments with limited face-to-face interactions, these professionals must rely primarily on their own efforts to obtain the competitive knowledge needed to support the stability and growth of their micro-businesses (Pulka *et al.*, 2021). This presents challenges for continuous skill development and staying abreast of rapidly evolving industry trends.

What is more, understanding the gender perspective and the position of female micro-entrepreneurs is crucial, especially considering the unique challenges and barriers they face in the entrepreneurial landscape. These challenges, including gender biases (Lee and Huang, 2018), and greater work-family conflict (Stephan, 2018), distinctly impact their satisfaction levels and overall entrepreneurial experience. Such challenges are not just theoretical but have real-world implications on their professional and personal lives. For instance, female entrepreneurs often prioritize work-family balance, creating synergies that emphasize quality family life, sometimes even at the expense of their business growth (Adom *et al.*, 2017). This balancing act is further complicated by events like the COVID-19 pandemic, which has significantly affected the economic, social and psychological wellbeing of women entrepreneurs, impacting their sales, household income, lifestyle and mental health (Mustafa *et al.*, 2021). The professional wellbeing of female entrepreneurs is notably influenced by family-related factors more so than their male counterparts, presenting a substantial challenge in harmonizing work and family responsibilities. This balancing act often disrupts their entrepreneurial pursuits, as Clercq *et al.* (2019) highlighted. Compounding this, a study by Berge *et al.* (2015) through a randomized control trial uncovered that work-family conflict adversely affects only female entrepreneurs, underscoring the gender-specific hurdles they face. These entrepreneurs' motivation frequently revolves around the aspiration to navigate career demands alongside personal life, emphasizing the criticality of attaining work-life balance for their wellbeing (DeMartino *et al.*, 2006).

Recognizing and addressing these gender-specific nuances is crucial in fostering equitable and supportive ecosystems that bolster female micro-entrepreneurs. In this context, the significance of physical environments designed for collaboration becomes apparent, offering a potential avenue to alleviate the challenges identified, thereby enhancing their entrepreneurial success and satisfaction.

2.2 Coworking environments as places of support

CWS are open-plan workplaces where individuals or teams of individuals can benefit from spatial resources and mediation mechanisms that support the opportunity to knit social ties (Sutherland *et al.*, 2020), build supportive networks and ensure social support (Bianchi *et al.*, 2018). These spaces are characterized by strong institutional, cognitive and social proximities (Micek, 2020) and contribute to knowledge creation (Bouncken *et al.*, 2023). The CWS facilitate productivity (Sutherland *et al.*, 2020) and individual work satisfaction through agility, knowledge and social configurations (Bouncken *et al.*, 2020).

Being primarily membership-based, CWS enable professionals to utilize shared workstations that accelerate users' flexibility and fluctuation within the designated work environment, supporting interactivity and sociality among individuals (Bueno *et al.*, 2018). That said, CWS function as catalysts for social interaction and reciprocal knowledge sharing, although spontaneous and serendipitous collaborative exchanges are not as common as expected (Brown, 2017). A recent study by Appel-Meulenbroek *et al.* (2021) on user preferences for CWS showed varying perspectives and motivations behind using these collaborative workspaces, particularly in the desired quality levels of attributes like accessibility, atmosphere and contract options. That does not come with the surprise, mainly given the perspective behind community-level cultural norms of CWS. Performance-based culture and socially supportive institutional norms influence entrepreneurial self-efficacy and

motivation (Hopp and Stephan, 2012). With that, CWS foster a sense of community, leading to cooperative attitudes and behaviors, preferred partnerships and occasionally startups, with soft internal competition (Cuérel *et al.*, 2019). However, there is a rather crucial component of the gender perspective and the question of possible (in)differences that needs to be addressed.

Surrounding the latter, research has highlighted that female entrepreneurs face greater work-family conflict compared to men, which can negatively impact their entrepreneurial endeavors and satisfaction (Eddleston and Powell, 2012; Stephan, 2018). The work-family interface shapes the entrepreneurial experience, as women often prioritize quality family life even at the expense of business growth (Adom *et al.*, 2017). Our study will examine whether CWS can mitigate work-family conflicts for micro-entrepreneurs and consider the gender dimension.

This necessitates an approach attentive to gender differences in work-family balance and isolation concerns. While existing literature highlights the importance of supporting female entrepreneurs (e.g. Baughn *et al.*, 2006; Berge *et al.*, 2015), our focus is specifically on how CWS environments influence work-family conflict and social connections. We aim to address the scarcity of research on how CWS impact micro-entrepreneurs' wellbeing and satisfaction levels.

2.3 Supporting wellbeing and satisfaction in coworking environments through sense of place and community

Based on the reviewed literature, there are strong implications towards CWS being viewed as modern hubs for collaboration, offering a rather unique environment conducive to micro-entrepreneurs' wellbeing and satisfaction. We see that these (work)spaces provide not just a physical location for work, but also a sense of place and community that fosters belonging and professional identity, enabling access to a supportive network of peers, sharing ideas, resources and encouragement. What remains unclear – however – is, how significant is the role of CWS in supporting micro-entrepreneur's work-life balance and general mental wellbeing? Moreover, how can CWS mitigate work-life spill-overs for these independent professionals, particularly in impacting their work-life balance and productivity? And lastly – what is the role of CWS in providing social interactions and mitigating isolation, especially for female micro-entrepreneurs?

To further clarify the study's theoretical framing and address these uncertainties, we position additional perspectives that coherently follow the empirical evidence in the literature review's upper segment. First, suggesting that CWS can positively influence micro-entrepreneurs' wellbeing and entrepreneurial satisfaction, this can be framed under the "Sense of Place" theory. This theory, encompassing a multidimensional attitude concept including place identity, place attachment and place dependence (Dameria *et al.*, 2022), perceives a selected place as a mechanism influencing a group's behavioral and sensory characteristics. The theory suggests that individuals and places develop place-based meanings and perceived attachment constructed by a person toward a specific setting (Raymond *et al.*, 2017). In this light, CWS can be seen as places directly influencing individuals by assisting in building their preferential emotional and social foundations, narrated by the CWS's organizational setting. Sense of place theory shapes personal and collective identity (Shamai and Ilatov, 2005).

Second, to comprehend the human-centered component behind the CWS model, the theory behind the "Sense of Community" clarifies the behavioral patterns and identification marks of CWS users. This theory, characterized by feelings of belonging, attachment and identification within a community (McMillan and Chavis, 1986), posits that CWS can establish a community grouping users with a collaborative mentality and a high tendency to share common resources. The sense of community in CWS is achieved by users collaboratively engaging,

endorsing and encountering one another, aiming to maintain the desired community experience (Garrett *et al.*, 2017). The theory's four key elements—membership, need fulfillment, integration, influence and shared emotional connection (Lee *et al.*, 2022)—have been applied in various contexts, including schools, neighborhoods and organizations. This has been linked to positive outcomes for individuals and communities (Prati *et al.*, 2018; Halamová *et al.*, 2018). Additionally, the sense of community theory is not only a psychological construct but also a valuable resource for community development and participation (Nowell and Boyd, 2014), suggesting its applicability in understanding the dynamics within CWS.

Continuing in this context, contextualizing workplace wellbeing within the field of organizational research highlights the intertwining of individuals' emotional or social workplace-related experiences and their non-work domains (Yitshaki, 2021; Danna and Griffin, 1999). Independent professionals experiencing higher levels of work-life spill-over and blurred boundaries between work and personal life tend to see a drop in productivity, make fewer quality decisions and are negatively impacted, especially compared to those who maintain clear distinctions between their work and non-work domains (De Simone, 2014). From this perspective, CWS hold the potential to contain these spill-overs, enabling micro-entrepreneurs to structure their work-life balance by using a separate workspace for work and family obligations. This needs empirical support. Furthermore, despite some highly skilled micro-entrepreneurs being satisfied with working from home, the need for face-to-face social interactions is still prominent, especially among knowledge workers (Daniel *et al.*, 2018). Women with young children may particularly feel the brunt of family-driven distractions and physical isolation. Female knowledge workers often balance dual roles and seek ways to tackle distractions, such as by structuring schedules more precisely within their households (Lim, 2019). In this light, contemporary CWS might offer a viable solution for female micro-entrepreneurs with children to optimize their work-life balance, improve work performance and overcome work-family conflicts, while maintaining a level of inspiration and satisfaction in their roles.

Integrating these perspectives with the previously discussed sense of place and community theories, it becomes evident that CWS can support independent workers' wellbeing and entrepreneurial satisfaction. These aspects are crucial usage factors for micro-business owners. Consequently, we propose to empirically test two relevant hypotheses: H1, which posits that the utilization of CWS significantly enhances the wellbeing (H1a) and entrepreneurial satisfaction (H1b) of micro-entrepreneurs, and H2, which suggests that the benefits of CWS, in terms of wellbeing enhancement, work satisfaction, inspiration, cooperation and work performance are more pronounced for female micro-entrepreneurs (H2a) and those with young children (H2b).

3. Methodological framework

The research design is based on the mixed methods approach, initially built on the quantitative approach, and subsequently expanded with the data gathered from the focus group. The mixed methods approach enabled the latter's integration in a single study. While the quantitative research design enables us to test the set hypotheses, the qualitative component allows us to contextualize the findings, bringing enriched meaning.

3.1 Quantitative research design

Our quantitative analysis aimed to explore the impact of CWS on the satisfaction and wellbeing of entrepreneurs, focusing on whether these benefits vary by gender and family status. We investigated two main hypotheses: H1, concerning the reduction of precarity for

entrepreneurs using CWS, and H2, on the differential benefits of CWS membership. The analysis utilized data from two surveys conducted in 2021. The first, Survey 1, targeted microbusiness owners (up to 10 employees), gathering data from 135 participants in a pilot phase, which informed slight adjustments to the questionnaire. Conducted by market research agencies Behavio and Data Collect, the main survey reached 3,900 entrepreneurs, achieving a 24.3% response rate (947 responses). After applying filters to ensure the focus on dedicated microbusiness owners—excluding those with large ventures, minimal weekly work hours or concurrent full-time jobs—the useable sample was narrowed to 824 observations.

Our sample's representativeness was verified against the Czech Statistical Office's data on economic entities and Dvouletý's (2019) analysis of Czech entrepreneurs' age and gender distribution. The sample matched well with national demographics in age and region, though women and sectors like ICT and finance were slightly overrepresented, underscoring the need to adjust for gender and industry in our analysis. Due to the low prevalence of CWS regulars, only seven entrepreneurs from our initial survey reported primarily working from CWS. To deepen our understanding of CWS users, we conducted a second survey (Survey 2) targeting CWS attendees, using the same questionnaire as the first. This follow-up survey, carried out by trained university students, added 108 observations of entrepreneurs who mainly work from CWS.

3.1.1 Dependent variables. Two types of dependent variables were included in our analyses, reflecting the different questions we were trying to answer. The first question compared wellbeing and satisfaction with entrepreneurship from the CWS with the rest of the population. The questionnaire measured both wellbeing and entrepreneurial satisfaction by a battery of 6-point Likert-scale items.

For *wellbeing*, the battery contained five questions, asking the respondents about how they felt over the past three months. Three items were worded positively, asking about feeling satisfied with own life (Diener *et al.*, 1985), relaxed, balanced and cheerful (WHO, 1998). The remaining two items were worded negatively, asking about feeling downhearted (Ware *et al.*, 1996) and stressed (Cohen *et al.*, 1983); the negatively worded questions were reverse-coded in the data processing phase to align with the rest. The eventual value of the *wellbeing* scale was obtained as the mean across the five items (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.90$, avg. interitem correlation = 0.66); items were not standardized before taking the mean.

Entrepreneurial satisfaction is a scale constructed analogously from a battery of four items (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.83$, avg. interitem correlation = 0.55). In this case, all items were positively worded and asked respondents about their satisfaction with being an entrepreneur: (1) the decision to start up the business, (2) the type of work they are doing, (3) the level of independence and (4) the degree of self-realization. The item construction was inspired by previously developed scale by Hytti *et al.* (2013) and Bögenhold *et al.* (2014).

The second goal of quantitative analyses was to assess the entrepreneurs' perception of the value added by working from a CWS. Therefore, the dependent variables in this strand of analyses were only measured for the CWS regulars. A total of 5 questions regarding the CWS effects were asked, all measured using a 6-point Likert scale. Two partially mirrored the previous dependent variables: respondents reported how CWS affected their *wellbeing* and *work satisfaction*. This allowed us to assess the same concepts from two different angles (i.e. the effect of CWS on wellbeing is subjectively evaluated by the respondents and objectively by comparing wellbeing levels with those not in CWS.) The remaining questions asked how CWS affected the respondents' *work performance*, that is, how effectively an individual performs activities required by the job (Borman and Motowidlo, 1997), *cooperation with others*, and *inspiration* (e.g. "What is the effect of your CWS membership on gaining new ideas and work inspiration?").

3.1.2 Independent variables. The key independent variable, *coworking space member*, indicated whether the respondents do most of their work from a CWS. Survey 1 included 7 such respondents; Survey 2 contained only CWS members.

We accounted for the general effects of demographic differences among respondents in all statistical analyses. These included gender (coded as a *female* indicator), *age* (in years), education (included as an indicator of a *university degree*), the presence of *children* in the household (utilizing three categories: no children, only children aged 7+, at least one child aged 0–6) and degree of urbanization at the place of residence (included in the form of an indicator of *Prague or Brno* – Czechia’s two major cities, standing out in terms of entrepreneurial activity). The variables for education and degree of urbanization were recoded from a finer scale to (1) keep the number of model parameters reasonable and (2) avoid categories with uneven/deficient counts.

The remaining two independent variables were related to the respondents’ business. Firstly, we asked about the number of employees; in the survey, this question was an early question aimed at filtering out respondents from other than micro-sized ventures. *Venture size* was coded into three categories: 0, 1, 2–4 and 5–9 co-workers. Secondly, we accounted for the venture industries. These were processed manually from an open-ended survey item asking for a description of the entrepreneurial activity. The responses were aligned with the level-4 categories of the NACE classification (For approx. 1.5% of the sample, the verbal description did not suffice for reliable classification, producing missing values.). Our *industry* variable aggregated the results into a cruder scale of 13 categories. Aggregation was mostly based on level-1 categories of NACE. However, two lower-level NACE classes were used to separate industries heavily affected by the COVID-19 pandemic: tourism and personal services.

3.1.3 Statistical analyses. In the initial phase of our analysis, we examined how CWS membership impacts entrepreneurs’ wellbeing and satisfaction. Several challenges complicate measuring this effect: a small proportion of entrepreneurs use CWS, CWS users often belong to specific industries, and many choose CWS voluntarily, believing it suits their needs. To mitigate these issues, we merged data from Survey 1, a broad sample of entrepreneurs, with Survey 2, focused on CWS users. This approach helps us navigate the strong self-selection bias of CWS members, recognizing that simply comparing wellbeing and satisfaction between CWS users and non-users may not accurately reflect the actual impact of CWS membership.

To overcome this problem, we use a matching estimator explicitly designed to estimate treatment effects from observational data. Concretely, we use the nearest-neighbor matching estimator derived by [Abadie and Imbens \(2006, 2011\)](#) and implemented in Stata 17 ([StataCorp, 2021](#)), in the *tteffects nmmatch* command. The estimation procedure locates the nearest neighbor for each observation in the sample with the opposing value of *CWS member*; distances between observations are based on all other independent variables and measured by the standard Mahalanobis metric. In the case of ties, multiple nearest neighbors were averaged into one synthetic observation. Additionally, as a simple robustness check, we employ the propensity-score matching estimator by [Rosenbaum and Rubin \(1983\)](#), with standard errors suggested by [Abadie and Imbens \(2012\)](#) (in Stata 17: *tteffects psmatch*).

In the second phase, we use standard multiple regression to investigate the determinants of the effect of CWS on wellbeing and various aspects of work, as perceived by the respondents. This analysis only includes data on the 115 respondents who worked from CWS. We simplified our categorical variables as follows to keep the number of regression coefficients reasonable. *Children* and *venture size* were replaced with simple dummies identifying the presence of *younger children* in the household and *solo entrepreneurs*; the *industry* variable was dropped altogether.

3.2 Qualitative research design

The second part of the study utilized a focus group method, engaging participants in an interactive discussion to gather data. This group was composed of micro-entrepreneurs and independent knowledge workers from a Prague-based CWS, with eligibility criteria including a minimum 6-month usage of the CWS and residency in Prague. Recruitment took place in December 2021 amidst a partial COVID-19 lockdown, with a deliberate emphasis on female representation, as they were found to benefit more from CWS membership, according to the study’s quantitative results. The focus group, comprising 5 women and 2 men from 6 different countries, all in their 20s or 30s (see Table 1), convened in-person in January 2022 at the CWS, under improved COVID-19 conditions and with participants’ consent. The moderator took notes to capture the dynamics of the discussion, particularly the extent of agreement among participants’ perceptions and thoughts. However, the session faced certain limitations: some participants felt rushed after the first half-hour, likely due to work deadlines, and the moderator found it challenging to grasp participants’ emotions due to their mask-wearing, which obscured facial expressions.

While a single focus group may seem limited, it provides valuable insights that complement the quantitative findings. A well-moderated discussion with carefully selected participants can yield meaningful data (Krueger and Casey, 2015). The participants’ frequent use of coworking spaces ensured relevant insights, and the semi-structured discussion allowed for in-depth exploration. The purpose was to contextualize the quantitative results, adding depth to our understanding of coworking spaces’ impact on micro-entrepreneurs’ well-being and satisfaction. Even a single focus group can serve as a valuable tool for triangulation, generating rich data that supports the study (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2018) and paints a broader picture around the quantitative findings (Wenger, 1999).

3.2.1 Analysis. The recording of the debate has been transcribed and edited for clarity, with the observation notes attached as a commentary to the transcription. The compiled data has been analyzed using mixed content analysis. The approach has been selected due to its ability to acquire information through a three-element coding framework (White and Marsh, 2006). The first completed sub-approach involved the initial coding for generating provisional category codes, and then continued with the focused coding (e.g. wellbeing, satisfaction, work-life balance, professional growth, etc.), where we eliminated some of the less relevant coding categories (e.g. coffee breaks, material sharing, etc.). The third and final step involved the ethnographic analysis. The latter looked at the accompanying data gathered in parallel with conducting the group interview. These notes and subsequent memo outcomes provided a richer insight into findings, mainly due to drawing on direct quotes.

4. Findings

4.1 Quantitative results interpretation

We first examine the quantitative data collection and analysis results. Parts A and B of Table 2 display descriptive statistics for CWS members and the entire sample, while part C

Participant	Gender	Nationality	Age	Occupation
P1	Female	Russian	35	Copywriter
P2	Female	Spanish	26	Travel agent
P3	Female	British	28	Translator
P4	Female	Czech	32	Copywriter
P5	Female	Czech	36	Researcher
P6	Male	Spanish	34	Copywriter
P7	Male	Italian	38	Programmer

Source(s): Created by authors

Table 1. Focus group participants

	(A) Survey 1, CWS non-members				(B) Survey 1 and 2, CWS members				(C) CWS members' matched neighbors			
	N	Mean	SD	Range	N	Mean	SD	Range	N	Mean	SD	Range
Wellbeing	847	3.73	1.19	1-6	115	4.04	0.89	1.4-5.6	111	3.50	1.12	1-6
Entrepreneurial satisfaction	847	4.92	0.88	1-6	115	5.10	0.91	1.5-6	111	4.99	0.69	3-6
Female	847	0.44	0.50	0-1	115	0.34	0.48	0-1	111	0.36	0.48	0-1
Age	845	43.6	10.8	18-70	115	30.1	8.78	21-59	111	32.5	8.62	21-59
Prague or Brno	847	0.29	0.45	0-1	115	0.71	0.45	0-1	111	0.64	0.48	0-1
University degree	847	0.36	0.48	0-1	115	0.64	0.48	0-1	111	0.63	0.48	0-1
<i>Children in household</i>												
• No children	847	0.62	0.49	0-1	115	0.80	0.40	0-1	111	0.78	0.41	0-1
• Older children only	847	0.22	0.42	0-1	115	0.026	0.16	0-1	111	0.036	0.19	0-1
• Young children	847	0.16	0.37	0-1	115	0.17	0.38	0-1	111	0.18	0.39	0-1
<i>Venture size (# of employees)</i>												
• 0	847	0.38	0.49	0-1	115	0.70	0.46	0-1	111	0.71	0.46	0-1
• 1	847	0.39	0.49	0-1	115	0.096	0.30	0-1	111	0.11	0.31	0-1
• 2-4	847	0.17	0.38	0-1	115	0.17	0.38	0-1	111	0.15	0.36	0-1
• 5-9	847	0.052	0.22	0-1	115	0.035	0.18	0-1	111	0.027	0.16	0-1
<i>Industry</i>												
• A-E Primary and manuf	835	0.085	0.28	0-1	111	0.036	0.19	0-1	111	0.027	0.16	0-1
• F Construction	835	0.079	0.27	0-1	111	0.018	0.13	0-1	111	0.018	0.13	0-1
• G Commerce	835	0.14	0.34	0-1	111	0.081	0.27	0-1	111	0.081	0.27	0-1
• H Transport	835	0.025	0.16	0-1	111	0.018	0.13	0-1	111	0.018	0.13	0-1
• I Accommodation/food	835	0.034	0.18	0-1	111	0.018	0.13	0-1	111	0.018	0.13	0-1
• J ICT	835	0.11	0.32	0-1	111	0.18	0.39	0-1	111	0.18	0.39	0-1
• K-N Fin./prof./tech	835	0.37	0.48	0-1	111	0.40	0.49	0-1	111	0.41	0.49	0-1
• N79 Tourism	835	0.0060	0.077	0-1	111	0.0090	0.095	0-1	111	0.0090	0.095	0-1
• P Education	835	0.047	0.21	0-1	111	0.081	0.27	0-1	111	0.081	0.27	0-1
• Q Health	835	0.016	0.12	0-1	111	0.0090	0.095	0-1	111	0.0090	0.095	0-1
• R Culture and sport	835	0.040	0.19	0-1	111	0.14	0.35	0-1	111	0.14	0.35	0-1
• S96 Personal services	835	0.048	0.21	0-1	111	0.027	0.16	0-1	111	0.027	0.16	0-1
• Other	835	0.0024	0.049	0-1	111	0.027	0.16	0-1	111	0.027	0.16	0-1

Note(s): Two sectors (*I Accommodation/food* and *Other*) were not present among the CWS members; these were removed from the sample prior to the matching procedure
Source(s): Created by authors

Table 2. Descriptive statistics for (A) CWS non-members from Survey 1 (representative sample), (B) CWS members from both surveys combined and (C) for a synthetic sample where observations from A were matched to observations from B via nearest-neighbour matching using Mahalonobis distance

outlines statistics for a synthetic sample of 111 nearest neighbors to CWS members, identified through matching (13 of these are averages due to tied distance metrics). As can be noted, both *B* and *C* are remarkably close in terms of the independent variables. However, a comparison of the means of the outcome variables suggests an improvement in average *wellbeing* by about 0.54 points of the 6-point Likert scale for those working from CWSs (mean wellbeing for *B* = 4.04, mean wellbeing for *C* = 3.50). The magnitude of this effect corresponds to about half of the standard deviation of *wellbeing*. For *entrepreneurial satisfaction*, the difference seems less pronounced (0.11 points of the 6-point scale).

More detailed results regarding the matching estimators are shown in Table 3. The aforementioned difference in means corresponds to the *average treatment effect on the treated* (ATET) obtained by the nearest-neighbor estimator. Inferential results confirm the effect on *wellbeing* as statistically significant at the conventional 5% level ($p = 0.015$); the estimated effect on *entrepreneurial satisfaction* is much smaller and statistically insignificant ($p = 0.427$). Results regarding the overall *average treatment effect* (ATE) align with the idea of self-selection: people who decide to join CWS seem to benefit from them: the ATE for *wellbeing* is substantially smaller than the corresponding ATET (ATE = 0.54, ATET = 0.34). That said, the estimated ATE is still positive and significant. The results obtained by the propensity-score matching estimator are remarkably close to their nearest-neighbor counterpart, suggesting that the findings are reasonably robust.

Table 4 shows the results of regressions explaining the perceived effect of CWS membership, self-reported by the respondents. No sizeable or significant effects were detected for the respondents' age and education or the ventures' size and region. There were, however, clearly discernible gender differences, with women appreciating the positive effect of CWS membership more often than men (the effect of gender was significant in the regression for *wellbeing*, *work satisfaction*, *inspiration* and *work performance*, with $p = 0.015$ or less in all cases). The magnitudes of these effects were all between 0.55 and 0.74 points on the 6-point Likert scale. On the other hand, in the regression for *cooperation*, the point estimate of the impact of gender is much smaller (about 0.19) and statistically insignificant.

Moreover, entrepreneurs with young children in the household valued their CWS membership more than the rest in terms of *inspiration* ($p = 0.033$); analogous effects were marginally significant in the case of *wellbeing* ($p = 0.088$) and *cooperation* ($p = 0.080$). The effect sizes varied between 0.56 and 0.75 points on the 6-point scale. In the regressions for *work satisfaction* and *work performance*, the estimated effects were both smaller (both being about 0.24) and statistically insignificant.

4.2 Qualitative results interpretation

The qualitative findings shed light on the key factors driving micro-entrepreneurs' utilization of CWS and the subsequent impact on their wellbeing and work-life balance. The analysis

Table 3. Results of the nearest-neighbour and propensity-score matching regressions estimating the effect of CWS membership on wellbeing and entrepreneurial satisfaction

Estimator	Nearest-neighbour matching		Propensity-score matching	
	Wellbeing	Entrepreneurial satisfaction	Wellbeing	Entrepreneurial satisfaction
Average treatment effect on the treated (ATET)	0.537** (0.222)	0.114 (0.144)	0.551** (0.198)	0.117 (0.174)
Average treatment effect (ATE)	0.340** (0.122)	0.123 (0.110)	0.332** (0.0692)	0.152 (0.106)
<i>N</i>	914	914	914	914

Note(s): (i) Standard errors in parentheses. (ii) * $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$
Source(s): Created by authors

	Perceived effect of CWS membership on				
	Wellbeing	Work satisfaction	Inspiration	Cooperation	Work performance
Female	0.622** (0.252)	0.642** (0.221)	0.554** (0.253)	0.186 (0.243)	0.738** (0.231)
Age	-0.00577 (0.0143)	-0.000708 (0.0126)	0.00235 (0.0144)	0.00650 (0.0138)	-0.00379 (0.0132)
Young children in the household	0.570* (0.331)	0.235 (0.290)	0.720** (0.333)	0.563* (0.318)	0.236 (0.304)
University degree	-0.274 (0.265)	0.147 (0.233)	-0.00300 (0.267)	-0.0869 (0.255)	0.195 (0.243)
Solo entrepreneur	-0.147 (0.265)	-0.178 (0.232)	-0.261 (0.266)	-0.292 (0.254)	-0.137 (0.243)
Prague or Brno	0.262 (0.285)	0.0516 (0.249)	0.354 (0.286)	0.253 (0.273)	0.326 (0.261)
Constant	4.295** (0.557)	4.190** (0.488)	3.851** (0.559)	3.921** (0.535)	4.004** (0.511)
N	115	115	115	114	115
R-squared	0.0815	0.0953	0.0959	0.0589	0.123

Note(s): (i) A total of five different regressions presented, each for one dependent variables, indicated by the column heading. (ii) Standard errors in parentheses. (iii) * $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$

Source(s): Created by authors

Table 4.
Regressions explaining
the perceived effect of
CWS membership on
wellbeing and various
aspects of work

revealed that the primary motivation for using a CWS is the desire to establish an optimal work-life separation and boundary management.

You can separate the personal life and work-life in a way that I was not doing when I was a working home as a remote freelancer. So, for me, it mentally works like this. I need this physical separation to change my mind and focus more on what I am doing. (P5)

The physical separation provided by CWS enables micro-entrepreneurs to structure their workdays more effectively. Participants highlighted how CWS facilitate productivity by creating a dedicated workspace that fosters focus and minimizes distractions compared to working from home.

I can be very productive instead of working at home for six hours because I will be interrupted every 30 minutes. I can come to a coworking space and do the work in four hours; then, I can spend two quality hours with my daughter. I think that this is helping me work less time but be more productive and then have more time. What I feel is quality of life. (P6)

It appears that micro-entrepreneurs can establish clearer boundaries between their work and personal domains when actively using a selected CWS. This boundary creation mitigates work-family conflicts that often arise when working from home, reducing stress levels for entrepreneurs and their family members.

Using a coworking space will reduce stress, even for the entire family or household members. I think people suppose that when you are at home, even though you are like me, in front of your computer, they can ask you stuff, like talk to you and they keep interrupting. So, I think it contributes to a healthy household and less stress. (P5)

While home-based distractions can undermine productivity, the qualitative data suggests that micro-entrepreneurs perceive certain distractions within CWS differently. Participants described these as intentional breaks that they can control, leading to improved mental wellbeing.

It is a different kind of distraction that we get with coworking. I get distracted when I want to, like when I have time for lunch or something. And I do not have any other work tasks except what I plan to do at home. So, it is different. When I feel tired, I can go and have coffee and chat with someone, which is very good. And it does not feel like I get distracted. It is the rest. (P4)

Using the coworking space breaks a certain habit so that you can focus three hours on a task. And then, you can initiate the break when you choose to have it. For example, with my daughter at home, there is no way you can focus for more than 20 minutes at a time. There is no way around it. So yeah, I think it is the benefit for my mental health that I was talking about. (P6)

Beyond the physical workspace, participants emphasized the importance of the CWS community in mitigating isolation and enhancing wellbeing. While the extent of community involvement varied among micro-entrepreneurs, the mere sense of belonging to a supportive network contributed positively to their overall quality of life.

Using a coworking space helps because you are part of a community. So, you feel you are a part of it. Even if you do not attend the events, you are still somehow a member or part of something; I think that can help many freelancers not feel so isolated and just on their own. So just the feeling of being part of it can be enough. (P5)

Participants highlighted the value of social interactions and relationships facilitated by CWS, especially for those with young children who may experience heightened isolation when working from home.

You cannot meet people or have a chat over lunch or coffee. There is also a social interaction that is missing if you work from home. (P7)

I would also stress out this social interaction because most freelancers that just work on their own if they stay at home are missing social relationships. And for me, that is a quality of life. (P2)

With that, the qualitative findings reinforce the notion that CWS play a multifaceted role in supporting the wellbeing and work-life balance of micro-entrepreneurs. By enabling boundary creation, structuring workdays, mitigating work-family conflicts and providing a supportive community, CWS emerge as a valuable resource for independent professionals, particularly those with young children and heightened isolation concerns.

5. Concluding discussion, limitations and future research directions

This study offers insights into the impact of CWS on the wellbeing and satisfaction of those micro-entrepreneurs, whose jobs enable remote work. The quantitative results provide empirical evidence that CWS membership enhances micro-entrepreneurs' overall wellbeing compared to those outside CWS. This finding supports H1a, which posited that CWS users would report higher wellbeing. The qualitative data provides contextual details, revealing how the physical separation from home and a motivated community in CWS enable boundary creation between work and personal life. With the aim of facilitating focus and structure during work hours, CWS reduce work-family conflict and enable better work-life balance, thereby lowering stress and improving wellbeing.

However, our findings do not provide sufficient evidence to support H1b, which predicted higher entrepreneurial satisfaction among CWS users. While the estimated CWS impact is positive, the effect size is small and the result is not statistically significant. This suggests that while the community aspect of CWS combats isolation, micro-entrepreneurs do not fully utilize the network for business connections and knowledge sharing that could enhance entrepreneurial satisfaction.

Supporting H2a, the study provides evidence that women benefit more from CWS membership in terms of improved wellbeing, work satisfaction, inspiration and work performance. For women juggling family obligations, CWS facilitate boundary creation and focused work time without constant disruptions from household members. This is invaluable for female micro-entrepreneurs seeking work-family balance. H2b is also partially supported, as micro-entrepreneurs with young children value the improved well-being, inspiration and cooperation with others provided by CWS.

That leads us to the two main contributions. First, the qualitative data analysis highlights how the CWS community mitigates isolation and contributes to wellbeing through social connections. With that, the study behind the paper makes a relevant contribution to the two framed theories, that is, "Sense of Place" theory and "Sense of Community" theory. The "Sense of Place" theory suggests that physical and social environments shape people's attachments and wellbeing (Materson *et al.*, 2017; Raymond *et al.*, 2017). The quantitative and qualitative results provide empirical support for this notion. The boundary creation and structure enabled by the CWS physical separation from home led to improved wellbeing. This demonstrates that places like CWS can positively influence wellbeing by facilitating focus and balance. Similarly, the "Sense of Community" theory highlights how shared values, mutual support and belonging in a community affect members (McMillan and Chavis, 1986; Garrett *et al.*, 2017). The accounts of how the CWS community combats isolation and provides social connections that enhance wellbeing align with this theory. Micro-entrepreneurs gain satisfaction by experiencing a sense of belonging and (meaningful) relationships in the CWS.

Second, our findings reveal that the impact of CWS on remotely working micro-entrepreneurs' wellbeing and satisfaction varies based on gender and family situation, with women and those with young children benefiting more from these environments. This suggests that the 'Sense of Place' theory, which underlines individuals' emotional and social

attachments with specific settings (Raymond *et al.*, 2017), may operate differently depending on personal context. For micro-entrepreneurs with young children, particularly women, the emotional attachment to a CWS may be heightened due to its role in mitigating work-family conflicts and providing a supportive community. This aligns with the notion that individual experiences and social interactions influence place attachment within a setting (e.g. Scannell and Gifford, 2010). Our study extends the “Sense of Place” theory by emphasizing the role of personal factors, such as gender and family responsibilities, in shaping place-based attachments and wellbeing benefits. What is more, our findings challenge the assumption of uniform CWS experiences among micro-entrepreneurs, underlining the need for a nuanced understanding of how these spaces cater to diverse needs.

5.1 Implications, limitations and future research directions

This study offers practical implications for remotely working micro-entrepreneurs, especially women with young children at home, by highlighting why utilizing CWS as their primary workspace can enhance their wellbeing and work-life balance. That said, findings provide valuable insights for policymakers and CWS providers on the importance of designing environments catering to micro-entrepreneurs’ diverse needs. To give one example; CWS can be strategically located in residential areas to facilitate access and commute time for entrepreneurs with families. The spaces themselves can be thoughtfully configured to allow both communal areas conducive to networking as well as private nooks that enable solitude and focus when required. Providing affordable childcare facilities and scheduling family-friendly events are other ways CWS providers can support micro-entrepreneurs juggling work and family obligations.

Despite the study’s contributions to understanding the role of CWS in micro-entrepreneurs’ well-being and satisfaction, it has two main limitations that offer opportunities for future research. First, focusing on a single CWS model catering to independent professionals may limit generalizability to other CWS types. Second, the study’s localization to one country may not capture potential cultural variations in CWS experiences and benefits.

Coming from these limitations and building on our findings, the future research could take several directions. First, comparative research on diverse CWS models and their specific mechanisms for enhancing member wellbeing would be beneficial in identifying best practices and tailoring support to different subgroups of micro-entrepreneurs. Third, a detailed investigation of how micro-entrepreneurs, especially women with young children, balance work and family while utilizing CWS would enrich our understanding of boundary creation practices and the role of CWS in facilitating work-life “harmony”. Future research could also delve deeper into the gendered experiences of CWS and examine how these spaces can be designed to better cater to women entrepreneurs’ distinctive needs and challenges. What is more, longitudinal studies tracking the long-term impact of CWS on micro-entrepreneurs’ wellbeing, satisfaction and business success would provide valuable insights into the sustainability and effectiveness of these support mechanisms over time. Coming to a close, our study’s extension of the “Sense of Place” theory to consider personal context invites further theoretical development and empirical testing to refine our understanding of how individual factors shape the formation of place attachments and the derivation of wellbeing benefits from specific environments.

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