Space, Place, and Scale:
Critical Reflections on the New Spatial Turn in Organization Studies

Conveners
Dr. Céline Donis, Université catholique de Louvain, Belgium
Prof. Dr. Véronique Perret, Université Paris-Dauphine, France
Prof. Dr. Laurent Taskin (lead convenor), Université catholique de Louvain, Belgium

Proposal
Many established disciplines such as human and economic geography, urban sociology, or architecture recognize that space and place exert a considerable influence on people’s lives, social relations, and identities. Indeed, intuitively this influence of spatial configuration on identities and representations must seem obvious. Despite this long-standing recognition in many other disciplines, we note that organization studies has only recently begun to make the “spatial turn” (Lauriol, Perret and Tannery, 2008). We are beginning to consider how space—and its related features of place, mobility, territory, distance—structure, compel, and empower social relationships through subjective, inter-subjective, and political dimensions. Moreover, far from being neutral, space is produced and processed by human and social experience. In a contemporary era of spatial research (e.g., Soja, 1989; Lussault, 2007), it seems particularly important to understand this multidimensionality of space to better capture and understand the complexity of the processes at work in organization studies. Here we can look to recent developments outside our own discipline—especially developments in critical social theory and human geography—which provide pointers to a promising direction of renewed critical analysis. This move will assist the broader organization studies community by enriching our analysis of many of the processes and objects that we commonly study.

Among the more obvious themes that are amenable to such a spatially-oriented critical investigation, are familiar macro processes like globalization, individualization, or digitalization. Here we can augment traditional research on these topics by understanding them through their status as epiphenomena of the re-scaling of the spatial and temporal borders of the fundamental norms of labour, organization, and management. At a micro-level, the intersubjective relations of organizational life are also re-scaled, such as when we are expected to work in geographically dispersed teams. And, of course, such coarse scales as the macro and micro themselves begin to look increasingly arbitrary analytical concretes scales as organizational members come to terms with the interaction of myriad intervening scales associated with developments like hot-desking, open offices, co-working spaces, home-based teleworking, etc.

In this stream we seek contributions that go beyond the mainstream organizational literature dealing with space as something to be conquered or overcome in the pursuit of effective change, global reach, performance management, governance, etc. We will also seek contributions that go beyond showing the more obvious negative effects of the spatial reorganization of work such as absenteeism, resistance, reduced well-being, disengagement, etc. We thus seek contributions that extend the growing body of critical research that examines the spatial reorganization of work—for example, how it contributes to things such as loss of meaning, work degradation, a shifting of disciplinary effects, or a reduction in autonomy (see: Carter et al, 2011; Leclercq - Vandelannoitte, Isaac and Kalika, 2014; Taskin and Raone, 2014)—by taking the new spatial turn.

Thus we invite a reconsideration of how recent organizational and economic transformations involve and affect the territories and social spaces through ideational and material relationships (see: Veschambre, 2006; Ripoll and Veschambre, 2006; Hérin, 2013; Di Meo and Buleon, 2005). Here human geography and social theory provide helpful grids, concepts, and tools. If some called for such multidisciplinary approach (Ripoll, 2006; Warf and Arias, 2009), few management scholars engaged in this avenue. In the field of strategic management, the collective work edited by Clegg and Kornberger (2006) showed the interest of such dialogue for organizational analysis. In the field of critical management studies, the spatial scale and spatial concepts are central to the analysis of
power relations and conflicts in work practices developed by Herod et al. (2007) and Donis (2015). They also serve to understand the dynamics of organizational transformation in logical research by Spicer (2006). The social construction of spatial boundary of an organization can also be designed as a crop management tool and employee control (Fleming and Spicer, 2004; Sewell and Taskin, 2015). Ropo et al. (2013) also analyze the performative role of space in building leadership. In this research tradition, the work of geographers such as Henri Lefebvre and, more recently, Claude Raffestin has been mobilized to rethink some central issues of management. This is, for example, the case of Dale (2005) who proposes a socio-physical analysis of the transformations of organizational control modes, or Fahy et al. (2013) who mobilize the temporal dimension of space.

In summary, this stream seeks contributions that further the spatial turn in organization studies through an engagement, inter alia, with the following questions:

- How does the consideration of spatial dimensions contribute to understand differently the way one experience organizational and managerial practices and realities?
- How does the consideration of spatial dimensions contribute to better understand the power-resistance relationships, i.e. contribute to the study of control and emancipation mechanisms in management studies.
- Specifically, how does space (territory, place, distanation, etc.) help re-considering concrete work, labour, expertise, in the study of management, i.e. help to develop the study of the materiality of management, as well as management effects on bodies?
- Specifically, how do spatial dimensions, a.o. in the study of new ways of working, help understanding identities at work?

Conveners’ biography and experience

Céline Donis holds a PhD from the Louvain School of Management and is currently invited professor at Université catholique de Louvain where she teaches critical management studies and human resource management. She is member of the Louvain School of Management Research Institute. Her research adopts a spatial perspective to study new forms of work organization.
Celine.donis@uclouvain.be

Véronique Perret is Professor of Management Studies and responsible for the Phd Program in Management at Université Paris-Dauphine PSL. She is a member of the DRM Research Center and Head of the research team DRM-Most. The DRM-Most team project is based on the critical analysis of the managerialisation of society. Its aim is to develop and promote research focused on the relationships between the ways organisations are governed and the markets and managerial technologies deployed to this end. It also aims to identify and propose alternative forms of organised action. Her current research focuses on the questions of change and emancipation. She has published several articles on these topics in edited books and in refereed academic journals such as Organization or M@n@gement. Veronique.perret@dauphine.fr

>Veronique convened many streams, notably one with Laurent at the 24th AIMS conference, in June 2015 in Paris.

Laurent Taskin is Professor of Human Resource and Organisation Studies at the Louvain School of Management, Université catholique de Louvain, Belgium, where He is currently Head of Chair laboRH. His research focuses on critical approaches to management in the context of new forms of work organisation and knowledge management. Laurent has published articles in journals such as Organization Studies or Journal of Business Ethics. He is also Editor-in-chief of the International Journal of Work Innovation (Inderscience). Laurent.taskin@uclouvain.be

>Laurent convened many stream among which one in 2011 at the 7th CMS conference in Naples.

References


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