

# Spacing Identity

## Unfolding Social and Spatial-material Entanglements of Identity Performance

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# Spacing Identity: Unfolding Social and Spatial-material Entanglements of Identity Performance

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## **Spacing identity: unfolding social and spatial-material entanglements of identity performance**

### **Abstract**

In this paper, we analyze how architectural design, and the spatial and material changes this involves, contributes to the continuous shaping of identities in an organization. Based upon a case study of organizational and architectural change in a municipal administration at a time of major public sector reforms, we examine how design interventions were used to (re)form work and professional relationships. The paper examines how engagements with spatial arrangements and material artifacts affected people's sense of both occupational and organizational identity. Taking a relational approach to sociomateriality, the paper contributes to the further theorizing of space in organization studies by proposing the concept of *spacing identity* to capture the fluidity of identity performance.

Key words: spacing identity, organizational space, sociomateriality, identity performance, design interventions, dissonance

## Introduction

Winston Churchill's statement "we shape our buildings, and afterwards our buildings shape us" refers to the reconstruction of the old chamber in the House of Commons partially destroyed during the Second World War. He insisted the chamber's rectangular shape with benches on the sides and a divide in the middle of the room be maintained because this would uphold the two-party system ([www.parliament.co.uk](http://www.parliament.co.uk)). What makes Churchill's statement intriguing is not only the observation that space and architecture can affect people inside a building, but also the importance of space and architecture in support of broader societal ideas. In this paper, we address both of these facets of "what buildings do" (Gieryn, 2002) in relation to identity performance in organizations. In keeping with recent research on space and identity as well as studies of the sociomateriality of identity, the paper examines how spatial-material arrangements of buildings contribute to the continuous shaping of identity. This is not cast as a matter of unidirectional influence, but as a result of co-constitutive spatial-material and social entanglements, not only produced through and affecting everyday work practices, but also serving as conduits for the unfolding of political agendas.

The backdrop for our study is the growing scholarly interest in the role of design and architecture in contemporary management (Boland & Collopy, 2004; 2008) and leadership theory (Ropo et al., 2015). Inspired by how expert designers work, Boland and Collopy (2004) argue that design should be considered a process – as opposed to something stable – and that managers should (learn to) adopt a "design attitude" to management as this can bring "emotional energy back into the center of managing [...] invoking the hopes and dreams of those involved" (Boland & Collopy, 2008: 17). Ropo et al. (2015) offer another perspective. They draw attention to how leadership affects and is affected by changes in the material and spatial arrangements of organizations, and where the emphasis is given to the space, embodiment and materiality of leadership. Following these lines of inquiry, we aim to unfold the interplay between architectural design and the everyday work practices of an organization, i.e. the ways that peoples' sense of identity is challenged, enacted and accommodated through the spatial-material arrangements in which they work.

In exploring this issue, we build upon work on organizational space (Beyes and Steyaert, 2011), the sociomateriality of identity performance (Symon and Pritchard, 2015), and the notion of organizational dissonance (Stark, 2009). We also draw on insights from architectural geography (Kraftl & Adey, 2008; Sage, 2013; Gottschling, 2017) and Science and Technology Studies (Akrich, 1992; Latour, 2005; Farias, 2015), all of which offer performative and relational

understandings of the role of space, architecture, technology and other artefacts in creating constraints and affordances that influence peoples' actions. In conceptualizing the interplay between the spatial-material arrangements of the workplace and peoples' sense of identity, we are particularly inspired by Beyes and Steyaert's notion of "spacing" (2011), which emphasizes the multiplicity and agency of space and its material, embodied, affective dimensions. We extend this notion in the context of identity construction and suggest the concept of *spacing identity* to emphasize the processual aspects of how spatial-material arrangements of organizations are closely involved in the shaping of practices and professional relationships. The paper is based on a case study of a municipal administration that used design interventions as a means of promoting organizational change. Our analysis shows how changes in, and the use of, spatial-material arrangements affected the staff's sense of occupational identity as well as the organization's sense of 'who we are' – its organizational identity.

By empirically illustrating different ways in which the spatial and material dimensions of workspace matter for people's sense of work and organization, the paper makes several contributions. First, we introduce and theorize the notion of *spacing identity* to capture the ongoing performance of identities, which happens as an integral part of the spatial-material formatting of work and workspace. Spacing identity involves not only the entanglement of bodies, artefacts and physical space in organizations, but also affect and dissonance. Identity performance is, thus, a "relational contingency" (Law, 2002: 92). Second, we show that design interventions that engage staff in collective design processes can be productive means for enrolling staff. The use of visuals and material artifacts in these processes allow participants to re-view their current practices while also envisioning their future work and workspace. Although design interventions can be considered as scripts that seek to shape participants' engagement, they also allow for further reflections through this double movement of re-viewing and envisioning. Third, our study demonstrates how organizational politics is materially tied to and performed in the context of general political debates, in this way supporting recent work on the complex interplay of the spatial, material and discursive dimensions of identity construction (Ashcraft, et.al, 2009). Further, we suggest that a better understanding of these sociomaterial entanglements can help both managers and employees in their efforts to develop productive conditions for new work practices and professional relationships.

The paper is organized as follows: We begin by expanding on the theoretical backdrop for our study, which is followed by the methodological approach. A description of our case organization

provides the backdrop for two empirical vignettes, which illustrate how changes in an organization's spatial-material arrangements challenge and is challenged by the staffs' sense of identity. In the ensuing discussion, we unfold the notion of spacing identity and argue that our work contributes to the existing literature on organizational space and materiality by providing a more processual account of the mutual constitutive relationship between identity and spatial-material arrangements. We conclude with some implications for management.

### **Organizational space and the sociomateriality of identity performance**

Architecture has, as Dale and Burrell note, a privileged position – it is “the place where space and organization meet face to face” (2008: 23-24). Moreover, organizational spaces are not empty. Apart from the people in them, they are full of material artefacts that are “mundanely obvious” features of organizational life (Whyte & Harty, 2010:196). These observations highlight the three interweaving topics dealt with in this paper – space, materiality, and identity – each of which have a long history in management and organization studies. As noted by Kornberger & Clegg (2004), *space* has been a managerial issue since the early days of scientific management. Dvora Yanow is, however, to our knowledge, one of the first to introduce the concept of “organizational space”. By suggesting that built spaces are “at once storytellers and part of the story being told” (Yanow, 1998: 215), she underscores that space concurrently acts and is acted upon. Since then, and perhaps prompted by Kornberger and Clegg’s call for “bringing space back in” to organization studies (2004:1095), there has been a substantial amount of publications attending to the role of the spatial in organizations, particularly to the issue of power and control (e.g. Clegg & Kornberger, 2006; Taylor & Spicer, 2007; Dale & Burrell, 2008). As for the *materiality* of organizations, this has largely entailed studies of technology use, and there have also been calls for “bringing materiality back in” to organization studies (Carlile et al., 2014:2). These calls emphasize moving beyond the traditional view that humans live in a world separate of things, considering the relationship between humans and things – the social and material – as inherently entangled (Barad, 2003; Orlikowski & Scott, 2008). *Identity* is another long-standing topic of organizational research. Central to this research are questions of how identities are established, upheld, transformed, and regulated (Ybema et al., 2009; Brown, 2015). While scholars attending to occupational identity often focus on the overlap between “‘who are we’ as members of an occupation and ‘what do we do’” in our work (Nelson & Irwin, 2014: 893; Ashcraft, 2013), research on organizational identity focuses on the

understanding of an organization's characteristics and central values, and how these are shared amongst and challenged by members of an organization (Gioia, et al., 2000) as well as by external stakeholders (Hatch & Schultz, 2002).

When it comes to studies of how space and materiality affect identity, space is considered as actively involved in controlling and regulating identity (Dale & Burrell, 2008), creating the model worker (Hancock & Spicer, 2011) and in doing gender (Wasserman & Frenkel, 2015). Moreover, Dale (2005) demonstrates how work, social relations and the material structures of organizational spaces are understood as mutually enacting, thus, highlighting the importance of both organizational space and materiality. However, much of the research on material artifacts and identity emphasizes the strong symbolic effects of artifacts (Elsbach, 2004; Jones & Massa, 2013), how their removal can pose substantial identity threats to both individuals and/or groups (Elsbach, 2003), and on the instrumental and/or aesthetical effects of artifacts (Elsbach & Pratt, 2007; Wasserman & Frenkel, 2011). With a few notable exceptions (Dale, 2005; Wasserman & Frenkel, 2011), these two strands of literature pay little attention to the mutually constitutive entanglements of spatial arrangements, material artefacts and peoples' everyday work encounters.

Recent work on organizational space (Beyes & Steyaert, 2011) and on the sociomateriality of identity (Symon & Pritchard, 2015) offers useful conceptual resources for addressing these issues. Drawing on insights from geography (notably Thrift (2007) and Massey (2005)), Beyes & Steyaert (2011:53) argue that "thinking of space towards the thresholds of the material, the embodied, the affective and the minor" politics of organizational life offers a new perspective on organizational space. They introduce the concept of "spacing organization" to capture "the provisional constellation of the material, embodied, affective, and multiple sides and sites of organizing" (ibid). From this perspective, organizational space is not a static container but conceived of as active – generative for the organizational practices taking place within, enabled by, and constituted through the spatial arrangements. These spatial experiences are, however, imbued with affect and inherently political (Massey, 2005). In their paper on the sociomateriality of identity work, Symon and Pritchard (2015) appear to have a similar position. Following Orlikowski & Scott (2008: 456), they argue that the social and the material should not be considered as separate entities but as sociomaterial assemblages, in which neither the social nor the material are independent entities with distinct characteristics (Symon & Pritchard, 2015: 243). The sociomaterial assemblages are what "produce the capacity for action", and this "comes from the enmeshing of material affordances,

human understanding, situated practices and cultural discourses” (ibid: 244). Both contributions provide a relational understanding of the social, spatial and material as inextricably entangled in constellations or assemblages. This being said, they each point to additional facets of organizational practice that are important for understanding what architecture does to peoples’ sense of identity. Symon and Pritchard (2015: 244) emphasize the role of “cultural discourses”, whereas Beyes and Steyaert (2011) direct attention to the role of affect and to the minor politics of organizational life. Taking each of these facets in turn: First, much of the interest in developing a sociomaterial understanding of identity regulation is motivated in moving beyond the discursive (Paring et al., 2017). This does, however, not mean that discourse has no role to play in identity performance. The challenge is to capture both the discursive and the social, spatial and material (Ashcraft et al., 2009). Second, affect is often thought of in individualistic terms, i.e. in terms of emotion. However, Thrift (2004) suggests that affect is “a sense of push in the world”, which “presents itself socially as something that is pushing, pulling or lifting us to feel, think, or act” (Thrift, 2004:64, in Kraftl & Adey, 2008:215). Viewed from this perspective affect is not something tied to individuals, but understood as a relational effect of peoples’ encounters with what is around them. Third, the politics of space is closely associated with both discourse and affect. Discourses inform, reflect, reify ongoing concerns (inside and outside the organization), and they prompt affect and produce dissonance. Dissonance occurs in situations when conflicting expectations as to what constitutes as a good workspace design continue to persist in an organization. Sometimes dissonance persists as noise, and sometimes it leads to new developments (Stark, 2009; Hutter & Stark, 2015).

Against this backdrop, we suggest extending Beyes and Steyaert’s notion of spacing to *spacing identity* as a means of capturing the processual and relational aspects of the connection between spatial-material arrangements and identity construction. Accordingly, identity performance is linked to the constellations of materials, people/bodies, spatial arrangements in which people are enmeshed. Identity is performed through the interactions and encounters enabled by these constellations, which make people act in multifarious ways. Hence, changes in the spatial-material arrangements of organizations may not only affect bodily experience but also supply “the perceptive body with a set of possible actions or movements to perform” (Kraftl & Adey, 2008:226-227). Spacing identity emphasizes how identity is constituted through organizational practices taking place within, enabled by and constitutive of particular constellations of the social, material and spatial.



The paper provides a performative understanding of identity as being brought into being through practice (Muniesa, 2014). In analyzing spacing identity in the context of architectural and organizational change, we draw upon two constructs from Actor Network Theory – script and inscription device. Although developed in the context of technology development (Akrich, 1992), script is also used in the context of architecture (Gottschling, 2017). A script is a “program of actions” – an instantiation of action or an intended pattern of activity that can be inscribed into a specific material artefact (Akrich & Latour, 1992, p. 260). They are conceived of much like a film script that “defines a framework of action together with the actors and the space in which they are supposed to act” (Akrich, 1992, p. 208). Accordingly, scripts constrain and afford possibilities for action. Inscription devices are material representations that make something known or visible (Latour, 1986; Akrich, 1992). Inscriptions such as drawings help people see and make sense of e.g. new designs or layouts, and develop possible courses of action. However, the ways in which designs, inscriptions and other material artefacts are “de-scribed” is not given (Akrich, 1992). Action cannot be determined by the material alone – it is dependent upon the ways in which the users engage with the material (Akrich & Latour, 1992). All scripts can thus be contested and challenged, potentially producing dissonance (Farias, 2015) and multiple scripts (Law and Mol, 1995). In taking a performative view of the space and materiality of organizations, the interplay between space, the material and the social – identity – is considered “a tentative and hesitant unfolding” that is only “very partially under any form of deliberate control” (Law 2004: 41-42). Rather than being a pre-existing place or framework, spacing identity is constituted and defined through interaction, through the social, material and spatial entanglements of everyday work.

## **Methods**

The paper is based on the first author’s longitudinal, ethnographic study of design interventions in the design and construction of a new town hall, which took place in a Danish municipality between 2005 and 2008. This involved several design interventions in relation to the design of the building, the office layout, and the interior design. The design interventions were based on extensive user participation that involved meetings, interactive workshops, and design games.

Data collection was based on semi-structured interviews, ethnographic fieldwork and document analysis. 21 interviews were conducted in 2007 and 2008, while we made an additional interview in 2011 and had an informal conversation with one staff member in 2015. Although these more recent interactions were not part of the initial research design, they provided insights into some of the changes taking place in the organization. The informants included representatives from five different departments within the municipality administration (including top management) and the two design companies involved; one responsible for interior design and user participation activities, and the other responsible for the building design. Each interview lasted 1-1½ hours and were tape-recorded and professionally transcribed. The interviews were carried out in Danish and the excerpts below have been translated by the authors. Statements from interviews are referred to with title the first time they appear; e.g. Social Worker 1, Architect 1, Managing Director, and subsequently as SW1, A1, MD, etc.

The fieldwork included participant observation of six full days of workshops (involving approximately 50 participants from across the organization), two plenary meetings to which all staff were invited, and seven project development meetings between management representatives, designers and the construction team. The field work also included three months of full time fieldwork among the designers in charge of interior design and user participation activities. This allowed for many informal conversations about the planning and execution of the design interventions. The available documents included policy documents, the design brief, descriptions of existing and expected work practices, and materials produced for and as part of the user participation activities.

The analysis is based on multiple readings of the data with the aim of identifying recurring themes related to the question of how changes in the architectural design, and the associated spatial-material arrangements, influence and are influenced by the staff's sense of work and organization. We developed a chronology of the design interventions supported by narratives regarding the events, so as to develop an overview of staff concerns and get a clearer sense of the spatial-material-social entanglements at hand in the case. In keeping with the theoretical framing, we identified and organized the recurring themes in the data into three overarching thematic categories (Braun & Clarke, 2006): (1) changes in the work practices related to changes in the organizational spaces, (2) the use and agency of space and material objects, and (3) references to societal developments connected to the public sector reform, implemented during the same period. Insights to support

these themes were generated through observations of group discussions in design games and workshops, interview responses, documents regarding the planning and execution of the design interventions, and documents reflecting the intentions of the town hall project. In analyzing the data, we moved back and forth between data and theoretical concepts in an iterative process that provided better insight into the themes.

Reading the material, it became clear that the social workers felt particularly challenged by the planned architectural and organizational changes. This occupational group was highly engaged in the user participation activities. Choosing to address this occupational group's reactions to the planned changes, we subsequently focused on extracting descriptions of their concerns from the data material. The opportunities and challenges the changes produced for this occupational group, are depicted in the first empirical vignette. Interested in exploring intersections between the social and the spatial-material at a time of major public-sector reforms, we were also curious as to how this would affect municipal service and the administration's interface with the municipality's citizens. We then went through the data to detect what our informants considered as important changes. This directed our attention to the developments in the Citizen Service Center, placed at the entrance of the new town hall, and to the objects in and layout of this reception area. The 'design journey' of the reception counter is described in the second empirical vignette.

Our analysis is informed by our theoretical understanding of spacing identity as an unfolding process, in which the social, material and spatial are constitutively entangled (Orlikowski, 2007). By building a narrative in each vignette, we seek to illustrate how the staffs' interactions with and debates about the spatial-material arrangements of their workspace, provoked identity performance.

## **Findings**

We have divided our findings section into three parts. The first part presents the case organization, followed by two empirical vignettes illustrating the mutually constitutive effects of the social, material and spatial. The first vignette attends to how the spatial organization of open offices and the establishment of the CSC affect one particular occupational group's sense of work and identity. The second vignette attends to how the design of an organizational fixture – the CSC's reception counter – can be seen as a reflection of the municipality's organizational identity. Both vignettes

highlight the interplay between scripted political aspirations – governmental as well as managerial – and the changes taking place in the organization’s social, material, and spatial constellations.

### ***Case introduction: developing a modern public organization***

We explore “spacing identity” in a public organization undergoing dramatic change. There are four organizational events at play in our case. First, our study was conducted at a time of major public sector reforms in 2004-2008, when modernizing the public sector was a central discourse in Danish politics. Aimed at increasing government efficiency, the reform involved a substantial reshuffling of administrative responsibilities from regional to municipal government and reducing the number of municipalities from 271 to 98 through mergers (Christoffersen, 2005; Pedersen, 2008). This entailed a transfer of government services within areas such as social security, rehabilitation and employment from the regions to the ‘new’ municipalities. These changes in the governmental structure had wide ranging implications for the municipalities as organizational entities and for the people working in them. We report from one of these mergers.

Second and in keeping with the modernization discourse, creating a “Citizen Service Center” (CSC) to provide citizens with ‘one point of entry’ when seeking municipal services, was considered key to making the administration more attentive to citizen needs. According to the managing director (project document):

*”Our aspiration is to become one of the best driven local governments in the country [...] where the citizen is at stage center. [The administration] is to serve the citizens and to deliver loyal counseling and support – in accordance with political decisions and professional standards.”*

The CSC was to be located in the town hall entrance; designed to include a reception counter and an adjacent waiting area, meeting rooms to accommodate staff encounters with citizens, and a back-office area. Previously, the CSC had “just been a reception counter” (Interview 2, MD), but after the merger it would be the municipality’s “window to the world” (the MD’s introduction to the first user participant workshop). The CSC would be the coordinating unit responsible for several services previously provided by other departments, e.g. the distribution of social and employment benefits, assignment of daycare, and housing services. This meant an increase in the number of

tasks, a doubling of staff (from 25 to 50 people) and more collaboration with other departments. A middle manager, the department manager of the CSC, explains:

*“For us, the changes generated much more exposure within the administration. Today, our tasks border with almost every department and our staff has had to broaden their approach considerably. [...] We need to think across cases: to look at the citizen’s problem and requests, and identify what kind of counselling they need. [...] To our receptionists it means they will be handling the whole palette – helping clients with things like unemployment and social security, handling people who will have their kids removed. It’s a new type of work.”*  
(Interview, middle manager 1)

As the middle manager points out, the establishment of the CSC would represent considerable changes in the work of a number of public servants, involving increased inter-departmental collaboration and more complex tasks, e.g. for the receptionists. As the municipality’s “window to the world”, the CSC would be a symbol of the administration as an organization; reflecting the current modernization of the public sector by signaling a new relationship between citizens and local government.

Third, our case also involved bold architectural changes: The construction of a new town hall, designed with open plan offices for every department, including top management. The aim was to promote what had come to be known as “new ways of working” or “new office” (Duffy and Powell, 1997). Accordingly, cellular offices were deemed a thing of the past, and to reduce space and costs, the number of available workstations was reduced, corresponding to approximately 70 % of the staff. This meant that staff would not only have to share offices but also workstations. To help implement these changes, top management engaged an interior design firm. Specialized in “strategic space design”, this firm was responsible for organizing an extensive user participation process – the fourth organizational event characterizing our case.

The user participation process took place 2005-2008 and involved surveys of how and when staff used their offices and other facilities; interviews with staff; two plenary meetings where the staff at large could meet the architects, and a number of interactive workshops (see appendix 1). Staff reactions to these activities varied from severe resistance to great interest. Some resigned. Others joined the workshops with trepidation, while still others engaged enthusiastically in the process. According to the managing director:

*“[D]iscussing these things in the workshops, [staff] realized that physical changes also affect the work itself and the perception of what work is. [...] Consciously as well as unconsciously, the work affects and is affected by the physical workspace. Distance and accessibility influence culture and work processes. These things change our perception of work.”* (Interview 1, MD)

To him, architectural and organizational design processes are mutually supportive – “a double design process” (interview 2, MD). The user participation process was a way to signal that the municipality was in line with ongoing political debates about creating more flexible workplaces, and a way to implement “new approaches to work” (interview 1, MD). The staff’s engagement in this process was particularly obvious in the interactive workshops, organized as 2D and 3D design games (Brandt, 2011) and structured in a number of separate series<sup>1</sup>.

The managing director considered the building project as “a gift to the merger” (interview 1, MD), because the architectural design process would allow them to experiment with the implementation of the organizational changes prompted by the merger. His approach had the markings of a “design attitude” (Boland and Collopy, 2004), i.e. of being willing to try developing different designs.

### ***Vignette 1: Spacing occupational identity – in moving from individual to open space offices***

Although the spatial organization of the new town hall is a key topic at the interactive workshops, discussing the open office layout is never on formally on the agenda in the design games or in the other user participation activities. However, judging from the conversations taking place at the workshops, this managerial scripting of what is debatable does not seem to work. The prospect of open offices is, indeed, a key concern among the staff because of the “[lack of] confidentiality in the work processes”, “work disturbances through passageway traffic”, “increased levels of stress”, and “a lack of privacy” (field notes). For many, “we just want to hold on to our individual offices”. However, as an HR employee points out, the implications are greater for some departments than others:

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<sup>1</sup> The first workshop-series was held prior to the architectural competition so as to inform the brief. The second series consisted of three workshops, each with a specific focus: A) the departments’ distribution within the building, B) the facilities of the “Citizen Service Center”, and C) the spatial organization of the open office layout. While workshop series 1 and 2 were based on board games in 2D representations of the workspace, the third series was organized – one per department – as 3D participatory simulation games (Nyholm and Broberg, 2016) allowing staff to physically experiment with their department’s spatial layout.

*“[Working in an open office] is toughest for the departments attending to heavy casework – social cases or family related cases, where the work is mainly confidential. [...] their most distinct concern is always the citizens and how to handle these exchanges.”* (Interview, HR1)

Below, we focus on the social workers of the Family and Health department, which is one of the department’s with “heavy casework”. The social workers’ task is to help citizens cope and deal with personal, social and economic issues, e.g. disabilities, child care and social welfare. In a “photo diary” produced for one of the workshops, the social workers describe their work as having:

*“flexible workhours – exchanges with citizens often outside of the opening hours”*

*“many informal meetings”*

*“many phone conversations requiring tranquility”*

*“sometimes full days of concentrated screen work”*

*“acute and urgent cases producing a hectic and concerned atmosphere”*

*“planned procedures that often need readjustments”*

Before the merger they did most of these things in their own offices, but with the open layout this would have to change. According to two social workers:

*“It’s no secret that we, the staff [of social workers], have been really, really worried, because we think our work is very well suited for small offices, where we can sit with the clients and discuss things. Keep our work to ourselves, talk on the phone and the like.”* (Interview, social worker 1)

*“You know, when a citizen is coming over for a meeting – these meetings are no one else’s business, really. [...] Normally they’re held in our own offices, but in the new town hall, citizens are to be kept on the ground floor [while most offices are placed on the first and second floors]. You’d better get used to book a meeting room, accepting this as the future location for citizen contact.”*  
(Interview, social worker 2)

The statements point to several concerns regarding the future spatial-material arrangements’ effect on their everyday work practices, i.e. issues of confidentiality and citizen contact. For the social workers, the open office layout means that they will share workspaces with 8-15 people, demarcated with partitions but without solid walls. In effect, they will no longer be able to meet the citizens at their workstations, easily access their archives and provide their clients the confidentiality offered by the walls of the individual office. This invokes another concern: The

safekeeping of case materials. As one social worker points out: “[I]t’s hard to see how we can keep individual cases locked [up] and safe, and still easily accessible for us to work on. The confidential documents need to be protected once you leave the workstation” (SW3). While discretion is easily provided by a closed door and walls, this needs to be ensured by other means when the space is accessible to colleagues. The introduction of the new layout sparks off dissonance amongst the social workers because of the mismatch between the management’s commitment to the concept of open office and their sense of how best to conduct casework.

An additional concern revolves around the issue of meetings. The social workers they have a tradition for “office swapping” when meetings involve larger groups: “If I have too little space for example, there are colleagues down the hallway with a bigger meeting table – then we’ll swap” (SW1). This ensures confidentiality and a flexible use of the space. With the prospect of no longer having individual offices, the availability of meeting rooms becomes critical. At a workshop dedicated to debating the CSC’s spatial organization, this is “one of the most pressing issues” (field notes): “Will there be enough meeting rooms in the CSC? Will they have enough space? We particularly need meeting rooms for 2-4 people.”

This concern is also brought up in a workshop based on a 2D design game debating staff-citizen consultations at the CSC. Exploring the spatial implications of such encounters, the social workers are given a board with a print of the reception area (including waiting area and meeting rooms) and 16 predefined “citizen profiles” (cardboard figures). This inscription device serves a double function: it makes the contour of the future spatial organization visible and allows the staff to mirror themselves in this representation of the office lay-out. Each profile represents a citizen with a service need, ranging from ‘simple’ services like passport issuance, to complex issues concerning welfare benefits or child custody. In the game, the participants are asked to position the profiles on the board, deciding on how and where to serve them through questions like: “Citizen profile in relation to workspace: where should the service be located?” and “How can the spatial arrangements support the exchanges [between staff and citizens]?”

While the inscriptions involve definitions of the (spatial) context for, and actors involved in the game, they also give way to different translations of what the new spatial-material arrangements will mean in the everyday practice at the reception. For some, the exercise is...



*“...a great way to discuss work processes in the new facilities. People have really gone at it – discussing back and forth. Of course, there are disagreements around ‘how we do things’ as opposed to ‘how they do them’, but I think [the exercise] was exciting. Finally, you understand: ‘OK, so this is how they think of it!’” (interview with receptionist 1).*

Some of the social workers, however, are disappointed, because the game does not address their main concern about the number of meeting facilities. Preparing for this workshop, one of them had made a small survey among her colleagues, asking them “to register citizen-meetings over a two-month period, on Thursdays between 3 and 6 PM which is our peak – that’s when the citizens are off work and can meet with us” (SW1). The results showed that “in one out of three Thursdays, our group of social workers will – alone – need more than the eight meeting rooms available at the CSC”. Although she informs the management about these results, they are not addressed in the game. She describes her disappointment:

*“We could easily distribute [on the board] for example the profile of the mum who breaks into tears because her own mum is being abused at the nursing home, or whatever. Into a meeting room she goes! But [the game] didn’t take into account how many people from other departments will be using these spaces at the same time. [...] A lot of our meetings take up sensitive things. Of course, they’re not all about forcibly removing the children – far from it! But still, there are no situations more vulnerable than when it has to do with peoples’ kids.” (SW1).*

With too few meeting facilities at the CSC, the social workers fear that they will have to postpone meetings. This will make it difficult for them to handle “acute and urgent cases” (from Photo Diary). Another pertinent issue is the material design of the meeting rooms’ – glassed off enclosures – which will make it difficult for the social workers to ensure confidentiality. The choice of glass walls follows from top management’s wanting to signal that the municipal administration is an “open, transparent and modern organization” (Interview 1, MD). According to a receptionist, whose work it is to guide citizens to their meetings:

*“Given that most walls are made of glass in the building – there’s been much talk in the workshops about getting an open atmosphere. But there might also be some who don’t want to see Mrs. Hansen crying. Maybe we need for some spaces that are not transparent” (R1).*

There is a tension between signaling openness and protecting citizen confidentiality that is difficult to resolve. The social workers want to ensure that the meeting participants are not on display; not only in respect for the citizens and the professional social worker-client relationship, but also out of consideration for everyone else using the reception area: other colleagues, citizens and visitors. One social worker reflects:

*“We have fought a tough battle – endless discussions – to prevent the transparency of the meeting rooms. [...] Already in the beginning [of the user participation process] we talked about how important it is to have facilities where the citizens can feel sure that no one can see or hear them. But apparently, that doesn’t fit a modern town hall. I don’t know if [the top management and the designers] are aware of what our conversations with the citizens are about.”* (SW2)

Although critical of top management, the social worker’s comment also reflects their engagement in the user participation – as a way to accommodate professional concerns and develop possible organizational and architectural solutions. Based on the spatial-material discussions prompted by a 2D design game addressing how to organize the “local areas” within the open office, the Family and Health department staff decides to arrange their local areas *across* occupational groups, as a way of dealing with having to share work stations:

*“If we all sat with our own group: social workers with social workers, nurses with nurses, etc. then [our] peak times would be the same. You’d enter one section to see it cramped with people, while other sections would be empty”* (SW2).

They further develop this new structure in a departmental workshop based on a 3D design game. In this event, the department’s workspace layout is physically outlined, chalked up on the floor, and foam blocks serve as representations of office furniture. Using predefined “work scenarios” developed by the interior designers, the participants move the foam blocks around to assess how the scripted layouts fit their work and patterns of collaboration. According to a social worker:

*“We were to position ourselves in the space: ‘In this setting, where could this and this task be solved?’ We could choose to be placed at a desk, in the coffee area, or elsewhere. The point was to see ‘I can move around’ [while doing my job], ‘I’m not settled in one place’. We also saw that if different tasks are taken care of in different places, a number of desks are constantly free.”* (SW1)

Experimenting with the layout, workshop participants discover that the open office provides a flexibility that individual offices did not, and it allows them to see new constellations of how, where and with whom the work can be done. This provokes a change from focusing on “us as a community of social workers” (SW1) to cross-occupational teams.

Above, we have highlighted a number of ways that architectural designs may produce adjustments to the existing constellations of the social, material and spatial, and how the staff is concerned about these changes. By engaging in the design games and other user participation activities, however, the social workers are given the opportunity to re-view and discuss their practice to produce new ways of organizing their work; adapting to new spatial-material conditions and developing strategies to uphold their sense of professional responsibility. As one of them remarks: “We will undoubtedly be using many places to host meetings in the future, for example by increasing the number of home visits” (SW1).

The vignette exemplifies some of the many scripts involved in the merger and associated building event (Akrich, 1992; Gottschling, 2017), e.g. the scripting of the open layout as a fundamental premise, the use of other materials to signal transparency, and the use of design games to facilitate discussions and other exchanges about the professional relationship between e.g. social workers and citizens. In different ways, these scripts reflected aspirations to modernize the public organization by supporting new ways of working (Duffy and Powell, 1997). The user participation process was in itself another vehicle to support the renewal of the municipal organization. By inviting staff to engage in a process that in much detail explored the intersection between work and workspace, the user participation activities lead to a de-scripting (Akrich, 1992) that was not always entirely loyal to the scripts. The scripts were questioned and contested by engaged professionals with tasks and responsibilities, producing different reactions to and outcomes of the design interventions.

To the social workers, the prospects of open office and other transparent demarcation lines threatened their occupational identity. Although a clear code of conduct is not easy to specify for social work as every action is situated and closely knitted to the context in which it occurs (Butler, 2002), the mutual respect and confidentiality between social worker and citizen is a central feature in upholding the relationship. The spatial-material arrangements of individual offices play an essential role in protecting both (Brennan et al., 2002). Actively participating in and even preparing for the design games, the social workers brought these arguments to bear and developed alternative

spatial strategies accordingly. These spatial strategies are effects of spacing identity, causing different conceptions of identity to form and emerge amongst the social workers.

### ***Vignette 2: Spacing organizational identity – the design journey of a reception counter***

As the administration's new "window to the world" and the citizens' one point of entry to municipal services, the CSC plays an important role politically, organizationally and architecturally. This vignette attends to how the CSC area, and more specifically the reception counter placed at the entrance of the new town hall, is a key in shaping the administration's organizational identity. The counter is subject to several design iterations. We approach this 'design journey' from a middle manager perspective, exploring in what ways adjustments of the counter reflects a recursive interplay between the spatial, material and practice, leading to developments in the organization's self-perception.

The journey begins with the brief that initiated the architectural competition – the script used by the competing design teams in conceptualizing their proposals. In keeping with the MD's idea of "a double design process", staff is "given the opportunity to influence the design process" (interview 2, MD). At a workshop prior to the competition, participants characterize the CSC as "the [municipality's] nerve center" and "the most important place in the building" (field notes). These inputs are translated and rephrased in the brief as "an entrance that is unequivocal, accommodating and welcoming" with "a layout in which we approach the citizens, not the other way around" (Brief, section 2).

According to architects from the winning team, the brief is "distinctly different from other competition briefs" (individual interviews, architect 1 and 2), both in content and in form. As an inscription device, it contains information about the current and prospective users of the building and about the envisioned, future usage of the building. These visions are presented both in writing and through different visuals. According to one of the architects:

*"[The way] the citizens were supposed to meet 'the system' in this governmental building was specified in a number of really precise diagrams and also pictograms, in which you could see the distribution and organization of the many departments [...] We interpreted all this quite literally and used it as a framework to organize our design proposal. (A1)*

Their design interpretation of how the citizens would meet the system at the reception counter is illustrated in figure 1. The architect explains their conceptual idea for the counter:

*“... as a serpentine, a winding line running through the underworld of the town hall; a multifunctional furniture representing [...] something you can sit on, get brochures from, where you can talk to people from each side. And at some places [the serpentine] is wiped out to avoid signaling this unfortunate situation where you have a divider between one side and the other.” (A1)*



**Figure 1:** A stylized drawing of the reception counter, intended to erase boundaries between staff and citizens in the reception area. The black characters represent the citizens and the grey characters represent the staff.

Symbolically, functionally and aesthetically, this proposal – or script to guide the construction process – suggests a less bureaucratic and more “welcoming” interface between the local government and its citizens. However, the assessment committee, consisting of management and staff representatives, find the design “too open” and “exposed” (A1). The architect explains:

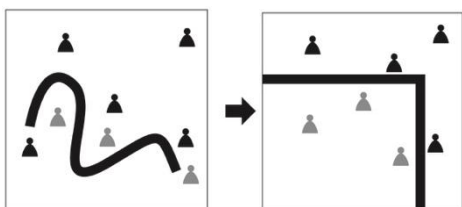
*“Based on various unfortunate episodes, local government clients seem to end up asking for buildings with buffers to secure the safety of their staff. [...] But by designing modern, public buildings attractive for the citizens... perhaps these buildings can help facilitate a meeting between the citizen and the system, creating a more healthy dialogue between them.” (A1)*

Nevertheless, the committee votes against this new and radical idea. According to one middle manager:

*“We couldn’t at all handle ‘the snake’ – it went as far as into the atrium [of the reception] and would produce a lot of noise throughout the house [to the floors of open offices]. It wouldn’t be an acceptable workspace at all, neither upstairs nor downstairs.” (Interview, middle manager 2)*

While the architects consider the counter’s open shape as a way to facilitate “a more healthy dialogue”, this middle manager is concerned about the noise the serpentine is likely to produce in

the atrium. It will disturb staff at the reception as well as those in the open offices on the floors above with interface to the atrium. Keen to accommodate the client's adjusted requirements, the architects develop a new proposal (the right diagram of figure 2). Accepted by top management, this iteration provides a script for the counter that lasts well into the construction phase.



**Figure 2:** The second design iteration of the counter, depicted in the right diagram, provided more protection for the staff by making a distinct division between being in front of or behind the counter.

However, as the building begins to take form, unexpected things start to happen. During the weeks up to the counter's cast molding into the floor of the reception area, the middle manager who was also department manager of the CSC returns from her 8 months of maternity leave. Seeing the sketches of the counter, she recalls her reaction:

*"I didn't like the reception counter. It was a desk of the worst kind. We would be very much separated from the citizens. [...] I think, when we build a town hall that in all other ways is supposed to signal openness and a sense of belonging, I don't think we can leave the citizens at such a substantial counter, with 15 of our people behind it."* (Interview, middle manager 1)

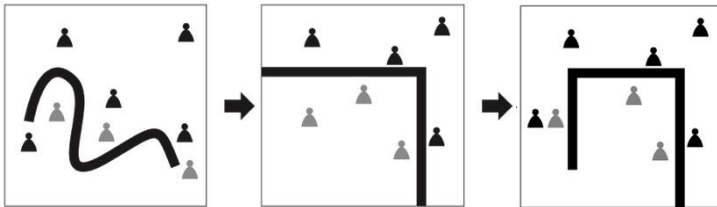
Having been deeply engaged in the user participation activities, she finds the outcome disturbing. The design does not convey the "openness" or the accommodating approach she thinks they agreed on as a result of the design games. Her point about the counter as a potential divider between staff and citizens, sending out particular signals, is supported by one of the architects:

*"[The counter] has the utmost function in a project like this – it is the threshold between those, who represent the support base of the administration and those in front, meeting the citizens. It's really strong metaphorically."* (A1)

To prevent CSC from "getting a counter that wouldn't work" (interview, MM1), the department manager approaches the managing director suggesting a redesign. With his support, she arranges a number of meetings to discuss how the counter best could meet the organization's ambitions of being open – but not as open as in the original proposal. She meets with six CSC colleagues to

discuss the workspace in relation to their daily work practices, with the project manager responsible for the construction project to discuss timing, and with the architects to discuss design.

Collaborating directly with the latter, she redesigns the counter as shown on the far-right diagram in figure 3.



**Figure 3:** This iteration (shown in diagram to the right) has a gentler spatial transition where both staff and citizens can circulate more freely.

Her initiative is well-received. One of her middle manager colleagues explains:

*“I agree that the counter needs to be more open. To me, [the accepted version of figure 2] signaled ‘you can just stay away’. It was much too shut off in relation to the type of citizen service I feel we should be offering. [...] As a public, local government we need to be more inviting.”* (MM2)

Also, the managing director is happy about the new development:

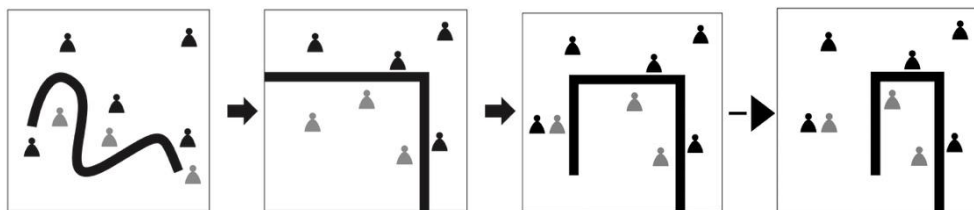
*“We wanted the intention of the open and accommodating exchange [between staff and citizens] to come through – and it wouldn’t work very well behind such a counter [the accepted version of figure 2]. The open environment might be something our staff needs to get used to with the closer proximity between the people working here and those who visit. This is precisely what we gained from the intensified dialogue about the shape [of the counter].”* (Interview 2, MD)

He points to two things regarding the counter’s material form. First, its form can induce ways of working that support (or do not support) the political aspiration of making citizens the center of attention. Second, the process of defining the counter’s shape generates discussions of work and identity in the organization. Repeatedly using the expression “learning by doing” (interview 2, MD), the MD emphasizes that the organization – himself included – are novices in engaging in such change processes. To him, developing the organization through spatial means is an approach “we are just starting to comprehend” (interview 2, MD).

The redesign “opens [the counter] up towards the citizens for them to get side by side with the staff, instead of waiting on the other side” (interview, MM1), possibly signaling less distance between staff and citizens and more in alignment with the managing director’s political vision of “the open and accommodating exchange” (interview 2, MD). This is also in keeping with the ambition of using the new town hall to change the municipality’s image as bureaucratic and impersonal. According to the department manager, this design of the counter could “help us get rid of the bureaucratic image we unfortunately struggle with” (MM1) – to reduce what the architect called “this unfortunate situation where you have a divider between one side and the other” (A1).

The new town hall is completed in 2008, with a reception counter built according to the department manager’s redesign. However, shortly after occupancy the counter’s design is again subject to debate, again at the department manager’s initiative. This time, she finds it too open! It provides too little privacy. People approaching the counter can, for instance, look directly onto some of the receptionists’ computer screens. The counter is redesigned to narrow the space behind the counter (see figure 4, far right). Although the iteration in figure 3 signaled the right things, the receptionists’ daily practices provoked further revision of this workspace. The managing director reflects on the continuous development of the counter:

*“Maybe it’s not until you’re in the actual space that you’re able to feel: OK this is my workspace. This is where the citizens come in – this is where I’m located. What kind of design can support that relationship? Our opportunities – and ability – to talk about these things in an untraditional way and to discuss them through sketches and drawings are probably a bit limited. So we had a breakthrough in the understanding of the interaction between function, organization and form when we experienced the space where these encounters happen.”* (Interview 2, MD)



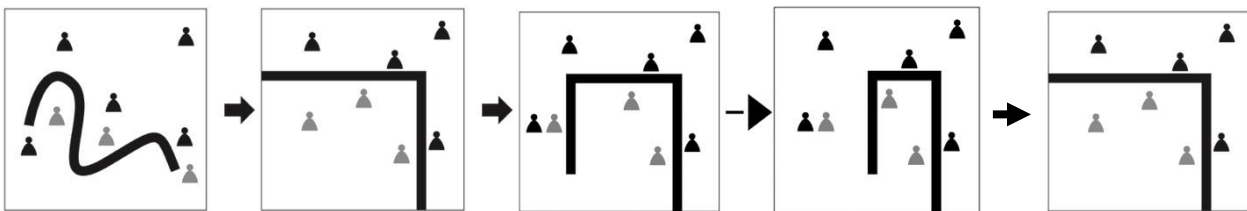
**Figure 4:** The result of yet another redesign – a counter with a quasi-closed structure, providing staff with workspace separated from the citizens.



The redesign is, however, put on hold because of economic cutbacks. Returning briefly to the site in 2011, we learn that the fourth iteration was never built. At this point the department manager of the CSC has left the organization, but another middle manager provides an explanation:

*“We’re going through an organizational change just now as the legal disbursement unit is moving down here. They have requested closing the reception counter somewhat more. Not so much because of confidential papers. Their concern is more the direct approaches – that citizens will come over to their workstation.”* (Interview, MM2)

To accommodate these concerns, a new design, depicted in figure 5, had been developed .



**Figure 5:** An illustration of the design iterations of the reception counter, coming almost full circle.

She elaborates on the developments:

*“When we first moved into the building, the reception area was widely used, but that’s not the case anymore [...] I think it has become a quieter organization. I don’t think [the reception area] is as dynamic as before. I think it’s a bad development. It’s not progressive – neither with regards to work processes, nor to what it signals.”* (MM2)

Her comment suggests that the changes in the reception area are indicative of a change in the organization’s identity and image – in how they see themselves and also how others may see them (Hatch and Schultz, 2002). On our next visit (in 2015), the counter has the shape illustrated in the far-right diagram of figure 5, and is augmented with two extra entities: A guard positioned by the entrance to ensure staff safety and help guide citizens, and an electronic queuing and screening system.

Above, we have seen how the counter went through several design iterations – scripts reflecting different approaches to and perceptions of how best to organize governmental service provision. From the brief informing the architectural competition to the continuous adjustments of the counter’s design, each alteration reflects different assessments of what a good design might be. The

counter is the material interface between the political, administrative system and the citizens of a local community – the place from where further interaction is distributed. The reception area is, however, also a workspace in which the civil servants' encounters with sketches of the counter provoked affect, pushing the middle manager to act and redesign the counter. The sketches helped promote shared definitions of the organization's identity as more, and with time increasingly less, open to its citizens. The design journey of the counter illustrates how perceptions of the organization's tasks and roles evolve as the different constellations of social, material, and spatial entanglements of the project unfold. While aspirations to modernize and restructure the public sector were part of a major political reform, the many encounters enabled through the user participation process produced repeated rounds of translations of what being an "open" government service organization entails – in its spatial, material and social capacity. The town hall project can be considered a "social assemblage of persons and things that are in place and in motion during a span of time" (Hutter and Stark, 2015: 4) that generated reactions to the anticipated changes; tensions, disagreements or dissonance that were adjusted in the course of the project.

## **Discussion**

This paper has focused on the constitutive entanglement of the social, material and spatial of identity performance in the context of organizational and architectural change in a public organization. Through two empirical vignettes we have demonstrated how the design and use of spatial-material arrangements are intricately intertwined with people's sense of work, role and professional relationships, which are central issues of identity in organizations. We have conceptualized this as a matter of spacing identity. In keeping with the gerundial shift within organization studies (Weick, 1979), spacing identity emphasizes the processual enactment of identity. In the following, we elaborate on spacing identity as concept and process respectively, and connect this perspective to the extant literature on organizational space, sociomateriality and identity.

### *Spacing identity as concept*

Our aspiration with the notion of spacing identity is to conceptualize the tightly knitted and mutually constitutive relations between the social, material and the spatial, in this way extending

insights from work on sociomateriality (Orlikowski & Scott, 2008; Symon & Pritchard, 2015) to also encompass the spatial. Organizational space is, however, conceptualized as active and generative for the enactment and performance of identity. It is the continuous engagement with the spatial-material formatting of the work and the workspace that brings peoples' sense of identity into being. Spacing identity encompasses physical things like bodies, artifacts and spaces, and social reactions of affect and dissonance – as provisional constellations (Beyes & Steyaert, 2011) or assemblages (Symon & Pritchard, 2015), which enable actions through which identity is performed. It is highly situated and contingent, i.e. spatially and temporally localized, and subject to change as affect and dissonance may provoke new actions and form new constellations. This points to two additional, interrelated facets of spacing identity: that identity performance is a continuous and dynamic process, in which new performances emerge as constellations change, and, following from this that spacing identity is characterized by a certain fixity and fluidity. With the concept of spacing identity, we suggest that the relationship between managerial control and identity is more complex and, perhaps, indeterminate than often considered in the literature on organizational space and identity.

This approach to the spatial differs from, and adds to, work on organizational space and identity. In conceptualizing spacing identity as a constellation of social, material and spatial entanglements, i.e. of heterogeneous entities (Law, 1992), this brings visuals, material artifacts and physical space into the analysis and emphasizes their (mutually constitutive) agentic qualities in performing and producing new senses of work and organization. This offers another view on the regulation of identity than we see in the extant literature. Wasserman and Frenkel (2015:1490) emphasize that much of the work informed by Lefebvre's spatial triad of conceived, perceived and lived space (1991) consider employees as "passive individuals" upon which identity regulations are enforced. Spacing identity, on the other hand, suggests that this need not be the case. Rather than conceptualizing employees as passive individuals, spacing identity directs attention to the agency they can have in, through and with the constellations or assemblages of which they are part. Also, much of the work mobilizing Lefebvre's spatial triad tend to treat them as different modalities of spatial production (Beyes & Steyaert, 2011), i.e. as taking place on three distinct levels. Spacing identity can be seen as an attempt to cut across these levels. Further, although the scholarship on organizational space stresses that the regulation of identity is subject to resistance (Wasserman & Frenkel, 2015) and that it is not total or complete (Dale, 2005; Hancock & Spicer, 2011), our

approach to identity construction as a contingent effect of social, material and spatial constellations may offer an explanation for why this may be the case.

As for sociomateriality as an overarching topic, the research that address identity issues are grounded on different underlying ontological positions. Some, such as Paring et al. (2017) are based on a substantialist ontology (Leonardi, 2013) that conceptualizes people and artefacts as “‘as separate and self-contained entities that interact and affect each other’” (Cecez-Kecmanovic et al., 2014:809 quoted in Paring et al., 2017:848). Others, notably Orlikowski and Scott (2008), but also, and distinctly attending to questions of identity, the work of Symon and Pritchard (2015), are based on a relational ontology. With reference to this research on the sociomateriality of identity work, our paper differs from these contributions by focusing on identity as collective process rather than a case of the individual as done by both Paring et al. (2017) and Symon and Pritchard (2015). In addition, while these studies address the influence using discrete technologies (whiteboards and smart phones, respectively) can have, we attend to a more complex situation of organizational change, involving many mundane artifacts. In their discussion, Paring et al. (2017:861) call for further theorizing of the effects of sociomateriality on identity from an “‘entanglement’ perspective”. This paper may be seen as an attempt to answer this call.

### *Spacing identity as process*

Spacing identity represents a process, which explores how identity in organizations is performed through the social, material and spatial entanglements of organizational practices. Interventions based on the use of visuals and material artifacts, which involve staff or other stakeholders, can be considered as a framework to enact spacing identity. In our analysis, the interventions facilitate the organizational change process as a collective endeavor (Law, 2004), enrolling participants in a process that is both predefined and uncontrollable. By employing different organizational spaces, e.g. office spaces, meeting spaces, or reception area as contexts for discussing work, and by supporting these exchanges with inscription devices and other material configurations to make future tasks and roles visible, the participants get a chance to reconsider or “re-view” (Farias, 2015) current practices. These entanglements, however, are not likely to unfold without resistance. The implementation of events like the design games, illustrated in the analysis, are subject to many instances of dissonance (Stark, 2009; Hutter and Stark, 2015); tensions and affect that are necessarily at stake in situations of organizational change. Farias (2015) suggests two forms of dissonance to explain the reactions at hand in processes of change, both of which are relevant in our

analysis and as characteristics of spacing identity. While evaluative dissonance refers to disappointment with the prospects of change, shaped by participants' normative expectations of, for example, what is required a good workspace to accommodate work, epistemic dissonance refers to different reactions to "what is known" about the situation at hand (ibid.: 275). Although there were many instances of evaluative dissonance in the design games, and in other user participation activities in our study, the constellation of spatial-material arrangements of the design games also provided opportunities of getting to know more by seeing "things from a new perspective" (ibid.: 282). The tensions and dissonance produced by interventions like design games are seen as potentially productive and as much more than commonplace resistance to change. The reactions illustrated in the analysis materialized in different ways and were based on both forms of dissonance, e.g. as decisions to leave the organization as a result of the new workspace conditions, as the development of new departmental structures across professional boundaries, and as the production of alternative spatial strategies to support a shared sense of professional conduct among the social workers. In this way, interventions offer a material grounding of the experience of work. Spacing identity allows for the exploration and performance of future work – an opportunity to envision what is to become. The games were an elastic platform onto which well-known arguments and preconceptions about what a workplace is were mixed with new ideas about the performance of work and collaboration, thus representing an opportunity for negotiating future work conditions (Ewenstein & Whyte, 2009; Comi and Whyte, 2017).

Looking at (some of) the scripts invoked in our case, from the governmental legislation on the structural reform, through the initiated intentions formulated in the brief for the architectural competition, the initial design proposals, subsequent assessments and redesign processes, to the formatting of the design games and other workshop activities – just to mention some of the iterations in our study – these developments may be interpreted as "scripted participation" (Strandvad and Svabo, 2014). Accordingly, participation is seen as a discourse upon which the "planners aim to configure users and users contribute with re-configurations that planners may take up" (ibid.:13). Scripted participation involves an often concealed distinction between the facilitator and participant, obscuring their roles and in this way hiding who controls the outcome. Following Hancock and Spicer (2011) who propose the use of organizational space as a potentially staged outline of a "model worker", our case may also be interpreted as a scripted journey orchestrated to produce a certain kind of identity among staff and citizens of a local government. However, we suggest spacing identity as an alternative approach to understand these processes, emphasizing how

the continuous and fluid constellations of spatial-material arrangements with work tasks, roles and relationships evoke complex relations and produce unintended consequences. We suggest that attempts at control will most likely not ‘work’ as intended.

One implication of spacing identity is the acceptance of a “decentering” of the notion of designer. Scholars of architectural geography address how the role of architect has become distributed or “de-centered” in recent years, in the context of building construction (Jacobs and Merriman, 2011; Sage, 2013; Gottschling, 2017) – not necessarily resulting in more democratic architecture, but increasingly reflecting the introduction of standardized project management methods (Sage, 2013). This paper follows another line of thought, one in which the concept of designer is extended to the field of management in, for example, situations of organizational change (Suchman, 2004). Following Boland and Collopy’s (2004) notion of the “manager as designer”, Suchman argues that design and management are similar in that both seek to create “sociomaterial arrangements within or with which, others can act” (Suchman, 2004: 169). Asking what it would take for “the inevitable reworkings involved in the implementation or use [to] be seen not as design failures or user resistances, but as realizations of the designs” (ibid.: 170), she suggests for the manager (or designer) not to be seen as the initiator of the change. She promotes acknowledgement of the manager (designer) as a facilitator “involved in the *circulation* of ideas and objects” (ibid.). The decentering of the manager (designer) allows for a more collective practice that makes managerial regulation of identity much less straightforward.

Finally, our work offers a different perspective of organizational politics than much of the available studies of organizational space. The Lefebvrian inspired approaches considers conceived space as the architectural and managerial discourses, the perceived space as the materialization of this discourse and the lived space as where the users’ daily practice plays out (Dale & Burrell, 2008). This appears to locate the political in the conceived space. Our study, however, points to how the political and managerial agendas imbued in the design interventions are interrogated, challenged and interpreted through collectively organized design processes that bring the ‘big’ politics of e.g. modernizing the public sector or being the best driven local government agency into the ‘minor’ politics of working with design games, experimenting with the physical layout of future offices, and developing new ways of working. This suggests there are many small entanglements involved in the unfolding of larger political aspirations. With spacing identity we offer a view of how the politics of

changing the spatial-material arrangements of organizations is spread across discourse, artefacts and people.

## **Conclusion**

Churchill's maxim has precipitated a great deal of research on the deceptively simple question of what buildings do. When it comes to questions of what changes in architecture and workspace design do to identity, much of the previous research in organization studies has focused on the role of organizational space as identity regulation. This paper takes a different approach by drawing on insights on sociomateriality. Based on a case study of the use of design interventions in an organizational change process in a public organization, we have examined how visual and material artifacts used in these interventions enabled the participants to re-view their existing work, and to envision and enact their future workspaces. Prompting affect and dissonance, these encounters pushed some participants to act upon the new spatial-material arrangements of their workspace to change them. In keeping with the gerundial shift within organization studies, we introduce spacing identity as a concept that captures the ongoing performance of identity that happens in, through and with changes in the spatial-material formatting of work and workspace. The exploration of the social, material and spatial constellations involved in processes of change may call important issues of both occupational and organizational identity into question. The study makes three contributions: First, spacing identity emphasizes the importance of these constellations of social, and spatial-material arrangements through which identity is performed, suggesting this as a continuous process in which new performances emerge as constellations change. Accordingly, the relationship between managerial control and identity is complex and indeterminate, and can lead to a decentering of the manager. Second, it points to the important role that interventions, and the use of visuals and material artifacts to support such exchanges, can play in making new constellations visible, knowable and actionable, i.e. prompting organizational changes not necessarily conceived of or scripted by management. Third, the paper illustrates how the 'minor' politics of organizational and architectural change is tied to and materially tied to and performed in the context of the 'big' politics of national discourses.

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