

Exploring the everyday life of entrepreneurs in a coworking space

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Abstract

We examine how a collective workspace hosting entrepreneurs may influence their everyday life and sustain the development of their ventures. We use the conception of space as a social process introduced by Hall (1966) and we compare and contrast the perspective of entrepreneurs who located their business in a collective workspace with that of the designers of the space. We conducted a qualitative and inductive case analysis of a coworking space for social entrepreneurs in Paris. We propose a model differentiating three components: physical place, mode of operation, hosted population, and show how these components jointly contribute to the development of collaborative relations and facilitate access to external resources for the companies located in this type of workspace.

Keywords

Coworking space, workspace, entrepreneurs, intercompany cooperation

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The literature on 'third places' stresses the need that independent and mobile workers have to gather in a public place in order to relax and socialise (Oldenburg, 1989), instead of staying at home or working in a private office (the first and second places, respectively). Oldenburg suggests that third places serve as a place to meet individuals similar to oneself, where individuals become familiar, in a casual setting (e.g. cafes or coffee shops). Third places are also places for intellectual discussions and forming a community, as well as bonding with the place (Rivlin, 1987; Oldenburg 1989, 1997). Faced with working in relative isolation (Szarka, 1990; Messeghem and Sammut, 2010) and the need to develop their network to help their ventures grow (Burt, 2000) entrepreneurs may be eager to locate their activity in such places. In the spirit of third places, new alternative workspaces of coworking have recently emerged worldwide to support more mobile and flexible ways of working (Townsend, Forlano & Simeti, 2011; Spinuzzi, 2012). These coworking spaces are defined as open-plan office environments in which people work alongside other unaffiliated professionals, paying a fixed fee per month (Spinuzzi, 2012). There has been an explosion of coworking spaces and nascent peer-reviewed research on this recent empirical trend. It raises questions about the influence of such workspaces on the everyday life of the hosted business ventures, the group of companies formed and the practices it enables and enhances.

Indeed there is a growing stream of research that considers work as an essentially spatially ordered activity (Hancock, 2009), known as the 'spatial turn' in organisation studies (Dale & Burrell, 2008; Warf & Arias, 2009; van Marreijck & Yanow, 2010). Yet most existing studies on space and organisation have analysed intra-organisational relationships within a single large company. Very few have examined this phenomenon from an intercompany perspective. However, the entrepreneurship literature has long considered that being open to the ecosystem and connected to networks is fundamental to the survival and growth of start ups and small businesses (Hansen, 1995; Burt, 2000; Chaston, 2000). Moreover, the literature on intercompany collaboration (Levina & Vaast, 2005; Sydow, Windeler, Schubert & Möllering, 2012) is growing. The link between workspace and intercompany interactions therefore needs to be examined in greater depth.

Our aim is to better understand the role of a workspace when it hosts members of several different companies, especially regarding intercompany relationships. Building on E.T. Hall's work on spatial behaviour (1966), we will examine how the design of a shared office for

entrepreneurs affects the interaction between them and how it can be leveraged as a tool to gain access to external resources.

We studied the case of a collective workspace for social entrepreneurs in Paris, France called La Ruche. The ethnographically-researched design of this workspace offers an enriching empirical perspective that will help us to better understand how a shared workspace plays a role in the everyday life of a group of entrepreneurs.

The paper is organised as follows: first, we review the existing body of literature related to the spatial dimension of organisations. Second, we describe the setting and methods of our qualitative research to analyse how an organisational space shapes and is shaped by daily practices. Third, the case analysis is presented in two parts: from the perspective of the founders and designers of La Ruche and then from the entrepreneurs' experiences. Fourth, the main findings are presented and discussed. Finally, conclusions, limitations and suggestions for future studies are outlined.

Literature review: the spatial dimension of organisations

Pioneering works about the conceptualisation of space are split across many disciplines, each of which is partial (Lefebvre, 1991). The spatial dimension of organisations has long been an understudied dimension in strategic management and organisation studies (Kornberger & Clegg, 2004; Orlikowski, 2007; Lauriol, Perret & Tannery, 2008; Raulet-Croset, 2008; Ashcraft, Kuhn & Cooren, 2009). But some authors have tried to enlist the spatial dimension of organisations to explore management practices. Two main streams of research can be distinguished. We will first consider the static ontology which states that workers' behaviours are shaped by space. We will then focus on the processual understanding of organisational space which views its effects on everyday work as something that is at once a material, social and cultural production. In line with this second perspective, we will present dimensions that are relevant to the analysis of space and which will guide our study of a coworking space.

The mechanistic vision of the spatial productive organisation

One branch of literature considers that workers' behaviours are shaped by space. Early authors in this stream pay particular attention to how work environments are designed and managed to improve productivity and efficiency (Taylor, 1911; Ford, 1922). Following the principles of scientific management, sources of distraction are removed from the workspace – nothing is allowed except the materials necessary to get the job done. Tight managerial

control is exerted over workspace design, ensuring conformity to standardised work practices. Workplace organisation methods such as the 5S system (only essential items in the easily-accessible work area, a dedicated place for each item, etc.) are in line with this perspective of continuous performance improvement called lean management. The notion of surveillance, dear to Foucault (1995), is central to this paradigm. The need for supervision and hierarchy (Fayol, 1949) in this model has had significant impacts on building design up to the present day. In investigating the link between workspace and organisation, the focus of this stream remains on quantitative aspects (Thomas, 2010), that is to say elements of working conditions that can easily be measured objectively, such as air temperature, noise or lighting (Herzberg, 1966; Leaman, 1995). According to Harvey (1989), area, direction, shape, pattern, volume and distance are key attributes of space.

However, the findings of the Hawthorn studies on the effect on productivity of changing luminance levels in the workplace suggest that social relations and influences are also important drivers of workers' productivity (Mayo, 1933; Roethlisberger & Dickson 1939). Furthermore, recent research has produced contradictory results regarding productivity and well-being. The psychologists Knight and Haslam (2010a) determined that the more control people had over their office spaces (high involvement in space design and low surveillance), the happier and more motivated they were in their jobs (greater job satisfaction and well-being). Other studies in economics and human resources found significant positive effects on workers' well-being of being involved in more flexible workplace organisations (Freeman & Kleiner, 2000; Bailey, Berg & Sandy, 2001; Godard, 2001). For example, the qualitative aspects of the workplace – measured subjectively – such as workplace decoration, should not be neglected if job satisfaction, stimulation and perceived productivity are to be enhanced (Thomas, 2010; Wolfram, Cox & Minahan, 2006). Knight and Haslam (2010b) concluded that better organisational identification, well-being, and productivity are observed when offices are decorated (with plants and art) rather than lean (bare and functional).

It seems that a more holistic representation of the workspace is needed, considering the workplace environment as a whole, combining quantitative and qualitative features (Thomas, 2010). Moreover, workspaces may not only contribute to efficiency and productivity but also to creativity, innovation and learning for employees (Kanter, 1983; Peters, 1992; Amin & Cohendet, 2004; Allen & Henn, 2007; Moultrie, Dissel, Haner, Janssen & Van der Lugt, 2007).

Embeddedness of day-to-day practices within organisational space

A second stream of research, recently called the 'spatial turn' in organisation studies (Dale & Burrell, 2008; Warf & Arias, 2009; van Marreijck & Yanow, 2010), argues that organisational day-to-day practices are embedded in organisational space. Marx (1867/1993) moved beyond the previous mechanistic view of space as a container and linked it to social relations and organisation. Indeed, the workspace and its configuration seem to be able to initiate and influence social behaviour (Hatch, 1987; Allen & Henn, 2007).

This line of thinking conceptualises how meaning is attributed to space and how space influences perceptions and interpretations. It is based on the conception of space as a social process, introduced by the cultural anthropologist E.T. Hall, who coined the term 'proxemics' (1966) to define individuals' reactions and behaviours according to the type of space they are in or the ways that they use it – called 'proxemic behaviour' or spatial behaviour. The historian and philosopher De Certeau (1984) also treats space as something that is fundamentally transformed by the way it is occupied. The sociologist and philosopher Lefebvre (1991), another great pioneer in the conceptualisation of space, combines the physical with the mental and the social dimensions of space. What matters here is the process, the 'production of space' (the title of Lefebvre's book) – not space itself – emerging in the interplay between material production, the production of knowledge and the production of meaning (Goonewardena, Kipfer, Milgrom & Schmid, 2008).

The growing literature on spatial and social practices in organisations has highlighted the importance of workspaces as constituted and transformed through everyday practices (Clegg & Kornberger, 2006). The sociomateriality stream (Suchman, 1987, Pickering, 1995, Latour, 2005, Orlikowski, 2005/2007) argues that organisational practices are both materially and socially constituted and constituting in the human-technology relationship. Sometimes, material objects are treated as actors (Callon, 1986; Latour, 1987) or material objects and actors as entangled bundles (Leonardi, 2011; Kaplan, 2011). For instance, building on a case study of Paris Dauphine University, founded in the late 1960s, De Vaujany and Vaast (2013) show how organisational space and legitimacy are mutually constituted over time, in a nondeterministic way. The affordance stream (Gibson, 1986; Gaver, 1996) holds that the properties of space and organisational culture can shape organisational practices. Le Clus (2008) uses the sociocultural concept of affordances to examine how informal learning is embedded in everyday work activities, building on Lave and Wenger's concept of situated learning (1991). Fayard and Weeks (2007, 2011) show how three social affordances in organisational space – privacy, proximity, permission – can foster a capacity for informal interaction within the workspace.

According to this conceptual perspective, spatial design and social behaviour mutually interact: the workspace is socially produced and at the same time produces social relations. It therefore seems appropriate to analyse the opportunities offered by a shared workspace to a group of entrepreneurs and how it supports intercompany relationships.

Proxemics of space

To describe the specificities and characteristics of coworking spaces we mobilise Hall's categories (1966). He distinguished between two types of spatial organisation associated with spatial behaviours determined by cultural conventions: 'fixed-feature' spaces and 'semifixed-feature' spaces.

The fixed organisation of space refers to space planning and organisation involving permanent features such as walls and doorways: 'basic ways of organizing the activities of individuals and groups' (Hall, 1966, p.97). According to Ciborra and Lanzara (1994), we can speak of a 'formative context' where workers routinely engage in their business activities. Many authors have recognised that office buildings (fixed-feature space) may affect individuals' behaviours (Markus, 1993; Hillier, 1996; Duffy, 1997) and argued that they can have an incontestable impact on interactions and communication patterns influencing how and where communication takes place (Seiler, 1984; Girin, 1990). Hall highlights the importance of congruence: the alignment between the function, the inhabitants and the design of the space. It may be argued that this echoes Gibson's affordance paradigm (1986): material characteristics that enable individuals to perform certain actions in certain places (or inhibit them). However, some secondary places in organisational spaces – that are not devoted to the organisation's core activities – may transform into strategic places considering where interactions really occur within the workspace (Goffman, 1997; Allen & Henn, 2007; van Marrewijk & Yanow, 2010), such as corridors (Hurdley, 2010; Iedema, Merrick, Piper, Britton, Gray, Verma & Manning, 2010) or the coffee machine area and photocopier rooms (Fayard & Weeks, 2007, 2011; Hua, Loftness, Kraut & Powell, 2010).

The semifixed organisation of space contains moveable features such as furniture and partitions. For instance, moveable screens may be arranged to mark out territorial boundaries. Hall's main idea about this kind of space organisation is that a small change in the arrangement of space may have huge consequences on relationships. Being able to customise space – meaning being able to easily organise and move materials and furniture – is crucial to creating new partitions depending on the nature of the desired interaction in real time. This flexibility of semifixed space (Steele, 1973) allows a variety of spaces, taking place in a

'context-making' process (Ciborra & Lanzara, 1994). 'Multi-space environments' (Moultrie, Dissel, Haner, Janssen & Van der Lugt, 2007) are illustrative of these principles since modern open plan concepts offer diverse workspace arrangements (quiet zones, meeting rooms, social areas, etc.), which are often modular, inviting inhabitants to act as 'illegal architects' (Hill, 1998).

Research Question

Little research has been conducted about the way that entrepreneurs and organisations interact and how this can impact entrepreneurial growth. Social relationships between them are then promoted (Studdard, 2006; Bergek & Norrman, 2008) but the role of intercompany cooperation is often underestimated (Bøllingtoft, 2011).

We are therefore eager to investigate at a micro-level the role played by a coworking space in the day-to-day life of hosted entrepreneurs. Specifically, we would like to understand to what extent the spatial dimension influences practices across the boundaries of organisations and thus benefits their business development.

Research design and method

Research Settings

Given that few studies have linked workspace, entrepreneurship and an intercompany context, an exploratory case study seemed to be the best research protocol (Wacheux, 1996). Since this research focuses on the analysis of the process and the output of how people make sense of a shared workspace, a single case study with embedded units of analysis was considered to be particularly appropriate (Flyvbjerg, 2006; Yin, 2009). In line with Eisenhardt (1989) and Yin (1994), we identified the most relevant case possible. We used an empirical and interpretative qualitative research design in order to be able to show the subjective dimension of individuals' experiences of the new work relations in their specific context (Paillé, Mucchielli, 2007). We adopted an ethnographic approach to study in situ spatial and social day-to-day organisational life at La Ruche (de Certeau, 1984; Lapassade, 2008). We joined La Ruche as a 'pied-à-terre' (a membership plan, see below) to engage in peripheral participant observation (Adler & Adler, 1987; Chanlat, 2005) to become familiar with the setting and the people (Bernard, 2006). This suits the study of spatial settings (Warren, 2008) because the primary context for ethnography research is place (Casey, 1996). We combined in-depth

semi-structured interviews (Miles & Huberman, 1991) and direct observation to collect rich data. We also conducted several iterative analyses to monitor day-to-day practices in a medium-term perspective. The data collection phase of our study lasted from late 2010 to early 2013.

Case Selection

We chose to study the case of a French coworking space, La Ruche. It is a not-for-profit start-up and a collective workspace for social entrepreneurs in central Paris, launched in May 2008. La Ruche's primary activity is to operate the workspace for social entrepreneurs and organise workshops, conferences, and exhibitions. The business model is based on the provision of shared services and workspaces offered through three different membership plans: 'residents' have a full-time workstation, whereas 'pied-à-terre' (sporadic users) have part-time and flexible access (five or ten days per month). A third formula ('butineurs') allows people to attend private events at La Ruche and reserve meeting rooms without having access to a workstation (e.g. students, pre-launch companies).

La Ruche's target scope of business activity deals with an emerging class of entrepreneurs, called social entrepreneurs, which differ from traditional entrepreneurs by their desire to produce social value in addition to economic value (Smith-Hunter, 2008; Yunus, Moingeon & Lehmann-Ortega, 2010; Zahra, Gedajlovic, Neubam & Shulman, 2009). Zahra et al (2009) define social entrepreneurship broadly as 'the activities and processes undertaken to discover, define, and exploit opportunities in order to enhance social wealth by creating new ventures or managing existing organizations in an innovative manner'. La Ruche supports about forty entrepreneurial ventures engaged in social innovation projects. Startups are found alongside more mature companies. Associations, limited liability companies as well as freelancers can be hosted at La Ruche.

This case seemed particularly suited to the research question in that it is a new kind of organisational space reserved for a new kind of entrepreneurial population. Furthermore, this workspace has extensively communicated about its specific spatial design, which is considered by the management team as a management tool and a differentiation factor. We conducted a survey in which 71% of respondents state that this was one of the key motivations for them to join this workspace. The ethnographic study of this coworking space for social entrepreneurs offers an enriching empirical perspective that will help to better understand how a shared organisational workspace plays a role in the everyday life of a group of entrepreneurs.

Data Collection and Analysis

Our research design rests upon a variety of data sources (cf. Table 1) including: (1) participant-observation at La Ruche; (2) interviews with La Ruche's management team; (3) La Ruche's entrepreneur survey; (4) interviews with La Ruche members; (5) secondary data and La Ruche's internal documents.

We started the investigations by exploring the space. (1) We used workstations there sporadically (two 10-day observation periods, three months apart: in December 2010 in The Trees workspace and in March 2011 in the Old Stones workspace¹). We also attended dozens of events organised by La Ruche and interacted conversationally with various people in the workspace: entrepreneurs, guests, management team, people passing through, etc. A journal of observations was kept and updated each time we visited La Ruche since late 2010. Photographs of the interior of La Ruche were taken and used as visual documentation.

In a first phase, we began by carrying out (2) a series of regular semi-structured interviews with the management team at La Ruche (founder, chairman, managing director, communications officer, chief financial officer, intern) and key people who were involved in launching the initiative (eco-designer, architect, former employees). We were also granted access to the company's intranet and internal documents dating from its founding in 2008 (annual activity reports, monthly financial statements, members listing, events listing, newsletters, etc.). We triangulated some of this data with information about La Ruche and its entrepreneurs collected on the Internet (press, blogs, forums, social media, etc.).

Building on the analysis of this data and in order to compare the intentions declared by La Ruche management team with the perceptions of its members (Demers, 2003), we designed (3) a 50-question survey to ask the entrepreneurs about their personal experiences of the facilities, services and opportunities provided by La Ruche and the impact on their businesses. We wanted to find out the members' reasons for joining and staying at La Ruche. Sixteen entrepreneurs from 16 different ventures responded to our online survey of a total of 34 resident and 20 *pied-a-terre* members – a 30% response rate.

To move beyond this overview and obtain more information about the practices developed by entrepreneurs that were enabled by locating their business at La Ruche, we conducted (4) a series of semi-structured interviews with entrepreneurs. An announcement was placed in the weekly newsletter sent to the entire group of entrepreneurs hosted at La Ruche along with a

¹ The spatial design of La Ruche is described in the next section.

call for volunteers to be interviewed. We formally interviewed 19 entrepreneurs, currently or formerly hosted at La Ruche, making sure that the diversity of venture profiles was represented – cf. Table 2. The interviewees were between 25 and about 55 years old, and seven of them were female. They came from different backgrounds and worked in social businesses (reintegration of the unemployed in the workforce, fighting poverty, etc.) or environmental businesses (green energy, recycling, sustainable housing, etc.). Most of the interviewees were resident members because they are the permanent heart of La Ruche, but we also met two *pied-a-terre* and one *butineur* to be sure that their experiences were not too different from those of the residents. We mainly spoke with current members but also with one former member of La Ruche and four people who were about to leave, in order to contrast their points of view. The protocol was to ask the subject about their reasons for locating their business at La Ruche and what they got out of it. The interviews lasted an average of 75 minutes. All the interviews were recorded and transcribed. Quotes have been translated from French to English for this paper. This research design, combining immersion in the place and observation of the everyday activities and interviews providing detailed descriptions of salient activities from the perspective of entrepreneurs and managers of the place, enabled us to gather rich data (Bogdan & Taylor, 1975; Neyland, 2008).

Table 1. Summary of data collection

		Number of interviews			
		2010	2011	2012	2013
(2) in-depth interviews with La Ruche's management team	14 interviews				
	The founder	1	-	1	-
	Chairman*	-	-	-	1
	Managing Director	1	1	1	-
	Communications Officer**	1	-	1	-
	Chief Financial Officer***	-	-	-	1
	Intern****	-	1	2	-
	Eco-designer	1	-	-	-
Architect in charge of the renovation	1	-	-	-	
(4) in-depth interviews with La Ruche's members	25 interviews	-	-	-	-
	Entrepreneur - Resident*****	7	13	2	-
	Entrepreneur - Other membership	-	3	-	-
		Year of collection			
		2010	2011	2012	2013
(1) Participant-	10-day observation period	x	x	-	-

observation	Informal discussions	-	x	x	x
	Events participation	-	x	x	x
(3) La Ruche's entrepreneur survey	50-item online survey: 30% response rate	-	x	-	-
(5) Secondary data	La Ruche's internal documents since 2008 *****	x	x	x	x
	Buzz minutes	x	x	x	x
	La Ruche's impact analysis by a consultant	x	-	-	-
	Students' master thesis at La Ruche	x	x	x	-
	Press articles and Internet research about La Ruche	x	x	x	x
	Internet research on La Ruche's entrepreneurs	x	x	x	x

* A new Chairman was elected in early 2013

** A new Communications Officer arrived in 2012

*** The CFO position was created in 2012

**** We interviewed the intern for 2012 twice

***** 6 resident entrepreneurs interviewed late 2010 or early 2011 were interviewed again less than a year later

***** Annual activity reports, financial statements, meeting room schedules, events listing, etc.

Table 2. Attributes of 19 interviewed entrepreneurs

Membership	Status	Category*	Mission
Resident	Member	Towards a less unequal world	Occupational reinsertion
Resident	Member	Towards a less unequal world	Occupational reinsertion
Resident	About to leave	Towards a less unequal world	Fighting Poverty
Resident	About to leave	Towards a less unequal world	Fighting Poverty
Resident	Member	Towards new ways of life	Green energy
Resident	Member	Towards new ways of life	Recycling
Resident	Member	Towards new ways of life	Solidarity tourism
Resident	Member	Towards new ways of life	Sustainable housing
Resident	Member	Towards new ways of life	Sustainable housing
Resident	Member	Towards the organisations of tomorrow	Entrepreneurial support
Resident	Member	Towards the organisations of tomorrow	Partnership/events
Resident	Member	Towards the organisations of tomorrow	Recruitment
Resident	Member	Towards the organisations of tomorrow	Responsible finance
Resident	About to leave	Towards the organisations of tomorrow	Green business
Resident	About to leave	Towards the organisations of tomorrow	Green business
Resident	Left	Towards the organisations of tomorrow	Partnership/events

Other	Member	Towards new ways of life	Urban mobility
Other	Member	Towards the organisations of tomorrow	Communication
Other	Member	Towards the organisations of tomorrow	Brokerage

* The hosted entrepreneurial ventures are mapped out according to three categories by La Ruche: (1) Towards a less unequal world - promotion of diversity, fighting poverty, etc. (2) Towards the organisations of tomorrow - entrepreneurial support, responsible investment, etc. (3) Towards new ways of life - responsible consumption, natural resource management, etc.

A thematic content analysis of the entrepreneur interviews was conducted with NVivo software (version 8). Following the inductive qualitative method (Thiétart, 2000), we generated representative concepts of the phenomenon from the field data. The entrepreneurs interviewed are generally satisfied with La Ruche but they do not experience and use it in exactly the same way that its founders and managers had imagined. This is the reason why we constructed narratives of the entrepreneurs' overviews of La Ruche – based on their statements, confirmed and completed by other member or staff statements and secondary data – to recreate dynamically their experiences there over several years and describe in detail the day-to-day practices that were pointed out by the interviewees. First, we decided to focus on the entrepreneurs that we interviewed twice because we had more information about their experiences over time. Then, from those six cases, we picked four that were located in different areas of La Ruche: two in the Old Stones, two in The Trees – one in the Mezzanine and the other one near the Library. Two were engaged in social activities, whereas the other two were involved in different green projects. Two of them have left La Ruche; the other two are still residents there. What these four ventures have in common is that they are small firms – between one and three people – and not the success stories that La Ruche usually highlights in its communications. Exploring practices as they evolve over time, the way they are experienced by the entrepreneurs, allows us to contrast with the discourses and intentions of the managers of the coworking space. We can thus shed light on the role that the entrepreneurs attribute to the space in their personal and entrepreneurial development.

The aim of this research design is to understand the spatial and social world of La Ruche entrepreneurs. We feel that this methodological approach, combining the discourses and practices of La Ruche managers, on one hand, with statements made by individuals about their entrepreneurial processes and the role played by the host location on the other hand, supplemented with our observations, is particularly suited to the research question.

Case analysis: La Ruche, a coworking space for social entrepreneurs

In 2008, La Ruche was one of the first coworking spaces and the first organisational space dedicated to social innovation in France. We will begin by presenting La Ruche from the point of view of its founders and the designers of the space, as expressed during the interviews and in the official communications documents they produce. We will then focus on the practices that the entrepreneurs call attention to and which they associate with the opportunities created by the space. We will present these practices that as described by the entrepreneurs and as observed on site.

La Ruche's organisation

La Ruche was founded as a social business and conceived as an experiment to promote social innovation. It is a not-for-profit organisation that received public subsidies to renovate the site. Accordingly, it must maintain a balanced budget. In the event of surplus revenue, this will be used to improve the company's outreach and services. There are three full-time employees in addition to its president: a managing director of strategic and business development, a chief financial officer who deals also with administrative matters, IT and logistics, and a communications manager whose role is to galvanise the network of people, encourage interaction, and manage internal events. The coworking space is open 24/7; every resident has a key and has been trained to open and close the space according to safety rules.

La Ruche's members work on developing an innovative response to a significant challenge – either social or environmental – that affects a large number of people, while respecting shared values. These entrepreneurial ventures can be mapped out according to three categories: (1) Towards a less unequal world - promotion of diversity, fighting poverty, etc. (2) Towards the organisations of tomorrow - entrepreneurial support, responsible investment, etc. (3) Towards new ways of life - responsible consumption, natural resource management, etc. Members come from different cultures and professional backgrounds. Their ages range from about 18 to 65. There seems to be a balance of female and male members and most of them dress casually. What members have in common is that they are eager to interact and succeed within the social innovation ecosystem. The philosophy of La Ruche is not to select the 'best' projects – even though attention is paid to the realism of the business model, but rather to give space to those who really want to take up the challenge of social innovation and those that the group may help to grow. It is not a matter of merely approving an application; the selection process leads to a form of dialogue and mutual adoption.

To encourage people to explore each other's interests inside and outside of work, La Ruche organises some ten events per month with a variety of formats and themes – most of them in the kitchen² or in the largest conference room. Some are restricted to La Ruche members and others are open to a broader public. Large events are usually held at the end of the day in the 'Boutique'. Under certain conditions, very large open events can also be held at 'Le Comptoir Général', which is a well-known social event space located near La Ruche. There is only one recurring event that is particularly interesting to study in order to understand the everyday life of La Ruche members. It is called the 'Buzz' and attracts up to forty attendees per meeting. Every Friday, La Ruche members and their guests have lunch together and share a variety of information – skills swap, job offers, or things they are excited about – in the kitchen. This moment of informal exchange is extremely ritualised: a bell chimes, someone takes the floor and then summarises his/her message on a piece of paper which will remain posted in the kitchen for a week and will be copied in the minutes sent to the members at large – residents, *piéd-a-terre* and *butineurs*. It gives visibility to the abundance of actions carried out by members and allows the group to share its views on the La Ruche project. The Buzz is generally run by the La Ruche team, but a voluntary entrepreneur can take on this responsibility. Other events focusing more on creativity and collective intelligence (e.g. Hold up, Hackathon), on the acquisition of individual skills (e.g. Toolbox, Masterclass), or on better business visibility (e.g. fairs, conferences) are also held regularly. The entrepreneurs freely choose whether to attend and organise these events. No personalised recommendations are given by La Ruche, just a general invitation to participate in the life of the group.

Fixed-feature space

La Ruche is, to begin with, a physical space measuring 600 m² that has been ecologically designed and renovated as an open space by the founders with the help of committed professionals – an eco-designer and an architect. The eco-design of the workspace called for the use of environmentally-friendly construction materials and the application of sustainable building design criteria. For instance, La Ruche uses 100% natural wall surfacing material (decorative mineral plasters with no chemical additives), natural floor covering made of real linoleum (not plastic), low-voltage electric equipment to reduce energy consumption, etc.

The fixed space organisation of La Ruche follows a U-shaped layout, which according to the architect is very useful to give rhythm to the workspace. The workspace is divided into three

² The various interior spaces at La Ruche are described in detail in the next section.

distinct areas – called the ‘Trees’, the ‘Old Stones’, and the ‘Boutique’ – bounded by two corridors. The main entrance of La Ruche now overlooks the corridor between the Trees and the Old Stones; previously, each area had its own coded entrance. Corridors break up the visual transparency and smooth flow of the open workspace but help reduce noise. The open plan arrangement embodies the founders’ wish to foster open-mindedness and to avoid compartmentalisation: ‘The open space is an excuse for people to work together on social innovation’, says *La Ruche*’s founder. Indeed, the *pied-a-terre* workstations are concentrated in an island behind the kitchen, in The Trees area. This dedicated island is designed to maximise interaction between people and its physical centrality brings them the best immersion experience in the workspace.

Around eighty workstations, either individual or grouped in small islands, fill most of the space. A workstation is made up of a desk, a chair, lighting and a personal storage closet. Workstations in the three workspaces are balanced with (1) meeting rooms and (2) convivial spaces. (1) Six traditional conference rooms can accommodate up to twelve people each. In addition, there are at least seven more informal booths for one to three people. The conference rooms, available by reservation, allow the entrepreneurs to receive outside visitors for a meeting, for instance, while the booths afford a moment of privacy at any time for a long phone call or a face-to-face conversation without disturbing the concentration of other workers. (2) Convivial spaces, like the kitchen and the garden, allow the entrepreneurs to clear their mind or to meet and have discussions with other members or guests. The architect explains: ‘The space has been broken up with common areas to give breathing room; otherwise it would have been too dense.’ These spaces have both a socialising and isolating function.

Semi fixed-feature place

La Ruche strives to be a warm and comfortable space for work as the fat leather armchairs and piano attest as you enter through the kitchen. It is a colourful space (e.g. orange walls in the kitchen, green curtains...) with natural decoration, which is radically different from modern business centres where everything is white and antiseptic. Tree branches, honeycomb garlands, wooden casks, and kraft paper, for instance, can be found all around the space. A lot of objects are bargain-hunted or repurposed: the space includes odd tables and chairs, flowerpots serving as lampshades, etc.. As far as possible, all the furnishings are ecological: the paper is recycled, the soap is organic and fair-trade, the cleaning products are chemical-

free, etc. This type of decoration reminds visitors that La Ruche is rooted in green and social ventures.

La Ruche was designed and outfitted to allow many different work configurations depending on the number of start-ups hosted and the number of employees per start-up. The workspace is flexible: with each large wave of arrivals and departures the space is reconfigured to adapt to new working situations – new arrangement of workstation islands, reorientation of foot traffic, new equipment, etc. As the first adjustment factor, La Ruche's management team regularly relocates in the workspace. Even current residents may find themselves being moved to introduce new organisational dynamics, though attachment to space and neighbourhood may give rise to some resistance. For instance, the arrival of 15 people from a communications consultancy – when the average size of a venture at La Ruche at that time was around two or three people – was an important occasion to rearrange the space, but with minimal disruption to the daily business of La Ruche. To blend into the background and to multiply opportunities for interaction, the new agency cohort was split into three teams in three different areas. To allow for frequent rearrangements, the eco-designer had the electric outlets installed in an elevated position so as not to obstruct traffic through the space and not hinder its modularity.

The aim of the semifixed organisation of space is to offer multiple opportunities for interaction among peers and to house different events. For the eco-designer, La Ruche was conceived as a 'living lab' allowing the entrepreneurs to change the workspace according to their needs and desires because the goal is for the space to suit them (now and in the future). The architect states that 'communal spaces become spaces of possibilities' because of their primary function but may be rearranged easily depending on circumstances. For instance, the Boutique area has a separate entrance, kitchen equipment and mobile workstations that can be removed so it can easily be transformed into a reception area. People are free to write on the walls in the toilets. Formal conference rooms can host a traditional business meeting or a participative and collaborative workshop.

Intent of La Ruche founders and management team

The workspace was consciously redesigned by the founders and renovators to be open, flexible, and communicative. Unlike a business centre, *La Ruche* does not merely offer a desk and shared resources (Wi-Fi, printers, meeting rooms, etc.). The founders' aim is to enable and empower social entrepreneurs by connecting them with each other and by fostering interaction and collaboration within the space on a variety of issues through informal

exchanges and formal encounters. 'A nightmare would be to become just a shared office since really that is not the model at all. [...] A social entrepreneur is by definition someone who's going to look for partnerships. That is a natural way of functioning for them. So what we are doing is just providing the context for that to happen. And what happens within a space like this is incredible. It is completely beyond our control as founders and facilitators of the space.' According to them, the entrepreneurs will grow in the end by becoming more visible and by having a collective voice.

To achieve this, La Ruche connects places dedicated to work – workstations gathered in the three workspaces and formal meeting rooms – with places for relaxation and socialisation – convivial places such as the kitchen and the garden and the informal meeting rooms – to work and meet. The architect states that they gave priority to convivial spaces in terms of square meters rather than to workstations in order to favour the cross-fertilisation of ideas between entrepreneurs through their gathering in those spaces: 'Communal spaces encourage occasional exchanges, where they are more natural than in large spaces. That's the reason why we also set up small alcoves too.' Having smaller workstations is another factor that helps to keep people from eating in front of their computer and encourages them to take a break and talk to the others in the kitchen. The eco-designer claims that 'you don't feel like talking about your work when you are working!' If the entrepreneurs stay at their workstations during lunch, they will miss the opportunity to share their entrepreneurial experiences with the others. The way the spaces are laid out is designed to encourage circulation between the spaces for alone work and those that allow for discussions, hence the kitchen is located centrally near the main entrance. Together with the garden, it forms the heart of La Ruche – physically and socially. The founders offer unlimited, good quality coffee and tea in the kitchen (complementary; included in the membership plan). Mail boxes have been installed along the wall behind the kitchen so as to draw foot traffic toward the centre of La Ruche. The kitchen is also the reception zone for guests. Visitors are invited to show up in the kitchen to wait for their contacts. As they enter the kitchen, they will find a map and a telephone directory so they can locate and contact the person they have come to see. There is no welcome desk run by the La Ruche management team, and the team is not identified in the workspace. People who just want some information have to ask whoever is around, but usually La Ruche members spontaneously ask if they can help whenever they see an unknown person that seems to be lost. Notice boards with information on upcoming events and portraits of the entrepreneurs are also displayed in the kitchen, which gives visitors a better idea of what La Ruche is all about. But long discussions are only allowed there at lunch time –

between 12.30 and 2.00 pm, to avoid disturbing people working nearby. People are invited to use informal booths or go to the garden if they want to chat outside this time slot. They are also asked to keep the space clean (wash the dishes and tidy their desk) and ready-to-serve (clear the table or tidy up a meeting room after using it, replenish the printers or toilets with paper, etc.) because everyday life at La Ruche is based on self-management.

The workspace designed by the architects and founders of La Ruche is supposed to encourage interaction between members, but is this the way the entrepreneurs use the space? We will attempt to answer this question in the next section by examining the practices described by four of them.

Entrepreneurs' practices at La Ruche

To understand the interplay between fixed and semifixed-feature spaces and the entrepreneurs' everyday lives at La Ruche, we decided to focus on the stories of four entrepreneurs, Sarah, Caroline, Romain and Jérôme, who we interviewed several times during the research period. We questioned them about the influence that the space had on their practices and more broadly on the development of their business. We reorganised the interviews to retrace the history of their company and detail the practices that they talked about. By including the entrepreneurs' perspective, we provide a more complete picture of how affordances are shaped and enacted within the spatial and social context of multiple relations and how this enactment further impacts work practices.

Sarah

Spring 2010, Sarah decided to create an ecological hotel in an urban area, in the form of a work integration social enterprise (WISE) that hires and trains long-term unemployed people. In early September she found a plot of land to build the hotel and she moved into La Ruche as a 'resident' to draw up the business plan for the project, find investors and obtain a bank loan. Through her residence at La Ruche, which she discovered through a member company, she was able to obtain an interview at the Paris city council, where her professionalism was immediately recognised. Previously, she had held business meetings in cafés and restaurants, but felt that was not a satisfactory approach. The people who came to meet her at La Ruche

were impressed by the place. She herself devoted significant energy to promoting La Ruche externally. Her architect became a *butineur*, for example, and her lawyer a resident.

In January 2011, the owner of the land ultimately accepted a more attractive offer. Sarah set out to find a new location, meanwhile the bank loan had already been set in motion. At La Ruche she had the opportunity to discuss her various options with several people: terminate the project, find partners, etc. She appreciated the freedom, the absence of hierarchy and judgement at La Ruche, which she attributes to the shared desire of the entrepreneurs to 'change things at their level, using their skills and abilities'. She says that being at La Ruche made her think, encouraged her to question herself, and helped her move forward, while leaving her the autonomy to make the decisions necessary for the development of her business. It is not the same type of stimulation that she might find elsewhere, such as at a business incubator where she also received advice and support.

At La Ruche, Sarah developed her ability to work with a network of partners. She drew on the expertise of her neighbours in the Old Stones area about eco-design, eco-renovation, and urban planning, etc. She also talked a lot with the CREPI (regional associations of work integration social enterprises) people located in The Trees, whose aim is to help the long-term unemployed to rejoin the workforce. She drew inspiration from the techniques they use in running workshops. During a 'Buzz' Sarah learned of the existence of Carmel de Condom, an ancient abbey that had been purchased by a property developer, where people from a variety of backgrounds are housed in exchange for small jobs (cooking, looking after the vegetable garden, etc.) Through the director of Carmel, Sarah was introduced to an association called Les Enfants de Don Quichotte,³ which became involved in the development of her project, causing it to change in scale. Development was now being considered over three to four years (with around fifty rooms, ten of them being allocated to socially-mixed housing) instead of a one-year project (with 20 rooms directly managed by Sarah alone). Sarah no longer planned to buy the property but left this up to investors who would then entrust the operational management of the site to her. She expanded the scope of her search beyond Paris and began looking in nearby suburbs. She changed her status at La Ruche to *pied-à-terre* because she no longer needed to be physically present (fewer meetings, more travel). She started joint projects in the Seine-et-Marne department with another business, a resident at La Ruche, that helped her to benefit from its contacts with a local WISE, the tourist board, and also to attend several work meetings with local community-supported agriculture associations.

³ Les Enfants de Don Quichotte is an association whose aim is to provide housing for the homeless.

By the end of 2011 Sarah had not found a satisfactory property (location, selling price, potential after renovations). She abandoned the solidarity hotel project and left La Ruche (no funds left to pay the rent). She joined a former La Ruche resident as sales director. A year later she started her own freelance business finding customers (a sort of business introducer) for companies that offer products and services connected with ecological and social issues. Mid-2013 she returned to La Ruche to develop her new business.

Sarah used all the spaces offered by La Ruche (including the meeting rooms) and actively participated in the numerous events on offer. Sarah fully adhered to the ethos that is conducive to discussion and to the values of sharing promoted by La Ruche members. For her, freedom and self-management are the key principles of La Ruche's way of working. She had never encountered such an environment in her previous company experiences, nor in a traditional entrepreneurial support structure. The La Ruche environment made her truly enjoy going to work and motivated her to persevere in her undertaking.

She networked with as many La Ruche entrepreneurs as possible who might be useful to her in different complementary aspects of her project (eco-design, management of a social enterprise, etc.), wherever they were located in the space (close to her workstation or not).

Sarah experienced different forms of collaborative relationship with various organisations and people at La Ruche: from a simple discussion to an exchange of ideas, advice and services, to the formation of professional relationships, and even went as far as joining forces with other organisations with the aim of accelerating the growth of her company.

Sarah co-organised events with other entrepreneurs. She called on partners of La Ruche who were not physically present in the space to enrich and consolidate her project. She not only built up her professional contacts, but also strengthened her ability to work in a network and acquire new knowledge and skills. She would even spontaneously act as an ambassador for La Ruche and its entrepreneurs in her personal and professional networks.

Finally, she points out that just being at La Ruche strengthened the credibility of her project in the eyes of stakeholders such as public officials and financial backers, who recognise La Ruche as a significant player in the social and solidarity sector.

Her experience testifies to another of La Ruche's advantages that is not emphasised in its managers' discourse. The opportunities that entrepreneurs have to bounce back in the event of difficulties or the failure of their entrepreneurial project may be improved by immersion in a place that fosters so much intercompany interaction. It was through La Ruche that she was able to find a new job quickly after terminating her project – without having to leave the field

of social innovation – by capitalising on the skills developed, and was thus in a better position to start a new entrepreneurial project.

Caroline

Caroline joined La Ruche as a *butineuse* in April 2010, shifting her status to *résidente* in June as soon as a place opened up, to create an employment agency specialising in sustainable development professions in September. She chose La Ruche because it offered good 'value for money' and to be with people who, like her, were committed to the spirit of sharing and who might be useful for her business.

Caroline benefited from the very rich exchanges of ideas that get started so easily at La Ruche. She remarks that many unofficial discussions can later lead to official ones, that a simple conversation over coffee can give rise to something much more serious. Following a 'Buzz' event, for example, she talked about her project with a consultant (a *butineur* at La Ruche) in the kitchen. They then moved to a meeting room to continue the discussion further and ended up reviewing the overall positioning of her business together. With another person that she met during a coffee break she had a brainstorming session to find suitable names for her range of services.

At the same time, she tried to meet and interview all the entrepreneurs at La Ruche who were experts in sustainable development. Furthermore, she arranged for several La Ruche members to do work for her clients. She also placed several colleagues, consultants and interns in different organisations at La Ruche, some of which appear among the agency's references on her website. She swapped her list of contacts with two companies residing at La Ruche that target the same market as her, but offer different services. She collaborated on a study conducted by the European sustainable investment forum network to find out what students in sustainable development and finance thought of the French *Forum pour l'Investissement Responsable*. This was an opportunity to promote her agency, to better understand the candidates and to get a more precise idea of the profiles being sought in the field of socially responsible investment.

Caroline counts on the reputation and image of La Ruche to enhance the credibility of her agency. Clients are more likely to work with a young agency when they learn that it has been accepted at La Ruche, which is recognised as a leader in the field. Caroline interviews as many candidates as possible at La Ruche as they are positively influenced by the values conveyed by the place, in keeping with their area of expertise. She books the small meeting

rooms, since members are no longer allowed to receive guests in the kitchen (especially since the creation of the mezzanine next to the kitchen). Finally, the various scheduled events are also opportunities for her to develop her knowledge about new ways to advance society in a positive fashion (e.g. collaborative consumption, responsible finance, etc.) and hence to improve her professional credibility in the eyes of consultants, for whom it is important to talk with and be advised by someone who is up to date on these subjects. She also considers this a precious resource for her associates and she strongly encourages them to attend the 'Buzz' and other events.

Caroline recruited an intern in March 2011 and then converted the internship into a permanent contract a year later. In general, Caroline considers that a significant share of the increase in new contracts, new partners and prospects, and quality CVs in her database can be directly attributed to being at La Ruche (on site contacts, promotion of her agency by La Ruche members, etc.) As of 2013 Caroline is still at La Ruche and has become one of its emblematic businesses.

Caroline operates a typical consulting and recruitment business, specialising in professions related to the environment and sustainable development. She takes full advantage of the space at La Ruche. She invites as many candidates and clients as possible to go there so they can see the reality of her positioning and thus capitalise on the 'wow' effect of the place. She juggles the different meeting rooms to conduct face-to-face and telephone interviews with candidates – often early in the morning and late in the evening, i.e. before or after work for those who are currently employed, which is facilitated by La Ruche's 24/7 access (every resident has a key and is trained in securely opening and closing the place). Caroline draws on the calendar of scheduled events as a strategic intelligence tool, as a recruiting ground and as a source of business opportunities, but also uses it as a management and training tool for her employees.

She even joins in events organised by other La Ruche members to raise the visibility and enhance the reputation of her service and improve her knowledge of the specific market that she operates on (e.g. her partnership with the Responsible Investment Forum). Caroline also cultivates other types of interaction with members or visitors at La Ruche that will prompt her to re-examine her business (discussions, exchange of ideas and advice) and accelerate its development (trading favours, such as sharing client databases).

All of these opportunities have had direct consequences on her placement and recruiting activities.

Jérôme

In 2006 Jérôme started a service company whose purpose is to promote the consumption of green electricity. He offers to provide companies with a certification that electricity is produced from renewable sources. He came to La Ruche as a resident in June 2010 to gain greater exposure, to multiply his contacts and to develop his network. He was determined to break with the isolation he had suffered in a traditional business centre and that had kept him oriented toward himself.

For Jérôme, La Ruche is a world of networks, information and sharing where many different ideas and people come together and interact. This environment, combined with a shared set of 'high values' (good will, positive attitude), fosters a kind of natural emulation between members that creates value. Even though he does not manage to participate in all the activities on offer, he is always aware of what is going on at La Ruche. He also considers that it is a tremendous asset for the students that he employs regularly through internships or apprenticeships. He never hesitates to bring clients to La Ruche to show them a different working environment – testimony to the change dynamic he subscribes to. The geographic location and the premises (eco-designed space, hipster decoration) are a good match with the positioning of his business. And the number of prominent social and solidarity economy enterprises that have passed through La Ruche 'that have brought something significant to the market in the area of social enterprise broadly speaking' strengthens the recognition of its value proposition in the field.

As of 2013, Jérôme is still a resident at La Ruche. He intends to pursue his discussions with La Ruche members who are also working on the issue of energy transition. He is thinking about creating a kind of co-development group among peers to have regular discussions in complete confidence with four or five entrepreneurs who are facing the same doubts and challenges as him.

Jérôme definitely found it advantageous to share in the daily life of other social entrepreneurs after his experience in a traditional business centre. Being surrounded by people who share his entrepreneurial vision and his values (e.g. the conviction that there are other ways to produce and consume) constitutes a favourable environment for his personal and professional development, in addition to making a break from isolation.

He considers that the freedom allowed by the La Ruche team in terms of the form and intensity of intercompany interactions allows each individual to adapt and personalise the

resources (people, skills, etc.) found at La Ruche to suit his own needs, in a way that evolves over time. Forming a co-development group with other La Ruche entrepreneurs has now reached the stage of a project from which he expects enhanced learning between peers.

Jérôme's experience is similar to Caroline's on several points: the development of business opportunities, made possible by the presence of complementary activities and competences, and using the events calendar for strategic intelligence, developing teams and enhancing the image of the activity externally (enhanced credibility, strengthened positioning due to being affiliated with such a place).

Jérôme underlines the positive impact that the successes of current and past La Ruche entrepreneurs have on the reputation of the place in general, which subsequently benefits each of its members.

Romain

Romain was hired in January 2011 by an association whose aim is to break the social isolation of people living in economically precarious circumstances. In order to facilitate their social reintegration, the association offers them a job as a street paper vendor. They purchase copies of the paper at half the cover price and become micro entrepreneurs, selling their product on the streets to earn their own living. This newspaper is an independent magazine that operates on a self-help and social enterprise model to provide an innovative solution to urban homelessness and unemployment. Dozens of voluntary professionals (journalists, artists, photographers) donate their time every month to bring out the magazine. Editorial partnerships with news organisations also help to enrich the content.

The association is domiciled in Lyon, but Romain was based in Paris to accelerate the growth of the initiative. In order not to leave him alone in the Paris premises where the newspapers are stored, the directors of the association decided to set him up in La Ruche as a resident. Nevertheless, Romain had to be on duty three times a week at the storage facility to receive the vendors, as this task is not suited to La Ruche's way of working. First, the constant coming and going of vendors would disturb the occupants at La Ruche, and it could create a misunderstanding if the vendors mistook them for association staff. Second, it would be hard to carry out certain warehousing tasks in this type of space: receiving packages at random times in a space that has no reception desk and where the structures are not clearly identified. Packing boxes requires space – after being gently reprimanded by his 'colleagues' [i.e. the people at the neighbouring desks] Romain started booking a conference room to tape his

cartons, which can be a very noisy activity. On the other hand, being at La Ruche helped him find ideas for interesting subjects to promote in the newspaper and to form numerous new partnerships easily and quickly, for example, with two journalists and an online channel on solidarity, as well as with other actors in the solidarity ecosystem that were easier to approach thanks to his affiliation with La Ruche – and who were impressed by the premises when he invited them there!

Romain naturally adhered to the La Ruche dynamic, though he had received no instructions from his employer on what course of action to follow. He liked the ethos at La Ruche and the willingness to share and to pool ideas and resources that was manifested by most of the organisations, untainted by questions of seniority at La Ruche or the obligation to collaborate. It was very different from the tensions of internal competition and the race for profitability that typically imbues corporate working spaces. He felt comfortable in the space because he could reproduce some of the "same practices as at home" (waste sorting for recycling in the kitchen, scrap paper near the printers, etc.), which once again he feels is less comfortable in a traditional workspace. Romain got involved in the different events proposed by La Ruche (e.g. organisation of a carnival). He often ran the 'Buzz', replacing the person in charge of hosting events, he learned how to run 'Hold ups' and helped to organise a festival in which La Ruche was a partner. These experiences, together with the entrepreneurs' stories he heard and the abundance of advice he received during the six months of his short-term contract, encouraged him to start his own consulting business in eco-responsible events planning. He left La Ruche at the start of summer 2011, at the same time as the association, but wanted to keep regular contact with the entrepreneurs and the life of the organisation. Indeed, we would see him again at La Ruche several times in the months following his departure, especially during the 'Buzz'. For Romain, La Ruche was a 'motivation accelerator' and acted as a springboard: 'when I arrived at La Ruche I never thought I would become an entrepreneur myself...'

Romain was not the initiator of the entrepreneurial project that he came to La Ruche to work on. The social entrepreneur that headed up the organisation decided that the only member of the association based in Paris should benefit from the presence of other people at work and chose La Ruche, which testifies to its reputation. Romain's experience shows that La Ruche can act as a catalyst for a vocation and also as a project accelerator. Immersed in the entrepreneurial atmosphere, Romain found the courage to launch his own business. The freedom members have to get involved in the daily life and events calendar at La Ruche was

an opportunity for Romain, who took advantage of it to hone his skills in events planning and was then able to showcase some initial experiences in the field when he started his own business. Thanks to La Ruche and its members, he was also able to find the first contracts needed to launch his project.

Romain's experience reveals certain limitations of La Ruche. It is awkward to try to use the space to interact with the beneficiaries of the initiatives. The somewhat inaccessible location, decoration, and mode of operation of the place may prove to be too unfamiliar and bewildering for people living in precarious circumstances, for example, especially as there is no signage to indicate the fact that multiple organisations are housed under the same roof and that Romain only represents one of them. Other organisations doing social work for the same type of population, such as the regional associations of work integration social enterprises (CREPI), have also pointed this out. Organisations involved in services or ones that are heavily dematerialised are much easier to manage in a space such as this. But as soon as the business involves storage, packing and shipping, the space appears just too cramped for such logistics operations, and using the conference rooms is not really an effective solution.

Spotlighting entrepreneurs of varying age, gender, background and activity, these four accounts show the particular conditions associated with La Ruche that contributed to the development of their entrepreneurial activities. Various day-to-day practices are facilitated by the shared workspace: discussion, exchanges of information, ideas, advice, connections, services and even partnerships. We have seen how the entrepreneurs relate these practices to opportunities for business growth and have given examples of those business impacts – new clients, new sales, competence and skill development, etc. which help us to better understand what is actually happening in a coworking space.

A very strong attachment to the place is evinced in all the interviews. Certain constraints on the activities hosted there also emerged. Some tasks and responsibilities are difficult to carry out at La Ruche (e.g. reception of fragile populations, repetitive logistics operations, intensive telephoning, etc.) The noise, foot traffic, and multiple opportunities for interaction may also perturb and slow down the activity, distracting attention and disturbing the concentration of the entrepreneurs.

Findings: model of a coworking space for a set of entrepreneurs

Based on our comparison of the practices conceived/intended by the managers of the space with those actually experienced by the entrepreneurs, we suggest the following model relating the characteristics of the workspace to the emergence of certain practices.

The findings will be broken down into the following categories:

- The environment of La Ruche as it facilitates the development of collaborative relations between members, which have a positive impact on their business
- The environment of La Ruche as it facilitates access to external resources that positively impact their business
- The properties of the environment at La Ruche that help entrepreneurs to successfully develop collaborations and access these external resources.

Figure 1. Model of a coworking space for entrepreneurs



Development of intercompany collaborations

The working environment at La Ruche proved favourable to the development of collaborations between members, which had a positive impact on the development of their business.

All of the entrepreneurs highlight their numerous and varied interactions with other La Ruche members and associate them with the place, the arrangement of the spaces, the ambiance, the events, the management style of the place and the other entrepreneurs that share it. It should be noted that these interactions are the fruit of a proactive effort made by the entrepreneurs, not something prepared and guided by the La Ruche managers. A simple discussion between neighbours, around the coffee machine or at the kitchen sink, in the garden during a cigarette break or in the kitchen during a meal or an event will bring the entrepreneurs out of their solitude and the focus on their project, to make an initial contact or to keep a relationship going in an informal way. These spontaneous conversations may transform or lead to more

structured discussions later and the sharing of information, ideas and advice which may prove useful for the personal and professional development of the people present. Some interactions might entail more of a commitment on the part of the entrepreneurs and take the form of cooperation in networking and making introductions, swapping favours, (e.g. a group brainstorming session, sharing client lists, etc.) or partnerships of varying duration (e.g. co-branding of an event, joint training programmes). Reciprocity is not always a given in this type of exchange, but someone who receives advice one day may later offer some to another person residing at La Ruche.

The interactions cultivated by the entrepreneurs at La Ruche help them to perfect their project (e.g. revise a business plan, a marketing and communications plan, consumer tests and customer feedback, etc.) and also to take a look at themselves as a project developer (by exposing themselves to different opinions, by answering unexpected questions during formal and informal discussions). They can also lead to traditional sales activities (an entrepreneur becoming the client of another La Ruche entrepreneur). Sometimes these interactions give rise to the acquisition of new knowledge and skills by the entrepreneurs (learning how to work in a network, mastering new techniques for running seminars), particularly during events held at La Ruche – whether initiated by the organisation or not. In the most advanced collaborations, the entrepreneurs may find partners to change the scale of their project or to generate new related activities with La Ruche members (e.g. joint response to calls for tender, co-organisation of events, etc.). In the event of difficulty or the failure of their entrepreneurial project La Ruche members can also draw support from these collaborative relationships to change direction or to find new professional opportunities (e.g. being hired by an organisation at La Ruche). In addition to opportunities for growth and speeding up their projects, La Ruche nurtures the ability of entrepreneurs to bounce back.

Easier access to external resources

Belonging to La Ruche helps entrepreneurs gain faster and easier access to a certain number of external resources that can secure a competitive advantage. The entrepreneurs' experiences highlight a 'quality label' and 'showcase' effect at La Ruche that facilitates the communication of their values and objectives and boosts the promotion of their ventures.

Being a member of La Ruche, having been 'accepted' there, enhances the credibility of the entrepreneurs vis-à-vis potential institutional and financial sponsors, which makes it easier to arrange meetings and obtain support. Being located at La Ruche (i.e. having the company's permanent address there) and meeting with clients, suppliers and partners there communicates

the company's values and objectives in a clear and generally convincing way. Locating their social innovation project at La Ruche allows entrepreneurs to capitalise on the success of those that went before them, to firmly anchor their strategic positioning and to attract people's attention faster, as it takes less time to present the context of their business. The development of their business benefits from this, especially as credibility and visibility are extremely critical for nascent or fledgling businesses.

Directly or indirectly, access to these external resources can help the entrepreneurs to obtain additional resources (e.g. recruitment, financing, etc.) and attract new customers or renew contracts.

Properties of the La Ruche environment

What are the properties of the La Ruche environment that help entrepreneurs to develop collaborative relations with other members and gain access to external resources?

At La Ruche the entrepreneurs may interact around a desk, in a meeting room, in a living area like the kitchen or garden, or even beyond the walls of the coworking space, for example in the field, close to the groups of people that they work with. The variety of spaces available to the entrepreneurs and their flexibility facilitates adaptation to different kinds of interaction.

But there are also certain features, such as the diverse events that are frequently held (e.g. open and restricted events on different topics), through which the entrepreneurs stay abreast of other members' activities and the current news in the social innovation ecosystem (e.g. learning about the launch of a competition or a call for tenders during a 'Buzz', finding out about the project of a new member by reading his/her passport posted in the kitchen, etc.) and multiplying the opportunities for interaction with La Ruche members or other stakeholders, which can then provide access to external resources.

The entrepreneurs are free to decide how they will use the space and its associated features (freedom to participate in events, encouragement to take initiatives, absence of hierarchical relationships, etc.), which facilitates the spirit of sharing and cooperation that has become engrained at La Ruche. We are inclined to believe that these cooperative relationships are partly rooted in the fact that La Ruche operates on the principle of self management. The fact that anyone may be called upon to welcome visitors for another company (no reception desk), that doing the dishes and restocking coffee (or paper for the printers or toilets) are the responsibility of everyone, and that residents can open and close the place by themselves (24-hour access) constitute the first instances of intercompany collaboration.

The managers of La Ruche oversee the implementation of the operating rules that they defined for the place, they propose and organise a certain number of events, encourage members to participate in events and help them to run theirs by informing newcomers, and also publicise La Ruche.

Entrepreneurs entering La Ruche are selected by the managers so as to maintain a degree of similarity between members in terms of the goals pursued and values shared. This similarity constitutes a favourable breeding ground for cooperative relationships between members and also for stakeholders in the ecosystem that the entrepreneurs will try to obtain resources from. This selection process is justified because at the outset La Ruche defined a target scope of business activity and the specific identity of the place is shaped within the ecosystem in reference to this.

Through this La Ruche case study, we have shown how a coworking space can constitute a rich environment conducive to the development of practices that facilitate the development of the businesses hosted there.

Characteristics of a coworking space hosting a group of entrepreneurs

Based on our analysis of this case, we will now put forward a set of characteristics for a coworking space hosting several companies that can stimulate practices which facilitate their development. We identify three key factors that make collaborative relations possible between members and facilitate access to external resources: (i) the place itself, (ii) the way the place is run (iii) and the resident population.

(i) The place provides a favourable environment for the development of intercompany interactions owing to its fixed and semifixed features, i.e. the configuration and arrangement of the space (variety and modularity of the kinds of space offered) and the opportunities for discussion stimulated by the place (convivial spaces, circulation through the space). These features influence the entrepreneurs' practices. The congruence of design elements and the activities that take place there (e.g. design of an open space decorated according to codes and values that are easily associated with the scope of the business activities hosted there, posters announcing upcoming events, etc.) plays an important role in gaining access to external resources, particularly when the entrepreneurs bring visitors to the place (showcasing effect). Nevertheless, the spatial dimension alone does not tell us how these practices take place in a day-to-day intercompany context and how they can benefit entrepreneurial growth.

(ii) The operating mode and the management style of the place, that we will call 'running' or 'operating' the space, also play a crucial role in the intercompany interaction dynamic and the accessibility of external resources. The rules for living as a group that have been set down (self management, autonomy) and the stimulation of opportunities for interaction (restricted and open events) constitute spatial and social affordances that influence the ethos of the place (freedom to take initiatives, sharing) and the nature of relations that form between members (confidence, reciprocity), that are conducive to the development of collaborative relations.

The most visible part of the managers' activity is the organisation of events in the sense of field-configuring events (Meyer et al., 2005) – temporally and spatially bounded arenas of idea exchange and innovation. The open events are more important for the place as such and indirectly for the entrepreneurs, who seldom manage to attend. These events help to raise the visibility of the place for the ecosystem that is associated with its scope of activity by strengthening La Ruche's brand image and its positioning as a leading player in its field. The strong image of the place and its reputation indirectly benefit the entrepreneurs whose own visibility may thus be enhanced. The way the place is run therefore contributes to the congruence between the physical place and the practices that develop there.

(iii) Finally, it is the complementary nature of the hosted activities that explains how sharing a coworking space can have a positive impact on the development of entrepreneurial projects. The fact that the entrepreneurs are all involved in the same field and share the values associated with this field (homogeneity), while covering a variety of issues and projects (heterogeneity), tends to produce congruence between the place and the hosted activities. Homogeneity facilitates cooperation between members, that can go as far as co-development partnerships and improve visibility to actors involved in supporting the development of social innovation activities, while heterogeneity forestalls the risk of competition between members and with external actors. Defining a specialisation for the place ensures congruence between the field of activity, the type of business hosted, the place and the image it projects.

Although these three factors exist independently, it is the combination of the three that ultimately has a positive impact on the development of entrepreneurial projects – even though the success rate is obviously not 100%. We have shown that they constantly interact and communicate with each other.

This triad of factors – underpinning the capacity of a coworking space to influence the practices of hosted companies – constitutes a contribution to the literature on the spatial dimension of organisations, which often considers the relationship from a binary perspective. The mechanistic stream sees the place as a tool for effectiveness in the hands of its managers

without taking into account the practices of residents, while the organisational space stream focuses on the interactions between the place and the practices of occupants, without recognising the particular role played by the managers who run the place.

Our analysis shows how a place can contribute to structuring the practices of a third party: the hosted companies that have no hierarchical or organisational relationship with the managers who operate the place, although they rub shoulders with them on a daily basis and have a contractual relationship with them. While studies emphasising the importance of intercompany networks are multiplying, our analysis emphasises the structuring role of the work environment in building relations, which having an intermediate status between the market and the organisation, as opposed in the work of Aoki and Williamson. It also highlights the conditions that enable the coworking space to have a structuring role on the practices of the hosted companies.

Conclusion

Owing to the revolution in information technology and online communications in the late 20th century the meaning of material space may be disputed. Some researchers consider that physical space has lost its importance (Giddens, 1991; Castells, 2000). However, the increasing number of coworking spaces opening worldwide seems to be evidence of a specific role of physical co-presence on a micro level.

The present study has focused on the links between workspace, entrepreneurship and practices in an intercompany context. It builds on ethnographic research at a French coworking space for social entrepreneurs and combines the perspective of entrepreneurs with the perspective of the managers of the place.

From a theoretical perspective, we contribute to the literature on entrepreneurship and organisational spaces. We add to the growing stream of research in the 'spatial turn' (Dale and Burrell, 2008; Warf and Arias, 2009; van Marrejkick and Yanow, 2010) by showing that entrepreneurs' practices in a coworking space are influenced by the collective workspace. Our goal was not only to examine whether or not the workspace was becoming more strategic, but also to analyse why and how. We identify and describe two practices that were enhanced and which supported the development of the ventures: cooperative relationships between members and access to external resources specialising in the same field of activity. The 'community' of entrepreneurs that contributes to federating the shared space is built on multiple cooperative

relations between some of its members and also on external recognition of this set of companies as a group sharing common objectives, values and qualities. We have suggested a triad of factors that underpins the ability of a coworking space to influence the practices of the hosted companies: (i) the place itself, (ii) the way the place is run (iii) and the resident population.

From a managerial perspective, we highlighted the importance of how the coworking space is operated and the proclaimed specialisation of such a space.

From an empirical perspective, we offer an ethnographic account of social entrepreneurs' everyday work lives. Furthermore, we help to explain why more and more entrepreneurs are setting up in new organisational spaces called coworking spaces.

From a more methodological perspective, we hope that this article encourages others to reconsider the importance of workspace and particularly in an intercompany context.

As we conclude this paper, we acknowledge its limitations. Our findings are based on the study of one case. Future studies should therefore examine whether these findings can be generalised to other contexts and especially to fields of activity other than social innovation. Indeed, social entrepreneurs may accept the relative lack of comfort of a shared workspace more easily due to their values and inclination towards the common good. What would happen in the case of entrepreneurs operating in other fields? We can also wonder if these findings are specific to the relations between small companies or whether they could be extended to the interactions between small and large companies, or between organisations operating in the same sector but relatively different associations, public services and private companies, or industrial companies and academic research centres. We can also ask whether the place/operational management/population triad that we proposed here would be relevant in an intra-company context.

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