

**SPACES FOR CREATIVITY AND
INNOVATION WITHIN AND ACROSS
ORGANIZATIONAL BOUNDARIES**

RESEARCH IN THE SOCIOLOGY OF ORGANIZATIONS

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ORGANIZATIONS VOLUME 91

**SPACES FOR CREATIVITY
AND INNOVATION
WITHIN AND ACROSS
ORGANIZATIONAL
BOUNDARIES**

EDITED BY

AMALYA L. OLIVER

Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Israel

JÖRG SYDOW

Freie Universität Berlin, Germany

and

PATRICK COHENDET

HEC Montréal, Canada



United Kingdom – North America – Japan
India – Malaysia – China

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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

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ABOUT THE EDITORS

Amalya L. Oliver is Professor of Organizational Sociology at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem (graduated from Sociology at UCLA). She is currently a member of the editorial board of *Organization Studies* and the *Journal of Professions and Organizations*. She is also a board member of the Israel Innovation Institute, a non-profit organization that aims to accelerate the impact economy by managing six Israeli-based international innovation ecosystems. Her major research interests include innovation and entrepreneurship in the context of ethnicity, gender and the periphery, inter-organizational collaborations and networks, university–industry technology transfer, ethics, values, and organizational misconduct, and recently, platforms for innovation. Her recent books were: *From Ivory Tower to Academic Commitment and Leadership: The Changing Public Mission of Universities* with Gili S. Drori, 2021; and *Peace Entrepreneurs and Social Entrepreneurship: Life Stories from Israelis and Palestinians* with Tammar B. Zilber, Haneen S. Magadlah, and Yosepha Tabib-Calif, 2021. Both published with Edward Elgar Publishing.

Jörg Sydow is a Professor of Management and Chair for Inter-firm Cooperation at the School of Business & Economics at Freie Universität Berlin, Germany. While he was a Founding Co-editor of two leading German journals, *Managementforschung* and *Industrielle Beziehungen – The German Journal of Industrial Relations*, he is currently one of the Senior Editors of *Organization Studies* as well as of the *Project Management Journal*. He served on the editorial boards of many leading academic journals including not only *Organization Studies* but also *Organization Science*, *Academy of Management Journal*, *Academy of Management Review*, and *Journal of Management Studies*. With H. Berends, he co-edited a volume of *Research in the Sociology of Organizations* on *Managing Inter-organizational Collaborations – Process Views*, Emerald Publishing Limited, in 2019. With T. Braun, he was awarded the Global Research Award of the International Project Management Association in 2018. Since 2021, he is an Honorary Member of the European Group of Organization Studies.

Patrick Cohendet is Full Professor at HEC Montréal in the International Business Department and Co-director of Mosaic, the research group on the management of creativity and innovation at HEC Montréal. He is member of the editorial board of several academic journals such as *Research Policy*, *European Management Review*, *ZFW – Advances in Economic Geography*, *Management International*. With Elke Schuessler and Silviya Svejenova, he co-edited a volume of *Research in the Sociology of Organizations* on *Organizing Creativity in the Innovation Journey*, Emerald Publishing Limited in 2021. He participated as a

co-convenor to several tracks of different colloquiums of the European Group of Organization Studies. He is elected member of the Royal Society of Canada in Social Sciences.

ABOUT THE CONTRIBUTORS

Efrat Asulin is a PhD candidate in Organizational Sociology at the Hebrew University, Israel. Her research focuses on innovation, entrepreneurship, and knowledge-based industries in Israel's periphery. The goal of her research is to understand what contributes to the establishment and success of startups in the northern and southern peripheries of Israel.

Hans Berends is Professor of Innovation and Organization at the KIN Center for Digital Innovation, School of Business and Economics, Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam. He is an Organization Scientist with a background in Philosophy and Industrial Engineering, and received a PhD from Eindhoven University of Technology. His current research focuses on organizing for digital innovation, examining platforms, ecosystems, and other emerging forms of collaboration. Much of his research uses a process research approach, explaining the emergence and development of innovation over time. He teaches innovation management at bachelor, master, and executive levels and process research methods for doctoral students.

Thomas Blonski (PhD in Management) is Assistant Professor at ICN Business School (CEREFIGE) in Paris and Nancy, France. His research focuses on arts-based methods and creativity in management. Besides, he explores the strategic and organizational aspects of cultural and creative industries and especially the art market.

Etienne Capron is Postdoctoral Researcher at Mosaic – Pôle créativité et innovation, HEC Montréal. His research interests are the spatial dimension of organizational phenomena and innovation processes, particularly in the arts.

Ziad Elsahn is a Senior Lecturer in Strategy in the Entrepreneurship and Strategy Department at Lancaster University Management School. His research focuses on organizing and strategizing processes and practices in the context of internationalization, innovation, institutional change, and sustainable transition. He explores these topics in the context of multinational enterprises and cooperatives. His work is published in journals such as *Journal of International Management*, *International Business Review*, *Management International Review*, *Management Learning*, *Organization Studies*, and *R&D Management*, among others.

Takahiro Endo is an Associate Professor at Gustavson School of Business and the CAPI Jarislowsky Chair at University of Victoria, Canada. He is also a Research

Fellow at Kobe University, Japan. His interests include the translation of ideas and practices in business and management, such as crowdfunding.

Ziyun Fan is Associate Professor of Organization Studies at the School for Business and Society at the University of York, UK. Her current research focuses on different types and practices of social value judgment and their influence on responsible organizing. Her research has appeared in *Human Relations*, *Organization Studies*, *Journal of Management Inquiry*, *Management Learning*, and elsewhere. She serves the Executive Team of the Management History Division at the Academy of Management and the editorial boards of *Human Relations*, *Organization*, and *Management Learning*.

Gabriela Gutierrez-Huerter O is Assistant Professor in International Management at King's Business School, King's College London, UK. Her research interests include corporate social responsibility, multinational corporations, comparative institutional analysis, and modern slavery. Her work has appeared in *Journal of International Business Studies*, *Journal of World Business*, *Human Relations*, and *Journal of Business Ethics*.

Shai Harel is a Senior Lecturer at Tel Aviv University. His research focuses on strategy, entrepreneurship, and entrepreneurial finance, examining factors that influence startup outcomes. He founded the Executive MBA Startup 360° Program, the first of its kind, teaching students how to invest in startups. He is a member of the Israeli Innovation Authority's investment committees and consults in Israel and Europe on entrepreneurship and venture capital policy.

Christian Hobbach is a Postdoctoral Researcher at the Martin Luther University Halle-Wittenberg in Germany. His research focuses on actualizing creative potential in digitalized and hybrid work contexts, including creativity training, AI-augmented creative processes, creative self-beliefs, and self-leadership. He serves as an SIG officer within the European Academy of Management (EURAM) and organizes the standing track on "Managing creativity for innovation: Design, collaborative spaces, and people" at the annual EURAM conference.

Thierry Houé is Associate Professor of Purchasing and Supply Chain Management at ICN Business School in France. He is Director of the Supply Chain and Information Systems Management Department. His research interests include the analysis of logistic and purchasing operations within the supply chain, particularly the geographical, relational, and informational aspects (decision-making process, etc.). He is author and co-author of many articles in refereed journals and member of the CEREFIGE, the management research center of the University of Lorraine in France.

Marleen Huysman is Professor of Knowledge and Organization at Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam. Her research interests lie in the intersection of technology, work, and organizing. Her current research projects focus on artificial intelligence and the

future of work and managing knowledge creation, sharing, and integration. She has published articles in information systems and organization journals including *Organization Science*, *Journal of the Association for Information Systems*, *Academy of Management Discoveries*, *Information and Organization*, *Organization Studies*, *MIS Quarterly*, *Journal of Management Studies*, and others.

Genjiro Kosaka is Professor of Organization Management at Waseda University, Japan. His research interests lie in the impact of inter-organizational relationships on organizational innovation, with a particular focus on the Japanese automotive industry and crowdfunding.

Anne Kurzmann is a PhD student and Lecturer at the Chair of Human Resources Management and Business Governance at the Martin Luther University Halle-Wittenberg. Her current research focuses on creativity, organizational spaces, and individual work behavior in hybrid work environments.

Natalja Laurey obtained her PhD in Organization Science at the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam (KIN Center for Digital Innovation) and worked as an Assistant Professor on the Strategic Value of Design at the TU Delft University. Her work on emerging professions, creativity, and identity is strongly influenced by her background in cultural anthropology. Her research has been awarded multiple times, among others by the Academy of Management. Currently, she works as a Research Lead at Adyen. In this role, she is dedicated to bringing a human-centered perspective to FinTech.

Markus Messerschmidt studied Industrial Environmental Protection, Waste Management Technology, and Recycling at the University of Leoben, as well as Environmental Systems Sciences with a focus on Public Economics at the University of Graz. Since 2021, he has worked as a Junior Scientist at the University of Klagenfurt Institute of Instructional and School Development and the Department of Organization, Human Resources, and Service Management.

Marcela Miozzo is Professor of Innovation Management and Entrepreneurship at King's Business School, King's College London, UK. Her research focuses on the capabilities of firms for product, process, and service innovation in complex environments, with a focus on services and science-based sectors.

Tom Mordue is the Norman Richardson Professor of Tourism at Newcastle Business School. His research interests are in the cultural and economic relations of leisure, tourism, people, and place. He is particularly interested in how leisure and tourism integrate with other aspects of modern life to produce new spatial relations and new cultural forms. He has published this work in *Leisure Studies*, *Environment and Planning A* and *Marketing Theory*.

Anne-Katrin Neyer is a Full Professor of Human Resources and Business Governance at Martin Luther University Halle-Wittenberg, Germany. She

conducts research at the intersection of information technology and human resources on topics of cooperation, organizational transformation, and artificial intelligence. She is the Co-founder of the KI-HR-Lab in Germany. She was also the Vice President (EECC) of the European Academy of Management. The UNICUM Foundation named her “Professor of the Year 2022” in the Economics and Law category for her commitment to “paving the way for careers.”

Susanne Ollila is Professor in Organizational Behavior at Chalmers University of Technology and a Guest Professor at Linköping University. Her research revolves around managing and organizing collaborative innovation. She is the Founder of the Managing In-between research group, focusing on understanding social, cognitive, and emotional spaces in-between interacting actors.

Birke D. Otto is a Postdoctoral Researcher at Leuphana University Lüneburg and a Fellow at the Department of Business Humanities and Law at Copenhagen Business School. As a cultural sociologist, she conducts research on the everyday practices of organizations in relation to creativity and innovation, with a particular focus on the role of secrecy, time, and failure. She has published this work in journals such as *Organization Studies*, *Organization Science*, and others.

Thomas Paris is Researcher at CNRS (GREGHEC) and Associate Professor at HEC Paris, where he is Director of the MAC Master (media, art, creation). He holds a PhD in Management Science. His research focuses on the economics of creation and creative industries (cinema and audiovisual, music, fashion, publishing, architecture, advertising, haute cuisine, design, etc.) from the managerial, organizational, and sectoral viewpoints.

Pierre Poinignon (PhD in Management Science) is Assistant Professor at Burgundy School of Business, where he is Coordinator of the MECIC Master (Management of Cultural Companies and Creative Industries). His research explores theoretical trends in strategy and innovation management, particularly in the cultural and creative industries and the art worlds.

Rebecca Prescott is an Assistant Professor in Entrepreneurship at Newcastle Business School, Northumbria University. With 15 years’ experience working across sectors as a creative practitioner, researcher, and consultant, she has a sustained, extensive grounding in questions of creative practice and its relationship to wider issues of organization, identity, inclusion, and design.

Elie Saaoud is PhD candidate at HEC Montréal and member of Mosaic – Pôle créativité et innovation. He currently focuses on the integration of emerging technologies in healthcare organizations.

Benjamin Schiemer is a Postdoctoral Researcher at the Institute of Organization Science at Johannes Kepler University Linz, Austria. His research focuses on creativity and innovation, in particular on (1) temporality, materiality, and spatiality

of collective creative processes and (2) digitalization, online communities, and platforms. His work has been published in *Organization Studies*, *Organization Science*, and others.

Nadine Scholz is a Postdoctoral Researcher at King's College London, UK. Her primary research specializes in creativity and social networks in and beyond organizations aimed at creating and developing novel ideas. She is specifically interested in exploring how feedback interactions, networking, and social spaces impact creative processes and collaboration aimed at generating novelty.

Harry Sminia is Professor in Strategic Management at Strathclyde Business School, Glasgow, Scotland. He has done research on how a top management team activity actually affects the strategic direction of a firm, how organizations change, how environments develop, and how managers find their way in an ever-changing world. He is interested in anything at the crossroads of strategy, innovation, and operations, especially if it is all understood as a process.

Maura Soekijad is an Associate Professor Knowledge and Organization at the KIN Center for Digital Innovation in the School of Business and Economics at Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam. Trained as an ethnographer, her research focuses on working and organizing in a digital age, mostly based on qualitative data. She has among others published on identity work, online communities, and digital innovation, in journals such as *MIS Quarterly*, *Journal of Management Studies*, and *Organization Studies*.

Yuki Tsuboyama is an Associate Professor of Management at Hitotsubashi University. His research focuses on micro-politics in contested organizational and institutional change processes.

Martina Ukowitz is Associate Professor at the University of Klagenfurt (Austria), Department of Organization, Human Resources, and Service Management. Her main research fields are organizational studies and organizational development with a particular emphasis on inter-organizational relations. Her inter- and trans-disciplinary research practice is located in the fields of sustainable development, innovation management, and education.

Anna Yström is Senior Associate Professor in Industrial Management at Linköping University. Her research revolves around management of inter-organizational collaboration and new ways of organizing innovative work, focusing on co-creating and leveraging value through collaborative innovation, and collective sensemaking of unknown futures, often related to sustainability transitions.

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FOREWORD: RESEARCH IN THE SOCIOLOGY OF ORGANIZATIONS

Research in the Sociology of Organizations (RSO) publishes cutting-edge empirical research and theoretical papers that seek to enhance our understanding of organizations and organizing as pervasive and fundamental aspects of society and economy. We seek provocative papers that push the frontiers of current conversations, that help to revive old ones, or that incubate and develop new perspectives. Given its successes in this regard, RSO has become an impactful and indispensable fount of knowledge for scholars interested in organizational phenomena and theories. RSO is indexed and ranks highly in Scopus/SCImago as well as in the *Academic Journal Guide* published by the Chartered Association of Business Schools.

As one of the most vibrant areas in the social sciences, the sociology of organizations engages a plurality of empirical and theoretical approaches to enhance our understanding of the varied imperatives and challenges that these organizations and their organizers face. Of course, there is a diversity of formal and informal organizations – from for-profit entities to nonprofits, state and public agencies, social enterprises, communal forms of organizing, nongovernmental associations, trade associations, publicly traded, family owned and managed, private firms – the list goes on! Organizations, moreover, can vary dramatically in size from small entrepreneurial ventures to large multinational conglomerates to international governing bodies such as the United Nations.

Empirical topics addressed by RSO include the formation, survival, and growth of organizations; collaboration and competition between organizations; the accumulation and management of resources and legitimacy; and how organizations or organizing efforts cope with a multitude of internal and external challenges and pressures. Particular interest is growing in the complexities of contemporary organizations as they cope with changing social expectations and as they seek to address societal problems related to corporate social responsibility, inequality, corruption and wrongdoing, and the challenge of new technologies. As a result, levels of analysis reach from the individual to the organization, industry, community and field, and even the nation-state or world society. Much research is multilevel and embraces both qualitative and quantitative forms of data.

Diverse theory is employed or constructed to enhance our understanding of these topics. While anchored in the discipline of sociology and the field of management, RSO also welcomes theoretical engagement that draws on other disciplinary conversations – such as those in political science or economics, as well as work from diverse philosophical traditions. RSO scholarship has helped push forward a plethora of theoretical conversations on institutions and institutional

change, networks, practice, culture, power, inequality, social movements, categories, routines, organization design and change, configurational dynamics, and many other topics.

Each volume of RSO tends to be thematically focused on a particular empirical phenomenon (e.g., creative industries, multinational corporations, and entrepreneurship) or theoretical conversation (e.g., institutional logics, actors and agency, and microfoundations). The series publishes papers by junior as well as leading international scholars and embraces diversity in all dimensions. If you are a scholar interested in organizations or organizing, I hope you find RSO to be an invaluable resource as you develop your work.

Professor Michael Lounsbury
Series Editor, *Research in the Sociology of Organizations*
Canada Research Chair in Entrepreneurship & Innovation
University of Alberta

SPACES FOR CREATIVITY AND INNOVATION WITHIN AND ACROSS ORGANIZATIONAL BOUNDARIES: INTRODUCTION

Jörg Sydow^a, Amalya L. Oliver^b and Patrick Cohendet^c

^a*Department of Management, Freie Universität Berlin, Germany*

^b*Department of Sociology and Anthropology, Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Israel*

^c*Department of International Businesses, HEC Montréal, Canada*

INTRODUCTION

The need for novel and innovative solutions in society seems greater than ever before. Organizations and interorganizational arrangements such as networks, communities, platforms, and consortia have to organize creative processes in order to provide innovative products and services and/or excel with innovative structures and processes in more or less competitive environments. In particular, if so-called grand challenges or wicked problems are at stake, the production of new knowledge, products and services, or processes requires the crossing of organizational boundaries (Gray et al., 2022) into what is often termed “in-between spaces” (Yström & Agogué, 2020). These spaces are emerging in social interactions, potentially leading to creativity and innovation, and, at the same time, enabling the necessary interactions.

With this focus on spaces and social interactions, new organization-theoretical approaches and organizing-focused research questions emerge. Recent research in this area concentrated, for instance, on resources such as time, knowledge, and structure, and how they are enacted as enabling collaboration (Altman

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et al., 2015; Kalish & Oliver, 2021). Other research discussed either the puzzling relevance of constraints in creative processes (April et al., 2019; Lampel et al., 2014; Ortman & Sydow, 2018) or explicitly focused on temporary or permanent experimental spaces for creating, for instance, new routines (Bucher & Langley, 2016). Another research stream centers on the social networks that are formed in such spaces within or across organizational boundaries (Amin & Cohendet, 2004; Cohendet & Simon, 2016; Perry-Smith & Mannucci, 2017). These networks can vary by type of collaboration, structure, and membership over time (Kalish & Oliver, 2021), or by the exchange processes and practices they capture (Bouncken & Aslam, 2019; Oliver, 2022).

For the creative process to unfold its dynamic and become institutionalized, another level of interactions needs to be considered. According to Cohendet and colleagues (Cohendet et al., 2010; Grandadam et al., 2013) or Lange and Schüßler (2018), creative processes critically rely not only on formal organizations and formal interorganizational arrangements from the “upperground” but also on the “underground” that brings together informal actors from creative, scientific, artistic, and cultural activities that take place outside any formal organization or institution, focused mostly on production, exploitation, or dissemination. The “middleground” often provides a link between the informal activities of the underground and the formal institutions and organizations of the upperground. This intermediate layer thus provides favorable conditions for creative ideas to move from the underground to the upperground and vice versa. Issues of intellectual capital and property rights are further elements to consider in creative processes within and across organizational boundaries (Konno & Schillaci, 2021), as well as lack of trust at different levels (Oliver et al., 2020) and tensions of competition within collaboration processes (Bullinger et al., 2010; Oliver, 2004).

Research on creativity and innovation within and across organizational boundaries has increasingly adopted process- or practice-based perspectives (Fortwengel et al., 2017). With their help, research has focused on how (inter)organizational activities are enabled and restrained by structure on the micro-level of groups, the meso-level of organizations and interorganizational arrangements, and/or the macro-level of fields or society. In turn, this research considers how this structure on one or more of these levels that are not identical with the upper-, middle-, and underground distinguished by Cohendet et al. (2010) but rather cut across them, is being reproduced or transformed by more or less creative and innovative practice.

This introduction and the whole volume on this particular topic intend to broaden and deepen research on managing and organizing creativity and innovation within and across organizational boundaries creating and making use of such spaces. In this introduction, we will pave the way by first clarifying what we mean by creativity and how it relates to innovation. Then we will give a short overview of how exactly research on creativity and innovation has not only considered spaces, but also in the sense of (physical) places. Thereby, we will review the manifold ways in how “space” in such studies has been addressed. Then, we will give a short overview of the papers of this volume and discuss to what

extent a “spatial turn” has already taken place in management and organization studies – or should be considered against the background of current process and practice theories that currently dominate this field of study.

PROCESSES AND PRACTICES OF CREATIVITY AND INNOVATION

Creativity and innovation are often defined with regard to the outcome, that is, the generation and implementation of a new product or service or process. If the outcome is considered not only as novel but also as at least potentially useful or valuable (Amabile, 1996; Anderson et al., 2014) it is commonly understood as “creative” and, if actually implemented, as “innovative.” The minimum form of implementation is the use of the outcome within the organization or the interorganizational arrangement that has generated it. Despite the initial focus on outcomes, research on creativity and innovation has, during the last two decades or so, shifted more toward a better understanding of the process (e.g., Cohendet & Simon, 2016; DeFillippi et al., 2007; Hargadon & Bechky, 2006). One particularly and increasingly prominent process view focuses on creative or innovative ideas and related practices (cf., Fortwengel et al., 2017).

Many Process Views

Originally, creativity was considered as being the hard-to-understand front end of innovation processes. These processes were assumed to start with an idea that possibly leads to a scientifically or technically feasible invention and, finally, to a possibly economically viable innovation (Amabile & Pratt, 2016; Anderson et al., 2014). Over the years, process conceptualizations have moved from such a linear to a more complex and recursive understanding (Schübler et al., 2021). One example is the “idea journey” conceptualized by Perry-Smith and Mannucci (2017). With a focus on the role of social networks in creative processes, these authors distinguish, in addition to the phases of idea generation, implementation, and diffusion, two intermediate phases of idea elaboration and idea championing. Others like Coldevin et al. (2019) go one step further by relying on an entirely recursive conceptualizations in which not only interaction but also elements of chance, friction, play, serendipity, and uncertainty are accentuated in their relevance for processes of idea generation and evaluation (see also Hjorth et al., 2018; Ibert et al., 2021; Oliver, 2009). Such conceptualizations typically note the tension between freedom and constraint, either thought of as a “paradox of organizing” for creativity and innovation (DeFillippi et al., 2007) or as requiring a “dance in chains” (Ortmann & Sydow, 2018), in which chains – as constraints – may not only hinder but also stimulate creativity. This stimulation can also relate to the change of “chains” (e.g., in terms of postponed deadlines, more plastic objectives, or expanded resources) required in the creative process over time.

Fortwengel et al. (2017) distinguish, with regard to practices, between a “strong” and a “moderate” process view. While the former often builds on Schatzki (2002) and applies a flat ontology, the latter tends to build on Giddens (1984) and allows adhering to a tall ontology, a multi-level analysis that pleads to study creative practices on different levels: from the individual and (project) teams to organizations and interorganizational arrangements, organizational fields, and even whole societies. A study adhering to a strong process view would focus on interconnected events and the “becoming” of a creative practice. A study following a more moderate process view, by contrast, would investigate temporal work practices and explore the possibility of creativity in the light of spatial and temporal structures.

One Practice-based View

Following the “practice turn” in social sciences in general (Schatzki et al., 2001) and management and organization studies in particular (cf. Jarzabkowski et al., 2022), research on creativity and innovation has increasingly adopted a practice-based perspective as one particular process view that focuses on social practices and pays attention to the duality of structure and agency (Giddens, 1984). Like process views in general that do justice to the fact that “creativity is complex, elusive and multidimensional” (Schaefer, 2023, p. 9) a practice-based perspective requires to focus on situated practices as recurrent doings and sayings (Schatzki, 2002).

In their study of drug discovery processes with their extreme requirements for predictability (that result from the high investments involved), Otto et al. (2024) focus simultaneously on the need for entraining to and detrainning from certain *zeitgeber* (and sometimes entirely reframing clock-time structures) as well as on the temporal work practices to do so on the levels of projects as well as organizations. Such research applies what can be called a “creativity-as-practice” approach (Schaefer, 2023, p. 46) in which space and place in their different accentuations matter as much as time and temporality. Practices, including creative practices, are always either produced or reproduced or transformed in time *and* space (Giddens, 1984).

THE ROLE OF SPACE AND PLACE IN RESEARCH ON CREATIVITY AND INNOVATION

Institutional economists, management scholars, and economic geographers have long emphasized that the forces of spatial and temporal context should be at the center of any theorization of knowledge formation that could serve as the basis for creativity and innovation. This would be very much in line with a theoretical perspective that emphasizes the fact that social practice plays out in time *and* space (Giddens, 1984). Space, however, appears in different forms, one of which being geographical, physical places, and others socially constructed spaces.

About Places

Scholars have insisted on the importance of place, understood as the realm of close, intimate, and bounded relationships (Amin & Cohendet, 2004), in the development of innovation. They view innovation and learning as a situated practice in distinctive local territories and emphasize the benefits of geographic embeddedness in fostering the increasing returns and competitive advantages associated with such localizations. Materiality matters here as much as meaning. For example, Brown and Duguid (2000) describe innovative places, such as local clusters in Silicon Valley, as “knowledge ecologies” that are fertile for knowledge growth because knowledge trapped within firms quickly finds ways to flow between them, particularly through the circulation of ideas and tacit knowledge among localized firms resulting from local product specialization. Another example is given by Grabher (2001) about Soho in London, which is a typical place where firms in this local media and advertising cluster provide their critical knowledge inputs through the local industrial atmosphere and clusters of related firms. In such places, the social and cultural dimensions of co-location and collaboration support micro-scale interactions that also depend on the type of proximity between actors (cognitive, organizational, social, institutional, and geographic proximity, according to Boschma, 2005).

In such representations, places are characterized by a unique geographic-physical location, often accompanied by a specific identity and a socially constructed set of meanings. Places appear as relatively stable locations conducive to social interaction, work, and organization. Cartel et al. (2022) distinguish two ontologies of place: (a) *place as an experience* through which people develop a sense of place: how they identify with or feel attached to a place and develop a strong or weak embodied, emotional attachment to the place (Relph, 1976; Tuan, 1977). A place is socially constructed insofar as it is “interpreted, narrated, perceived, felt, understood, and imagined” by its inhabitants throughout history (Gieryn, 2000, p. 465); (b) *place as practice*, which captures how people, either self-consciously or not, make places and develop a socialized sense of place.

However, one of the limitations of this understanding of place is that while it explains how the nature of interactions between individuals and institutions in these localized milieus influences the nature, pace, and direction of innovation (how “institutions drive action”), it does not provide an adequate perspective for explaining how interactions among local actors lead to creativity and innovation, particularly how these social interactions enable the institutional design of contexts that foster creativity (how “action drives institutions”). For example, while it has been widely recognized since Marshall (2009 [1890]) that existing ideas circulate in localized clusters and contribute to creativity and innovation, there is no analytical tool in this understanding of place to explain how new ideas are generated, developed, or enriched in a given localized cluster. It is precisely this important nuance that the concept of space allows us to capture.

About Spaces

Holstein and Rantakari (2023, p. 57) define space as the location that “constitutively emerges from (inter)organizational activities, objects, arrangements, and

social practices.” Thus, space is now seen as both a social product and a generative force. In such a perspective, space emerges from a collaborative effort to socially construct a context that allows for the development of potentially innovative ideas. As *De Certeau* (1984, p. 117) pointed out, while “place is the stable, static, ideologically informed given, ... space as practiced place is about potentially anarchic movement.”

The difficulty with the concept of space, however, is its wide range of different meanings. For example, the literature refers to: relational spaces (*Grabher & Ibert, 2011*), constructed physical spaces (*Oliver & Rittblat, 2023*), esthetic spaces (*Sgourev et al., 2023*), reflective and experimental spaces (*Bucher & Langley, 2016*), open spaces/innovation spaces (*Maruani & Amit-Cohen, 2007*), creative spaces (*Gaim & Wählin, 2016*), collaborative spaces (*Cohendet, 2022; Kalish & Oliver, 2021; Montanari et al., 2020; Schiemer et al., 2023*), co-working spaces (*Leforestier, 2009*), online spaces (*Hondros et al., 2023*), social media spaces (*Burke et al., 2023*), hybrid spaces (*Perkmann et al., 2019*), safe spaces (*Hondros et al., 2023; Otto et al., 2020*), unitary spaces (*Cepa & Schildt, 2023*), social spaces (*Friedman, 2011*), temporary spaces (*Sydow & Windeler, 2020*), interstitial spaces (*Furnari, 2014; Villani & Phillips, 2021*), intermediation spaces (*Gasparro et al., 2022*), network spaces (*Fortwengel, 2023*), lived spaces (*Lefebvre, 1991 [1974]; Steigenberger & Lübcke, 2022*), provisional spaces (*Li & Khessina, 2024*), liminal spaces (*Shortt, 2015*), heterotopic spaces (*Topinka, 2010*), etc. In this inflation of space concepts, neither creative spaces (*Gaim & Wählin, 2016*) nor innovation spaces (*Caccamo, 2020*) are missing. Several of these types of spaces are explored in this volume. The different functions as well as modes and types of social interaction could explain this wide range of meanings, but we believe that the notion of “in-between spaces” proposed by *Yström and Agogué (2020)* captures the essence of such spaces: they are experimental constructs voluntarily designed out of traditional ways of organizing, they are generally located at the intersection of organizational boundaries, and they are characterized as places between organizational actors that are, as already stated above, not only emerging in social interactions, potentially leading to creativity and innovation, but at the same time enabling the necessary interactions.

To a large extent, these different constructs of experimentation can be interpreted in terms of innovation commons. Drawing on the concept of commons (*Ostrom, 1990*), *Allen and Potts (2016)* introduce the concept of innovation commons, as rule-governed spaces for solving the social dilemmas inherent in sharing knowledge, information, and other resource inputs for creativity and innovation. According to this theoretical perspective, this type of commons is an institution in which stakeholders (even if they are competitors) engage in collective action and even cooperation to foster innovation dynamics by developing rules for creating, sharing, and managing a pool of innovation resources. It is a community-level governance solution that emerges spontaneously from the mutual accommodation and agreements of communities of interacting agents in what is sometimes called the “middleground” (*Cohendet et al., 2010*). Innovation commons exist, for example, at the very beginning of the development of a new technology, at the point where a group of actors (often informal agents such as

technology enthusiasts) come together to explore knowledge bases and discover opportunities to use and develop the technology, and to bring it to the market (Cohendet, 2022; Potts, 2018). As history and theory show, technology development – from initial idea to widespread use – is fundamentally a collective process (Mondschein et al., 2021).

About the Ideation Process

The focus on “in-between spaces” allows for an in-depth study of the ideation process, which is inherently linked to the emergence and development of creativity, leading to a less linear, more recursive understanding of innovation processes (Coldevin et al., 2019; Perry-Smith & Mannucci, 2017).

On the one hand, a careful study of the conditions and modes of collaboration *within* the different forms of these reflective or experimental spaces offers new ways of understanding the conditions of idea generation and elaboration. A series of recent contributions to the literature have revealed how the constraints in these spaces can stimulate creativity (Ortmann & Sydow, 2018), how the combination of timing and spatial organization can trigger the formation of new ideas (Schübler et al., 2021), how the arrangement of material objects in these spaces can favor serendipity and unexpected ideas (Makri et al., 2014), and how they can lead to the creation of new routines (Bucher & Langley, 2016).

On the other hand, a number of works analyze how the ideation process is nurtured and enriched by the interactions *between* the specific in-between spaces and the entities beyond the boundaries of these experimental spaces. In such a perspective, the notion of “middleground” (Cohendet et al., 2010) refers to cases of in-between spaces that connect the informal communities of the “underground” with the formal institutions in the “upperground.” The enrichment of the ideation process through the circulation of ideas in the “middleground” resulting from bottom-up initiatives of the underground or from top-down impulses of the upperground could be associated to the dynamic between top-down plans, bottom-up experience, and the negotiation between them, which has been analyzed by Lefebvre (1991 [1974]) in his book *The Production of Space*. Lefebvre theorizes space as a trialectic (a triple dialectic) between three different forces. The first force is the “conceived space”: the power play of capital and state, that is, the investments of bankers, the rules of bureaucrats, and the blueprints of architects. The second force is “lived space”: the desires of the dwellers, their dreams, and memories. The third force, finally, is “perceived space”: the way in which these dwellers actually use space.

TOWARD A SPATIAL TURN IN RESEARCH ON CREATIVITY AND INNOVATION

In this section, we provide a short overview of the papers accepted for this volume and conclude with some thoughts about the role of space (and place) in research on creativity and innovation.

Short Overview of the Volume's Papers

In an effort to better understand the role of the spatial dimension in research on creativity and innovation, this volume brings together a wide range of empirical studies that examine different types and forms of spaces and places. The studies in this volume focus on multiple units of analyses, including teams, organizations, fields, as well as cities and regions, and their role in enhancing and facilitating creative and innovative products and services or processes (see Hedborg & Addyman, 2024, for a study focussing the level of projects). Creativity and innovation processes themselves are negotiated, defined, and co-constructed among and between different stakeholders, knowledge experts, creative and scientific professionals, and entrepreneurs. The studies extend our conceptualization and insights with regard to creativity and innovation embedded in spaces and places and are relevant for organizational scholars and policy-related spheres.

The papers in this volume focus on and contextualize social and organizational dynamics of creativity and innovation in three main conceptualizations of spaces and places. [Table 1](#) provides a “map” of the papers, describing the main phenomenon examined, the main theoretical lenses used, and the methods applied for data collection. In the last column, we describe the way by which each study approaches the concept of “spaces,” their meaning and contextualization, and the process they facilitate.

We organized the papers under three main themes related to spaces and places. The first theme describes different characterizations of spaces in which creative and innovative processes take place and are based on exchanges and negotiations between individuals. Here the respective studies examine the notion of in-between, safe, and relational spaces. These spaces allow for informal exchanges and disorder and ambiguity. They foster interactions, brainstorming, and experimentation and enable cognitive construction.

The second theme includes three studies that focus on nonstandard spaces and these include temporary, other, and digital spaces. Temporary settings offer spaces for bounded social actors in ways that are distinctive and allow for experimentation of novel ideas. “Other spaces” follow the concept of heterotopias and are outside and different from all other spaces. They foster creativity and innovation by allowing for escaping the routines and constraints of everyday life. Digital platforms create spaces for idea work and communication that is exposed to wide audiences and diverse users.

The third theme presents physical spaces, that is, places, on different levels. These include large peripheral geographic regions that allow for different and new opportunities for establishing innovative technology entrepreneurship; small places that have a distinctive physical form and identity and are advantageous for interactions and collaborations; and cities that adopt creative policies that allow for relational processes to be (re)produced continually.