**Coworking can make the suburban and rural areas more attractive**

**Coworking is more than office community and shared office. Now the phenomenon is on its way into Norwegian working life.**

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Imagine that you live in a suburb or even further outside the city, but that you do not have to travel into the city every day because your employer - or your home municipality - offers local office and work opportunities, says researcher Mina Di Marino. The change in working life accelerated in March 2020, when we threw ourselves around, downloaded Teams and logged on to Zoom, worked from home and became more digital. At the same time, we experienced that the large, fixed structures around us, such as our cities, traditional office landscapes and public transport, were not as ready to cope with a pandemic.

This could mean a new view of rural areas as more attractive places to live, live and work - if employers continue to be flexible. Employers see that it is possible. In Norway, covid-19 can accelerate a trend that already exists in other countries

We work from home, at the cabin, on the train and at the library. This is not entirely new, but it is perhaps only now that many employers have seen that it is possible. And many employees want just this, a more flexible relationship to where the workplace should be, Di Marino explains. She is an associate professor at the Department of Urban and Regional Planning at the Faculty of Landscape and Society at NMBU.

***Forced to change***

The researcher says that it is not just the corona that makes working life change. We probably look a little different in rural areas now. They are becoming more attractive, says researcher Mina di Marino (Photo: Private)

Factors such as globalization, new technology, the financial crisis in 2008, higher unemployment and a growing sharing economy are important. Many companies push costs by outsourcing rather than letting permanent employees do the work. More and more people are choosing - or being forced to - a freelance life with a home office, office community and café work.

In Norway, around 300,000 stated that they were freelancers or self-employed, according to Statistics Norway in March this year. Only one in four had freelance assignments as their only source of income. In Europe, the proportion of freelancers is higher. And in the United States, it was up to 16 percent in 2015, according to a study by labor market economists Larry Katz of Harvard and Alan Krueger of Princeton.

***More than an office***

Di Marino researches flexible workplaces and especially the switching between several workplaces. She is interested in people who work from the office, from an office community, in home offices, cafes, libraries and on public transport. Coworking is an English concept and phenomenon that is gradually gaining a foothold in Norway as well. It includes more than the Norwegian term office community or shared office.Public places for coworking are free and can consist of both flexible and permanent workplaces. These can be funded by municipalities, universities and the state.

***Current situation***

Private coworking occurs in partnership with many private actors, such as companies and banks. They work together to create great places for their employees and freelancers to work from. These places are often better suited than working from a cafe, but not quite as permanent as working from a permanent office in a company. Such a working community is also relevant for entrepreneurial companies that cannot have the same expenses for offices and premises as established companies. The most common so far has been to have premises for coworking and flexible workplaces in the cities. It probably puts as much strain on public transport as ordinary, permanent jobs in the cities do.

***A phenomenon in the peripheral and rural areas?***

Di Marino examines the use of office communities and coworking in the periphery and in rural areas. In the cities, the advantages are high accumulation of different types of companies, more people with higher education and access to public transport. Di Marino explains that in the periphery and in rural areas, work communities - coworking - will be able to offer larger premises than in the cities. You will be able to cycle or walk there, since your workplace is close to where you live and not in the city center.

She envisages that it will also be characterized by greater diversity in competence in, for example, agriculture, health services and IT, which can provide greater opportunities for development and synergies. This can lead to a diversity of services and opportunities for alternating use, where the premises can be used for, for example, teaching, library, health and work.

**Om prosjektet -about the research project -links to the website**

På nettsidene til NMBU finnes det mer informasjon om prosjektet [The geography of New Working Spaces and impact on the periphery](https://www.nmbu.no/en/projects/new-working-spaces). <https://www.nmbu.no/en/projects/new-working-spaces>

Et mål for forskerne er å dele kunnskap om de nye arbeidsmåtene, etter hvert som de vokser frem, også på bygda.

One goal for the researchers is to share knowledge about the new ways of working, as they grow, also in the peripheral and rural areas.