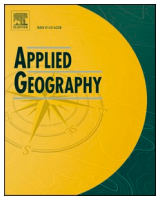
Applied Geography 174 (2025) 103485

Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

Applied Geography

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/apgeog



The role of geographical location for work-life balance satisfaction: Insights from Italian coworking spaces

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ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:
Work-life balance satisfaction
Work-life conflicts
Coworking space
Non-urban areas
Italy

ABSTRACT

With the rapid advancements in information and communication technologies reshaping ways and places of work, the quest for work-life balance has gained crucial importance. Recent literature has increasingly emphasised coworking spaces as a potential solution to foster work-life balance by alleviating work-life conflicts and offering environments that favour an integration of work and leisure. Despite this growing interest, quantitative studies in this domain are still lacking. This study aims to fill this gap by drawing on data from an online survey addressed to coworking space users in Italy conducted in 2022–2023. By applying an ordered logit model, the paper investigates the factors influencing coworkers' work-life balance satisfaction and the work-life conflicts they experienced. A specific focus is devoted to the role of the geographical location of coworking spaces, controlling for working conditions and the adoption of multilocal working and living arrangements. The results reveal that coworkers in non-urban areas report higher work-life balance levels and encounter fewer conflicts than their urban counterparts.

1. Introduction

Work-life balance "*expresses the aim of working women and men to achieve a balance between work and other spheres of their lives*" (Eurofound, 2022, p. 87). The necessity to balance work and life has been included as an essential dimension in the theorisation of quality of working life (Grote & Guest, 2017; Walton, 1973), given its contribution to individuals' health, wellbeing and quality of life (Greenhaus et al., 2003; Lunau et al., 2014). The latest developments in ICTs and the introduction of mobile technologies enhanced the encroachment of work on individual private lives (Orlikowski, 2007) and increased the blurring between different spatial and temporal boundaries among life spheres (Webster & Randle, 2016), making the study of work-life balance an even more urgent issue.

Remote working is an umbrella term that includes several working arrangements outside the main place of work and refers to both employees and self-employed workers (ILO, 2020). The last decades saw a progressive increase in the portion of work that can be conducted remotely, with consequential effects on workers' wellbeing and working conditions (Eurofound & International Labour Office, 2017). This increase also coincided with the opening of collaborative workplaces, such as coworking spaces (CSs), which have emerged as a valid alternative to offices and homes (Mariotti et al., 2023). Studies extensively explore the impacts of working from home on workers' wellbeing, revealing challenges in terms of social and professional isolation (Charalampous et al., 2019; Cooper & Kurland, 2002) and varying findings on work-life balance, particularly when considering gender differences (Alfano et al., 2023; Shaw et al., 2003). The COVID-19 pandemic had varying effects on this issue. After the initial wave, workers in jobs with high levels of teleworkability (Sostero et al., 2020) gained more control over managing their work and personal lives, improving their work-life balance (Fana et al., 2020). In turn, workers who could not work remotely remained excluded from these advantages, with the effect of teleworking rising socioeconomic and geographic disparities (Ewers & Kangmennaang, 2023). Despite the end of the pandemic and the rise of alternative workplaces, evidence related to workers' quality of work life in spaces such as CSs is still lacking.

CSs started emerging at the beginning of this century, especially in big creative cities of the Western world (Merkel, 2015), with a strong orientation towards creative work, so to be defined as "new places of the creative economy" (Moriset, 2013). CSs are shared workplaces where professionals who are independent of each other are co-located

This article is part of a special issue entitled: New Working Spaces published in Applied Geography.

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https://doi.org/10.1016/j.apgeog.2024.103485
Received 28 November 2023; Received in revised form 23 July 2024; Accepted 9 December 2024
Available online 13 December 2024
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(Spinuzzi, 2012; Parrino, 2015). Even though these spaces originally addressed the needs of self-employed workers (Merkel, 2019), with time, they started hosting several types of users, including remote workers (Akhavan et al., 2023; Mariotti et al., 2023). There is a certain consensus in the literature that CSs contribute to workers' wellbeing and work-life balance in several ways. In one of the foundational studies on CSs, Spinuzzi (2012) mentions the need to improve one's work-life balance and to overcome isolation among the motivations for joining a CS. CSs may certainly favour a clearer separation between work and other life domains, contributing to containing home-related distractions (Orel, 2019; Vaddadi et al., 2022), in particular for female professionals (Merkel et al., 2024; Rodríguez-Modroño, 2021). At the same time, when offering services such as baby creche or gaming and sports facilities (Merkel, 2019; Wijngaarden et al., 2020), these spaces may also allow for an integration of family and leisure spheres into the work domain, an aspect that seems to reduce work-life conflicts (Olson-Buchanan & Boswell, 2006).

The recent expansion of CSs in non-urban and peripheral areas, especially after the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic (Akhavan et al., 2023; Biagetti et al., 2024; Gandini & Cossu, 2021; Mariotti et al., 2023), is raising interest in exploring whether these spaces may affect differently, compared to those located in urban cores, coworkers' lives – direct effects – wellbeing, economic performance and entrepreneurial growth (Akhavan & Mariotti, 2023; Flipo et al., 2022; Fuzi, 2015; Mariotti & Di Matteo, 2022), and the wider local context – indirect effects – (Mariotti et al., 2021; Vogl & Akhavan, 2022). CSs in non-urban areas are indeed reported by the existing literature to play a broader role for the local community and be linked to local development aims (Capdevila, 2022), and for this, are also frequently subsidised by public actors (Avdikos & Merkel, 2020; Gandini & Cossu, 2021). For this reason, although one of the first definitions of CSs implied that users were paying a fee (Spinuzzi, 2012), scattered evidence suggests that some of these spaces are made available for free in rural and peripheral areas (Avdikos & Papageorgiou, 2021; Mariotti & Lo Russo, 2023; Biagetti et al., 2024).

Within this context, the paper aims to investigate the work-life balance satisfaction (hereon WLBS) of coworkers in Italy, controlling for the work-life conflicts (hereon WLC) they might experience. Specifically, it explores whether and how the following determinants play a role: 1) the location of the CS in an urban or non-urban area; 2) the demographic characteristics of coworkers; 3) some aspects related to the working conditions of coworkers; 4); coworkers' work and residential arrangements. The analysis is based on data from a recent online survey addressed to coworkers in Italy. To our knowledge, this is the first quantitative study exploring the factors influencing WLBS and WLC among CS users. The paper is organised into five sections. The introduction is followed by a literature review on the different determinants of work-life balance. Section three is dedicated to the description of data and methodology. The results of the econometric analysis are presented and discussed in section four. Conclusions, policy implications, and further research follow.

2. Literature review

2.1. An overview of work-life balance satisfaction and work-life conflicts

Although no clear-cut definition of work-life balance satisfaction exists yet (Bulger et al., 2007), empirical and theoretical studies on the concept have multiplied in the years, also following historical changes concerning gender roles, family and career models (Powell et al., 2019), changes that brought to the consideration of other spheres beyond the family one. Therefore, work-life balance satisfaction depends on both single individual characteristics, such as household composition (Eurofound, 2020), and the wider social and cultural context (Lewis & Beauregard, 2018). Sirgy and Lee (2018) report that conceptualisations of work-life balance in the current literature develop along two lines: (1) attentive engagement in multiple roles and balanced satisfaction between work and non-work spheres of life; and (2) minimisation of conflicts and effective management of these spheres. The scholars propose their definition, according to which work-life balance corresponds to "*a high level of engagement in work life and nonwork life with minimal conflict between social roles in work and nonwork life*" (Sirgy & Lee, 2018, p. 232).

As concerns minimisation of conflicts among different spheres, this concept has grounded some definitions of the work-life balance concept as outlined in Sirgy and Lee's review. Work-life conflicts were originally theorised as work-family conflicts arising when the demands of different roles in one's personal and professional lives are incompatible with each other and are thought to have two directions, that is, 1) the encroachment of work in life spheres and 2) the invasion of other life spheres into work (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). Nevertheless, scholars have also emphasised the positive spillovers that can take place between work and other life domains (Greenhaus & Powell, 2006). Indeed, boundaries among work and non-work domains can be handled through different approaches, ranging from separation to integration, with several middle-ground strategies (Kossek, 2016). Given the complexity of all the possible different configurations of the work-life interface (Abendroth & den Dulk, 2011), considering satisfaction with work-life balance allows to acknowledge the different importance that individuals may allocate to the multiple roles (Dilmaghani & Tabvuma, 2019).

Valcour (2007) proposes to consider work-family balance satisfaction as a holistic concept capturing the overall sense of satisfaction that comes from evaluating how well one manages the demands of both work and family roles. According to Valcour (2007), two components of this theoretical construct can be considered, namely a cognitive one consisting of the evaluation of the degree of individual success in juggling multiple roles, and an affective one involving a positive emotional state (satisfaction) arising from this evaluation. The perceived right balance is not a given, being bound to the values that different social groups and individuals attribute to life dimensions such as work, family or leisure (Lewis et al., 2007). Indeed, this approach of overall satisfaction with the work-life interface allows to focus on one specific job's facet that is "*the job's suitability in responding to the workers' needs in their personal lives*" (Dilmaghani & Tabvuma, 2019, p. 401). The following sections present the influence of demographics, working conditions, and of geographical factors on work-life balance satisfaction and work-life conflicts.

2.2. Determinants of work-life balance satisfaction and work-life conflicts

2.2.1. Demographic factors

The concept of WLBS entered the academic debate in the 20th century, especially following an increased integration of women into the workforce in Western countries. A more widespread engagement of women in the job market did not automatically coincide with a more balanced sharing of family responsibilities between women and men. This resulted in women being occupied with a "first shift" at their paid job position and a "second shift" consisting of unpaid care labour at home (Hochschild & Machung, 1989). For this reason, the standard conceptualisation of work-life balance was highly gendered and revolved around balancing work and family life and reducing work-family conflicts (Lewis et al., 2007). In the last decades, the so-called non-work domain has enlarged to include leisure and other social activities more consistently, attempting to go beyond the family domain and overcoming this traditional gendered construction of the concept (Land & Taylor, 2010).

Paid and unpaid care labour is still disproportionately gendered. These divisions create disparities in the labour market, pay, and general well-being, including WLC (Eurofound, 2022). Hosseini et al. (2023) conducted a systematic literature review concerning work-life conflicts among working women, identifying different factors ranging from individual factors connected to personality traits, health status and resources, interpersonal and organisational factors (including long

working hours), and cultural ones. Already before the COVID-19 pandemic, women faced difficulties balancing their jobs and family responsibilities due to a lack of care services and excessive time spent on caregiving activities (EIGE, 2021; Eurofound, 2021). The last European Working Conditions Survey (EWCS) 2021 wave shows a prevalence of women being more satisfied with their work-life balance, but also a prevalence of this group in experiencing WLC. On the other hand, a study conducted in October 2020 in Italy found that female remote workers were experiencing lower WLBS (Alfano et al., 2023); similarly, a European analysis on remote workers found that work-life balance deteriorated for married workers, women (with higher adverse effects at the end of the pandemic), and those with children (Alfano et al., 2024).

Having dependent children and other caregiving responsibilities outside the household are mentioned among the determinants of work-life balance satisfaction (Dilmaghani e Tabvuma, 2019; Valcour, 2007). Indeed, the existence of policies on care support across different levels seems to help enhance work-life balance satisfaction and reduce conflicts (Abendroth & den Dulk, 2011; Butts et al., 2013). Finally, age may also play a role, with research demonstrating how age is positively correlated to positive job attitudes (Ng & Feldman, 2010) and the maintenance of work-life balance (Richert-Kaźmierska & Stankiewicz, 2016).

Given the evidence described above, we framed the following hypothesis:

H1. Women experience lower WLBS, while they are more likely to experience WLC.

2.2.2. Working conditions

The digitalisation of work has been associated with extended working hours and working during free time (Eurofound & International Labour Office, 2017), which in turn is related to reduced work-life balance and a worsening of WLC (Fagan et al., 2012). New ways of working emerging from digitalisation are also reported to be connected to workplace cultures, according to which workers are always expected to be available (van der Lippe & Lippényi, 2020), emphasising the invasion of work on other life domains. Long working hours and the expectation of being constantly on seem to be even more accentuated in work environments connected to start-ups (Papageorgiou, 2020). Indeed, a higher work permeability into non-work domains is more likely to lead to WLC (Olson-Buchanan & Boswell, 2006). Indeed, homeworking, coupled with the use of ICTs, may lead to virtual presenteeism (Eurofound, 2020), that is, keeping working while feeling sick, a condition associated with burnout (Demerouti et al., 2009). Precarious work associated with uncertainty and a lack of control and predictability over one's work life may negatively affect work-life balance (Bohle et al., 2004). However, when working remotely is associated with higher degrees of autonomy and flexibility in setting priorities and handling work tasks, satisfaction with the work experience increases (Fana et al., 2020). According to the latest Eurofound report on working conditions in Eurofound & International Labour Office (2017), in terms of WLC, and particularly considering the ability to disconnect from work, self-employed workers seem to be a particularly vulnerable group (Eurofound, 2022). Although the coworker population is relatively homogeneous in terms of frequency of use of ICTs and sectors of activity, since they are mainly employed in creative and digital occupations (Gandini, 2015a), they are quite diversified in terms of working conditions. Indeed, they could differ concerning income insecurity and be dependent or independent workers (Pacchi & Mariotti, 2021). Therefore, we will consider how coworkers' working conditions affect their WLBS and WLC. Specifically, we framed the following hypothesis:

H2. The higher the working hours, the lower the WLBS, and the higher the WLC.

2.2.3. Work location

As mentioned in Section 1, thanks to advances in mobile ICTs, work is increasingly being performed anywhere and anytime (Eurofound & International Labour Office, 2017). Living and working arrangements involving more than one location have started becoming more widespread, although they have already existed in different forms in the past (Wood et al., 2015). Multi-local work has been considered an emerging mode of the spatial organisation of labour, which is decreasingly depending on the assumption of a fixed workplace (Di Marino & Lapintie, 2020; Reuschke & Ekinsmyth, 2021; Shearmur, 2021). In this context, Eurofound and ILO introduced a statistical definition of ICT-enabled mobile work, defined as work conducted from more than one place and enabled by ICTs (Eurofound & International Labour Office, 2017), and describing different levels of mobility depending on the number of workplaces and the frequency of use of each of these locations.

When considering places of living, multilocality is defined as having two or more places of residence and using them cyclically for work, as a danger of the advantages of working multi-locally alternating a central urban location with a rural peripheral one, an aspect that in this study is related to the change of scenery, the decreased direct control from supervisors translating into a greater autonomy in managing their workdays. In line with the importance of considering context, the type of workplace used by multilocal workers is also relevant for their work-life balance, ability to focus, and the emergence of conflicts (Vartiainen, 2021). Adverse effects of multilocational work also appear in the literature, in particular resulting in reduced social support and increased marginalisation (Koroma et al., 2014), and worrisome effects on work-life balance, especially for those workers working in different time zones (Vartiainen & Hyrkkänen, 2010), and connected to frequent work-related long-distance travel (Casinowsky, 2013).

The quest for a better work-life balance is also the leitmotiv characterising the lifestyle mobilities (Cohen et al., 2015) of the so-called digital nomads. In these mobilities, the optimal work-life balance is constructed as escaping the 9-5 office logic and moving to a place that offers amenities, outdoor activities, and, at the same time, a good internet connection and possibly a community of like-minded travellers, often embodied in CSs (Chevtaeva & Denizci-Guillet, 2021; Thompson, 2019). Besides this narrative, empirical research also found that these leisure-related multilocational work and living arrangements could also bring complicated management of work and other life spheres. Being in a place full of leisure amenities at their disposal could become distracting for digital nomads, as well as organising work with colleagues and clients in other time zones (Cook, 2020; Mancinelli, 2020). Therefore, even though the actual autonomy and flexibility of workers in deciding over their workday and travels are undoubtedly important, an autonomy paradox (Mazmanian et al., 2013) may emerge, with increased autonomy leading to self-exploitation or distraction. Given the inconclusive nature of this academic discussion, we aim to explore the relationship between multilocal ways of working and living, considering these aspects in our analysis.

The geography of WLBS and WLC has been somewhat overlooked in the literature. A study in Spain by Baylina et al. (2017) looking at the work-life balance of female professionals in rural areas found that the social fabric in those areas reinforced traditional gender roles while at the same time providing a caregiving and support networks that allowed workers with children to deal with daily tasks. Another aspect highlighted by the literature seems to be the role played by the natural, blue and green environments for individual wellbeing (Finlay et al., 2015). Bürgin et al. (2021) mention the change of scenery represented by working for some time in peripheral and rural locations with wider access to green areas and natural amenities as an aspect positively affecting work-life balance. Related to commuting, long commutes seem to contribute to a worse work-life balance and enhanced WLC (Bai et al., 2021; Kim et al., 2019) and in particular, Herman and Larouche (2021) found that active forms of travelling seem to be related with better work-life balance and women commuting by public transport enjoy a better work-life balance. Several studies found that creative workers,

who make up a large part of coworkers (Avdikos & Kalogeresis, 2017), seem to be more likely to be attracted by the possibilities of adopting an active lifestyle, being closer to certain natural landscapes compared to the general population (Argent et al., 2013). Felton's study in Australia (2013) found that creative workers are also located in suburban localities rather than only being present in large creative cities, demonstrating that suburban and rural areas may also be attractive to these workers. Moreover, Haisch et al. (2017) found amenities and quality of life aspects, together with a florid entrepreneurial atmosphere, to be relevant factors conditioning the choice of creative individuals to move to non-metropolitan regions. Other studies reported a slower pace of life in more remote contexts (Hracs et al., 2011) and peripheral and rural destinations as places where to thrive, enhancing one's wellbeing outside core urban locales (Alacovska et al., 2021).

As for studies investigating CSs located outside urban areas, some emphasise that CSs are branding themselves as places where to achieve a better work-life balance and to enhance wellbeing, relating this to the possibility of being closer and practising sports and physical activity in nature (Bosworth et al., 2023). Indeed, the few studies available emphasised the positive role of CSs in rural areas for users' wellbeing and work-life balance, specifically in keeping professional life separated from the rest (Flipo et al., 2022; Merrell et al., 2022). Akhavan and Mariotti (2023) found that coworkers in smaller towns in Italy are more likely to be satisfied with the CS they work at. The investigation also highlighted the crucial roles of organisational proximity, a sense of community, and the engagement of CSs with local communities for coworkers' satisfaction. Moreover, Mariotti and Di Matteo (2022) described that coworkers of CSs in rural and peripheral areas in Italy are more likely to increase their income than those working in CSs in metropolitan areas. The presence of these spaces in peripheral areas may allow workers to work closer to their homes, avoiding long commutes to more central destinations (Mariotti et al., 2023), which may also positively affect work-life balance (Houghton et al., 2018). In light of the existing literature highlighting the positive role played by 1) non-urban areas in providing access to green spaces and sometimes caregiving support networks and 2) CSs located in non-urban areas in providing a sociable workplace possibly closer to home, we framed our last hypothesis as follows:

H3. Users of non-urban CSs are more satisfied with their WLBS, and they experience fewer WLC, than their urban counterparts.

3. Data and methodology

The paper analyses data from a sample of coworkers collected through a survey launched between November 2022 and April 2023. The link to the online questionnaire was emailed to the managers of 695 CSs located in Italy, who were asked to share it with CS users. The survey included 45 questions collecting information on basic characteristics of the CS, respondents' socio-demographics, job and working life, links to the CS community, mobility and residential patterns, and digital and job skills. The questionnaire borrowed several pre-existing questions from the European Working Conditions Telephone Survey (EWCTS 2021),[1] including the questions on WLBS and WLC, with the advantage of using questions already pre-tested with a similar population. Several reminders were sent to minimise no-response bias, and 188 full replies were collected from 93 different CSs (representing 13,4% of the total) located in 68 different municipalities. The surveyed CSs are geographically distributed across macro areas (37 in North-West, 22 in North-East, 18 in Central Italy, and 16 in the South and the Islands) (see Fig. 1), similarly to the CS population in Italy, with our sample including 61 spaces located in urban areas and 32 in suburban and rural areas[2,3]. Looking at the characteristics of the coworkers who answered the questionnaire, Table A1 (in the Appendix) shows that the sample is balanced in terms of gender (48% female, 52% male). 38% of coworkers have children under 18, 76% have at least a bachelor's degree, 34% are 30–39, 24% are 40–49, and 26% are over 50.

This study focuses on coworkers' WLBS and WLC, measured through three questions. In the first question, coworkers were asked to indicate, in general, how their working hours fit in with their family or social commitments outside work on a Likert scale (1 = Not at all well; 4 = Very well). Given the subjective nature of the question concerning WLBS, we also analyse WLC, particularly the invasion of work into other life domains. Eurofound (2022) operationalised such WLC into feeling tired after work to deal with non-work tasks, and as keeping thinking of work while not working, that is workers' inability to disconnect. Indeed, Eurofound results show a mismatch between the perceived work-life balance satisfaction and the conflicts workers experience. Therefore, not necessarily a perceived high WLBS will correspond to low conflicts and *vice versa*. We are thus controlling also for WLC in order to add a layer of complexity and go beyond a simplified measuring of work-life balance satisfaction. Firstly, coworkers were asked to indicate how often in the last 12 months they felt too tired after work to do some of the household jobs that needed to be done on a Likert scale (1 = Never; 5 = Always). The second indicator concerns the inability to disconnect from work. Specifically, coworkers were asked to indicate how often, in the last 12 months, they kept worrying about work when they were not working on a Likert scale (1 = Never; 5 = Always).

Given the nature of the dependent variables investigated (i.e., WLBS, and WLC including kept worrying about work, and feeling tired after work), an ordered logit model is applied to investigate the role of sociodemographic characteristics, working conditions, working and living arrangements, and geographical dimensions in affecting coworkers' work-life balance satisfaction and conflicts.

As described by Greene and Hensher (2010), we consider a latent variable, y_i^* which depicts the coworkers' work-life balance satisfaction and can be represented by a discrete and ordinal indicator y_i, which is the self-assessed satisfaction with work-life balance on a 4-point Likert scale.

The following latent regression model captures the relationship between y_i and x_i:

$$y_i^* = \beta' x_i + \varepsilon_i$$

and is observed in a discrete form through a censoring mechanism:

$$y_i = \mathrm{j} \text{ if } \mu_{j-1} < y_i^* < \text{ if } \mu_j \text{ for } \mathrm{j} = 1, \ldots, 4$$

The sample observations (coworkers) are labelled i = 1, …, n; the vector of unknown parameters β and the thresholds μ_j (with j = 1, …, 4) are the object of estimation and inference. The vector x_i includes all the explanatory variables, which are assumed to be strictly exogenous of the error term (see Table A2 for multicollinearity test in Appendix).

Specifically, the covariates include the sociodemographic characteristics (gender, age, household composition, education), the location of CSs used by the respondents, job and working life (working contract, future income predictive capacity, working hours) and mobility and residential patterns (multilocality of living and working, commuting transport mode). Precisely, multilocality of living is a dummy variable

[1] https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/en/european-working-conditions-telephone-survey-2021.

[2] We used the DEGURBA (degree of urbanisation) classification to define urban and non-urban CSs, with urban municipalities defined as "Densely populated", and non-urban as "Thinly populated" and "Intermediate density".

[3] Table A3 in the Appendix describes the number of respondents in urban vs non-urban by macro-areas.

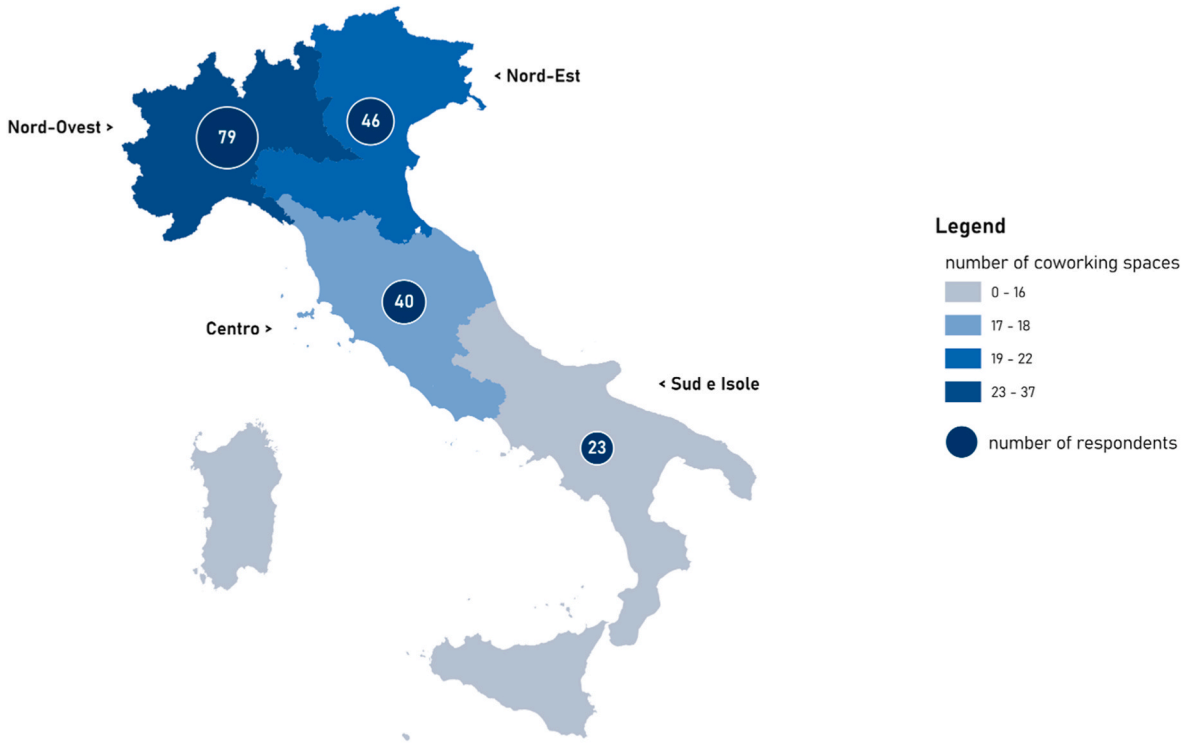

Fig. 1. Geographical distribution of CWs and respondents by Italian macro-area. Source: Authors' elaboration.

indicating respondents who stated to have more than one stable place of residency, while multilocality of working is a dummy variable indicating respondents who work in other spaces besides the CS they are replying from at least often or always.

4. Results and discussion

4.1. Descriptive statistics evidence

Fig. 2 shows the distribution of the self-assessed answers to work-life balance satisfaction. Descriptive statistics show that most coworkers are satisfied: 81% answered that their working hours fit well or very well with their family or social commitments outside work.

Looking at the self-assessed answers to the first WLC indicator in Fig. 3, 41% of coworkers said they sometimes felt too tired after work to do housework, 30% often felt tired, and 5% always.

Finally, Fig. 4 shows the distribution of the self-assessed answers to the second WLC indicator. Even in this case, coworkers live some WLC: 69% answered sometimes or often, and 14% have always kept worrying about work when not working.

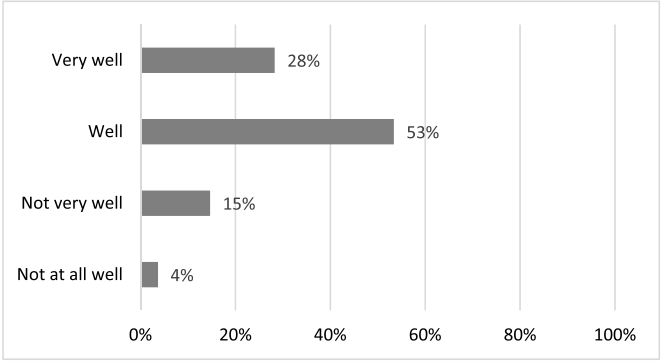

Fig. 2. Frequency levels (%) of answers to WLBS. Source: Authors' elaboration.

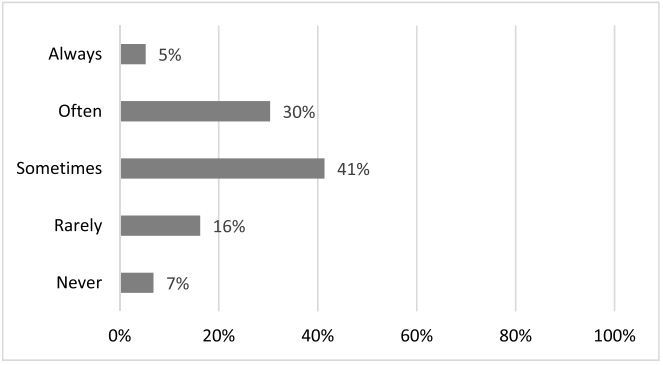

Fig. 3. Frequency levels (%) of answers to the first WLC indicator: "How often in the last 12 months have you felt too tired after work to do some of the household jobs which need to be done?" Source: Authors' elaboration.

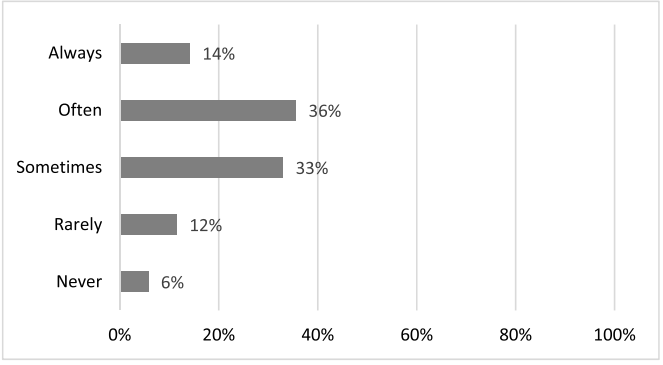

Fig. 4. Frequency levels (%) of answers to the second WLC indicator: "How often in the last 12 months, have you kept worrying about work when you were not working?". Source: Authors' elaboration.

The last three columns of Table A1 show the differences (in the means) among the socioeconomic and demographic groups in terms of work-life balance satisfaction and WLC. Women reported a higher average score in the overall work-life balance (3.14) than men (2.96). At the same time, women experienced WLC concerning both feeling tired after work (3.28) and worrying about work (3.46). Looking at WLBS, the reported scores show no significant differences across education and household composition. Instead, coworkers who are self-employed (3.09), those who are able to predict their income in the next three months (3.12), those who have only one stable place of residence (3.11), those who are multilocal in terms of working arrangement (3.11) and those working from a CS not located in an urban area (3.22) show the highest WLBS.

4.2. Estimation results

Table 1 presents the estimation results of the ordered logit model concerning WLBS. We first introduce only the main covariate of interest: urban CS (specification (i)). We then include the vector of control variables (specification (ii)) and macro areas controls (specification (iii)) to investigate the relationships with WLBS further. Table 3 shows the estimation results of the ordered logit model concerning WLC.

Results show that there is always a negative and significant association between working in an urban CS and WLBS (Table 1) and a positive and significant association between working in an urban CS and WLC (Table 3). Therefore, hypothesis 3 is confirmed. Specifically, Table 2 reports the marginal effects: working in a CS in an urban area is associated with a 16% decrease in reporting a high WLBS. This could be due to several factors about non-urban locations. As illustrated in section 2.4, CSs in non-urban areas may contribute to WLBS and WLC by 1) providing greater access to natural amenities and the possibility to adopt a more active lifestyle; 2) being characterised by a slower pace of life and providing traditional caregiving support networks which are beneficial, especially to workers with children under 18; 3) providing a separate workplace which is still relatively close to workers' homes. Nevertheless, these aspects should be further investigated to understand what contributes to workers' work-life balance satisfaction in these locations.

Concerning control variables, it appears that worse working conditions will also lead to worse work-life balance outcomes in coworking environments. In line with Eurofound's results (2022) on the European workforce, WLBS in CSs seems hindered by increased working hours, and WLC appears significantly worsened. Therefore hypothesis 2 is confirmed. In terms of employment status, a paradox seems to emerge. Our results suggest that self-employed people, on average, tend to be more satisfied with their work-life balance, but, at the same time, experience more conflicts, at least in terms of difficulty disconnecting from work when not working. Such a finding aligns with the autonomy

Table 1
Estimates from the ordered logit model: WLBS.

	(i)	(ii)	(iii)
Not urban CS	*Reference category*		
Urban CS	**−0.67 (0.3)****	**−0.83 (0.3)*****	**−0.84 (0.3)*****
Men	*Reference category*		
Women		0.35 (0.3)	0.43 (0.3)
20–29 years old	*Reference category*		
30–39 years old		**−0.84 (0.5)***	**−0.86 (0.5)***
40–49 years old		0.10 (0.5)	0.11 (0.6)
Over 50 years old		0.73 (0.5)	0.71 (0.5)
No degree	*Reference category*		
University degree		0.10 (0.4)	−0.008 (0.4)
No children	*Reference category*		
Having children		−0.24 (0.3)	−0.26(0.3)
Working hours		**−0.06 (0.02)*****	**−0.06 (0.02)*****
Self-employed	*Reference category*		
Employee		**−0.65 (0.3)****	**−0.67 (0.3)****
Predictable income	*Reference category*		
Unpredictable income		**−1.29 (0.3)*****	**−1.28 (0.3)*****
Not multilocal (living)	*Reference category*		
Multilocal (living)		**−0.58 (0.3)***	**−0.65 (0.3)****
Not multilocal (working)	*Reference category*		
Multilocal (working)		0.35 (0.3)	0.33 (0.3)
Commuting by private vehicle	*Reference category*		
Commuting by bycicle		−0.39 (0.4)	−0.34 (0.4)
Commuting by public transport		−0.47 (0.4)	−0.54 (0.4)
Commuting by foot		−0.12 (0.3)	−0.24 (0.4)
Geographical macro areas	No	No	Yes
Pseudo Log-likelihood	−203.35	−182.151	−180.731
Pseudo-R^2	0.013	0.115	0.122
Prob > chi2	0.022	0.000	0.000
Observations	188	188	188

Notes: Robust std errors in parentheses. Significance levels: ***p < 0.01; **p < 0.05; *p < 0.10.

Table 2
Marginal effects on WLBS.

	4 – Working hours fit very well with family/social commitments
Urban CS	**−0.16*****
Working hours	**−0.011*****
Employee	**−0.12****
Unpredictable income	**−0.19*****
Multilocal (living)	**−0.11****

Table 3
Estimates from the ordered logit model: WLC.

	Feeling tired after work	Kept worrying about work
Not urban CS	*Reference category*	
Urban CS	**0.91 (0.3)*****	**0.59 (0.3)***
Men	*Reference category*	
Women	**0.82 (0.3)*****	**0.67 (0.3)***
20–29 years old	*Reference category*	
30–39 years old	0.17 (0.5)	−0.004 (0.4)
40–49 years old	−0.64 (0.5)	0.057 (0.5)
Over 50 years old	−0.64 (0.5)	0.25 (0.5)
No degree	*Reference category*	
University degree	0.28 (0.3)	−0.08 (0.3)
No children	*Reference category*	
Having children	0.10 (0.3)	−0.08 (0.3)
Working hours	**0.05 (0.01)*****	**0.06 (0.01)*****
Self-employed	*Reference category*	
Employee	−0.17 (0.4)	**−0.73 (0.3)****
Predictable income	*Reference category*	
Unpredictable income	0.31 (0.3)	0.34 (0.3)
Not multilocal (living)	*Reference category*	
Multilocal (living)	**0.77 (0.3)*****	**0.73 (0.3)****
Not multilocal (working)	*Reference category*	
Multilocal (working)	0.14 (0.3)	0.34 (0.3)
Commuting by private vehicle	*Reference category*	
Commuting by bycicle	0.13 (0.5)	0.51 (0.4)
Commuting by public transport	**−0.76 (0.4)***	−0.22 (0.5)
Commuting by foot	**0.21 (0.4)***	−0.007 (0.3)
Geographical macro areas	Yes	Yes
Pseudo Log-likelihood	−336.81	−248.18
Pseudo-R^2	0.078	0.073
Prob > chi2	0.000	0.002
Observations	188	188

Notes: Robust std errors in parentheses. Significance levels: ***p < 0.01; **p < 0.05; *p < 0.10.

paradox mentioned in section 2.2 and with studies reporting a tendency for digital professionals to report high levels of satisfaction with their work while displaying poor working conditions (Gandini, 2015b). Indeed, not always the encroachment of work into life spheres is perceived as problematic. Besides being embedded in an always-on culture (Derks et al., 2015), self-employed workers in coworking contexts have also been reported to be keener to an increased integration of work and non-work domains compared to dependent employees (Rinaldini et al., 2021). Finally, income instability also seems to be related to lower satisfaction with work-life balance in coworking contexts, consistent with studies cited in section 2.2.

In terms of demographic controls, while overall, there seems to be no significant difference between men and women regarding WLBS, women seem more likely to experience WLC, consistent with Eurofound's findings concerning the European workforce (Eurofound, 2022). Therefore, hypothesis 1 is partially confirmed. Age also plays a role, with people between 30 and 40 experiencing increased WLC compared to the younger counterparts. This could be related to the likeliness of workers in this age group to have younger children, resulting in increased care responsibilities. Indeed, results of the last wave of the EWCS go in the same direction, highlighting that parents with younger children report a worse work-life balance than parents with older children (Eurofound, 2022). Besides, workers in this age group are more willing to capitalise on investments made in the initial phase of the career path.

We find mixed results concerning multilocality. Working from multiple workplaces does not seem to affect the work-life balance satisfaction of coworkers. On the contrary, living in multiple locations is negatively correlated to WLBS and WLC. This preliminary finding points in two directions. Firstly, despite the overwhelming liberating discourse on residential flexibility and nomadism, changing location and the type of location may lead to complicated management of work-life balance (Cook, 2020; Mancinelli, 2020). Secondly, enhanced mobility does not necessarily correspond to high levels of flexibility and autonomy. As we know from the available literature, residential multilocality has a diversified array of causes and is not always a result of a deliberate choice. Rather, a mechanism of forced flexibility may be in place, for which people find themselves compelled to adopt a multilocal lifestyle, for instance, to maintain family and other strong social ties.

An example in this sense is represented by those who tend to work in metropolitan areas but then reside in their villages of origin, where they may spend several periods per year. Indeed, in Italy, not all organisations allow high levels of geographical flexibility and, despite a positive change in this direction after the COVID-19 pandemic, remote working is relatively less widespread than in other European countries. According to EU-LFS data[4] for 2022, only 5.2% of the Italian employed population works from home, against the European Union average of 10.2, registering a decrease of 7 percentage points compared to 2020.

Finally, the last determinant concerns commuting transport mode. The results show that commuting by public transport reduces the WLC, specifically feeling tired, compared with commuting by car, as found by Herman and Larouche (2021). Instead, commuting by foot (if compared to private vehicles) increased the likelihood of feeling tired after work.

5. Conclusions

This study explored the role played by the geographical location of CSs (urban vs. non-urban) on coworkers' WLBS and WLC, thus enriching the literature on the effects of CSs on their users. Drawing on data from an online survey conducted in Italy in 2022–2023, the analysis found a positive role played by non-urban locations for coworkers' WLBS and WLC reduction. The other determinants explaining WLBS and WLC are (i) working conditions (working hours and income insecurity), (ii) employment status, (iii) gender and (iv) age, (v) multilocality of living, (vi) commuting transport mode. Therefore, our hypotheses are confirmed.

The association of living and working in a non-urban area with WLBS and WLC reduction could be investigated more in-depth by considering the heterogeneity of non-urban CSs. This study could not reach such a granularity given the relatively small sample. Moreover, while the results have provided insights into the specific Italian context, they may not be geographically generalisable. Furthermore, the quantitative nature of the study did not allow us to go in-depth and explore the ways CSs located outside urban agglomerations are acting upon coworkers' work-life balance. Applying a mixed-method approach, including a qualitative analysis through interviews with users and managers of CSs may provide a better understanding of the reasons behind these results.

Given the relevance of work hours for WLBS, promoting healthy work cultures and the right to disconnect in CSs is extremely important. Furthermore, the link between income insecurity and work-life balance is still an overlooked topic that could be explored more in-depth, especially considering creative work and collaborative workspaces. Moreover, the fact that about 1/3 of the sample of the users of Italian CSs declared to have more than one place of residence (as shown in Table A1) highlights the need to investigate more in-depth the role that these spaces may play for multilocal workers. Another important aspect to explore, which contributes to enhancing WLBS, is represented by the companies' welfare programmes that include CSs.

While CSs seem to positively affect their users, especially in non-urban areas, further research should focus on their effects on the local context. CSs may help counter depopulation by encouraging the inflow of new residents (Ciccarelli & Mariotti, 2024; Mariotti et al., 2023; Vogl & Akhavan, 2022) by offering new services to nearby independent contractors. These workplaces serving as remote network bridges connecting urban and non-urban areas (Bosworth et al., 2023) may also encourage social innovation, social cohesiveness, and the interchange of ideas and expertise, thus contributing to developing community well-being (Capdevila, 2022; Ciccarelli & Mariotti, 2024; Mariotti & Sasso, 2024).

By contrast, CSs may produce adverse effects since the local community can consider remote workers and digital nomads a danger (Ciccarelli & Mariotti, 2024). The long-term effects of these newcomers could lead to an increase in land and housing costs and overall living expenses (Morgan & Woodriff, 2019). Additionally, the development of workcations, which combine leisure time with work time, may have more consumeristic undertones and contribute to commodifying these areas (Vogl & Micek, 2023; Voll et al., 2023). Tailored policy tools and a multi-governance approach should be adopted to contrast the negative effects of opening new CSs in non-urban areas. It is, indeed, essential to identify the current needs of local communities and potential coworkers to foster the gradual construction of a community, both inside and outside of the CS, as Capdevila (2022) emphasised.

European policymakers have realised how crucial it is to permit private workers and employees of public administration to work in CSs in peripheral, and rural areas near their homes (a practice known as "near-working"), thus improving their WLBS and reducing WLC. In Italy, public administration employees are permitted to work from home in CS in non-urban areas by the Emilia Romagna region, Milan (Milano Strategia di Adattamento), and Bologna (Smart Bo initiative). In France, the government supports the National Association of Third Places, or "Tiers Lieux," in its endeavours to promote near working and lessen traffic, pollution, and urban commute. Its goal is to give remote workers access to a network, a professional setting, resources, and support services (Bisello & Litardi, 2024). In Ireland, the National Connected Hubs Network promotes remote working in rural areas (Bisello & Litardi, 2024), and through the "Learning in the Hubs" project, it offers tertiary education programmes recognised by partner universities with the goal of mentoring and training community development leaders (Mariotti &

[4] https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/lfsa_ehomp/default/table.

Sasso, 2024). Occasionally, even private organisations, such as the Milano Smart City Alliance and Unicredit in Italy, have implemented initiatives to promote short commutes and work from nearby hubs (Mariotti & Tagliaro, 2024). The Bank of Ireland opened 11 new hybrid working hubs in 2022, and Eurobank in Greece implemented a new hybrid program in 2022 and opened two additional hubs in 2023 (Bisello & Litardi, 2024).

CRediT authorship contribution statement

Francesca Chiara Ciccarelli: Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Validation, Software, Methodology, Investigation, Formal analysis, Data curation, Conceptualization. **Ilaria Mariotti:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Validation, Methodology, Investigation, Funding acquisition, Data curation, Conceptualization. **Federica Rossi:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Validation, Software, Methodology, Formal analysis, Data curation, Conceptualization.

Funding declaration

This paper has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under the Marie Skłodowska-Curie grant agreement No 955907, project CORAL (Exploring the impacts of collaborative workspaces in rural and peripheral areas in the EU).

Support from COST Action CA18214 'The geography of New Working Spaces and the impact on the periphery', which is funded by the European Union (http://www.new-working-spaces.eu, https://www.cost.eu/actions/CA18214) is acknowledged.

Declaration of interest

We have nothing to declare.

Appendix

Table A1
Descriptive statistics

Variable	N	%	WLBS	WLC	
				Feeling tired after work	Kept worrying about work
			Mean (SD)	Mean (SD)	Mean (SD)
Gender					
Female	91	48	3.14 (0.7)	3.28 (0.8)	3.46 (0.9)
Male	97	52	2.96 (0.8)	2.94 (1.1)	3.34 (1.1)
Age (classes)					
20-29	31	16	3.16 (0.7)	3.19 (0.9)	3.25 (1.1)
30-39	65	34	2.81 (0.8)	3.28 (0.9)	3.31 (1.1)
40-49	45	24	3.18 (0.7)	2.93 (0.9)	3.40 (1.0)
50+	47	26	3.18 (0.7)	3.00 (0.9)	3.63 (1.0)
Household composition					
Having children	71	38	3.01 (0.8)	3.07 (0.9)	3.37 (1.1)
No children	117	62	3.07 (0.8)	3.14 (1.0)	3.42 (1.0)
Education					
Degree	142	76	3.04 (0.7)	3.19 (0.9)	3.39 (1.01)
No degree	46	24	3.09 (0.8)	2.87 (1.0)	3.43 (1.16)
Working contract					
Being employee	72	38	2.98 (0.7)	3.06 (0.9)	3.10 (1.1)
Self-Employed	116	62	3.09 (0.8)	3.15 (1.0)	3.59 (0.9)
Future income					
Unpredictable income	40	21	2.83 (0.8)	3.17 (1.1)	3.66 (0.9)
Predictable income	148	79	3.12 (0.7)	3.09 (0.9)	3.33 (1.1)
Living arrangement					
Multilocal	62	33	2.94 (0.8)	3.32 (0.8)	3.59 (1.0)
Not multilocal	126	67	3.11 (0.7)	3.01 (1.0)	3.31 (1.1)
Working arrangement					
Multilocal	82	44	3.11 (0.8)	3.19 (0.9)	3.51 (1.1)
Not multilocal	106	56	3.01 (0.7)	3.05 (0.9)	3.32 (0.9)
CS location					
Urban	121	64	2.96 (0.8)	3.23 (0.9)	3.46 (1.1)
Non-urban	67	36	3.22 (0.7)	2.89 (0.9)	3.29 (1.0)
Commuting trasport mode[5]					
Private vehicle	112	/	3.06	3.10	3.5
Bycicle	36	/	2.9	3.14	3.6
Public transport	26	/	2.76	3	3.3
Foot	61	/	3.1	3.3	3.5
NUTS-1 region					
North-West	79	42	3.11 (0.7)	3.14 (0.9)	3.49 (1.1)
North-East	46	25	2.89 (0.9)	3.13 (1.0)	3.47 (0.9)
Centre	40	21	3.10 (0.7)	3.12 (1.0)	3.15 (1.1)
South and Islands	23	12	3.09 (0.7)	2.95 (1.0)	3.39 (1.2)

5 Multiple answers allowed.

Table A2
Collinearity diagnostic

VARIABLE	VIF	SQRT VIF	Tolerance	R-Squared
URBAN_CS	1.14	1.07	0.8763	0.1237
MULTILOCAL	1.13	1.06	0.8875	0.1125
MOBILE	1.08	1.04	0.9245	0.0755
FEMALE	1.31	1.14	0.7660	0.2340
AGE 30-40	2.38	1.54	0.4208	0.5792
AGE 40-50	2.50	1.58	0.3999	0.6001
AGE OVER 50	2.74	1.65	0.3655	0.6345
WITH DEGREE	1.19	1.09	0.8389	0.1611
WITH CHILDREN	1.28	1.13	0.7809	0.2191
EMPLOYEE	1.41	1.19	0.7083	0.2917
WORK HOURS	1.23	1.11	0.8133	0.1867
UNABLE TO PREDICT EARNINGS	1.22	1.11	0.8163	0.1837
BICYCLE OR KICKSCOOTER	1.10	1.05	0.9066	0.0934
PUBLIC TRANSPORT	1.32	1.15	0.7573	0.2427
FOOT	1.21	1.10	0.8232	0.1768
NORTH WEST	1.93	1.39	0.5182	0.4818
NORTH EAST	1.70	1.30	0.5888	0.4112
SOUTH AND ISLANDS	1.54	1.24	0.6476	0.3524
MEAN VIF	1.52			

Table A3
Number of respondents in urban vs non-urban areas by macro-areas

Macro-area	Non-Urban	Urban	Tot
North West	27	52	79
North East	16	30	46
Centre	16	24	40
South and Islands	8	15	23
Tot	67	121	188

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