

Buildings and Institutional Change: Stepping Stones or Stumbling Blocks?

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This study aims to throw some theoretical light on the relationship between institutions and the buildings housing them, particularly in the context of institutional change. Drawing on my ethnographic study of the UK Parliament buildings in London, I put forward a framework for analysing the effects that buildings and the artifacts within them may have on institutional change. This framework consists of three elements: (1) buildings enabling or constraining the activities performed inside; (2) spatial hierarchy; and (3) buildings as a resource. My intention is to draw scholars' attention to the notion of buildings as sites of contestation – places where conflicts over nature and the extent of institutional change are played out. I conclude that redesigning buildings might be seen as a stepping stone to change, but also that buildings can be used to resist change and maintain the status quo. Although buildings 'inhabited' by institutions may appear to stand still, they never do; they change in time, both enabling and constraining those who use them and they have an ability to 'act back'.

Introduction

Buildings are more than a backdrop to events; they also shape organizational practices and, arguably, they are carriers of institutions (Scott, 2008). Management literature has many examples of processes in which settling into a permanent venue helped to establish an institution (Czarniawska, 2009), and where failure to establish a link between an institution and the building that was to represent it caused the demise of the institution (Delacour and Leca, 2011). Architects, cultural geographers and sociologists have adopted many different perspectives on how spaces affect people and organizations (Dovey, 1999; Gieryn, 2000; Lefebvre, 1974; Massey, 2005; Soja, 1989). In recent years, management scholars have also joined these efforts, mainly focusing on the link between the physical form and the stability of institutions and institutional maintenance (Lawrence and Dover, 2015; Rodner *et al.*, 2019; Siebert, Wilson and Hamilton, 2017; Siebert *et al.*, 2018; Wright *et al.*, 2021, 2022).

A building usually symbolizes stability and is seen by some authors as 'a strong material anchor' for institutions (Monteiro and Nicolini, 2015: 4). The traditional approach is that people move, whereas architecture stays put. People inhabiting institutions move on or die, but buildings have a permanence that outlives generations of institutional actors (Doucet and Cupers, 2009). Yet although buildings 'inhabited' by institutions

may appear to stand still, they never do, they change in time, both enabling and constraining those who use them; although physical structures cannot speak or act by themselves, they have an ability to 'act back' (Krishnan, 2011).

Within the theoretical context of institutional change, I consider a building a potential site of contestation – a place where conflicts over the nature and extent of institutional change are played out. I argue that a building can be considered both as a stepping stone to change and as a barrier to change. So, although the role of the building in the creation and maintenance of institutions has been recognized in the literature (Blanc and Huault, 2014; Gawer and Phillips, 2013; Lawrence and Dover, 2015; Lawrence, Leca and Zilber, 2013; Patriotta, Gond and Schultz, 2011; Siebert, Wilson and Hamilton, 2017), institutionalists have recently called for more research into the role of the building in institutional change. Both Stephenson *et al.* (2020) and Wright *et al.* (2022) noted that more theoretical light needs to be cast on *where* change happens and how places and spaces play a role in the ways organizations and institutions are created, disrupted and adapted. My research question is: How do institutional actors use the redesign of buildings to drive or resist institutional change?

In my attempt to answer this research question, I focused on the institution of parliament. It offers an intriguing case, as it is usually housed in a prominent building. Over the past 30 years, a number of parliaments

have had to move location or had their operations disrupted by the restoration of their building.¹ What is more, buildings shape not only parliaments, but also other institutions: churches, universities, professional associations, accounting firms or banks. Because buildings housing institutions are assumed to display status by their size, age and grandeur, they assure society of the financial soundness of their institutions (Jones and Massa, 2013; Kerr and Robinson, 2016; MacDonald, 1989). Buildings also symbolize power, as spaces within them produce social relationships, directly influencing power relations (Lefebvre, 1974). I hope, therefore, that my study will contribute to a widening of the discussions about buildings and institutional change.

I have chosen the case study of restoration of the UK Parliament in London. The Houses of Parliament are the site of the UK Parliament, which includes the House of Commons and the House of Lords. Although the Parliamentary offices occupy 11 buildings, the most iconic is Westminster Palace, which has not undergone major renovation for over 150 years and is in urgent need of restoration. Numerous problems have been evident: old unreliable wiring, asbestos insulation, leaky roofs, leaky pipes, crumbling stonework and rodent infestation. As these systems are no longer fit for purpose, the building is said to be on the brink of catastrophe. Despite the impending crisis and the urgent need to move out, many powerful stakeholders are apprehensive and block the move. While proponents of the move see it as an opportunity to improve the workings of Parliament, the opponents see it as a threat to the traditional institutional order, possibly brought about by the ‘decant’ – the rehousing during renovations. This case study of the impending restoration offers valuable insights into the nature of institutional change.

Scott (2008: 48) defined institutions as social structures that have attained a high degree of resilience and are composed of cultural-cognitive, normative and regulative elements that, together with associated activities and resources, provide stability and meaning to social life. Analytically, I approach Parliament as an institution, but I acknowledge that it is also an organization. Institution as a term has multiple meanings (Alvesson and Blom, 2022; Czarniawska, 2009), and they interact with each other. Parliament is an institution (the United Kingdom’s highest legislative body), an organization (a group of people who work together), but also a building (Westminster Palace and the adjacent buildings). Similarly, ‘Church’ is an institution (Catholic church vs. Protestant church), an organization (‘Vatican is the headquarters of the Catholic church’), but also a building (e.g. the Church of St. Mary in Whitby). Per-

haps it is not strange, then, that when entering a Parliamentary building or a church building one feels the impact of all three.

Based on my analysis, I make two contributions to the management literature. Firstly, I put forward a framework for analysing the effects that buildings and the artifacts within them have on institutional actors: (1) buildings enabling or constraining activities performed inside (thus enhancing or hindering functionality); (2) spatial hierarchy (where the rules of access separate an insider from an outsider and create boundaries and maintain the status order); and (3) buildings as a resource (where materiality is used as a status symbol; it provides the backdrop to traditions, maintains ‘the anchoring effect’ and grants institutional actors a sense of elevated status). Each of these effects may play a role in institutional change – either by supporting change or by constraining it. Hence, secondly, I argue that restoration of a building might be seen as a stepping stone to change; but it can also become a stumbling block to change and can be used to maintain the status quo.

Theoretical context

In the management literature, ‘material turn’ manifests itself in a growth of studies into the unique roles of artifacts, objects, buildings, bodies and technologies in institutions (De Vaujany *et al.*, 2019; Weinfurter and Seidl, 2019), showing how they enable or constrain organizational phenomena. Drawing on such key contributors to cultural geography as Lefebvre (1974), Soja (1989) and Massey (2005), several management scholars have recognized the role of spaces and places in the maintenance of institutions and have acknowledged that organizational spaces have social and symbolic consequences. They affect people, for example, through enchantment, emplacement, enclosure, maintenance of status order or elevating people’s status (Jones and Massa, 2013; Lawrence and Dover, 2015; Rodner *et al.*, 2019; Siebert, Wilson and Hamilton, 2017; Wright *et al.*, 2021). Institutionalists have approached materiality from various theoretical perspectives: institutional work (Blanc and Huault, 2014; Gawer and Phillips, 2013; Jones and Massa, 2013; Lawrence, Leca and Zilber, 2013; Patriotta, Gond and Schultz, 2011), legitimacy (Puyou and Quattrone, 2018) and sensemaking (Stigliani and Ravasi, 2012).

Different intellectual traditions have different ways of explaining the effects that buildings and objects have on people. Institutionalists have primarily focused on the role of spaces in institutional maintenance. Lawrence and Dover looked beyond the work done by people, and acknowledge the role of spaces in institutions, arguing that places with their material and symbolic resources contained, mediated and complicated

¹For example, the Australian Parliament in Canberra, the Canadian Parliament in Ottawa, the Austrian Parliament in Vienna and the German *Bundestag* in Berlin.

institutional work. Siebert, Wilson and Hamilton (2017) investigated how institutionalized practices at the micro-level maintained a profession of advocates by foregrounding the role of enchantment related to organizational spaces and highlighted the importance of the emotional and aesthetic aspects of institutional maintenance. Rodner *et al.* (2019) studied Venezuela's art world following the Bolivarian Revolution in the late 1990s, focusing on the disruption and defence of institutions through spaces. In their investigation into the social and symbolic consequences of organizational spaces – how spaces are conceived, perceived and lived – they foregrounded the socio-political nature of space.

Science and technology studies (STS) – the work of Latour (1992), for example – provide a significant source of theorizing in the role that buildings play in shaping agency and institutional change. This tradition focuses on the interactions among scientific knowledge, technology and society, and offers creative ways of looking at agency and how it is creatively reconstructed around material objects and technologies (Leonardi and Barley, 2018; Orlikowski, 2007, 2010; Pinch, 2010). STS scholars have also reminded organization scholars of the importance of objects and quasi-objects (non-human elements in a network such as technology) in the production and maintenance of social connections and have developed actor–network theory (ANT) (Latour, 2012). ANT suggests that humans and non-humans, words and things must be studied together, and that equal attention should be paid to both. Objects and quasi-objects have an impact on people, which is sometimes stronger and lasts much longer than the impact of words (Ricoeur, 1981). So, for example, a cheque in the hand is worth more than a promise of payment, while being inside a famous building will have a stronger effect on us than reading a description of that building.

Strategy scholars have also drawn on the notion of materiality (Jarzabkowski *et al.*, 2013, 2015; Leonardi, 2015; Werle and Seidl, 2015; Whittington, 2015). They link strategy and materiality in their discussions of 'strategic spaces' (Jarzabkowski, Burke and Spee, 2015) such as offices, boardrooms, meeting rooms or hallways. These spaces have physical properties like décor, and they affect people in various ways – creating a sense of awe, elevating people's status or making them feel small (De Vaujany and Vaast, 2014). Because strategy work happens within the confines of a physical space, Dameron, Lê and LeBaron (2015) argue that it is important to understand the effects of the physical environment on how strategy is made, because these environments impact people's interpretation of what is happening and shape their subsequent response.

Some materiality scholars have invoked the notion of affordances (Gibson, 1977), that is, that 'the materiality of an object favours, shapes or invites and at the same time constrains, a set of specific uses' (Zammuto *et al.*,

2007: 752). These scholars tend to focus on the enabling and constraining influences of spaces on organizational phenomena. Affordance theory suggests that the world is perceived not only in terms of objects and shapes, but also in terms of the use that can be made of them and how the objects offer opportunities for action (Zammuto *et al.*, 2007).

Related to the topic of materiality and power is the notion of demarcation. Some researchers of the materiality of institutions have focused on the role of boundaries as a corollary to the detection of power (Elsbach and Pratt, 2007; Hatch, 1987; Keith and Pile, 1993). Soja has argued that 'drawing boundaries is a political act' (after Dale and Burrell, 2008: 171), as boundaries solidify power relations and status orders. Indeed, boundaries include some people and exclude others, shape people's identities and guide their actions (Dacin, Munir and Tracey, 2010; De Vaujany and Vaast, 2014; Siebert, Wilson and Hamilton, 2017). Searle (2005) talked persuasively of the status function of boundaries in institutions, illustrating his point with a parable about a tribe that builds a wall around its collection of huts. If a stone wall decays and there is nothing left of the line of stones, the boundary is still recognized and people know not to cross the line unless authorized to do so. The line on the ground continues 'to perform the same function that it did before, but this time not in virtue of its physical structure, but in virtue of the fact that the people involved continue to accept the line of stones as having a certain status' (Searle, 2005: 8). The status is assigned to the line on the ground and a function is performed in virtue of the collective acceptance of the object as having that status. Weinfurter and Seidl (2019) acknowledge the role of boundaries in their theoretical framework of materiality in organizations, and identified four general uses of spaces: the distribution of positions in space; the isolation of spaces; the differentiation of spaces; and the intersection of spaces. Buildings and demarcations within them carry symbolic value and play a key role in maintaining institutions (Giovannoni and Quattrone, 2018; Siebert, Wilson and Hamilton, 2017), and this is why groups in the process of forming a strong identity tend to construct visible spatial enclosures and barriers (Elsbach and Pratt, 2007; Hatch, 2013; Thrift, 2011). On the negative side, the identity-shaping elements of the physical environment, such as enclosures and barriers, lead to tensions in organizations (Elsbach and Pratt, 2007).

Methods

The crucial premise underpinning this project is that tensions over the shape of the institution's physical site are a fitting metaphor for the tensions arising from the shape of the actual institution. I chose an inductive,

single-case-study methodology to study the UK Parliament as an extreme case, but I believe it exemplifies some of the mechanisms evident in other institutions (Lawrence, Leca and Zilber, 2013; Lok and de Rond, 2013; Suddaby and Greenwood, 2005). To complete this study, I drew on four types of data: field observations, walking interviews, standard interviews and document analysis.

Field observations

During my 13-month study, I spent 31 days as a participant and non-participant observer in various buildings of the Parliamentary Estate in a variety of spaces. The intensive observation of participants and the practices they engaged in *in situ* was especially suitable for a study focused on organizational spaces. I developed an observation schedule, which included categories relating to the geographic/situated dimensions of practices within Parliament. I engaged in a wide range of activities, including sitting in social spaces (bars, cafés, canteens, tea rooms), helping in the organization of an event for external visitors, listening to debates in the public galleries of the House of Commons and the House of Lords, attending lectures for and by parliamentarians, sitting in the Central Lobby linking the Commons and the Lords, and observing the work of journalists interviewing politicians. I also observed spaces surrounding the Parliamentary Estate, including Parliament Green, which attracts public demonstrations. Whenever it was practical and in line with the code of conduct in Parliament, I engaged in informal conversations with the participants – either asking for additional explanations or eliciting their reflections. I made detailed written records of observations and casual conversations and generated over 150 extensive field notes.

Walking interviews

I conducted nine walking interviews, otherwise known as ‘go-along’ interviews (Carpiano, 2009) or commented walks (Raulet-Croset and Borzeix, 2014). In contrast to shadowing, which relies on observations of behaviour, sequences of activities and events, walking interviews are interactive and dynamic in nature, and it is the interviewee who directs the walk and the course of discussion. They are based on the premise that the act of walking and talking provides richer insight into embodied, sensory and affective experiences. In these nine interviews ‘on the move’, the interviewees were asked to take me to the places that mattered to them, places that were particularly interesting, embarrassing or highlighted problems in the functioning of Parliament. The route that each interviewee chose was valuable research material in itself. The spontaneous nature of the walk

took me to some unusual places off the beaten track, such as the roof above the House of Commons Chamber and an overflow staff office in the basement. Recording the route was a challenge as, for security concerns, no form of location monitoring was possible in Parliament. Also, Parliamentary security did not allow photography anywhere in the research field, so I had to rely on my descriptions.

Standard interviews

As well as collecting data through walking interviews, I conducted 22 standard interviews with various Parliamentary stakeholders. I asked the interviewees to describe their experiences of working in the Parliamentary buildings, and their hopes and fears related to the restoration of the Parliamentary Estate. The interviews (listed in Table 1) lasted from 30 to 120 minutes and were recorded and transcribed. The interviewees were given a choice of a walking or standard interview, and the majority opted for the latter. Unlike other research studies that focused primarily on the perspectives of Members of Parliament (MPs) and peers, this research also provided insights into the perceptions of Parliamentary staff and captured their concerns.

Document analysis

Documents were analysed with a view to identifying the ways in which the discourse around the restoration is formed and propagated. Examples include: the Pre-Feasibility Study (2012); the Independent Options Appraisal (2015); the Joint Committee (2016), containing evidence provided by various stakeholders (over 200 pages of text of written and oral statements); and a draft Restoration and Renewal Bill (2019). These documents captured the process and spirit of decision-making around restoration and renewal.

Data analysis

I worked within the tradition of interpretive ethnography (Denzin, 1997; Hammersley and Atkinson, 2004), and investigated the shared beliefs, customs and behaviours of people working in Parliament, while recognizing that institutional actors construct the ‘presentations of self’ (Goffman, 1959). As well as analysing the interview transcripts and documentary evidence, in line with the principles of ethnographic inquiry I also drew upon detailed descriptions of observations (Flick, 2018; Geertz, 1973). Following the recommendations of Miles and Huberman (1994), I engaged in the iterative process of reading and re-reading all the material – documents, observation notes and interview transcripts – travelling back and forth between the data and the literature,

Table 1. Interview types

Interview number	Job title/role	Interview type
1	Heritage professional	standard
2	Manager in the House of Commons	standard
3	Senior Clerk of the House of Commons	standard
4	Librarian in the House of Commons	walking
5	Manager in the House of Commons	standard
6	Manager in the House of Commons	standard
7	Doorkeeper	standard
8	Senior Clerk of the House of Commons	walking
9	House of Commons staff member	standard
10	Manager in the House of Commons	standard
11	Clerk of the House of Commons	standard
12	Manager in the House of Commons	standard
13	Manager in the House of Commons	walking
14	Doorkeeper	walking
15	Member of Parliament	standard
16	Clerk of the House of Commons	standard
17	Clerk of the House of Commons	walking and standard
18	Manager in the House of Commons	standard
19	Member of the House of Lords	walking and standard
20	Member of Parliament	walking and standard
21	Member of the House of Lords	standard
22	Member of the Visitor Services Team	walking
23	House of Commons staff member	walking
24	Clerk of the House of Commons	standard
25	Manager in the House of Commons	standard
26	Member of Parliament	standard
27	Member of Parliament	standard
28	House of Lords staff member	standard
29	Librarian in the House of Commons	standard
30	House of Commons staff member	standard
31	Houses of Parliament staff member	standard

linking the emerging theoretical arguments with more general constructs from the literature.

My focus on the way spaces affect institutions has led me to adopt an approach based on analytical induction (Suddaby, 2006). The data analysis comprised two stages. In the first stage I coded the data, searching for themes related to organizational spaces and practices shaped by these spaces. The examples of codes included references to the use of such social spaces as cafés and bars, mentions of how the design of spaces aids or hinders bullying and harassment, and how physical access affects people's perceptions of the workings of democracy. I was looking for evidence of the dynamics of social relations that were in some way intertwined with spaces. In the process of analysing the codes, I constantly compared coded data with a view to identifying emerging patterns (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Strauss and Corbin, 1998). My themes, informed by concepts drawn from the relevant literature, enabled me to separate analytically three functions of the buildings: the role of spaces in enabling and constraining func-

tionality, spatial hierarchy and buildings as a resource (Figure 1).

In the second stage I revisited the data, looking for information about the potential for change and the extent to which Parliamentary buildings are a site of contestation over the shape of the institution of Parliament. In other words, I identified a pattern whereby people's resistance to institutional change was in line with their attachment to the buildings 'as they are'. Conversely, people pursuing institutional change were more likely to lobby for redesign of the buildings, a decant or even a permanent move to a purpose-built building. Based on people's hopes and fears related to the impending change, I was able to build two composite narratives of the visions for the future of the UK Parliament: those by the traditionalists and those by the reformists. The process of collecting observational data was a fascinating experience, as it spanned the months of the most heated Brexit negotiations. Parliamentary buildings were not only the site of contestation about the shape of the institution, they also witnessed historic political change.

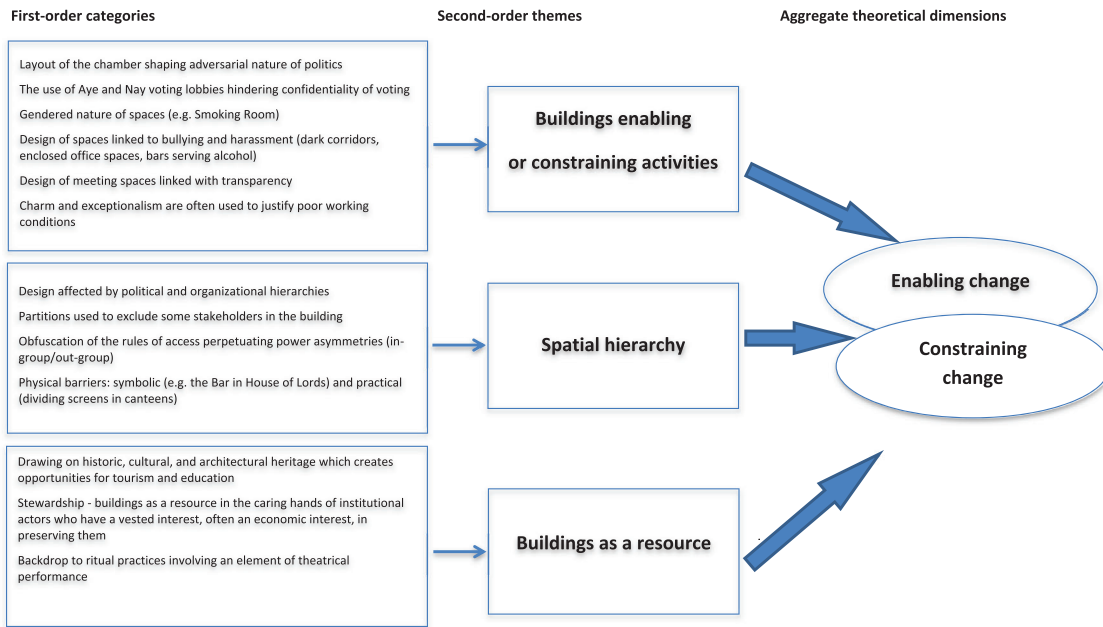


Figure 1. Overview of data structure [Colour figure can be viewed at [wileyonlinelibrary.com](https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/1467-8851.12711)]

Findings

Buildings enabling or constraining activities

In Westminster, the material structures are not merely symbolic of the institution; they also actively enable or constrain practices. The arrangement of seats in the debating chambers in various parliaments is one of the most noticeable examples frequently discussed by political scientists (Flinders *et al.*, 2017). The rectangular chamber with the governing party and the opposition directly against each other is said to create an adversarial culture of debate. Although a re-design of the chamber is architecturally possible, a semi-circular arrangement of the seats in the chambers is seen as ‘politically impossible’, as it would reduce the majoritarian nature of the British political tradition. The traditionalists see the current arrangement as necessary in preserving ‘the vitality and the closeness of the chamber’ and ensuring a passionate political debate, as one of them told me. They argue that the small intimate space is said to mask the fact that the chamber is sometimes poorly attended, whereas a fully packed, standing-room-only chamber gives the MPs (or Members) the sense of a momentous occasion.

Similarly, the current voting mechanism is subject to conflicting evaluations. Currently, in order to vote, Members walk through the Division Lobbies – the Aye or Nay lobbies – where they are visible and exposed to pressure from the party whips. This is a lengthy process that could be replaced with electronic voting, but concerns have been voiced that electronic voting may reduce

the Members’ opportunities to mingle, and mingling, it has often been pointed out, is an integral part of politics.

There is evidence to suggest that the current design of spaces also shapes gender relations. My interviews have revealed a set of embedded gender inequalities in the physical design of the Palace of Westminster – inadequate facilities for breastfeeding, a shortage of ladies’ toilets, the non-family-friendly hours of Parliamentary sessions and the non-family-friendly rules of not permitting children in the chamber and committees. Some interviewees emphasized a masculine feel to the Palace of Westminster: its neogothic splendour, symbols of power, images of politicians of the past, high ceilings, turrets and spires, the rituals and ceremonies – all embedded in a period dominated almost entirely by privileged men.

There are surprisingly many bars in the Parliamentary buildings, and one of my interviewees argued that alcohol is ‘integral to politics’ and that most political discussions across party lines take place over drinks. The importance of bars was emphasized:

[On the terrace] there are evenings where everybody’s hanging around, especially in the light summer evenings. People talk to each other and people coalesce across party lines. The staff and Members mingle. You talk to people who you wouldn’t normally see in the course of the day.

Yet others saw a strong link between alcohol and some negative aspects of organizational culture. Bars also tend to attract media attention, which leads to reputational damage, as the following quote highlights:

Drinking at work is just the most ridiculous scenario. I understand why bars were there historically, I'm not completely convinced that we still should have them. (...) Unfortunately the bars do attract media attention when things go wrong in them and despite all efforts.

Younger interviewees and women generally appeared more sceptical about bars on the Parliamentary Estate. The replacement of Bellamy's Bar with a nursery has been seen by some as a move away from the culture of drinking in Parliament, towards a more inclusive, family-friendly environment. Another House of Commons staff member echoed this sentiment: 'I understand fully the need for informal areas where staff, Peers and Members can discuss whatever they need in confidence. I am just not sure that there needs to be alcohol available'. There was a feeling that Parliament has fallen behind the wider world of work, in relation to curbs on alcohol consumption. Alcohol, combined with inequalities in power and status, create widespread vulnerabilities and these are often seen as leading to bullying and sexual harassment; a finding that resonates with two reports published within Parliament (Cox, 2018; Ellenbogen, 2019).

Although there is no hard evidence for the link between physical space and bullying and harassment, this link was implied by many of my interviewees. Several interviewees mentioned that the layout of space in Westminster – dark corridors, small rooms, closed office doors and lack of CCTV cameras – lends itself to misbehaviour. Open and transparent spaces typically make bullying and harassment more difficult, and one interviewee suggested that 'it is much harder to shout at and bully your staff if you're in the middle of a large public space. It's much harder to sexually assault someone if you haven't got a dark corner to do it in'. Inappropriate behaviour often goes unnoticed behind closed doors. One member of the Library staff captured this sentiment:

You only have to view *House of Cards*, and it gives you that feel of things happening in dark corridors, people being taken aside and spoken to and all of that which, you know, doesn't help with the bullying culture as well. That's why, when the atrium opened, it was literally a new transparent light on the way in which Parliament operated.

The issue of transparency is related partly to the design of social spaces. Interviewees drew comparisons with modern parliaments, such as the Scottish Parliament and the Welsh Assembly, hinting at the improved culture of transparency that these new Parliament buildings offer through open and transparent spaces. A greater openness of social spaces is likely to contribute to a safer working environment.

The Palace of Westminster does not always lend itself to modern ways of working, with small, dark, offices

sometimes physically distant from the chambers. Rather than being 'held hostage to the Victorian floorplan', as the Joint Committee (2016) evidence suggested, some interviewees suggested changing the floor plan instead. Indeed, there were strong voices in favour of abandoning the ethos of traditionalism in the name of progress and more modern working. Some institutional actors were aware that evoking 'the dim and distant past' is inaccurate, as numerous traditions are recent inventions.

Spatial hierarchy

The allocation of spaces in Parliament is a contested issue and has a negative effect on working relationships. One member of the Library staff referred to it as a political battlefield. Whips are often said to take spaces from House staff members. 'Politicians always get their way', according to one member of the Library staff, suggesting that organizational hierarchies are affected by political hierarchies.

The symbolic demarcation of spaces clearly regulates the behaviour of stakeholders in the building. MPs are not allowed to cross the metal bar within the House of Lords Chamber, for example, and the Monarch is not allowed to step outside an invisible line separating the House of Lords from the House of Commons. Spaces in Parliament are bound by various complex rules, and those who have always enjoyed access to all areas want to see the rules of the space preserved. Restrictions on access to some spaces (e.g. the Members' Entrance Cloakroom, the Smoking Room, the Chess Room) reinforce hierarchies and keep strangers and 'tearaways' out. The privileged are entitled to a degree of privilege, precedence and privacy.

The notice on the Strangers' Bar is a good example of obfuscation of the rules of access:

Use of The Strangers' Bar is restricted to the following:

- MPs [Members of Parliament] and staff of the House of Commons of Grade A and above with up to three guests.
- Ex MPs, peers who were MPs and staff of the House of Commons of Grade B2 and above without guests.
- Guests may not buy drinks and must not be left unaccompanied for more than 15 min.

Maintaining the current rules of access to various spaces perpetuates power asymmetries. Maintaining exclusive access to the Members' Tea Room, Strangers' Bar or Terrace Cafeteria, for example, sustains the culture of divisions that younger generations of clerks resent, whereas older generations want to protect it. Democratizing the access to social spaces, such as the Dining Room or the Smoking Room, could offer gains in equality, while simultaneously bringing about loss of respect for politicians. One clerk argued that a good

balance between privacy and openness is needed, and lack of transparency is sometimes justified:

Members do have good reasons for wanting to meet in places where they aren't seen, and where others don't know who they're meeting, for good political reasons. If they're meeting someone from the other side of the House, or they're colluding with someone who is a well-known plotter against the Prime Minister.

Affiliation is a basic characteristic of institutions and organizations, and affiliation with certain groups within them is often manifested in the physical boundaries and rules of access. So, a line of demarcation is needed, not only between those who belong to an organization and those who do not, but it also serves as the demarcation of spaces that emplaces people and serves the function of maintaining status order.

The traditions in Parliament related to the use of spaces appear to institutionalize certain practices. In my research, I observed some acts of defiance by people who crossed these invisible boundaries – but with restrictions:

These rules are broken by people who are in the in-crowd. It's part of the deal. (...) If you can wink at the doorkeeper or smile at the barman and they recognize you it's fine, it's only keeping out strangers, literally.

Calls for more open access could be heard throughout my interviews. The Members' Tea Room, the Pugin Room and the Strangers' Bar were mentioned as places that are out of bounds for many employees. The complicated rules of access to the Strangers' Bar were perceived as particularly frustrating, and unique access is seen as one of the perks of the job. Access to other spaces is infrequently used to demonstrate superiority:

You have been to the little cramped room outside the Chamber [The Lower Chamber Office]? I worked in there for a few years, and we used to have a rule, which was that Members' staff as opposed to Members couldn't come into the room at all after midday, twelve noon. And so we took great pleasure in throwing them out. (...) It was reinforcing hierarchies. There was a perfectly legitimate business management, football management rule, going on there as well, but these rules are sometimes more to do with reinforcing hierarchies than any business need.

The traditionalists largely defended the restricted access to social spaces, even if (or because) its principal purpose is to maintain the existing status order. One senior clerk reflected on his sense of privilege:

I've grown up here in a state of privilege, and I've always been able to access all areas, so I don't know what it feels like to be kept out. One of the significant organizational changes over the last 30 or 40 years is the growth in Members' staff – huge growth. (...) there are hundreds of them,

and if you let everybody go everywhere, actually, it would overwhelm the services (...) I have no problem with the idea that Members should be entitled to a degree of privilege and precedence and privacy. (...) There was a lot of benefit in oiling the wheels of the organization in that privileged access.

In contrast to this sense of entitlement, the reformists argued that removing physical barriers and making various spaces more accessible would improve culture. The removal of the dividing screen that separated the area for Members from other staff in the Terrace Cafeteria is said to have created a more inclusive environment, though some interviewees cautioned against ascribing too much magical effect to it.

Buildings as a resource

The notion of buildings as a resource involves drawing on historic, cultural and architectural heritage, which on the one hand is associated with preserving the status quo, and on the other hand was associated with creating new exciting opportunities for tourism and education.

Most people working in the Parliamentary Estate have a sense of pride in being associated with the 'mother of parliaments'. More than one of them expressed a sense of awe at the architectural beauty of the Palace and the enchantment with pomp and circumstance, the symbols of power and history. One interviewee pointed out an important symbolic function of the ceremonies:

This is not like you or me just arriving at the office in the morning and going to get a cup of coffee, sit down and turn on the computer. Parliament sitting is making serious decisions; people are saying serious things; it's having a serious effect on people's lives. Speaker's Procession makes that clear.

Several interviewees evoked the historic events that occurred in the buildings going back to the Middle Ages. The sense of pride in that heritage was evident among the traditionalists. Built on the great Imperial past, Houses of Parliament were perceived to be one of the country's key institutions, representing 'a country which has wealth and power' (Joint Committee, 2016: 142). The traditionalists claimed that Parliament also represents the continuity of the British constitution and the Crown against the background of rapid societal changes and uncertainty, and for them the historic fabric of the buildings defined the cultural and political significance of Parliament. The traditionalists were in awe of the building as a physical manifestation of the great standing of Parliament. 'More than any other building, the Palace of Westminster is the embodiment of London' (Joint Committee, 2016: 131), and most people would instantly recognize as London a photograph

of Westminster with Big Ben. The value of Parliament's heritage to the economy of the United Kingdom is a significant economic force, with the power to attract large numbers of visitors. Still, the focus of some MPs on short-termism and self-interest was striking. Some Parliamentarians did not want to leave the Palace for the duration of the works, as leaving the Palace could prevent MPs who are elected for only one term from having the opportunity to sit in the current Commons Chamber. Through turnover, as politicians die, retire or lose their seats, some traditions may be forgotten.

The reformists were also interested in preserving the beauty of the buildings, but their accounts were characterized more by a future orientation. They saw the Palace as a tourist attraction and were conscious of the building's symbolic and economic potential. Some suggestions could be heard to turn the Palace of Westminster into a museum of democracy and to house the Parliament in a new purpose-built building. Parliament as an institution would change as a result of this move – precisely what the traditionalists feared. The conflict of perspectives on the historical heritage, in other words an inherent conflict between the duty to the dead and the duty to future generations, suggested that the time horizon in stewardship matters hugely; the interests of today's stakeholders are not necessarily those of future groups.

Buildings as a stepping stone to institutional change

A restoration project is an excellent opportunity to reform an institution, and a massive reform is what some stakeholders hope for. In Westminster, practical improvements are the most obvious first step: toilets breaking down, lights going out, lifts not working. Some progress has already been made: a bar was turned into a creche, the Smoking Room is no longer used for smoking, the shooting range has been closed down and there are more ladies' toilets. These changes are incremental, but according to the reformists, they could be more substantial. The redesign of spaces could bring about change in the culture by disrupting the culture of deference for politicians, toning down pomp and circumstance, and discontinuing the tradition of voting in the Voting Lobbies. There is hope that new spaces may create new practices.

The traditionalists oppose such changes. Because they take the view that a fully reconstructed Parliament would not be the same institution, they advocate minimal changes to the existing structures. Preserving the structure and the artifacts that bear 'Churchill's touch' are clearly important to them; both the site of Parliament – the place – and the actual walls and furniture are crucial, they believe, to the survival of the institution.

Tension is inevitable. On the one hand, the traditionalists believe that Westminster is 'the mother of

parliaments', a blueprint that other institutions have followed, and that it must not be changed. On the other hand, the reformists believe that 'the slow deterioration and degradation of the Palace of Westminster serves as a visual metaphor for the state of our parliamentary institutions; both are in need of restoration and renewal' (Joint Committee, 2016: 147). Although the heritage is core to the Parliament, the reformists believed that its safeguarding needs to go beyond simply preserving the historic fabric and making the buildings operational and functional. The restoration project is thus a 'window of opportunity' for change (Cotter and Flinders, 2019). The Joint Committee warned that not being bold now could lead to the building 'continuing the sense and function of a gentleman's club or a public school' (Joint Committee, 2016: 16), but one interviewee expressed his pessimism: 'Let's start with the biggest fear – that we will end up with a museum reproduction of the Palace of Westminster and that nothing will really have changed'.

Discussion

The majority of recent contributions to the study of materiality (e.g. Gonsalves, 2020; Rodner *et al.*, 2019; Wright *et al.*, 2021) indicate that buildings are important 'stabilizers' for institutions, but some commentators have also pointed towards the dynamic aspects of the relationship between buildings and institutions. Wright *et al.* (2022) argued that empirical phenomena studied by management scholars begin to expose how spaces and places can drive and shape change in institutions; for example, the use of technology, climate change and the move to digital and hybrid work change our buildings, and consequently lead to change in organizations and institutions. Stephenson *et al.* (2020) cast space as a process (rather than a physical location or an outcome), discussed the dynamic features that create and alter spatial arrangements and called for empirical insights into how spaces shape organizations and institutions.

My study offers such empirical insights and throws a theoretical light on the role of the buildings in institutional change. Although the institution of the UK Parliament is unique and quirky, the findings from this study will illuminate an understanding of the effects materiality has on newer institutions and institutional change. I demonstrated how buildings influence institutional processes, and how buildings also evolve and affect institutions. I identified three ways in which buildings motivate actors to work to reshape institutions as they act as social enclosures, and can be used as interpretive filters between institutional work and institutional change (Figure 2).

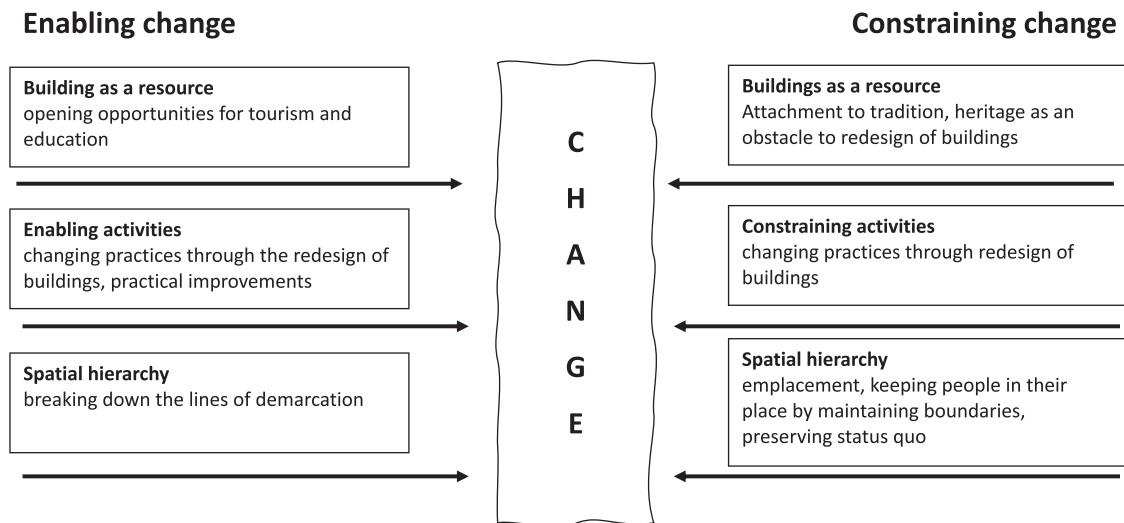


Figure 2. Buildings as a contested space for enabling or constraining institutional change

Enabling/constraining activities

One of the themes emerging from the literature on agency of architecture is the performative capacity through the movement of people around and through a building (Doucet and Cupers, 2009). Buildings enable or constrain functionality, and my study provided some insights into the ways in which buildings become a contested ground for the organization's functioning. Discussions about the shape of the debating chamber, the availability of social spaces and the layout of offices reflect the debates about the wider shape of Parliament as an institution. Opposition to changing the adversarial to the semi-circular arrangement of seats in the chamber is the result not of architectural constraints, but of the elite blockages resulting from the nature of the British political tradition (Flinders *et al.*, 2017). A material change may endanger the quasi-elitist and masculine form of politics, a two-party system, and may even lead to reform of the electoral system. A change to electronic voting might reduce the exclusionary nature of decision-making. This study identifies some ways in which the buildings perpetuate inequality by favouring some actors, often middle-aged white men, over others, mainly younger women and parents. This inequality is evident at the practical level (i.e. inadequate facilities for women) and at the symbolic level (i.e. images of male politicians decorating the walls). This study provided further evidence that a change of design of some spaces may eradicate some gender inequalities, echoing earlier investigations by Crewe (2005, 2015) and Childs (2016). Thus, the traditionalists oppose these changes to the fabric of the building and are prepared to accept the lack of comforts in exchange for preservation of the institutional order. The reformists, on the other hand, see hope in the practical changes as these changes might trigger more significant institutional change.

Spatial hierarchy

The theme of spatial hierarchy in this study resonates with earlier studies, like those by Lawrence and Dover (2015) and Siebert, Wilson and Hamilton (2017). For an institution that aspires to promote public engagement, inclusion, diversity and equality, Parliament is riddled with boundaries and restrictions. Some are naturally motivated by security concerns, but many are a physical manifestation of elitism, party divisions and power games. Ahrne (1994) observed that affiliation is a basic characteristic of institutions and organizations, and physical boundaries are often a manifestation of such affiliation. The rules of access similarly separate an insider from an outsider, the one in the know and the one who does not possess the institutional knowledge. Maintenance of the status order requires boundaries (Siebert, Wilson and Hamilton, 2017), otherwise change might be imposed on institutional actors. Preserving these boundaries is in the interest of those trying to maintain the status quo, while the reformists pursuing change hope that redrawing boundaries may lead to institutional change by making the spaces more egalitarian and accessible.

Buildings as a resource

Buildings as a resource is one of the key tenets of the history of arts and heritage literature, and management scholars have commented extensively on how organizations and institutions use materiality as a status symbol; as a backdrop to events, ceremonies and rituals; and as a foundation on which to build traditions (Jones and Massa, 2013; Lawrence and Dover, 2015; Rodner *et al.*, 2019). Buildings provide the backdrop to traditions, but it is often the case that traditions *make* the

place, insofar as the place often provides the raw material for inventing and changing tradition (Dacin, Dacin and Kent, 2018). The analysis outlined here is largely in line with the existing literature and indicates that the maintenance of rules, norms, practices and traditions is interlinked with the stewardship/custodianship of the building, central to our understanding of both institutional change and institutional maintenance (Dacin, Munir and Tracey, 2010; Lawrence and Suddaby, 2006; Lawrence *et al.*, 2009; Lok and de Rond, 2013). Embeddedness of power symbols contributes to the anchoring effect (Monteiro and Nicolini, 2015). One element of Scott's (2008) definition of institutions is stability, and a strive for preserving stability has clearly emerged from my study. The embeddedness in the building gives the institution stability, and the architecture provides dignity, but buildings also grant institutional actors a sense of elevated status and moral legitimacy (Greenwood, Suddaby and Hinings, 2002).

Traditions are kept as a means of control (Dacin, Dacin and Kent, 2018; Hobsbawm and Ranger, 1983;), and the traditions in Parliament related to the use of spaces institutionalize practices. This perspective resonates with the Dacin, Dacin and Kent (2018: 344) term, tradition-as-constraint, as an approach 'antithetical to modernity and occasionally something maintained by the elites to protect their status in society'. For those resisting change, the attachment to traditions and rituals intertwined with historical heritage of buildings may serve as an anchor in the status quo; buildings cannot change, hence the institution has to stay the same. For those pursuing change, renovation of the buildings may be an opportunity to reshape what is on display, and what is removed from sight, what is shown and celebrated, and what is hidden.

Institutional change through the redesign of spaces

Wright *et al.* (2022) threw light on spaces as the broader context in which processes of change are situated. My study adds to earlier theorization of spaces and institutions by demonstrating that both those pursuing institutional change and those resisting change tend to use redesign to support their own agenda. Although I do not ascribe agency to buildings, my analysis indicates that buildings can be sites of the contestation of change and that the redesign of buildings is a space of contestation for institutional change.

Architecture and cultural geography literature (Dovey, 1999; Gieryn, 2000; Lefebvre, 1974; Massey, 2005; Soja, 1989) abounds in examples of 'disciplining' buildings such as prisons, court rooms or military establishments, but it also provides examples of buildings enchanting people, for example churches or palaces. Architecture is often evoked as a rationale for resis-

tance to change; Westminster buildings 'act back' by enforcing certain practices (such as adversarial debate in the chambers) but also 'talk back' by projecting the images of past Imperial glory. There is some evidence that culture in other parliaments in other parts of the United Kingdom – Edinburgh or Cardiff – is different, partly because of the modern design of the buildings (Orr and Siebert, 2021). Their glass walls enable greater transparency, fewer bars are seen to prevent misconduct related to alcohol and the semi-circular arrangement of seats is said to improve the inclusive nature of the debate. It is not surprising then that in Westminster, the traditionalists take the view that a redesigned Parliament would not be the same institution; exceptionalism and heritage status are often used as get-out clauses and as a constraint. For the traditionalists, the aim is restoration understood as conservation of the existing buildings, as they feel bound by their duty to the dead to preserve the status quo. Those who want to pursue change, however, see their redesign as a vehicle for change. The metaphor of the Trojan horse effectively captures that sentiment – a sneaky tactic to break into the heart of the opponent. By constraining some practices and enabling activities in other ways, the redesign of spaces may create new institutional patterns and new ways of working. By removing the effects of spatial hierarchy – removing the walls – the new more egalitarian and inclusive order may be achieved.

There is another ancient story – a thought experiment that serves as a useful metaphor of change: the Ship of Theseus. This is the story of a ship that was used by the mythical Greek King Theseus in a great battle. The reader is asked to imagine that the ship was kept in the harbour as a museum piece and that over time, as some of the wooden parts began to rot, they were replaced with new ones, until eventually all the parts had been replaced. A philosophical question arises: Is the restored ship still the same ship as the original?

Although buildings are material anchors (Monteiro and Nicolini, 2015), they change incrementally over time; they age and must be repaired and that creates opportunities to modify some of their features to suit the changing needs of the users. Some elements must be modernized in line with advances in technology and ergonomics, and health, safety and accessibility requirements. So, changes always happen, but over a long period of time. The metaphor of the Ship of Theseus relies on the passage of time. If the restoration of Westminster takes 8–10 years, as predicted, institutional memory may fade through turnover – as MPs die, retire or lose their seats. New generations of MPs will be socialized into different practices, and new traditions will be invented (Hobsbawm and Ranger, 1983), if no spaces or objects are there to carry the historical imprints.

It needs to be remembered that contests over the shape of space in Parliament have a socio-political

dimension, and the shape of space impacts on the working of the institution of Parliament, which, in turn, impacts on how the country is run. The two metaphors – that of the Trojan horse and the Ship of Theseus – map onto the two visions of the future emerging from composite narratives in my study: those by the traditionalists and those by the reformists. It is difficult to speculate which of the scenarios is going to win, as the options are still to be debated by Parliament.

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