What's taking space?

Re-framing space and place in everyday organizational life

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Editorial

What's taking space? Re-framing space and place in everyday organizational life

1. Bringing space back in... again: revisiting concepts, contestations, contexts and change

Inspired by Lefebvre's (1991) *Production of Space*, organisational scholars (e.g. Clegg & Kornberger, 2006; Dale & Burrell, 2008; Van Marrewijk & Yanow, 2010; de Vaujany & Mitev, 2013) have opened up more critical ways of studying how organisational space is simultaneously planned, perceived and practised (see Taylor & Spicer, 2007). Organisational spaces produce us as much as we produce our place(s) in the spaces of organising.

Space is a contingent and contested concept, represented by an ongoing process of continuous production and becoming, and so invokes a need for political and affective engagement (see Massey, 2005; Beyes & Steyaert, 2012). Such engagement implies that the definition of space is never always stable, and thus the nebulous nature of space opens up a productive potential for space to become an inviting, alluring concept for scholars and practitioners to reflect upon. This productive potential has transported us from iconic skyscrapers such as the 'Turning Torso' in Malmö (Tryggestad and Georg, 2011) to university buildings (e.g. de Vaujany and Vaast, 2013), open-plan offices (e.g. Baldry, 2010) to car factories (e.g. Bazin, 2013). Other scholars have focussed on less obvious organisational spaces of production to emphasise the productive capacities of liminal spaces (Iedema, Long, & Carroll, 2012) and transitory places (Shortt, 2015) such as stairwells, doorways, toilets, corridors and hotels. In these expositions, we have been told not only about the productive and collaborative capacities of space, but more crucially, we are also reminded of the controlling and constraining, and at times alienating and exclusionary, implications of space. Thus, while Lefebvre emphasised the production of space, these studies also draw our attention to the consumption and resistance of space within and beyond the spaces and places we inhabit in our organisational lives, and how spaces and places can also consume us in the process (e.g. Moran, 2013; Pritchard & Morgan, 2005).

Organisational scholars continue to give space to researching space, as can be seen in two recent special issues: Delbridge & Sallaz (2015) in *Organization Studies*, and Cutcher, Dale, Hancock, and Tyler (2016) in *Organization*. These recent editions serve to challenge conventional, physical notions of organisational space in order to highlight the importance that movement (and movements) play in conceptualising and enacting organisational space. Delbridge and Sallaz (2015) point to the changing worlds of work and how new information and communication technologies and new forms of work (e.g. telework) can have spatial implications that extend managerial control to home settings. These issues, they argue, necessitate further understanding of how spaces and places (re)produce hierarchical order and inequalities (see also Massey, 2005). Cutcher et al. (2016) probe the underexplored practices of organisational remembering and commemoration. In so doing, they raise

questions concerning the processual qualities of spatiality, and how organisational spaces embody the connections of an organisational past, present and future.

In this special issue, we join this renewed interest in organisational space, and deliberately ask the question: 'What's taking space'? In so doing, we provoke an examination of the relationship of place(s) to and with space(s) in organizations. Where space is socially produced through the performance of everyday practices, representations and imaginations (Lefebvre, 1991), place often invokes a particular form of space that is inhabited and embodied (Hubbard & Kitchin, 2011). By asking 'what takes place' in organisations, organisational spaces are treated as 'neutral shells' divorced from social dynamics (Baldry, 2010), implicitly taking occupied as well as unoccupied space(s) for granted. However, by asking 'what takes space' we want to challenge both the idea of place as a bounded and static entity and the idea of space as a neutral shell. Thus, our intention is to problematise issues of who and what gets placed where, when and why within and across organisational spaces, in order to tackle the relational concepts of, and relationships between, space and place in everyday organising and how these may impact on subjectivities and selfhoods (see e.g. Burrell & Dale, 2003; Kornberger & Clegg, 2004).

In answering who places whom and what in organisational space, we are concerned with the role of (re-)framing 'space' in organisations (Goffman, 1974). Traditional representations of workplaces in factories and offices are increasingly becoming replaced by agile and flexible spaces such as fab labs and virtual organisation in the cloud, as well as transitory and liminal spaces of cafés and travel lounges (see e.g. O'Doherty, 2017). In an ever more 'open' society where the rhetoric of instilling greater freedom is met with the realities of growing uncertainties and precariousness (cf. Bauman, 2000), how do organisational actors avail themselves of territory that lends meaning to and legitimizes their experiences and actions (Benford & Snow, 2000)? In the Uberfication of everything, where peer-to-peer organising in the digital economy means that anything goes, organisations seem to always be in flux as organising can happen anytime, anywhere and with anyone. Yet, at the same time, this constant flux also drives a growing need for stabilisations, to bring things back to order and to re-capture the spaces of organisation. This can be seen through ongoing backlashes with Uber on the employment status of the drivers, which provide an example of re-framing old territory in new digital spaces. In open-plan offices, there is also evidence of workers who resist increasing de-territorialisation by re-territorialising and (re)appropriating the flexible work spaces with personal effects, which can in turn attenuate emotional exhaustion and safeguard wellbeing (e.g. Brown, Lawrence, & Robinson, 2005; Laurence, Fried, & Slowik, 2013). In an increasingly virtual and (hyper)mobile world, how do organisational actors territorialise, de-territorialise and re-territorialise (Bauman, 2000) the

spaces of organisation? How do previous representations and imagined anticipations of space and place disrupt or facilitate the real-life performances (Lefebvre, 1991) in spaces that are different from traditional work spaces?

2. The papers in this special issue[1]

The first paper of this special issue by Weinfurtner and Seidl provides an integrative review of studies of organisational space to take stock of studies on organisational space since the seminal review by Taylor and Spicer (2007). Rather than to analyse the selected studies simply from Lefebvre's perspective of the production of space, they seek to distil how 'space' is conceptualised in order to articulate a broader range of theoretical perspectives of space. They suggest that prevailing studies can be classified into four key areas of concern – distribution of positions in space, isolation of space, differentiation and distinctiveness of space, and the intersection of space. Weinfurtner and Seidl's review highlights three fundamental interrelated spatial dimensions – boundaries, distance and movement – that offer a productive space for probing the spaces of organisation and the organisation of space.

A critical dimension in Weinfurtner and Seidl's framework is the concept of movement, as they ask how pace and direction of movement can overcome boundaries and influence relationships *between* spaces? In an increasingly virtual, digital and distributed world of work, where what matters spatially and temporally in organisations is not the precise here and now, movement becomes an important consideration since work can be accomplished anywhere and at any time, even on the go. Given the rise of such unbounded and fluid spatiality, the second paper of this special issue by de Vaujany, Dandoy, Grandazzi and Fargeot is based on an (auto-) ethnographic study into how tour guides of collaborative spaces convey different embodied experiences of space and place as the guides walk the participants through these spaces. de Vaujany et al., drawing on Merleau-Ponty's philosophy of embodiment, argue that emotions lie at the heart of the embodied first experience of a place argue that emotions lie at the heart of the embodied first experience of a space, and how this embodiment can at times turn a non-place (Augé, 1995) into a place. They explain how capturing this 'atmosphere', defined as the liquid and provisional experience of the space and time of work and life activities, can be done through a number of emotional registers which they term initiation, selection, gamification and commodification.

These emotional registers can, de Vaujany et al. argue, lead to inclusive and exclusive spaces and places; on the one hand, initiation and gamification can enable new participants to feel they are "in" a space by inviting them to play and explore, while selection and commodification, on the other hand, provide a sense of exclusive access to a space. The dynamics of inclusion and exclusion is also a central theme of the third paper of this special issue by Crevani, whose ethnographic study of an annual conference of Nordic Outdoor examines the trajectories brought to, coming to, and ordered at the conference. Crevani observes how the spaces at this event can be simultaneously inclusive and exclusive, in alignment with and divergent from the ideal image of the white, able-bodied masculine form. Thus, she shows that the accumulation of privilege is more than the mutual process of how place influences privilege and how privilege influences place. She concludes that "privilege is *meshed in place*: as trajectories are brought to a location, invited to come, and ordered [so that] they also become included (or not), aligned (or not), and positioned on the stage/on the periphery (or not)".

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[1] A total of 15 papers were submitted to this special issue accounting for a broad range of organisational spaces: from the city scale and free trade zones, to public arenas for protest movements, to a fascinating variety of different work spaces including open, non-territorial offices, cargo ships, iron ore mines, event halls, fab labs and collaborative makerspaces. In the end, five papers were selected for this special issue.

The dynamics of inclusion continues in the fourth paper of this special issue, a participant observational study of a corporate fab lab by Lô and Diochon. Just as Crevani draws on Massey to highlight the politics of space, Lô and Diochon question the Foucauldian disciplinary power of space. By following three protagonists of the Renault corporate fab lab – the founders, the supporters and the opponents – they highlight how such a third space, characterised by unconventionality, hybridity and in-between-ness, can 'unsilence' resistors to empower self-governing regulation as the protagonists seek control of meaning, resources and processes. By moving between the rigidity of traditional organisational processes and the informal and unstructured interactions of fab labs, Lô and Diochon disclose how the hybridity of the Corporate fab lab can bring down walls to destabilise existing order, propose alternative cultures, spaces, methodologies, tools and technologies, and eventually bring about the systematisation of more flexible, autonomous ways of working.

The power of walls also features in the fifth and final paper of this special issue. Here, Våland and Georg's ethnographic study shows how the entanglement of social, material and spatial arrangements in architectural design implicates occupational and organisational identity performance (people's sense of work, role and relationships). In the context of public sector reforms and rationalisation in Denmark, Våland and Georg illustrate through a number of vivid vignettes how the design of open spaces and transparent glass walls can simultaneously result in flexibility on the one hand, but also growing insecurities of who we are and what we do as organisations change. They theorise these movements as 'spacing identity', serving as both concept and processual movement. Continuing the theme of power, Våland and Georg also showed the connections of how small politics in organisational life of transforming new ways of working can often mirror the big politics in national discourses of public sector reform, modernisation and pursuit of social efficiency.

3. Closing reflections: movements in space

What ties these papers together is the concept of movement, human and non-human enactment and spatial as well as temporal arrangements. The authors of the papers in this special issue have either questioned the need to examine spatial movements, or followed ethnographically the organisational actors as they move around (Hatch, 2002), capturing different paces and rhythms of organisational life (Sabelis, 2001; Lefebvre, 2004). By taking a more processual reading of space, our authors have emphasised the role of space and place in providing fertile sites for struggle and negotiation, and attended to the performative ongoing spacing (Beyes & Steyaert, 2012) and everyday reordering (Knox, O'Doherty, Vurdubakis, and Westrup, 2015). While much scholarship on spaces and places tended to focus on how organisational practices are legitimised, the papers here – particularly by Lô and Diochon, and Våland and Georg – also highlight how spaces and places can serve to reform and destabilise old routines and institutional logics (see also de Vaujany and Vaast, 2013).

This brings us to the second point about movement; that is, the spatial movements observed in the studies here also reflect and represent broader societal/social movements. By coincidence, the focus in the four empirical papers in this special issue has been about inhabiting such open spaces as fab labs, collaborative makerspaces, events halls and open-plan offices collaborative makerspaces, events halls and open-plan offices, often emphasising how bodies move and make sense in these organisational spaces (Gherardi, Meriläinen, Strati, Valtonen, 2013). While the designers of these spaces laud the generative potential for these spaces to empower creativity and innovation, what is less examined are the perspectives of those left behind in the quest for flexibility. As open spaces create anxieties and threaten the seemingly fixed and stable occupational and organisational identities of the past, how do we maintain critical reflexivity on such a societal movement that privileges openness? How do we question the accumulation of privilege, reclaim place and resist spaces of a particular, neoliberal

capitalist order (e.g. Callahan, 2013; Raulet-Croset, 2013)? Thus, how do we move beyond critical scholarship, which has become an 'alternative form of establishment' (Simpson and Berti, 2014: 316), and occupy a more subversive space in opening up multiple trajectories of organisational spaces and places as Crevani attempted to do in this special issue (see also de Certeau, 1984; Massey, 2005)?

Indeed, recent developments in the BREXIT vote, the building of metaphorical walls in global politics, and various Occupy movements point to the uprising by those who perceive and are perceived to be left out in forgotten spaces and places in a neoliberal, globalised world. Examples abound of people trying to resist the establishment and the elite who drive an agenda of an ever open and porous society, and fight against exploitation that is often hidden in ever increasing global networks of production. In this "great unsettling" (Sennett, 2012), how do we account for the spatialities and dis-placing of institutions? In writing about organisational spaces and places, researchers can no longer absolve the responsibility of representation and political engagement (Massey, 2005; Vásquez and Cooren, 2013).

We close this editorial with a third point about movement. Organisational scholarship has largely privileged activity and wakefulness, and as a result has overlooked the roles rest and sleep may play in everyday organising (see Schoeneborn, Blaschke, & Kaufmann, 2009; Valtonen & Veijola, 2011). In moving from an ontological position of organisational being to becoming, we are also encouraged to attend to organisation as ceaselessly organising (Chia, 2002). In the fluid and unbounded world of work, where we are constantly blurring the boundaries of work lives and private lives, where work can often be done on the go, how do we take stock and stand still? In seizing spaces of organisation, there is a place for organisational actors and scholars to pause for reflection (Tuan, 1977). We hope that in pausing to read the collection of papers in this special issue, we offer some space for your restful reflection.

Acknowledgements

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