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### **Introduction: Lefebvre and leadership?**

In this chapter, we discuss possible connections between Lefebvre and current leadership research. Although Lefebvre’s writings on space have had a particularly significant impact on organizational thinking on spatiality, we do not go as far as to suggest that Lefebvre be forced into a category of leadership thinkers. However, borrowing Lefebvre’s wording in his comment that ‘Marx is not a sociologist ... there is sociology in Marx’ (in Elden, 2004, p. 129), we would like to say that Lefebvre is not a leadership researcher, but there is leadership in Lefebvre. His dissertation on rural peasant life in the Valley of Campan in the Pyrenees (2000, originally 1954), another more general book on the Pyrenees (1963) and his work on space (1991)<sup>1</sup> indicate a delicate understanding of how collectives become organized and of the relationship between humans and the natural and built environment, that is, between humans and materiality. This chapter introduces the concept of ‘spacing leadership’ that combines Lefebvre’s writings on spatiality and rural culture to suggest that his work offers ways to conceptualize relationships between humans and spatial materiality in a way that informs and connects to leadership studies.

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<sup>1</sup> Not all Lefebvre’s work has been translated into English, and we had to rely on secondary sources to some extent.

The interest in materiality shaping human (inter)action coincides with the recent focus on materiality in leadership studies. Instead of limiting leadership to human–human interactions, a number of authors claim that leadership takes place in human–material encounters as well; the material environment shapes and guides human action, for example, through physical resemblance to seafaring at the British Royal Navy training centre (Hawkins, 2015); through technological equipment, reports and protocols in healthcare policymaking (Oborn, Barrett, & Dawson, 2013); and through physical places and spaces (Ropo, Sauer, & Salovaara, 2013; Ropo, Salovaara, Sauer, & De Paoli, 2015; Zhang & Spicer, 2014). The chapter joins post-heroic and plural leadership approaches that extend the leadership concept beyond leaders to collectives, groups and communities with leaderless leadership (Crevani, Lindgren, & Packendorff, 2007, 2010; Denis, Langley, & Sergi, 2012; Edwards, 2015; Eslen-Ziya & Erhart, 2015; Sutherland, 2015). It is this line of thinking about leadership—how collectives work and cooperation and communities are organized—where Lefebvre’s texts have the potential to inform leadership studies.

We develop our argument in relation to a university space renovation project that links Lefebvre’s triadic, interrelated concept of space with ways of redirecting and organizing activities. Importantly for our argument, the project involved the end users of the space in a particularly integral fashion in the planning and designing phase. The way the space becomes a lived experience for the end users, including spatial atmosphere and mood, is something that is not commonly ‘observed, analysed or theorized in architecture or planning’, Pallasmaa notes (2014, p. 233), an architect himself. This implies that although participation is rhetorically paid attention to, those running the spatial design

process are often<sup>2</sup> not in possession of tools with which to facilitate more substantial engagement. In Lefebvre's terms, lived experience is typically not included in the design process.

To create a more nuanced image of how humans relate to space, we introduce the term 'spacing leadership'. It describes the emergent and on-going nature of the relationship between a space and the end users and how both gradually adapt to each other. Lefebvre's triad of conceived, perceived and lived space will be used as a conceptual device in explaining the social nature of this spatial production.

While attempting to connect Lefebvre with current leadership thinking, one must keep in mind on the one hand that Lefebvre lived and wrote his major texts between the 1930s and the 1970s in the French context, whereas leadership research is a predominantly North American endeavour that has flourished and expanded, particularly since the 1970s. On the other hand, we caution that leadership is very prone to a categorical mistake: when uttering the word leadership, people quickly and unreflectively think of leaders as individual human agents. This is fair enough, as mainstream leadership research has for the past century focused on leaders as strong individuals. However, in this paper we do not focus on leaders, but on leadership as a phenomenon that can take place between human and materiality.

Another categorical assumption is that leadership is about power, namely someone exerting power over someone else. The leader is seen in a power role as a

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<sup>2</sup> As architects' profession is not the key point of the paper, we will not delve further into this argument, but the reader is advised to, for instance, google 'what architects really' do. Lot of these descriptions are written by architects, and they seldom mention the client (except in terms of client presentations or communication) and almost never the term 'user experience' (or something similar). But as said, this is a different conversation from the one we aim to have here.

subject, and the follower is seen as being in a subordinated object role. In contrast to this leader/power-centric tradition of leadership theorizing, an early 20<sup>th</sup> century political theorist and philosopher of leadership, Mary Parker Follett (1868–1933), provides fitting terminology to describe the tension between vertical power structures and horizontal meaning-making processes. Instead of conceptualizing leadership only as a vertical *power over* others, it is also a horizontal *power with* phenomenon. The power over reading of leadership is represented in the mainstream, leader-centric leadership literature, for instance, as Crevani et al. (2007) note, and in critical leadership studies (Alvesson & Sveningsson, 2003; Collinson, 2005; Fairhurst, 2007; Ford & Harding, 2007; Grint, 2010; Harding, Lee, Ford, & Learmonth, 2011; Kelly, 2008). In critical leadership studies, leadership is literally described in terms of dominance and subservience, resistance, imbalance, hierarchy, omnipotence, inequality, gender or seduction. Leadership is seen to maintain and reinforce existing hierarchical and suppressive power structures that particularly disdain those in lower or poorer positions or who are otherwise disadvantaged. This (historically influenced) sociological reading of organizations, though meant to be liberating by making the repressive structures visible, still reproduces a power over divide between management and workers, capital and labour and leader and follower, thus reinstating ‘old school’ heroic, leader-centric and hierarchical constellations and enforcing ontologies based on dualisms.

But as power relations in Follett’s terms can function and be divided horizontally between people, the ‘new school’ of leadership thinking does not associate leadership with power over structures in the first place but with leaderful and plural organizing (Denis et al., 2012; Raelin, 2005) where, potentially, we are all leaders (Ford & Harding,

2007). Recently, non-authoritarian and empowering relationships in societal and corporate structures have begun to emerge in various instances, ranging from mass political participation in social movements, social experiments in corporations and online production on the Internet to terrorist and anarchist organizations. (Aaltonen & Lanzara, 2015; Hatch & Cunliffe, 2006; Laloux, 2014; Margetts et al., 2013; Robertson, 2015; Salovaara & Bathurst, 2016; Sutherland, 2015; Sutherland, Land, & Böhm, 2014).

It is in this spirit that we encourage the reader to step into the ‘new school’ of leadership thinking and to join post-heroic and sociomaterial leadership approaches that define leadership in two relatively novel ways. First, leadership is a collective quality that anybody can potentially contribute to, and it can take place even without designated or individual leaders. Second, leadership does not take place only in human–human relations but also between people and material objects, such as within social space. Discussing Lefebvre’s writings from the traditional ‘old school’ leader-centric angle is indeed not very fruitful, but analysing his texts on rural peasants and space from the plural leadership perspective does provide the reader with interesting cues on how nature, culture and the built environment influence human interaction. In this respect, Lefebvre can be helpful in explaining the ‘new school’ of leadership.

The chapter proceeds as follows. First, we discuss features in Lefebvre’s writings that have the potential to inform current plural and materially oriented leadership studies. We do this by relating Lefebvre to Follett’s power over and power with terms. Second, we consider in more detail how human–material relations have recently been conceptualized as leadership. To signify the processual and performative quality of space, we introduce the concept ‘spacing leadership’. Using the example of a university office

space renovation, we show how Lefebvre's triadic concept of space—conceived, perceived and lived—and a sociomaterial approach to leadership constitute a dynamic phenomenon, spacing leadership.

### **Lefebvre and plural leadership**

In Marxist writings, 'leadership' typically has two meanings; it either refers to a hierarchical leader-centric concept (as in under the leadership of Lenin/Stalin/Mao) or to an oppressive capitalist's power over workers (as in the labour process or industrial relations literature). The oppressive notion of power can be traced back to Hegel's (1986) dialectics of master and servant, where the master owns the land and the equipment, and the servant produces added value through his or her work because the master can later sell the products for a price that results in a surplus. This relationship constructs the identities of the master and the slave, as they and the surrounding society recognize these roles. Lefebvre's writing, however, is based on the assumption of oppressive power structures and 'differentiation between classes' (Lefebvre, 2003, p. 117). He also appreciates and studies the everydayness of rural communities, servants and their traditional life and feasts (e.g., 1963, 1971, 2000). Through his rural sociology, Lefebvre shows how everyday life is based on the collaboration of workers and collectives. Interestingly, it is this work on horizontal rather than vertical power structures that has the potential to inform the research on plural leadership (Denis et al., 2012), leaderless leadership (Sutherland et al., 2014) and community as leadership (Edwards, 2015).

Based on stays in the French Pyrenees during and after World War II and on archival materials he collected, Lefebvre wrote about local peasant communities and the

Pyrenees landscape and cultural traditions. (cf. Brenner & Elden, 2009; Elden, 2004; Entrikin & Berdoulay, 2005; Merrifield, 2006) These writings (Lefebvre, 1963, 2000) and his texts on rural sociology (1971, 2004) reveal several cultural features about organizing, cooperation, communication and the relationship to nature and the built environment within traditional communities. Today, these texts, and secondary literature on Lefebvre, inform us how cooperation becomes directed toward common goals by the influence of material elements on human actions. As such, they offer guidance for analysing forms of current organizing, such as that in universities.

*Collectives.* Lefebvre considered village communities as natural gatherings. Historically, rural peasantry gathered together to support and defend each other, to share tools and land and to harvest together. Although informal, for this purpose the peasant community was 'highly organized, held together by collective disciplines; it had collective characteristics, of widely varying types' (Lefebvre, 2003, p. 117). The post-heroic leadership approach (Crevani et al., 2007) points out that leadership is not only one person's power over others (the great man theories) but also what collections of people do in practice. As this conceptualization defines leadership as collective actions across informal networks (Denis et al., 2012; Edwards, 2015; Kuronen & Huhtinen, 2016), Lefebvre's interest in peasant groups serves as a contradiction to the model of industrialized society, where workers become alienated in various ways and used by oppressive power over structures. Although universities, for instance, are inherently hierarchical, collaboration forms through informal networks.

*From rural to industrial.* The way production was organized in rural communities was based on the cooperation between local inhabitants. However, as cities and industrial workplaces began to attract people with the promise of a better livelihood, organizing in these new societies differed greatly from the rural setting. Workers' responsibilities in a rural setting were based on the understanding that things constantly change—such as the land, its fertility and the growth of crops; the weather and the seasons; what tools are available, such as animals or machinery—and on decision making that fluctuates according to these changes. In contrast, a factory organization is a more rigid, hierarchic, abstract constellation that follows pre-described hierarchies, processes and orders. Similarly, in today's offices the connection to work is an abstraction in two ways. First, workspace has become subordinated to economy, and office space is measured as a means to an end rather than as an end in itself. It is a non-space, except for capitalist purposes. Second, at work, there is little connection to nature-type elements of physical materiality; these are replaced by products, instruments and software. However, Lefebvre's critique of urbanization does not imply a retreat to nature but rather signifies a way of reading and understanding current social conditions. (Elden, 2004, 2008)

Commodification of everyday experience is observed today on a structural level in terms of corporations' determination to manage the whole work–life experience. A trend to build 'creative workspaces' (De Paoli, Sauer, & Ropo, 2017; Ropo et al., 2015) shows how managerial implications also take over the domain of leadership. The same commodification and urge for creative design applies to present day universities.



*Atomization.* The shift from a rural to an urban environment also led to a ‘transition to a new, individualistic morality, with the breakdown of the rural community and extended family, the transition to the city and the atomization of society’ (Elden, 2004, p. 92). This social shift implicitly justified new forms of organizing. Whereas someone ploughing their field or selling products alone without any outside help would have been regarded as an anomaly in traditional peasantry, where organizing relied on the need for cooperation, industrial organizing depends on external management to bring separate individuals together. This shift can be observed in the leadership research; with the atomization of society from the 1950s onwards, modern leadership research concentrated on studying leaders as individuals and leadership as a rational intent (Grint, 2011). However, as Grint’s (2011) overview of the history of leadership shows, leadership has occurred prior to overtly rational accounts. New interest in collectives as a form of leadership has emerged in the 2000s, yet it is not a return to pre-industrial times but a more sociological interest in forms of human organizing and in how leadership takes place in informal leaderless groups, such as in academic teams and knowledge-intensive project groups.

*Natural frontiers and space.* One of Lefebvre’s major observations was that while the space defining a rural community used to be associated with its natural frontiers (rivers, forests, mountains), in emerging capitalism and Christianity nature, myths and first-hand experience became replaced by rational external reasoning (Elden, 2004, p. 92, 139). The limits and borders of rural landscape have been contested, as Lefebvre’s historical studies show; but it is only recently that this historical struggle (to define who we as ‘locals’ are) has become overruled by a process of more reification, where cultural reasoning based on

communal history, nature and its rhythms has become replaced by the culture of rationalism and capitalist market logic (Lefebvre, 2004).

*Rhythmanalysis*. In observing the everydayness, *quotidien*, Lefebvre (2004) noted how rural communities were transformed during the process of modernization, industrialization and urbanization. The local feasts and everyday life followed the rhythms of nature, whether it was the sun rising and falling or time to seed or harvest. The social bonds within the community and the peasants who are affected by the rhythms of nature create an organic base for collective activities and inform everyday life (Butler, 2012, p. 35). As Christianity, capitalism and individualism began to replace the rural order and the rhythm of nature, this shift resulted in alienation from natural rhythms. This shift from natural rhythm to chronological, analytical time concepts also showed in the objectification of nature. Whereas nature used to be considered as an organic, unpredictable, performing and active force, in a capitalist context it becomes subsumed to calculation and rationalization of production forces. However, originally in Christianity the nature was to be cared and cultivated for, not exploited.

In line with Heidegger's critique of technology, Lefebvre also considers how technology comes to dominate over nature rather than being in harmony with it (Elden, 2004, p. 133). The performance of nature (space) for rural peasants was something that was in flux, and thus nature 'spoke' to the farmer (when to seed or harvest, when crops are ripe), whereas industrialized agriculture takes over from this natural order (for instance, by adding fertilizers) and expects it to produce ever more value. The same

rational logic happens in present day universities by decreasing or increasing financial resources and expecting this to mechanically influence output.

### **Mary Parker-Follett's views on power**

As Edwards (2015b) and Sveiby (2011) describe in their anthropologically oriented leadership studies, hierarchies have always existed in human systems, but the pendulum has been swinging between 'strong men' and orientation to collectives. Lefebvre's examples are analogous to the historical accounts of collective leadership cultures and to understanding plural leadership in the form of collectives, networks and community formations (Denis et al. 2012; Edwards, 2015a; Sutherland et al., 2014).

Mary Parker-Follett was particularly interested in organizing that took place through collaboration between various stakeholder groups searching for a meaningful existence. She insisted that in these kinds of organizations 'we find responsibility for management shot all through a business, that we find some degree of authority all along the line, that leadership can be exercised by many people besides top executives' (Follett, 1949/1987, p. 61). What is needed is a democratic horizontal approach for which 'the experience of all is necessary' (Follett, 1924, p. 38). From a knowledge economy perspective, this is a very contemporary observation, and from the perspective of leadership, this is what plural and leaderless leadership approaches also claim. In horizontally networked modes of organizing, the hierarchical top-down/bottom-up thinking is not the most adequate way of conceptualizing leadership. In criticizing extensive use of authoritative power (power-over) that characterizes modern capitalist

societies, Lefebvre is clearly describing power with structures. This is one way to read his rural sociology from the plural leadership perspective.

As Elden (2004, p. 157) argues, Lefebvre's observations describe a shift from the rural agricultural communities to modern farming and urban industrialization. However, from the leadership perspective the crucial difference is between voluntary or involuntary, self-determined or managed organizing. In industrialized society, the workforce became organized in a mechanistic and hierarchical power over fashion; but in pre-modern rural communities there were fewer external forces forcing the community to gather together. Rather, people became organized through the principle of power with, through an understanding of their own context. The same self-relying organizing originally applied to universities as well.

Traditionally, the power discussions on leadership convey leadership as a phenomenon that occurs in hierarchical human-human relations. However, leadership has lately been considered as also taking place in human-material relations, which is a more radical proposition. This conceptualization, associated with the power with view and horizontal organizing, provides a fitting framework for discussing how Lefebvre's insights on natural frontiers, space, and rhythm analysis can become part of leadership analysis.

### **Conceptualization of spacing leadership: material, processual and embodied**

Lefebvre's major contribution to conceptualizing space is *The Production of Space* (1991), which argues space is socially constructed. Lefebvre argues that the dominant understanding of space refers to an empty area that in Euclidean geometrics became

defined through mathematical formulations, such as angles, length, and height. Lefebvre points to two problems; first, this concept has widened the gap between abstract thinkers of space and the experience and language of those within the space. The second problem is that the abstract mental space is taken as equal to the social space that people inhabit. For a thinker deeply rooted in (Marxist) materialism and socialist thinking, an uncritical identification of mental space with social space and a neglect of material reality is not legitimate (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 6). This critique explains how Lefebvre formed his triadic space concept; the terms *conceived* (idealistic, abstract) and *perceived* (material, physical) space are equivalent to Descartes' distinction between *res cogitans* (mental substance) and *res extensa* (corporeal substance) (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 14). To overcome this dualistic dilemma, Lefebvre—in a dialectical fashion—constitutes a third element, synthesis; *lived space* is an imperative integrating condition between conceived and perceived space.

The conceived space of architectural drawings consists of abstract representations of space—of architectural blueprints and technical illustrations composed of lines, boxes, flowcharts and symbols. The material, perceived space is composed of walls, furniture and other materials and of employees' movements, workflow and practices. Neither of these entail an experiential element or emotions, while lived space is experienced through emotions, imagination and embodied sensations.

Lefebvre's triadic space concept was introduced to organization studies by Dale, (2005), Ford and Harding (2004), Taylor and Spicer (2007), Watkins (2005), and Zhang (2006), and the adoption of Lefebvre among organization scholars can be connected to the material turn and sociomaterial approaches in organization studies (Barad, 2003; Carlile, Nicolini, Langley, & Tsoukas, 2014; Dale, 2005; Orlikowski, 2007) The material turn

argues that material objects—such as water coolers (Fayard & Weeks, 2007), copy machines (Humphries & Smith, 2014) and smart phones (Orlikowski, 2007), material spaces and the built environment influence social actions (Clegg & Kornberger, 2006; Dale, 2005; Dale & Burrell, 2008; De Vaujany & Mitev, 2013; Taylor & Spicer, 2007; Van Marrewijk & Yanow, 2010; Zhang, 2006). In leadership research, (socio)materiality has also been linked with leadership and particularly with spaces (Collinge, Gibney, & Mabey, 2011; Hawkins, 2015; Oborn et al., 2013; Sergi, 2016; Ropo et al., 2013, 2015; Zhang & Spicer, 2014). However, following Lefebvre’s triadic model, the influence of space is not a mechanical causal relation; there is no physical or mental structure that would ‘produce a space with a perfectly clear understanding of cause and effect, motive and implication’ (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 37). This idea is important in terms of leadership; although physical materiality influences social action, the lived experience cannot be ‘managed’ or manipulated for particular ends.

The noteworthy, even paradigmatic difference compared to the previous heroic leadership theories is that the (socio)materially inspired studies on leadership extend the definition of human–human relations to include human–material relations. But how exactly the connection between the social and the material should be conceptualized continues to be a subject of debate; the social and material are seen as intrinsically entangled (Barad, 2003; Orlikowski, 2007); intertwined (Jones, 2013); intertwined and mutually enacted (Dale, 2005); constitutively entangled (Orlikowski & Scott, 2008) or mutually constitutive (De Vaujany & Vaast, 2013; Hernes et al., 2006; Van Marrewijk & Yanow, 2010). As Clegg and Kornberger (2006) describe it: ‘we constitute space through the countless practices of everyday life as much as we are constituted through them’ (144). In Lefebvre’s

terminology, the perceived space constitutes a lived experience, which in turn affects our practices (perceived space).

This mutual constitution shows in everyday work practices, where work is intimately linked to materials that give direction, guidance and meaning to work, for example, copy machine repair technicians being guided by the machine (Orr, 1995) or electricians working in a 200-year old building or a shipbuilder working with wooden materials (Salovaara, 2014). Material spaces also guide human action in a very mundane fashion; we follow corridors, take stairs and cannot walk through the walls; but we can listen to the walls talk (De Vaujany & Vaast, 2013), read the ruins (Dale & Burrell, 2011) and give voice to space (Yanow, 2010). As Hawkins (2015) states, British Naval practices on the ground were very much shaped by the forms and functions of actual ship spaces. Given the deeply-rooted leader-centric views, these instances are not considered as leadership in the first place.

However, conceptualizing space through human experience the way Lefebvre does gives us a reason to view leadership as a sociomaterial phenomenon. What Lefebvre also brings to understanding leadership and space is the accounting of time. While noting that ‘with the advent of modernity, time has vanished from social space’, Lefebvre (1991, p. 95) observes that the social fabric in rural societies was greatly influenced by the rhythms of nature. Whereas spatiality can be accounted for visually, time needs to be grasped in terms of its historicity. It includes something that is not right now present but observable as an experience of the past. Time is accounted for through the horizon that connects the present with the past and the future. To borrow Shotter’s (2006) distinction, this is no longer space in terms of ‘aboutness thinking’ but space approached from within and in

terms of ‘witness thinking’. A human experience from within, being a participant within the space, means to live in the space at the moment of its unfolding; it literally is a lived space. This take on space emphasizes its emergent, processual nature. Even the physical character of the space can change in a matter of minutes by adjusting existing furniture (as our illustration below will show). This dynamic nature of space we associate with the quality of space as ‘performing’ (Beyes & Steyaert, 2012); space is a carrier and enabler of various incidents and moments.

Conceptualizing space this way has prompted us to use the term ‘spacing leadership’: the experience of materiality at the moment of its unfolding makes space an active but not independent partner in that interaction. The material and processual nature of space are here linked with the ‘new school’ of thinking of plural leadership; human–material relations contribute to leadership in a complex network of interactions where events are emerging and constantly becoming (Crevani et al., 2010; Denis et al., 2012; Simpson, 2015; Wood, 2005).

When arguing for ‘leadership in spaces and places’ (Ropo et al., 2015; Salovaara, 2014), most people take this to mean that spaces can be designed to guide human action in an objective, mechanistic fashion, as if certain spatial configurations would lead to particular predictable social behaviours and organizational outcomes. However, according to Lefebvre, ‘understanding of space ... must begin with the lived and the body, that is, from a space occupied by an organic, living, and thinking being’ (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 229; Simonsen, 2005). According to embodied and aesthetic notions, space is not an abstract, dead container, because the lived space is experienced through emotions, imagination and embodied sensations. As these experiences are personal, whatever the



leadership influence of space as materiality is, it is an indirect one. Therefore, the same space can produce different and unintended consequences (Balogun & Johnson, 2005; Elsbach & Pratt, 2007). In leadership studies, the body was earlier considered an ‘unwanted and unwelcome guest’ (Ropo, Parviainen, & Koivunen, 2002, p. 22), and Lefebvre identifies a similar rejection of the body throughout the history of space, the ‘decorporealization of space’. He describes this lack as a shift from ‘the space of the body to body-in-space, from opacity (warm) to translucency (cold)’ (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 201).

Lefebvre’s lived space as an embodied experience resembles what recent leadership literature has called ‘aesthetic’ or ‘felt sense’ (Ladkin, 2008; Hansen, Ropo, & Sauer, 2007; Ropo et al., 2002) parallel to the development of the literature on the aesthetics of organizations (Strati, 1999; Linstead & Höpfl, 2000 Wasserman & Frenkel, 2011, 2015). This resemblance is epistemological, as both Lefebvre and aesthetic epistemology define knowledge not only as something perceived ‘out there’ but as something understood primarily from within, as everyday experience. The relation between space and leadership is based on personal embodied, lived experience.

Lefebvre’s triadic concept of social space and the material and spatial turns in organization studies provide an ample basis for developing a novel sociomaterial conception of leadership—spacing leadership. Spacing leadership is a material and embodied conception of leadership that connects the past with the present and even with the future. For example, in the office renovation process that we will illustrate next, one contemplates the past while engaging in packing things and tossing things away and at the same time anticipating what it might be like in the new office setting. Thus, spacing emphasizes the processual nature of lived space.

In summary, work life in Lefebvre's and Follett's time was characterized by the great shift from agriculture to industrial work followed by various dualisms that reflect hierarchical asymmetries—worker/manager, blue collar/white collar, shop floor/top floor, low level supervisor/middle management/top management, among others. Here, we have introduced a sociomaterial notion of leadership that Lefebvre's triadic conceptualization of space greatly contributes to. The current work life and corporate situation have fundamentally changed since the industrial age and even from Lefebvre's time. Forms of work and forms of organizing are interdependent, and the changes in one impact the other (Barley & Kunda, 2001). Follett described plural leadership as 'collective creativeness' based on a 'circular theory of power' where employees, employers and other stakeholders collaborate and influence each other (Follett, 1918). Collective ways, also through material space, of leading and organizing have been increasingly developed and adopted both in theory and practice. Next, we will turn to an illustration of how this collaborative, human–material and emerging 'spacing leadership' might take place in today's modern office renovation.

### **Illustration: Spacing leadership in action**

While it may seem farfetched to link Lefebvre's rural communities to today's academic knowledge workers in their offices, we argue that the need to create more (knowledge) collectives and enhance cooperation in previously siloed university office spaces has made Lefebvre's thinking relevant in the current context. We wish to exemplify this by an illustration of a spatial renovation in a university building in Finland.

The materials were collected during a 12-month period in 2016–2017 from an actual renovation project, where the co-authors functioned as facilitators of the project workshops and aided architectural planning by including end users' lived experience on the agenda. Two other researchers were involved in the material collection. The materials comprise interviews of all the space users (27 altogether), mapping of their spatial practices, videotapes of four workshops, a survey at the end of the project and other official documents. As one of the authors worked in the space during the project and therefore interacted with the end users, the construction company and the administration, participant and auto-ethnographic observations were also collected during the 12-month period. The objective of the following illustration is to 'explain our arguments rather than offer evidence for them' (Puranam, Alexy, & Reitzig, 2014, p. 163). Instead of an empirical validation, the illustration primarily helps to create conceptual clarity.

Today, university buildings are increasingly redesigned to 'better meet the needs of academic work, such as teaching, research and community building' (a common discourse among the building owners and university administration). Fostering collaboration, creativity and a better sense of community and allowing chance encounters were often mentioned in the interviews when discussing why the renovation was needed. As one of the interviewees said: "*These spaces support quite well the traditional view of doing research alone in social science. Doing things together they do not support.*" And another continued: "*It would be a start to get to know people better.*" At the same time, more efficient use of the space was sought after by the university administration. It is no coincidence that universities provide ample instances for applying the above Lefebvrian terminology; the buildings are typically based on atomization and industrialization of

work experience, and within this architectural design natural forms are replaced by rational reasoning that takes less account of the embodied experience aspects. These aspects became something the end users wanted to be changed. An often-heard characterization of the space was that “*it looked like a hospital, clinical, sterile, bureaucratic.*”

Architect Antti Katajamäki, who has an established reputation in public building architecture in Finland, planned the School of Management building at the University of Tampere in Finland in the early 1990s. Novel at the time, the construction is of steel and concrete, and following the trend, the building has shiny metal surfaces and plenty of glass to give an airy atmosphere. The building is white outside and has a curvy shape (Picture 1).

*Picture 1 about here*

The inside architecture includes nature-like elements resembling trees (green pillars), curvy paths in the forest (corridors that are not straight) and cloud formations on the ceiling, over the windows and by the office doors, all made of concrete or painted metal. The building reflects the views of the time (late 1980s, early 1990s) of a university as a bureaucratic public organization, where the researchers work in individual offices.

*Picture 2 about here*

Despite the strong architectural symbolism, the interpretations of which were not shared or even recognized among most of the users, the layout follows a traditional cubicle structure and long corridors where people sit in their private offices with glass doors half dimmed (Picture 3).

*Pictures 3 and 4 about here*

There are hardly any common spaces for spontaneous encounters. The coffee room is located in the middle of the office corridors, separated with a curvy glass wall (Picture 4, often covered with heavy curtains), and the toilets, separate for men and women (although majority of the people working there were women), are ‘for staff only’. The spaces are made to last and offer hardly any flexibility. The building and the office spaces were not found to support communication, collaboration, knowledge sharing or community building, but for conducting independent work (alone) and seemingly to foster academic hierarchies as vividly described by an informant (Salovaara, 2014, 12:03). In addition, different sized offices were experienced to promote inequality and hierarchies among colleagues (professors and some lecturers having the biggest offices); walls and doors discourage socializing and corridors direct one to walk quickly past the offices, without stopping by to talk (Ropo & Höykinpuro, 2017). The offices are actively used for approximately 30% of the work time, while the administration struggles to assign workspaces to new recruits at the same time.

The DEMO project initiated by the project management team (including the authors) and the owner of the building (University Properties Finland UPF) had three

objectives: 1) to make the space more transparent and democratic, and to provide spaces for collaboration, informal socializing, and private work; 2) to improve collaboration, communication and community building and 3) to involve the users of the space, faculty and students in the planning process. This user-centric approach and engaging the end users to co-design the spaces throughout the process is quite unusual in projects (Stingl & Geraldi, 2017), although participation is a key issue in terms of employee satisfaction and achieving higher efficiency in organizations (Liverpool, 1990). However, he summarizes that even in organizational initiatives where participation is expected to take place, it does not necessarily happen due to the lack of integration of participatory practices in other organizational processes. As Pallasmaa (2014) observes, recognizing lived experience is not part of architectural processes. Therefore, it is highly likely that even in cases where participatory practices are used, the input these provides is not necessarily substantial, which leads to an ‘illusion of participation’. Based on Lefebvre’s distinction (and interrelation) between the three spaces, we distinguish the ‘illusion of participation’ and ‘engagement’. Engagement, as defined here, is based on embodied lived experience. Here, we join Shotter (2006), who draws a line between ‘aboutness thinking’ and ‘witness thinking’, the former representing a distanced, purely intellectual relation to the observed phenomenon and the latter describing ‘our relations with living forms when we enter into dialogically structured relations with them’ (Shotter, 2006, p. 585).

The renovation project was built on the Lefebvrian idea that space is a dynamic and evolving process that keeps changing as it is practiced and experienced over time. This, we think, is close to Shotter’s description of dialogical relations in ‘witness thinking’. In practice, the end users of the space had a key role in planning and designing

the spaces in workshops, theme groups and feed-back sessions (Table 1). They adjusted their activities and interactions to the physical (changing) office design as the process unfolded over time.

*Table 1 about here*

This dialogical unfolding we term ‘spacing leadership’; it does not describe the human relation to a momentary form of built environment but a process during which both parties change and evolve. This is how the process evolved:

- The process started in January 2016 with preliminary interviews of the faculty and the first workshops. As an inspiration, examples of office re-design projects from around the globe were presented and discussed, followed by the participants crafting their own models of office layout using materials such as clay, small wooden bricks, paper, cardboard and Legos. The architect was present at the workshops, but his role was to carefully listen and observe rather than participate in the discussion.
- After the first workshops, there was an interim task in which the end users formed theme groups that concentrated on selected aspects of the design. In the theme groups, the participants reflected on their professional needs and then imagined future spaces based on these needs.
- In May 2016, a second set of workshops was organized to further discuss the ideas. Here, through their design suggestions, the end users functioned as ‘lay-architects’ when they adopted the conceived space perspective and also imagined the future uses (First workshop: “Crafting models” in Table 1).

- Only after these workshops and the theme groups' outcomes was the architect asked to draft his first sketches. This was the project's first deviation to adopting the abstract and geometrical thinking of space as conceived/planned (Lefebvre, 1991; Taylor & Spicer, 2007). The architect's drafts were then discussed, after which he created the next versions.
- The actual construction work took place during the summer, and in August 2016 the end users returned to the newly designed space. Table 1 describes the activities during the first phase of the project in relation to Lefebvre's triadic concept of space.

The next phase started in August 2016 when people tried to get settled in the new spaces, especially in the two open office spaces (where 13 out of 27 faculty members volunteered to move) and the new large communal space that was opened between the corridors by tearing down the walls of some offices. The following architectural sketches illustrate the situation before and after the renovation.

*Figure 1 about here (old layout)*

*Figure 2 about here (new layout)*

During this phase, the furniture was moved back and forth several times within a few intensive weeks, and the spaces were shaped and reshaped constantly. As in Dale & Burrell (2015), the occupants of the open spaces took the initiative to physically reorganize the furniture by experimenting with different ideas, living with the arrangements for a few days or a week and then reorganizing things anew. This phase highlights Lefebvre's triadic and processual understanding of space. Conceived/planned,



perceived/practiced and lived /experienced spaces (Taylor & Spicer, 2007) were in a very practical sense intermingled and simultaneously present. Following is an example of how it happened.

Old furniture (from university storage and leftovers from other renovations) was used in the newly built spaces. Based on the architect's understanding of the users' needs, the furniture was carried to the space after the construction phase, but people felt it was too cramped and congested, which nobody felt comfortable with. As a result, on the first day back in the office most of the tall closets were carried away. Desks were changed for smaller ones and moved to different locations. Instead of closets dividing the space, partitions of different types and heights were tried out. This first contact with the new spaces was intense and literally embodied. It describes how people's everyday lives and work were keenly entangled with the spatial arrangements, how their (un)usability was perceived and how the new spaces made people feel (Hansen et al., 2007; Yanow, 2010). On the day of commissioning the open space areas, the administration insisted on receiving exact information on the location of individual desks, even though people were still negotiating and playing with ideas of how to locate themselves. This was seen as trying to exert power over (as was the case earlier when the administration assigned the workspaces). A clear uneasiness and frustration was sensed in the administration. "*We need to know where everyone sits. It cannot be that people move around between spaces*", one administrator lamented. Obviously, this process orientation was (and still is) at odds with the administration's purposes, thus being an example of the clash between the conceived space of the administration (they would like to see it as a planned entity, captured by numbers and measures) and the perceived, practiced, and experienced space.

A week passed, and sofas found new places and drawers and closets were moved back and forth after experiencing what felt good and visually attractive. A former office newly designed as a living room style for smaller meetings and the communal space were decorated with pillows, throws, playful soft balls, plants (not officially approved) and candles (knowing that they could not be lit for safety reasons) after a spontaneous shopping spree at IKEA. This is how the workspaces were domesticated (Dale & Burrell, 2015; Wasserman & Frenkel, 2015, p. 1496, 1500). The occupants of the open spaces did all this by themselves, occasionally with the help of the university facility management if hammering was needed or heavy objects moved. The architect was not involved in this phase at all.

*Picture 5 about here*

Picture 5 depicts how the new areas looked after the renovation; the area for communal space was increased but is now suitable for breaks, meetings and working. After the renovated space was handed over to the users in August 2016, a three-month period of observation, evaluation and experimentation followed to see how this and other areas would work. During this phase, the space was in a state of constant becoming as an open-ended, emerging outcome (Beyes & Steyart, 2012). People engaged in working in the new spaces tried out different spaces for different activities and realized how important and enjoyable it was to actually see and meet people in the common areas, even if only walking through. This sentiment was shared by many in the feed-back after the first round of renovation: *“I really like the setup and light. Every time I come to have lunch, there is someone to talk to or share lunch break with.”* Or: *“I often work by the*

*stand-up table there since I like to see other people coming and going.*” Colleagues from the other floors started to find their way to the new spaces (*“We have moved our research group meetings to this space. It feels good to work here.”*). Also students had found the new spaces to do their teamwork or quiet reading. After the first few months in the renovated spaces, workshops were organized where the project’s outcomes were evaluated and new ideas gathered. Based on user experiences, the floor carpet area was broadened, the copy machine was relocated to a specially designed noise-absorbing booth, separate phone booths were ordered and better lightning was installed.

*Picture 6 about here*

After a new ‘conversational furniture unit’ was delivered, some tables and chairs were carried away and old sofas found new spaces, all in the spirit of experimentation: *“Let’s try this out for now and we’ll see how this works”*. People started to spend more time with each other, have coffee and lunch together, and even work around the communal table or on the cosy sofas and the ‘Fatboy’ beanbag seats (see Picture 7). Whereas the previous space prevented seeing anybody work, now people are more visible: *“I like to see people working here. It makes the whole floor feel more dynamic and alive.”*

*Picture 7 about here*

## **DISCUSSION**

->Lived experience of the spaces make the difference between the pictures (before/after)

An interesting feature of the project was that, as the reader can see in the pictures, the end result itself is not that different from any modern office design. Part of the office space now has an open space design, updated furniture and contemporary functionalities such as phone booths and small meeting spaces. Looking on the surface, one might ask ‘So what? Why is it relevant?’ That is the key give-away of the paper: the point is not the physical space, but the process of co-creation where humans and materiality influence each other. In Lefebvre’s terms, the difference between the abstract plans (conceived space) does not explain the changes in the work environment and atmosphere. The pictures –as sort of ‘still life’ – need to be appreciated in their broader context in order to depict the feel and the atmosphere in the space. The space was developed in relation to history and the earlier experiences in the old space, and it was just as much the human community that changed as the physical space. The space changed also for those who remained in private offices: they were not anymore part of the earlier context of corridors, but anytime they open the door or pass the ‘coffice’, the relations between people are changed as all are now more visible.

Therefore, to refer to space as pure materiality is to misunderstand the concept of ‘spacing’ in the first place. To highlight how physical space can be considered as dynamic and active *spacing*, we will now discuss three key features of the process—the power with approach, collective leadership and the role of embodied knowledge.

*Power with approach.* The power with approach in this project meant that the hierarchical power structures (university administration, space owner, architect, construction company) were balanced by introducing a new perspective to the space

design—the rhythm of life of the end users. This aspect is akin to Lefebvre’s (2004) rhythmanalysis and draws attention to the geographical and historical limits of space (1964, 2000); the users interacted with each other and the space, and the new design was based on this lived experience. The main purpose of the participative, engaging design was to enable the renovated space to function more as a ‘generative building’ that, ‘instead of being a merely passive container for actions happening in it contributes positively towards an organization’s capacities’ (Kornberger & Clegg, 2004, p. 1095). An office design that supports an organization’s capacities would greatly benefit from engagement and witness thinking by those who act out the capacities, that is, the end users of the space.

Figure 2 depicts the difference between being informed, participating in the process and being bodily engaged in the co-design. We argue that the more fully the end users are engaged in the project as co-designers, the better they understand and accept the project and the more it becomes their own. Being able to do so, their relationship with the space becomes an activity and process, and not a passive reception of something given from outside (cf. Shotter’s (2016) witness thinking vs. aboutness thinking).

*Figure 2 about here*

*Knowledge* that architects, designers or consultants, for example, possess and share can provide the end users with some understanding and acceptance of the new space design (aboutness thinking, conceived space). Based on our materials and observations of the university illustration, we conceptualize in Figure 2 that being able to *participate* more

concretely and develop ideas produces more understanding, acceptance and commitment. We conclude that if participants can become *engaged* in the project as co-designers, they will voice their issues, problems and solutions in a more practical fashion than when reacting to ready-made solutions by professionals. Having co-created the new design, they accept it, and there is much less ‘change resistance’, which can be attributed to the fact that they were change agents themselves (Ford, Ford & D’Amelio, 2008). In Ryle’s (1946) terms, there is a big difference between ‘knowing that’ and being able to implement one’s know-how into the process (cf. Ropo et al., 2013). In summary, not only the space in itself but also the way the whole process was designed suggests a shift in the practice of power from power over relations towards power with relations.

*Collective leadership.* There was an ideological undercurrent in this project; the original physical layout of the spaces was experienced as hierarchical among the users, and the new spatial design implies a change towards more collective ways of cooperation. However, it would be a mistake to consider space—whether divided into closed offices or open—doing anything by itself. Spacing, as pointed out earlier, is not a deterministic procedure but takes place through minor impacts, affects and mutual constitution (Beyes & Steyaert, 2012) and is fuelled by personal embodied experiences. A space cannot be designed to assert an ideology—hierarchical, collective or other—, because it does not do anything by itself. Yet one should be reminded of the mutual constitution of space and people; neither takes over the agency on its own. At the core of the project is the process through which the space is moulded. The lived experience needed to be taken into account. Therefore, the process is more important than the outcome, as the process itself

also changed people's interactions and activities. The material space is still 'just' a workplace, but the shared process and new ways of working changed the culture (*"I like the atmosphere in the open office. I can see the others when turning my head and hear them working. People maintain a quiet, respectful conduct in the shared office"*). The end users seem to show more ownership of the space now. Although the space is still formally owned by the UPF and managed by the university administration, the users experienced an empowering process where the space became what they wanted; it became 'their own'. For example, they take more responsibility for keeping the kitchen and table surfaces clean and organized. Furthermore, people who participated in the process are now used to adjusting the space, for example, by moving the furniture.<sup>3</sup> The process of re-design and its impact on attitudes and new ways of being in the space we associated with spacing leadership. We argued that spacing is fundamentally an embodied relation, and to conceptualize it thus requires the Lefebvrian concept of lived space that includes emotions, experiences and embodied relations to space.

In networks and leaderless organizations leadership is not based on formal hierarchies or centralized command, but on collaboration that can emerge in an organic, improvised, needs-based fashion, as examples from informal organizing in social movements illustrate (Eslen-Ziya and Erhart, 2015; Sutherland, 2015) The same applies in our case; the spatial redesign was an outcome of constant reconfiguration and acting with the space. We suggest calling this form of plural power with organizing 'mass-driven', which indicates a collective of people formulating and following shared ideals.

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<sup>3</sup> However, as the space has started to be used by other than the occupants of the floor, these people do not know about this possibility.

This does not necessarily happen in a traditionally organized, controlled fashion but when undefined and unpredicted impulses porously enter the leadership process.

*Embodied knowledge.* Once the physical construction work was finished, the embodied experiences, felt sense of the end users were at the core of the process. When they entered the space, there were piles of boxes around the place and the furniture needed to be removed. To make sense of the totally changed space and the misplaced furniture, people relied on their aesthetic sensitivities, that is, their senses and feelings (Hansen et al., 2007; Ropo & Parviainen, 2001): What kind of emotions, feelings and atmosphere does this space convey? Where do I want to sit and why? How should the furniture in the common space be arranged? How do we make the place look more attractive and feel good? Moving obstacles created a concrete physical–material touch to objects and furniture. This enhanced sensitivity towards the material objects, which had a direct impact on how the space ‘became’. This was literally a first-hand experience, an experience from within the process in contrast to thinking about the space through architectural plans and miniature models (conceived space). The way perceptions through various senses advanced the project meant that spacing was based on sensible knowledge (Strati, 2007). The embodied experiences played a key role in defining how the space became designed and in the change process in general.

End user engagement here implies that their perceptions of space and lived experience provided the primary guidelines for the re-design. They knew what works and what does not, which emphasizes a practice perspective on leadership (Sergi, 2016). This co-design allowed spatiality and human experience to influence each other in a more



organic fashion. An organic relation to environment does not create a dualism between the human and material, but it reflects the same phenomenon Lefebvre's observed: how rural peasantry followed and was guided, even physically driven by the flows, rhythms and limits of their environment. They do not function in an architecturally designed space, but relate to the process in nature. Spacing leadership is meant as a reminder of this constant fluidity that in Beyes & Steyaert's (2012) terms can be defined as performative action. A similar approach was introduced in the renovation project: the end users were encouraged to explore and investigate how they move around in the space, use it and relate to space and each other. As the illustration shows, this 'natural' fluidity was infiltrated into the spatial design.

In this respect, the project discussed was an exercise in relating to the work environment and developing new practices. Increased openness and visibility prompted socializing and led people to do things together and pay more attention to the overall atmosphere of the workplace. They learned to use the new communal space and new meeting rooms (*"The renovation of the seminar room, 'the terrible one', had unexpected outcomes: Now it is in high demand. I did not think it would be possible."*) The process of trying out the new spaces and coming up with new ideas and implementing them continued; spaces construct leadership (give direction, guidance and support) not as dead materiality but through peoples' practices and experiences.

As noted above, prioritizing end user experience is rather untypical in the mainstream project management world, and this is also seen in the Project Management Book of Knowledge (PMBOK, 2013) according to which the norm is that the architect plans, the constructor makes the physical changes and the end users are given a ready-

made space. In that pattern, the end users of the space are clearly dominated by the power of other actors over them and the space. In contrast to this, our illustration shows that a space renovation process can be empowering to the end-users. We suggest that this is particularly the case if “the complexity and mutual dependencies of situated work activities” (Boell et al., 2016: 128) is integrated into the planning process. When this happens, the end-users and their relations with the space construct new work patterns and lead to new configurations and assemblages. This we consider as spacing leadership.

But just like getting to know a person takes time, so does getting to know a space. The space becomes known during a span of time, which means that the end users began to get accustomed to it, while they also introduced further changes to it. The relation to space becomes dynamic and active, and from a theoretical perspective the relation to space turns into spacing. This shows in many ways. The new space brought a new meeting and discussion culture and even affected who one meets. For example, the big communal table turned into a meeting place for people from other floors and even for students. The interview quotes above indicate that the sense of community and togetherness has changed. The former stable, walled and siloed space is reformed into a more open and multiple purpose space that allows more connections to various directions and activities than before. Because of this multiplicity Beyes & Steyaert (2012, p. 48) call it ‘and’ space.

### **Concluding remarks**

In this chapter, we have exercised a rather unorthodox reading of reading Lefebvre through the leadership lens. Leadership research has advanced from Taylorist

managerialism and leader-centric approaches toward today's plural and sociomaterial theories. (Grint, 2011; Sergi, 2016) Confirming that, there is a trend in today's society and work life that organizing for a common goal can occur through collectives and mass movements that have no dedicated leaders. (Aaltonen & Lanzara, 2015; Denis et al., 2012; Eslan-Ziya & Erhart, 2015; Margetts et al., 2013). Also large-scale organizations have been shown to function successfully through flat hierarchies, and by relying on self-management and informal organizing. (Getz, 2009; Hamel, 2007; Laloux, 2014; Salovaara & Bathurst, 2016) To conceptualize leadership in the current contexts calls for the inclusion of human-material relations, as well. Materiality is permeable in society in its various forms of technology, material artefacts, and physical spaces.

These new forms of organizing call for conceptualizing leadership in new ways, and it is in this context that Lefebvre's work on rural communities and space becomes relevant again. As he described it, during the process of industrialization also reification of nature took place. Reasoning that used to be based on communal history, culture, and nature and its rhythms became replaced by rationalism and capitalist market logics.

At universities, the researchers' autonomy was in the 20<sup>th</sup> century preserved centrally by providing the same standard for all: individual offices. But according to Scotto (2014) the original intent of university campus was the construction of collective life. In our case illustration, the researchers began to doubt the usefulness of the conceptual planning that increases separation. At the same time, with the advent of knowledge work and new ways of working, alternative office designs that emphasize lived experience have emerged. Compared to individual offices the advantage of these alternative spaces is that they provide more room for interaction with others, and more

chances for open communication and information sharing. The re-designed space of the management faculty now offers more common space that can be used for formal and informal meetings. As the space provides the chance for the construction of collective life, the whole lived experience of the space has changed.

Furthermore, there is an increasing awareness in the Western societies of the ethical responsibility to conserve and preserve the environment (material surroundings) for the future, as was the case in Lefebvre's rural examples. Being in touch and in sync with one's physical environment and co-workers is what Lefebvre observed in the rural Pyrenees. Taking care of work environment and the spaces we live in is a central feature of spacing leadership, and in the university case, this relation was created by the communal planning process. This long-term relation of mutual influence, constitution and respect between human and material surroundings we call spacing leadership.

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