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Studying intersections as production of place(s): illustrations from outdoors entrepreneuring
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Abstract

This paper aims at contributing to the study of intersections by focusing on the simultaneous accomplishment of gender, ethnicity and body ableness. While such enterprise in organization studies often draws on the concept of identity, I propose to bring the concepts of space and place into the discussion. Space is seen as “the sphere of a multiplicity of trajectories”. Hence, space does not exist prior to identities or entities and their relations, space is relationally constituted, space unfolds in interactions and is continuously being made. And space allows for thinking of coexisting heterogeneity, of a plurality of trajectories contemporaneously existing, the simultaneity of stories-so-far. Drawing on human geography, and in particular the work of Doreen Massey, and on a strong process perspective in organization studies, I thus focus on the production of specific places as central to entrepreneuring in the outdoors industry. The idea of place as the local, genuine, “real”, closed, coherent is also challenged by such a take on space. It thus becomes interesting studying how places are produced and reproduced, made coherent (or contested), in connections and disconnections, while doing entrepreneuring – and what kind of configurations of relations are thus achieved, configurations producing and reproducing gender, ethnicity and body ableness.

Keywords
Space, place, intersectionality, entrepreneuring, ethnicity, gender, body ableness, simultaneity.
“Chatting about training with Steve House” said the email I got from addnature, one of the large outdoors retailers in Stockholm. Steve House, "The best High-Altitude climber in the World today" according to Reinold Messner, the email goes on. Steve House stays a few days in Stockholm during his turné, the email informs me further, and on the addnature website I can buy tickets for a lecture with pictures from his expeditions to be held at the Swedish School of Sports and Health Science. And as a bonus, Steve House will also have a more informal session, about how to prepare for an expedition, at one of addnature stores the evening before. It is free but you have to register since the number of participant is limited. That’s how I end up waiting in a queue outside the store together with a growing number of people. It is 7 pm and the queue grows longer. Some people in group, some alone, some wearing outdoors garments, others not. Together we are approximately 40 people. When the door opens, we walk in the store. There is a corridor leading to the store main room that is located in the basement of the building. On the walls you can see pictures of wild landscapes, as well as pictures showing the employees as they are pursuing some outdoor achievement. Further in, a nice guy hands out a beer and some popcorns to everyone of us. Part of the floor has been cleared of shelves and rudimentary benches set up. There is also a sofa in the back. We take our seats and Steve House starts to talk about how he organizes his training. Steve looks actually older than in the picture on the poster advertising his lecture, but is certainly very well trained – his yellow Patagonia t-shirt revealing his shape. We listen, drink our beer and eat our popcorns. The lucky ones on the sofa get
cozy. Steve talks for about an hour, drawing some curves on the large blocknotes that he has as presentation-aid, going through the different phases in a training program lasting months, explaining some technical terms, sharing his experience and his failures with us. A couple of questions are asked, but otherwise it is Steve that does the talk. He is clearly experienced at that, he tries to activate the public at times, he makes us laugh a few times. At some point he also observes “I love that you guys are drinking beer!”. At the end he gets some question about training for being under psychological stress. It is an elder guy that poses the question and he is clearly not happy with the answer he gets, and therefore shortly informs us on what “has been proven” about that. When the talk is over, some people approach Steve. One of them has a book to sign. Others linger a while in the shop.

What is going on here? What kind of social achievements are being produced here? And what is this “here” that is taking shape as we sit, drink, listen, watch and talk? In this paper I want to argue that this is part of outdoors entrepreneuring and of the ongoing production of gender, ethnicity and body ableness.

**Studying intersections**

The relevance and importance of studying the doings of gender at work has been recognized in organization theory for decades now, the idea that there are more power-related ordering practices that play a role, and that such practices intersect with each other, is still relatively new. The idea of intersectionality was originally developed in order to highlight the importance of simultaneous categories of oppression that concur to constitute differences in power. (Crenshaw, 1991). Hence, an intersectional analysis considers gender, ethnicity, class, body abledness and other power-related categories as they jointly produce power effects because of how they intertwine and interact, while a “mono-dimensional” analysis as, for example, an analysis focusing exclusively on gender would silence other dimensions (Lykke, 2005, de los Reyes et al, 2003). In other words, an intersectional analysis does not consider each category separated from the others since there are always dynamic relations connecting them (Eriksson-Zetterquist & Styhre, 2007).

One way of taking an intersectional perspective is to study how gender, ethnicity, sexuality, class, body abledness are jointly performed in everyday situations, which practices are involved. Undertaking such endeavor requires a reflective handling of the categories studied in order not to reproduce inequalities and silences, and different ways of treating these categories are present in the literature (McCall, 2009). The construction of some categories is even problematic in itself, as for example in the case of abledness (Campbell, 2009). Still, critically used, these categories offer analytical means for making the (re)production of norms and power differences visible.

What many scholars do is therefore to study single practices, and at times their intersections, by directly or indirectly referring to the concept of identity and treating gender, ethnicity and body-abledness, for example, as facets related to people identity work, or as dimensions of individual and collective identities (cf Holvino, 2010). Taking a processual perspective, such dimensions are seen as embedded in other social relations, as for example sexuality, and as sites of heterogeneous subjects positions. Analyses thus often enable us to see how we, as subjects, become in doing gender, doing ethnicity, doing body-abledness, something that positions us in relation to others in certain ways and therefore leads to certain consequences. While such a take has brought insight on a number of phenomena, in this paper I want to argue for paying more attention to two other related concepts: place and space. Already when talking of positioning, in terms for example of power relations, we do introduce a spatial element. But we could also go further and make space and place two central concepts.
A processual take on space and place

Process organisation studies take the fluidity, interrelatedness and complexity of life and work into consideration. When speaking of organisations, the concept organisational becoming is thus increasingly used in order to understand the phenomenon “organisation”. Inspired by process theorists and philosophers, we turn our attention from stable and discrete entities to fluid and ongoing processes (Hernes and Maitlis, 2010). To be noted is that the idea of process may be understood in different ways. One common understanding is that a process is a sum of a number of finite stages that follow each other in a linear sequence. This is not what process means in a strong ontology of becoming. Rather, process is a more profound idea to be juxtaposed to entities:

What is real for postmodern thinkers are not so much social states, or entities, but emergent relational interactions and patternings that are recursively intimated in the fluxing and transforming of our life-worlds. (Chia, 1995, p 582)

The most apparent characteristic of modernist thought is in fact its entitative character and reliance on concreteness, “misplaced concreteness” in Whitehead’s terms, a way of expressing how we “have mistaken our abstractions for concrete realities” (Whitehead 1985, p 69 as cited in Chia, 1995). Disconnecting and “discretising” the world into entities is something that we do to the world, it is not the world itself. Interactions change the “entities” connected in the interactions, entities become in the interactions. Such emphasis on interactions can be supported by a relational ontology, which is a perspective making the self a social and dialogical self—compared to a singular independent self trying to control “other” typical of Western conceptions (Hosking, 2011).

The increasing interest in space in organization theory is contributing to the articulation of process and performative perspectives. Spacing puts the focus on “space as processual and performative, open-ended and multiple, practiced and of the everyday”, thus making us aware of provisional spatio-temporal configurations always in process (Beyes and Steyaert, 2011, p 47). Approaches based on spacing are being developed in a number of areas, also within studies of entrepreneurship, and in this paper I want to further discuss one possible way of spacing entrepreneuring. I base my suggestion on Doreen Massey’s work (2005) within human geography and her conceptualization of space and place (which, of course, in a relational fashion is not “hers”). Space is thus seen as “the sphere of a multiplicity of trajectories”. Hence, space does not exist prior to identities or entities and their relations, space is relationally constituted, space unfolds in interactions and is continuously being made. And space allows for thinking of coexisting heterogeneity, of a plurality of trajectories contemporaneously existing, the simultaneity of stories-so-far – which also makes space open and not already determined.

The idea of place as the local, genuine, “real”, closed, coherent is also challenged (something that makes her position different from others considering “place” as stable and pre-existing the individual). Even places are relationally constructed and their “boundedness” is socially produced (and always contested). It thus becomes interesting studying how places are produced and reproduced, made coherent (or contested), in connections and disconnections. Instead of a billiard-ball view of place, in which definite places come in contact with each other, the idea is that of place “meeting place, where ‘the difference’ of a place must be conceptualised more in the ineffable sense of the constant emergence of uniqueness out of (and within) the specific constellations of interrelations within which that place is set (“the impossibility of a position which is not already a relation” – Kamuf, 1991, p. xv) and what is made of that constellation” (Massey, 2005, p 68).
Intersections and simultaneity – A spatial perspective

Space is a relatively unexplored concept within organization studies. While the temporal aspect has increasingly being brought to the fore, as the different takes on process in organization theory withness, the spatial dimension has not been explored to the same extent. Studies focusing gender, and more recently on ethnicity, may be considered an exception as they conceptualize the particular doings of gender as instances of the unfolding of power relations that position people in different ways. The spatial dimension is therefore crucial, although not necessarily explicitly acknowledged. Taking a processual approach, we can think of space as socially enacted in everyday practices and of the spatial dimension as the dimension enabling us to make sense of relational configurations (while the temporal dimension, simplifying, allows us making sense of before-after developments). The spatial dimension also gives us the possibility to consider a multiplicity of trajectories in the present, while the temporal dimension most often narrows our attention to one trajectory over time. This means that a spatial perspective enables us to think in terms of simultaneity and relationality. There are always a number of stories-so-far that meet, clash, merge, diverge, and so on, and the resulting configurations always in the making are important to observe and analyse. This should be particularly interesting for intersectional studies in organization theory. In gender-blind and ethnicity-blind studies, what we often find is a single story-so-far that is being privileged over the others, which are silenced or not even considered. Studies taking gender and ethnicity into consideration do bring more stories-so-far to the front and do analyze the relation between different stories-so-far to more or less extent. What I argue is worth developing further is the idea of simultaneity of heterogeneous stories-so-far proposed by Masse, in order to add to the problematization of the doings of gender, ethnicity and other power-related practices in organization by deepening the analysis of the co-existence and interdependence of different stories-so-far. The configuration of trajectories becomes crucial.

Such concepts could enhance intersectional analyses in which the focus is on the simultaneous doings of practices resulting in certain positionings. While the idea of intersection seems to focus the analysis on certain subjects in which “the practices intersect”, a spatial perspective could center our attention on the social configurations enacted in practice characterized by multiplicity and relationality, thus adding to current studies by bringing to the fore the simultaneous and related unfolding of different doings. The focus is thus not on the nodes (certain people) but on the connections (relational configurations) in the social world.

Studying intersections and simultaneity as production of place(s)

One way of advancing such a perspective could be to use the concept of place, even in this case following Massey’s definition (Massey, 2005). While often place is taken for granted and conceptualized as static and closed, as site for authenticity and continuity (for example the national state or the local community), we could refer to her idea of place as constructed and its boundness as an ongoing social production, always necessarily contested. Moreover, the particularity of any place is not determined by drawing boundaries and presenting such a place in counterposition to other places, but is rather the result of the specificity of the configuration of links and interconnections to what is “beyond” such a place (Massey, 1994). Massey also draws connections between space and place, on the one hand, and gender, on the other hand, at a number of levels. For the purpose of this paper, what is of interest is the argument that spaces and places are gendered and that they in turn affect how gender is constructed and understood. For example, the Western traditional distinction between the private and the public, and the consequent attempts at confining women to the private thus limiting their mobility, illustrates this point.
What I want to develop in this paper is the view that by studying the production of place(s), we can study the construction of gender, ethnicity and body ableness, and their interrelations. As above argued, paying attention to the spatial dimension means focusing on the configurations under production. By looking for the production of places we are moreover enabled to study attempts to closure, positioning, authenticity – power-related processes.

The production of place may thus be an interesting way of studying power-related practices and the doings leading to certain configurations gaining stability as connections are being enacted and boundaries thus strengthened and/or challenged, making other configurations more peripheral.

**Functional winter week at Norrlandsgatan, Stockholm – another empirical impression**

Norrlandsgatan Functional winter week – 15-18 November: “experience week” (upplevelsevecka in Swedish) with winter inspiration along Norrlandsgatan, with Haglöfs, Hestra, Houdini, Norrona and Salomon. That’s what the flyers say. I learn later that this is the first time that such an event is being organized. Gatan is “street” in Swedish and Norrland is the North part of Sweden, which is just the proper location for a number of outdoors flagship stores that have recently opened along this street. Not all of them participate to this initiative, but all the organizers (with the exception of Salomon) are Swedish and Norwegian, and they sell outdoors equipment and clothes.

The pictures above show some scenes from these days. Starting with the one on the left upper part and going clockwise, we see one guy from Growerscup (a newly started Danish company producing coffee-bags to brew fresh coffee when outdoors) promoting the product in the Haglöfs store; a couple of guys from the Ice Hotel (North of Sweden) dressed in Haglöfs clothes helping people working on ice sculptures; a “clinics” (presentation of properties of materials/products) being held by a Polartech (one of the most technical and used materials in outdoors clothes) salesperson at the Norrona store (2 pictures) showing, among other things, their military products; two guys working
for Blå Band (food) that have further developed the dried food they worked on when employed by the Swedish army and promoting it in the Haglöfs store after an adventurer (which they cooperate with) has just held a presentation (and behind them you see the poster for “expeditionsresor”, a travel organizer); one large poster showing a mountain landscape at the entrance of the Haglöfs store; Hendryx skis exposed in the Norrona store (they have a “friendship”) and the poster advertising the clinic they will hold in Serre Chevalier; one guide from Mountain Guide Travels talking extreme tours in the Houdini store (also in this case they have a “friendship”); people from Ramundsberget (a small village known for skiing possibilities and wild nature more in general) promoting their village in the Norrona store (a “friendship” in this case too); a slide from Polartech clinics showing all the magazines in which their products had been praised; a number of outdoors magazines in the Norrona store.

These pictures capture just some moments of what was happening during the week. Due to space-limits in this short paper I cannot provide any more details. But I want to mention that similarly it is also interesting to look at companies product catalogues which, beside showing the products, narrate a number of outdoors stories and contain plenty of “extreme pictures”. Or at the website presenting these companies’ “friends”, who often are elite skiers or extreme “practitioners” of outdoors activities (again with plenty of pictures and capturing stories).

**Outdoors entrepreneuring – studying the production of place(s)**

The two empirical impressions presented may be considered instances of outdoors entrepreneuring that may provide an illustration of the proposed perspective. Entrepreneurship research has in fact been criticized for its gender-blindness and for constructing the ideal entrepreneur in masculine terms (Ahl, 2002, Bruni et al, 2004). Even when studying female entrepreneurs, and at times celebrating them, researchers end up reproducing a subordinate position for women by drawing on a set of assumptions about women, men, business, work, etc. that are never problematized, thus sustaining the social expectation of difference (Ahl, 2002). Taking a social constructionist stance, it is possible to consider both entrepreneurship and gender as socially produced and therefore to study how their constructions are related and with which consequences. Some scholars focus on the concept of identity constructions, rather than individual traits, and analyze how different identity dimensions are related to each other and how individuals handle possible conflicts (Lindgren & Packendorff, 2008, Essers & Benshop, 2007). Other scholars have focused on the doing of gender and the doing of entrepreneurship and conceptualized them as symbolic spaces of intertwined practices; the idea of entrepreneurship is intertwined with the construction of hegemonic (heterosexual) masculinity in complex ways in their empirical material, but they also found alternative practices, that is alternative forms of gender and entrepreneurship, including the mobilization of homosexuality (Bruni et al, 2004).

Not only has the entrepreneur been constructed as a male, but also as a white male (Essers & Benschop, 2007), thus making the concept of entrepreneurship not only gender-biased, but also ethnocentrically determined (Ogbor, 2000). Entrepreneurship done by minority (racial and ethnic) groups has not been considered interesting for theory development and the performance of minority groups has been explained in terms of attitudinal problems. This has resulted in a conviction that minority groups have psychological and racial characteristics that inhibit entrepreneurial development, thus overlooking the sociological, historical and political elements that shape the conditions in which minority business owners operate (ibid). Such assumption has lead to efforts to assimilate minority groups and change them in order to make them behave in the proper entrepreneurial way. Otherwise, ethnicity has been explored mostly in terms of ethnic minorities
entrepreneurs relying on network based on common ethnicity and family (Essers & Benschop, 2007), thus reconstructing their entrepreneurship as “other” compared with the dominant Western model. But there are also more critical studies problematizing racism in entrepreneurship (Knight, 2011) and the struggle between enterprise and equality discourse (Berglund & Johansson, 2007).

In this paper I want to add to such studies by arguing for the usefulness of a spatial perspective. When it comes to the phenomenon of entrepreneurship, one could interpret entrepreneurship as the anchoring of organizational presence in place(s). The two empirical “impressions” produced in this paper can be understood as being about the production of places and the simultaneous anchoring of organizational presence in those places. “Anchoring” may not be a good metaphor if it suggests that the places are “already” there, since I view the places as ongoing relational achievements. On the other hand, the metaphor suggests the temporary “tangible” organizational presence in those places and the attempt at further intensification of that presence that entrepreneuring may be argued to be about. I use the expression “organizational presence” since this is not about one company’s presence, but it is the interactionally and relationally achieved presence of a number of companies and organizations, a presence that becomes more intense as a number of places meet and are shaped, a number of trajectories intertwine, a number of materialities assemble in certain configurations. It is a collective achievement, but not collective in the sense of concerted, not everything is intentional nor everything is agreed upon. Rather, it is collective in the sense of relational and spatial achievements that are co-created.

In the first event, the Steve House evening, we have Steve House, who participates in the making of places as Mount Everest and the like; we have Patagonia (outdoors brand) who is present on Steve’s t-shirt and in a number of clothes hanging in the store; we have other brands hanging or piled around us; we have the beer and the popcorn which contribute to the making of the addnature store that evening (and clearly clash in a way with Steve House’s own trajectory); we have a number of people gathering to listen and thus becoming connected to, for example, the “extreme places” Steve House brings with his trajectory; we have the pictures on the walls showing other “extreme places” and people connecting them to the store. These are some of the trajectories that meet and shape the store addnature as a place, but also a number of other places. This way organizational presence is performed. For example, addnature’s presence and Patagonia’s presence.

The pictures from the second event have been chosen since each one of them shows the meeting of two or more trajectories. For example, Hendryx skis, Norrona and Serre Chevalier. Or Houdini, Mountain Guide Travel guides and the places connected to their trajectories. This even more clearly shows how organizational presence is simultaneously achieved by anchoring in place(s) through the shaping of new, or intensified, configurations. In the case of Swedish outdoor entrepreneuring, the places under production are both in Scandinavia (the brands themselves, the Norrlandsgatan street, Norrland (the North) in general, and specific “authentic” places as cosy villages, natural parks or celebrated mountains) and in other parts of the globe (other extreme and/or “genuinely” natural places such as mountains in India, for example). It is not one single event that may permanently anchor organizational presence, rather it is in the repetition of connections that configurations may be increasingly intensified. That is, what I am proposing is a performative view of organizational presence. Connections are being shaped through pictures (as the ones in the stores), people (the guides, the salespersons themselves, the adventurer), media (magazines and websites).

Hence, in both cases, all the places we are talking about are by no means closed nor are they authentic places to just be accessed. They are places under construction, for example during Norrlandsgatan winter week. The mountains in which Haglöfs’ or Patagonia’s presence is being anchored are, for instance, not necessarily the same as the mountains the indigenous people, whether...
in India or North Sweden, live and work. Or better, they are the same mountains, but we have coeval heterogeneous trajectories meeting (or not), there is no static closure of those places. In the same manner, Haglöfs Winter Weekend and Fjällräven Classic (in summer) are two events in the north of Sweden organized by two strong brands, events contributing to the shaping of those places by bringing together a number of heterogeneous trajectories, that may, or not, become related. The interconnectivity of the spatial is in fact not between static things but between movements, a plurality of trajectories.

What is being produced in such an intensification of certain configurations is, among others, exceptionally abled and equipped, mostly white, bodies, often lone bodies, that have certain kind of relations (love, respect, challenge, adrenaline-producing) to a supposedly wild and genuine nature, bodies that are mobile across the globe, while nature is, and should be kept, stable and authentic. We can thus see that processes of entrepreneuring rely on and reinforce the production of certain configurations in terms of gender, ethnicity and body ableness. These configurations may thus be argued to reproduce certain forms of masculinity, where physical strength, independence, risk are central. On the other hand, we also have family-friendly locations being connected here (Ramundberget), we have pregnant women and children participating to the event, we have female adventurers and companies starting by producing a bra, a product still highly visible in the flagship store, just beside the guide talking extreme tours (Houdini). Hence, while the pictures are often about loneliness, sweat, strength, danger, the practices taking form are more shifting, a number of trajectories intersect and relate. These configurations also produce certain forms of Swedishness in which the relation to “genuine nature” is crucial, reproducing to some extent a romantic national identity ideal. Whitness is central and when the indigenous people of the North (those living in the “genuine nature”) are introduced in these places, they are made symbols of authenticity, instrumentally useful for the white bodies to achieve the longed for experience of authenticity (the same goes for indigenous people in other parts of the globe). These configurations, finally, also produce bodies that are not only able, they are extraordinarily so. Young or middle-aged, mostly male but also female, white, most often blond, but above all strong and able to challenge nature and their own physical/psychological limits, and master it, not least because of the sophisticated outdoor equipment connected to their actions. Ability to enter an uncontaminated nature and master such encounter is not only constructed as taken-for-granted, but also made central.

Hence, while studying gender, ethnicity and entrepreneurship often results in analyzing the experiences and stories of women belonging to ethnical minorities and how they handle their businesses, the illustrations I presented show the accomplishment of gender, ethnicity and body ableness (in certain ways) in producing places when doing entrepreneuring. Similarly to an intersectional perspective, these three ongoing accomplishments are simultaneously done, but the focus is not on how they intersect in the experiences and position of one person or one category of people, but rather how they unfold in the production of certain configurations resulting from coevalence of a number of trajectories. These illustrations hence show that doing ethnicity, gender and body ableness are crucial doings in entrepreneuring in this sector.
Selected references


