Building collaboration?
Territorial struggles in the OCCR

This chapter extends the previous chapter, in the sense that it also looks at how maps are performative, but from a spatial perspective. The OCCR was established in 2010 after a series of large breakdowns in the railway infrastructure. The retrospective analysis of these breakdowns revealed that lack of collaboration between different organizations was one of the important factors determining the often tedious ways in which breakdowns were handled and the system was recovered. As a solution, and to improve inter-organizational collaboration, the OCCR was designed as a co-located coordination center from which different parties together should make sense of and manage breakdowns. The design aimed to simplify the complex collaborative relations, as the building provided a space in which the relations were newly arranged in order to stabilize the dynamics of collaboration. The findings, however, illustrate that the building was not fully determining collaboration and the practices of coordinators also produced how the space of the OCCR was perceived and experienced, often in different ways than the design intended. Through several territorial practices, coordinators tried to preserve existing and to create new territorial boundaries between the diverse sub-systems in the co-located space. This chapter, then, shows how attempts to reduce complexity interfere with the ‘reality’ that it aims to manage. Moreover, and much like the previous chapters and the broader argument of this book, the findings show how a reduction of complexity invariably introduces other layers of complexity.
Scholars interested in organizational collaboration increasingly emphasize the role of the physical and spatial distance between employees, teams, and organizations as an important point to address how collaboration is achieved (Elsbach and Bechky, 2007; Fayard and Weeks, 2007; McKelvey et al., 2003; Wilson et al., 2008). Co-location, for example, is explained as a spatial intervention through which organizations address problems associated with collaboration or the coordination of work (Okhuysen and Bechky, 2009). It brings multiple geographically dispersed teams or organizations into closer proximity (O’Mahony and Bechky, 2008) in one space where workstations may be freely arranged with few physical barriers between different groups. However, until now, research on the effects of co-location on collaboration has yielded mixed findings.

Some studies suggest that close proximity improves collaboration among employees. Sharing organizational spaces, according to this literature, stimulates and affords different types of interaction: knowledge is disseminated easier (Song et al., 2007), quality of teamwork increases (Hoegl and Proserpio, 2004), employees create a shared sense of identity (Hinds and Mortensen, 2005), information is shared more effectively (Mark, 2002), and unplanned, spontaneous encounters are promoted (Fayard and Weeks, 2007). At the same time, however, new and often unintended consequences emerge from co-location, actually hindering the collaborative efforts mentioned above. Co-location can create new boundaries or obstacles between employees (Song et al. 2007). Pepper (2008), for instance, shows that employees working in close physical proximity are worried to distract others, resulting in less collaboration. A recent study about a co-located office where engineering, architect, and client organizations collaborate, illustrates that employees build ‘fortresses’ within the ‘open’ environment, and use physical objects ‘to fence off their territory and to provide a semi-private work area’ (Bektas et al., 2015, p. 159). But how are we to interpret these mixed, sometimes even contradictory, findings?

In the current chapter I argue that research on co-location has treated space – e.g. co-located offices or workspaces – as mainly abstract and static space. Collaboration is explained as an effect of a well thought-out and designed space whilst how space is used, perceived, or resisted is neglected. Corridors in hospitals, for instance, designed as passageways to move from A to B, can become important places for communication between medical staff (Iedema et al., 2010). In a similar vein, organizational spaces can be appropriated by employees to become meaningful places where resistance against managerial policies is undertaken (Courpasson et al., 2017). Based on the work of Lefebvre (1991), I define space not as a fixed or
given spatial setting but as being socially produced through spatial practices and perceptions. From such a perspective, organizational space both shapes the actions of employees while, in turn, space is being shaped by those very same actions (Hernes et al., 2006). This entails a conceptualization of space ‘as practices of distance and proximity which are ordered through planning and interpreted through the ongoing experience of actors’ (Taylor and Spicer, 2007, p. 335). In other words, and by invoking Korzybski’s (1933) observation that the map is not the territory that it claims to represent, research on co-location has emphasized the abstract ‘map’ of co-location – i.e. how it is architecturally designed and with what intentions – whilst neglecting the actual ‘territory’ of co-location – i.e. how it is practiced and experienced – (see also Maréchal, Linstead and Munro, 2013).

The aim of the current chapter, then, is to answer the following question: How do territorial practices shape co-located spaces where collaboration is being ‘demanded’? I thus address those territorial aspects that are inherently bound up with and produce co-location vis-à-vis how it is initially designed. Doing so, I will argue, helps to understand why studies on co-locations have generated mixed findings as such a perspective does not focus on collaboration as a deterministic resultant of designed co-located space. Rather, focusing on the effects on and experiences of employees in a spatial setting where collaboration is ‘demanded’ shows how space emerges at the interplay of maps as well as territories and co-location as well as dis-location. I draw on a longitudinal ethnographic study on practices of collaboration in the Dutch railway system conducted between September 2013 and November 2015. I zoom in on data of a newly built national control center (OCCR) where seven major railway organizations are co-located since 2010 to manage complex and large disruptions. The findings indicate that employees in the OCCR developed several territorial practices that undermined and subverted the intentions behind the design of the co-located building. These practices illuminate the different conditions upon which employees decide to collaborate, transcend territories, or resurrect the boundaries between them.

This chapter makes three contributions. First, it answers calls for more empirical research on the relationship between co-location and collaboration (Irving, 2016). Second, this chapter contributes to the literature on co-location by analyzing this organizational phenomenon from an explicit spatial perspective. This gives further insights to the current debate that has yielded mixed findings (e.g. Bektas et al., 2015; Reddy et al., 2001; Song et al., 2007) by illustrating that the design of co-locations does not solely determine whether and to what degree employees of different organizations are willing to collaborate. Rather,
Chapter 6

Co-located space should be understood as socially constructed and spatially enacted through territorial practices, and the intentions and practical orientations of employees in a co-located space shape how people work together, or not. Third, although these insights might not be novel to the literature on organizational space, I do offer further empirically grounded insights on the role of territoriality in how the design of spatial interventions is enacted in practice. This provides a stepping-stone in understanding how designed organizational space is used, contested or even resisted.

The rest of the chapter is organized as follows. In the theoretical part I shortly discuss the relationship between co-location and collaboration, after which I explore how territoriality in organizations is understood. After the methods section, in which I reflect on some of the methodological issues regarding the study of space, the chapter presents the ethnographic data. I conclude the chapter with a discussion, after which I briefly summarize the research and elaborate its contributions.

6.1 Changing collaboration by changing space

New institutional demands can trigger the emergence of new organizational spaces (Vaujany and Vaast, 2014), and such organizational change may be realized through spatial (re)design (Cameron, 2003; Hancock, 2006; van Marrewijk, 2009). Consequently, the relation between co-location and collaboration emerged as an academic topic (e.g. Bektas et al 2015; McElroy and Morrow, 2010; Irving 2016). Notwithstanding that co-location changes collaborative practices at least to some extent, it remains unexplored how such change occurs and how this shapes collaboration. On the one hand, co-location promises to increase collaboration, resulting in higher performance and better quality of work (Hoegl and Proserpio, 2004). A study by Hinds and Mortensen (2005), for example, suggests that co-location increases a sense of shared identity and context amongst different teams, resulting in significantly less conflict than geographically distributed counterparts. On the other hand, others suggests that co-location may lead to several unintended consequences that actually undermine the efforts to improve collaboration by means of spatial design (e.g. Pepper, 2008).

I interpret these ambiguous findings as a result of research putting much emphasis on the design and intentions of a co-located space whilst neglecting the situational practices of the people inhabiting those spaces. It reflects a rather classical assumption, in organizational practice as well as theory, that the abstract descriptions of work – design, architecture,
manuals, organizational charts – can adequately represent how work is actually done (Brown and Duguid, 1991). Thus, studies on co-location generally depart from a designed space and its intentions to improve collaboration, and then ‘map’ this on an organizational reality to conclude whether collaboration indeed has changed or not. However, I contend, this does not do justice to the role of practices and experiences of those organizational actors who actually work in the newly designed space.

Co-located buildings usually involve a new collaborative setting between different teams, department or organizations. I see inter-organizational collaboration as a ‘hybrid’ solution through which organizations attempt to tackle problems that the individual entities alone cannot solve themselves (Gray, 1985). This relates closely to the notion of organizational boundaries, especially when considering that co-located buildings may need to dissolve existing boundaries between different individual entities whilst new boundaries are simultaneously created. Moreover, organizations can engage in such a new collaborative setting from a diverging set of goals and interests (O’Mahony and Bechky, 2008), and this may potentially lead to tensions (Star and Griesemer, 1989). Although co-location is seen as a way to overcome these tensions by making the work of the different groups visible to others (Okhuysen and Bechky, 2009), thereby facilitating both formal and informal coordination of activities, Reddy et al. (2001) claim that the practices of organizational members may still remain unintelligible or opaque to each other. Their study suggests that the practices of different groups shape how space is used, concluding that ‘although being physically co-located does help coordinate their activities, the diverse work practices of these groups prevent them from receiving the full benefits of co-location’ (2001, p. 256).

As Dale and Burrell (2008, p. 27) argue, spatial design is a cultural and social practice taking place within an existing system of power. Thus, power is enacted on a micro-level through the practices of organizational members, and power relations may develop in significantly different ways than was intended through the design of the building (Kornberger and Clegg, 2004). Co-location, then, does not just provide organizational actors with a newly mapped, designed territory, but this territory is produced and reproduced through practices (cf. Lefebvre, 1991). Similarly, a practice-approach on organizational boundaries illuminates how boundaries in co-located buildings may be blurred or reinforced in everyday organizational life (Østerlund and Carlile, 2005). Thus, shedding light on practices may enhance an understanding of co-location, an idea I will now highlight further in the context of territoriality.
6.2 The map… Or the territory?

Anthropological literature has been a rich source for our understanding of space and territories (Low and Lawrence-Zúñiga, 2003; Rodman, 1992). Departing from Lefebvre’s (1991) insights, I distinguish this literature in two different streams: space-as-map and space-as-territory. For Lefebvre, space is not a container that is ‘just there’, but space is socially produced through how it is conceived (i.e. through abstract representations), perceived (i.e. through everyday practices), and lived or imagined.

The first stream perceives space to be fixed; an ethnographic local reality taken for granted, the exotic setting in which social relations are more or less fixed to territories. This is what Corsin Jimenez (2003) calls an objectified understanding of space with social relations having certain spatial capabilities. He criticizes this understanding by addressing problems of representation. It puts space forward as a fixed category, a map with given attributes rather than an emerging or fluid territory. In a similar vein, Maréchal et al. (2013) draw on Korzybski’s (1933) famous expression that the map is not the territory it represents, illustrating that a fixed conception of space does not engage with space as it is lived and embodied by human beings through their material practices. In Lefebvre’s (1991) words, the space-as-map perspective is a limited understanding of how space comes about, as it mainly emphasizes how space is conceived in abstract plans or designs.

In the context of co-location, the space-as-map perspective is problematic. The design of space is reified to the extent that what is mapped is equated with the territory, and we forget that such abstractions are always incomplete. What gets on the map is not part of the territory and nor of ‘things themselves’. The map is constructed out of our (incomplete) understanding of the territory, and this is nothing else than information we perceive about differences in the world (Bateson, 1987; Zundel, 2014), such as differences in height or the boundary as a static line dividing separate parts. In the territory, however, boundaries between sub-systems (or, in this case, co-located sub-teams) are not static but active enactments of differences, emphasizing how such sub-systems in a spatial sense can be both close and distant, both separated and joined (Cooper, 1986).

The second stream of studies, the space-as-territory perspective, sees space as socially constructed, politicized, and emerging from a specific historical, multivocal trajectory (Low and Lawrence-Zúñiga, 2003; Rodman, 1992). From this perspective, space is produced through practices and events that are always already spatial and material, rather than being
inscribed from some outside and abstract map (Corsin Jimenez, 2003; Maréchal et al., 2013). Explained from Lefebvre’s idea of the social production of space, this perspective focuses on space beyond how it is planned by architects or managers by also considering how space is perceived (practiced or used) and lived (experienced or symbolically constructed). The practices and experiences of those working in the planned space may run counter to the intentions behind the design of that space. The appropriation and reconstruction of a specific (designed) place by employees, for instance, may produce meaningful places where employees subvert managerial intentions and plans (Courpasson et al., 2017).

This relates closely to a more phenomenological understanding of space. Anthropologist Ingold (2000), for instance, sees space not in terms of how the world is designed in a representational style (the building-perspective), but how it emerges through our engagements in that world (the dwelling-perspective). In fact, building would be wholly impossible without our dwelling (see also Heidegger, 1971), as ‘the forms people build, whether in the imagination or on the ground, arise within the current of their involved activity, in the specific relational contexts of their practical engagement with their surroundings’ (Ingold, 2000, p. 186). In other words, space is not just where people are but also involves people’s practical engagement with space (Corsin Jimenez, 2003).

This implies, then, that organizational territories are flexible to the extent that actors can conform, resist, or work around spaces as designed. This raises some questions about co-location that emphasize issues related to power: who (re)defines a territory, whose meaning prevails, who places landmarks, where are the shortcuts? De Certeau’s (1984) understanding of power relations is relevant here, as he distinguishes between spatial strategies and tactics. A strategy involves the calculation of power relations in which subjects with power ‘rationally’ postulate something as a place; for example, managers claiming an office to now be a co-located space where collaboration is demanded. However, what de Certeau calls ‘tactics of the weak’, this postulated place can always be spatially manipulated or contested through the practices of actors. Territoriality thus implies that co-location as designed space can be contested; its meaning and boundaries are open to negotiation and may materialize in different ways than intended.

In conclusion, the literature on co-location mainly highlights the space-as-map perspective, thereby emphasizing a space with fixed capabilities that were designed. As a result, organizational scholars come to diverging conclusions whether and to what extent collaboration has changed as per the original intentions (the map seems to either adequately
or insufficiently represent the actual new organizational reality). This chapter pushes this literature forward by arguing that the abstract representations of a space are only one aspect through which we can understand co-location. Adding the space-as-territory perspective, we can begin to interpret the mixed findings in this literature. Such a perspective takes serious the daily practices and experiences of those employees inhabiting a co-located building where collaboration is ‘demanded’, thereby accounting for maps as well as territories; order as well as disorder; blurred as well as reinforced organizational boundaries; co-location as well as dis-location.

6.3 Methodology

6.3.1 Research Context

Until 1995, the NS managed the Dutch railway system. For nearly 60 years the NS was the only organization managing the railways and all rail-related aspects (infrastructure, trains, traffic control, railway police, train mechanics, etc.). Then, under European legislation, bits and pieces of the organization were privatized, and in 2005 NS eventually split up into NS Passengers and ProRail. The commercial operator NS Passengers became responsible for transportation on the railways, and the publicly owned ProRail for traffic control, infrastructure management and rail allocation. This split did not happen without a fair share of setbacks and difficulties (Veenendaal, 2004), as a series of harsh Dutch winters in the first decade of the new millennium resulted in some ‘black days’; the whole railway system went out of control and people were stuck for hours at stations without information. A period commenced in which both organizations publicly blamed the other for under-performance, creating further territorial gaps between NS and ProRail. Every Dutch citizen seemed to have an opinion about the railways, ridiculing the fact that minor influences such as wet leaves and a little bit of snow could have such catastrophic effects on the once renowned railways.

On Wednesday afternoon April 6, 2005, the computer systems in one of the regional traffic control centres were malfunctioning. This was the start of a series of incidents, eventually culminating in a disruption of the complete railway system. Until the next morning, it was impossible to ride any trains to the city of Utrecht, a major hub. Internal research showed that the physical distance between the organizations and the different regional control posts was seen as the major reason of this lasting disruption; it was deemed difficult
to communicate and collaborate effectively when different parties did not share a common operational picture. This was the starting point for the development of a national control centre, called the OCCR. To overcome problems related to physical distance and in order to prevent similar disruptions in the future, the organizations were supposed to be brought in closer proximity by co-locating them in one control centre, thereby facilitating collective sensemaking of future disruptions (see Merkus et al., 2017).

Also the Dutch government made some severe statements that the organizations had to increase performance and improve their collaboration. These changing institutional demands resulted in the emergence of a new organizational space through which the railway organizations attempted to claim a (renewed) sense of legitimacy (Vaujany and Vaast, 2014). The OCCR was born and, since 2010, the most important railway organizations are co-located here underneath one roof (see figure 1 for a simplified layout of the OCCR).

![Figure 1. The layout of the OCCR](image)

1: NS rolling stock
2: Freight transporter
3: ProRail Traffic Control
4: NS Travel Information
5: National Coordinator
6: Rail Maintenance
7: ProRail Back office (intake of incidents)
8: ProRail Asset Management
9: Infrastructure Contractors
10: OCCR ICT
6.3.2 Methods and Analysis

To study the OCCR, I employed a range of methods that are typical for an ethnographic study (Ybema et al., 2009) in order to assess, observe and understand those territorial practices through which employees challenged the co-located space. By being present in the organization for a long period of time, ethnographers aim to interpret and explain a range of cultural and organizational phenomena (Pettigrew, 1990) to provide an emphatic understanding of the daily activities of employees (Yanow and Schwartz-Shea, 2006). The OCCR study was part of a larger research on collaboration in the Dutch railway system that was conducted between September 2013 and November 2015.

In this study, several interpretive research methods were used to collect data of the OCCR – participant observation, observation, interviewing, and document analysis. Although the level of participation was limited due to the highly specialized work of coordinators at the OCCR, from a spatial perspective the ethnographer was able to participate simply because by being there he was able to dwell in and experience the co-located building himself. By getting a ‘feel’ for the organizational space and its materials, the ethnographer tried to become aware his own embodied experiences through auto-ethnographic reflections (van Marrewijk, 2011).

For the field visits I followed coordinators during shifts, attended meetings, joined for lunch, observed their practices, etc. I followed coordinators from different organizations that were located in the OCCR, and made sure to be there during normal operations as well as during disruptions and incidents in order to observe both the exceptional and the mundane (Ybema et al., 2009). Whereas the ethnographic reflections highlighted the experience (of the ethnographer) of the OCCR, the observations of coordinators were focused on their use of the space. I also conducted 13 interviews to get additional information regarding the OCCR; five of these interviews were conducted with managers and external consultants who initiated and developed the OCCR from idea to construction, and eight were conducted with coordinators working in the co-located space. Whereas the interviews with consultants and managers mainly focused on the design of and intentions behind the OCCR, the interviews with coordinators further zoomed in on their experience as well as use of space. Finally, a range of organizational documents about plans and implementation of the OCCR was analyzed to get a clearer understanding of the design of the building.

During the fieldwork I already started the analysis from the auto-ethnographic reflections of how space was experienced by myself. The rest of the research was conducted
in an iterative-inductive style (O’Reilly, 2005), meaning that the analysis guided further observations and vice versa. I started exploring the notion of co-location from different theoretical explanations such as inter-organizational collaboration, territoriality, and aspects of identity and power, all of which were probed further in interviews. Eventually, I saw most merit in staying close to the actual physicality of the OCCR as a co-location, which is inherently spatial, and decided to analyze this spatial setting through the notion of territoriality. By reading and re-reading the data, I discovered that different spaces in the OCCR were used in very different ways. I analyzed these in terms of territoriality, and decided that the spaces of the kitchens and the control room were most interesting. By zooming in on the data I started understanding those discrepancies between spaces as designed and actually used in practice and experienced. From this, the practices of preserving, enacting, and situationally using territorial boundaries emerged, which I will now illustrate in the empirical section.

6.4 Findings: Co-location or ‘dis-location’?

Maréchal et al. state that the creation of new organizational forms, such as the OCCR, also implicate ‘the emergence of new territorial assemblages’ (2013, p. 202) and we can thus expect that the co-location of distinct organizations may produce questions of power and identity. Below I will show how these issues were not so much verbally negotiated but, rather, spatially enacted by OCCR employees in defining the territories in the new building. A telling example is offered by one of the OCCR project managers, who reflects how the transition from design to actual use happened, when the building was officially opened and ‘occupied’ by the first shift of employees:

‘After more than three years of designing and building, the OCCR was finished, a brand-new high-tech control centre, the showpiece of the rail-sector. The night of the move I stood on the balcony with a colleague... The first people arrived, and the National Coordinator, the figurehead of the OCCR, took a large yellow pencil sharpener out of his bag. Without hesitation he screwed it down onto the untouched shining desks. We couldn’t actually hear it, but I still imagine how the plywood of the desktop cracked: in our eyes a brute baptism of the workplace. From that moment, the OCCR wasn’t ours anymore but it was in the hands of the employees’ (interview project manager 14 October 2014).
6.4.1 The Kitchen – Do not enter

The consultants and project managers responsible for the design of the OCCR were clearly well aware that people usually bond by sharing food:

‘We started a kitchen-committee... We needed a common space for informal interaction between people... We tried giving a good example. On the night of completion [of the OCCR] I personally cooked six big pots of mash. We wanted to show: Dear people, cook for each other!’ (interview project manager 14 October 2014).

It seems almost universally accepted that cooking, eating and the sharing of food is not just one of the basic necessities of our human existence but, moreover, a way through which people bond. Anthropological examples on the role and meaning of cooking and eating in specific cultures abound: from cooking as a ‘language’ through which society translates its structures (Levi-Strauss, 1997) to cookbooks as ‘artifacts of culture in the making’ (Appadurai, 1988, p. 22). Food and food-related topics are rich sources through which anthropologists can study the constructed nature of a diverse range of societal processes (for a thorough review, see Mintz and Bois, 2002).

Railway operations happen in 24/7 shifts, including breaks for breakfast, lunch and dinner. An OCCR coordinator explains how food always used to be an important aspect of shifts when he was still working in one of the regional (not co-located) control centers. Ordering or cooking food was something you would do ‘with the whole crew’ and it ‘really belonged to the work’. Collective meals, parties, spontaneous after work drinks (‘drinking with the boys’) and even self-organized holidays with colleagues, stories about the past were abound illustrating what was often referred to as ‘Family Rails’. Through this nostalgic talk they not only emphasized their collective identity in the past but, more importantly, this exemplified the lack of a collective identity in the current co-located building. According to a coordinator there had been two attempts to organize a barbeque with all OCCR employees, but both failed due to a meager turnout. There was one exception: ‘Traffic Information’ sometimes arranged an informal breakfast on Sunday mornings. However, this breakfast actually reinforced boundaries, as it was by no means an invitation for the other organizations to join: ‘Sometimes, only if I’m really lucky, they fry me an egg as well’, a coordinator smirks.
6.4.2 Preserving existing territorial boundaries

The kitchen in the OCCR turned out to be anything but a place to cook. It was a place where few would engage in real conversation and even fewer would actually stay to enjoy their meal. The following excerpt from the ethnographic field-notes describes a typical day in the OCCR kitchen around dinnertime:

The television, which is always on, broadcasts the opening ceremony of the Olympic winter games in Sochi; the couches, where nobody ever sits, are empty; the chairs, never occupied, are turned upside down on the tables (see photo 2). The fluorescent light shines bright, but a faint mood prevails. The kitchen block looks uniform; all cabinets are sterile white and lack a handgrip. From the outside I cannot discern cupboards from dishwashers. At the far end are several refrigerators in the same design as the other cabinets. Upon closer inspection, however, I see there are nametags on each. NS, ProRail traffic control, ProRail asset management, ICT, Back Office, Freight Transporter; each column has its own fridge (see photo 3). In front of the microwaves stand five men in a row, waiting for their food to be finished. They are silent, except for the occasional smothered ‘hello’ or ‘have a good shift’ whenever someone joins or leaves the row. A microwave beeps and a man steps out of the row to get his plate. With a fork he squashes the amorphous lump of spaghetti into model, and while on the television the fireworks and bombastic music of the opening ceremony reach a climax, he leaves the kitchen to enjoy dinner from behind his desk (observation during fieldwork, 7 February 2014).

Photo 2. The abandoned kitchen of the OCCR. Photo by author
The ‘emptiness’ of the kitchen could be described using Stein’s famous expression: ‘there is no there there’ (1937, p. 289), an abandoned place of which most meaning has been deprived. Or, using Auge’s (1995) terminology, we could argue the kitchen is a non-place; opposed to an ‘anthropological’ place, a non-place is ‘a space which cannot be defined as relational, or historical, or concerned with identity’ (1995, pp. 77–8). However, from a perspective of territoriality, the kitchen is a space full of meaning. The OCCR as co-located space is designed to reflect the broader demands for improved collaboration between railway organizations, forcing OCCR employees, at least to a certain extent, to collaborate. One usually goes to the kitchen when on break or off duty and, hence, it is also one of the spaces that are informal and not under scrutiny of managerial control. So, in a sense, the kitchen is ‘unmanaged’ space. The OCCR as a map, that is as a representational concept that intends to stimulate inter-organizational collaboration, also fostered unintended practices through which employees sought ways to preserve existing territorial boundaries.

First, the kitchen was collectively constructed as a place that one should avoid or at least tread lightly. Evidencing the ‘un-kitchenly’ atmosphere (bright lights, no talking, chairs turned upside down on tables), the kitchen was no inviting place to actually eat, alone or together. There was a myth that right after the installment of the OCCR, the kitchen was used by people who disagreed with certain ‘forced’ collaborative concepts to give full vent to their
aggression, resulting in broken kitchen objects. Although nobody seemed to remember this when asked directly, someone reflected that this myth implicitly constructed the kitchen as taboo: ‘Apparently it has become a kind of no-man’s-land, because the social pressure of your own tribe is so high that... well, you just shouldn’t show your face in the kitchen’ (interview OCCR consultant).

Secondly, fridges were marked per individual organization. Before the OCCR started its operations, employees had already labeled the fridges by applying stickers with the names of the organizations. For a former OCCR consultant, the almost banal labels on the fridges could be traced back to NS and ProRail splitting up at the beginning of the century: ‘All conversations about the OCCR were poisoned by discussions between NS and ProRail about who would become the boss of the building... If this is what managers communicate to the people below, the result will be fridges with stickers’ (interview consultant OCCR). A project manager adds that labeling the fridges was a way through which employees were able to maintain their individual identities: ‘We knew we needed several fridges because we had to facilitate a large group of people. But eventually this resulted in fridges that were earmarked per “blood type”’ (interview project manager). Stories about the fridges were, most of the time, only implicitly or ironically referred to, only building on the myth of the kitchen as a no-man’s land where territories were preserved. When shadowing one of the National Coordinators, he insisted to put my dinner in their fridge, as ‘our fridge is much better than the others’ (informal conversation).

In sum, the kitchen was a place where the employees of the OCCR were able to preserve already existing territorial boundaries through certain sociomaterial practices. These ‘tactics of the weak’ (De Certeau 1984), are ways through which people manipulate a dominating strategy, something done spatially rather than verbally. The managers of the project team also realized they were hardly able to do anything about these tactics: ‘We can hardly force people to put their rolls in another fridge’ (interview project manager).

6.5 The Control Room – On traitors, friends and foes

The control room is the heart of the OCCR: the largest railway organizations are represented here, from which the operation of the Dutch train traffic is managed on a 24/7 base (see photo 4). Although smaller disruptions are still managed from the regional posts, coordinators
in the OCCR aim to reduce the impact of disruptions and anticipate and prevent larger disruptions (e.g. when extreme weather is expected). The control room is designed as an open space of 1,000 m$^2$, accommodating around 100 workstations. The floor-level is equal to avoid that differences in height could be interpreted as a difference in hierarchy. Each workstation is designed in a uniform way to allow flexible positioning and promote mingling of the different employees of the individual columns. In rows of four, the desks are built in a semi-circular formation, sometimes called ‘bananas’, in order to optimize the lines of sight deemed necessary for easy communication and collaboration between organizations. The spatial use in the control room, however, differed from how it was intended. The individual organizations usually sat together in one group. Although desks were designed in a semi-circular shape to disclose the whole space to every individual (see figure 2 left side), teams could enclose themselves from the rest by slightly repositioning their chairs (see figure 2 right side), thereby implicitly reinforcing territorial boundaries.

Photo 4. The control room at the OCCR
Retrieved from http://www.occr.nl/sites/default/files/8109%5B1%5D.jpg
6.5.1 Enacting territorial boundaries

In the control room, territories were enacted through verbal and spatial communication that remained rather indirect and implicit. The work of one of the organizations – concerned with the official registration of incidents – was largely done by phone, requiring some concentration and silence. Every now and then, these employees would let the others know their disregard of noise in the control room by releasing a long and loud ‘shshhhhh!’ to tell the others to keep it down. One coordinator explained this resulted from the fact that they used to be located in a separate office without other teams or organizations. He remembered this as ‘like a little paradise secluded from everybody else’ (informal conversation). In a sense, the hushing was a way to communicate to others to shut up without insulting anyone in particular.

Sometimes, on the other hand, coordinators intentionally raised their voice, so others would implicitly get a particular message:

A coordinator complains to the ethnographer about a colleague from one of the other organizations, sitting just 2 meters away from us. He had tried to arrange something without informing her. She suddenly raises her voice: ‘This guy [winking at him without looking] always believes he’s the boss. But right now, he has nothing to decide on this matter; it has to go through us’. Without paying any attention to him, she does want her remarks to be heard (observation during fieldwork, 10 February 2014).

By claiming ownership over particular resources according to certain procedures (‘this belongs to us’) territorial differences were enacted rather than dissolved. This indirect messaging happened on a regular basis and I interpret it as ways through which employees
enacted territorial boundaries to cope with being co-located with others who sometimes pursue other goals or have a different working style.

Although there were no visible boundaries in the control room (e.g. objects hindering lines of sight) or visible signs of differences in the design of the workstations, nowhere were boundaries between the organizations (or, indeed, borders between the territories) more sensible than here:

Today I will shadow Margret [NS]; since I can’t find her immediately I have a chat with Linda [ProRail] whom I already shadowed a few times. We’re having a friendly conversation about her upcoming holidays when suddenly Margret joins: ‘Hey there Thijs, let’s go to my place OK?’ I know it sounds strange, but I feel like a traitor. Linda doesn’t seem to mind, but I’m fully aware that today I will pay a visit to ‘The Other’. The entire day I feel the separation between Linda and myself. It’s like an invisible border between us; invisible, but clearly there (observation during fieldwork, 20 January 2014).

It was not just the researcher who ‘felt’ these divisions. The employees of the control room were also aware of the boundaries separating the individual organizations, and this sense of territoriosity was spatially enacted in different ways. During a workshop of one of the columns, a coordinator tells a story about what his colleague does whenever someone ‘from the other side of the aisle’ comes to him regarding an issue: ‘He doesn’t look up but carefully says “No! No! No!” synchronized with the rhythm of the footsteps of the other’ (informal conversation). The others chuckle and share different nicknames they use for others.

Often, when a coordinator from one organization would walk to another to discuss a potentially difficult topic, both would go to great lengths to symbolically rematerialize the non-existent barriers between them:

From a distance, Nate walks towards Jesse. With firm steps and eyes focused on Jesse, almost like a cowboy in a Wild West movie, he walks towards him in a straight line. It looks like ‘The Walk’ I have observed much more often. As if one literally makes a passage to another place, to an enemy you need to speak. ‘I come in peace, my brother’, could be the opening line of the conversation. When Nate arrives, Jesse pretends to not notice him. Nate pauses for a second but then, without hesitation, he knocks on Jesse’s table. ‘Knock, knock’, Nate says loud. Jesse turns his chair towards Nate but keeps his eyes on me: ‘I believe I have a customer’, he says with acted surprise (observation during fieldwork, 26 February 2015).
It was in these kinds of practices that differences between the territories, the ones that co-location aimed to dissolve in order to soothe communication and collaboration, were actually reinforced. Through ‘The Walk’, proximity was constructed as distant rather than close; not noticing someone at the table illustrated denial rather than acceptance; knocking on an imaginary door immediately resurrected the walls that the OCCR had tried to demolish, showing closure rather than openness; welcoming the other as ‘a customer’ reinforced differences in identity as well as power relations.

6.5.2 Situational use of territorial boundaries

Despite the enactment of territorial boundaries as described above, the different coordinators were most of the time still able to collaborate or come to an agreement on certain matters, and this required the boundaries between the different territories to be blurred or lifted to some degree. Thus, as the following section will show, territorial boundaries were not fixed but situationally constructed. Going back to coordinators Nate and Jesse will act as a good example:

Nate needs information concerning the prognosis of an incident, but Jesse nonchalantly tells him he does not feel like making the necessary calls right now. Nate reacts rather resolute: ‘I do not agree at all. You can’t get away with this so easily and I’m quite disgruntled’. Whereas this could either imply the end of the conversation or the beginning of a discussion, here the conversation continues but on a completely different topic. Earlier that week, a mechanic had forgotten to bring his lance (a safety tool to prevent trains from entering tracks under repair) to an incident, and this issue caused a delay of an extra 20 minutes and two cancelled trains. Both Jesse and Nate are astonished by what has happened and together they accuse the mechanic of a sloppy job. The cold conversation between the two seems to thaw, and Jesse promises to go after the prognosis, the reason why Nate came to Jesse in the first place (observation during fieldwork, 26 February 2015).

People in the OCCR seemed capable of forming and breaking bonds with different people quite easily. In fact, ‘The Other’ could shift within seconds from the ‘enemy’ to a ‘friend’. Situationally using the territorial boundaries seemed a way through which coordinators were able to cope with a wide array of different, competing interests. Thus, when certain practical orientations demanded collaboration, territorial boundaries became temporarily blurred.

When a larger disruption unexpectedly hit the railway system, coordinators formed a collective bond against a non-OCCR actor (e.g. a regional post, the disruption itself, news
items about bad railway performance, a winter-storm preventing train traffic). On such occasions, coordinator could ask for a consultation ‘on the car hood’. The ‘car hood’ is a large white cabinet, just off the main floor of the control room, and has a height of approximately 1,5 meters for people to easily stand around it. The car hood, one coordinator explained, referred to the idea that, at times, quick problem solving is needed: ‘You know, you get out of the car, put a map on the hood and gather around it to quickly find your way back again’ (informal conversation, 4 December 2013). Around the space of the ‘car hood’ and with a common enemy in mind, discussions or disagreements between coordinators were, at least for the time being, non-existent and in this spatial setting collective decisions were made relatively easily. It acted as a kind of neutral land through which coordinators were able to temporarily lift any territorial boundaries. Thus, employees constructed a new kind of space whenever faced with a collective and practical problem, and this shows how territories were contingent upon situational demands. Through the situational use of spatial settings and the flexible bonding of coordinators, territorial boundaries were lifted, accounting for the fact that, despite the many differences, coordinators were still able to reach agreement on certain matters.

In sum, three spatial practices of ‘dis-location’ have been found related to the construction of territories: preserving existing territorial boundaries, enacting new territorial boundaries, and the situational use of territorial boundaries (see table 6 for an overview).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Practice</th>
<th>Examples</th>
<th>What does it do?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Preserving existing territorial boundaries</td>
<td>• The kitchen as ‘taboo’</td>
<td>Constructing space as ‘taboo’ or ‘no-man’s land’ to resist co-location; employees preserve already existing territorial boundaries and identities of individual organizations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Labeling the fridges</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enacting new territorial boundaries</td>
<td>• Indirect messaging (hushing, raising one’s voice)</td>
<td>Making boundaries between the different organizations visible in a co-located space where such boundaries are physically non-existent.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Reinforcing boundaries (The Walk, ‘knock knock’)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Situational use of territorial boundaries</td>
<td>• Flexible bonding (finding a common enemy)</td>
<td>Temporarily lifting territorial boundaries to reach agreement and collaboration in co-located space.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Neutral land (‘the car hood’)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 6. Territorial practices and their effects*
6.6 Discussion and conclusions

This study explored the relation between co-location and inter-organizational collaboration in the OCCR through the concept of territoriality. The findings show that, although the OCCR was spatially designed to improve collaboration between the Dutch railway organizations, employees developed several territorial practices through which the intentions of the co-located space were subverted. In the kitchen, existing territorial boundaries between the individual organizations were preserved, thereby transforming the kitchen into a non-place (Auge, 1995). The kitchen, designed as a space to stimulate informal collaboration through cooking and sharing food, became a taboo at the initiation of the OCCR. The earmarked fridges, still reminiscent of a past when no collaboration was demanded by such close proximity, show how the kitchen became a place where OCCR employees spatially resisted the managerial intentions of the co-located building (cf. Courpasson et al., 2017).

In the control room, the designers of the OCCR had gone to great efforts to abolish these territorial boundaries by means of an almost egalitarian workspace with uniform workstations to promote the flexible mingling of employees. However, new territorial boundaries were enacted here, for instance through spatial practices such as ‘The Walk’ or knocking on someone’s invisible door. This reminds of what Wilson et al. (2008) define as a spatial paradox: colleagues can physically be in close proximity while perceiving the distance to be quite far. Thus, while the plan of the co-located building was to decrease distance, the practices of OCCR employees produced a space where new territorial boundaries were resurrected, thereby actually increasing the perceived distance between the organizations.

These territorial boundaries appeared to be situational. When collaboration was not so much managerially but instead practically demanded (e.g. during major incidents), OCCR employees quite easily lifted those very same territorial boundaries by creating a common enemy. This is in line with Irving (2016), who states that collaborative spaces should be understood as scaffolds, where an important factor whether co-located colleagues collaborate is the practical intentions of those employees. But the analysis also clearly shows that even in cases when collaboration was practically perceived as necessary, OCCR coordinators did not use those spaces that were designed to facilitate collaboration. Instead, they created new spaces such as ‘the car hood’ where territorial boundaries could, at least temporarily, be lifted. This suggests that scholars interested in collaboration from a spatial perspective
can put more emphasis on the situational construction of territorial and/or professional boundaries (see also Iedema et al., 2010).

Through the different practices as discussed above, employees found ways to carve out their territories, thereby fostering what co-location aims to diminish. These findings are in line with Maréchal et al. (2013, p. 202) who state that the creation of new organizational forms also implicate ‘the emergence of new territorial assemblages’. The preservation of existing and enactment of new territorial boundaries created the OCCR as a ‘dis-location’ rather than co-location.

The distinction I made between space-as-map and space-as-territory helps to further understand the discrepancies between the OCCR as designed co-location and practices of ‘dis-location’. As I have argued in this chapter, the space-as-map perspective is incomplete and provides a too static understanding of co-location. What gets on the map are abstractions arrived from our understanding of the territory (cf. Bateson, 1987). The findings are thus extending those studies that define collaboration as an effect or outcome of co-location. Offering an alternative perspective, namely one that takes into serious consideration what happens in the territory, I show how co-located buildings emerge from a recursive process (Hernes et al., 2006). Co-located spaces shape how people collaborate, but not in a deterministic way. Those very same spaces are shaped by the practices and experiences of people ‘inhabiting’ that space. Space-as-territory emphasizes how space as designed may be contested. Territorial practices provide further insights into the political dimension of space (Kornberger and Clegg, 2004) showing how spaces as well practices are inscribed with power (Dale and Burrell, 2008).

The contributions of such an alternative perspective are threefold. First, I have shed light on the complex relationships between spatial design and spatial use in the context of collaboration in co-located spaces. This answers calls for more empirical research by scholars interested in collaboration in co-located spaces (e.g. Bektas et al., 2015; Irving, 2016). Second, and closely related, the findings show that taking territoriality as a starting point opens new vistas to study the relation between co-location and inter-organizational collaboration, as it introduces an understanding of ‘dis-location’. Such an understanding may move the literature beyond the current impasse where research on co-location has yielded mixed and ambiguous findings (e.g. Hoegl and Proserpio, 2004; Mark, 2002; Pepper, 2008), as it challenges the assumption that the design of space determines whether and to what degree people will collaborate. The space-as-map and space-as-territory distinction is especially interesting
here, as it provides a more dynamic understanding of the relationship between spatial design and use and, thus, may help interpret these mixed findings. Spatial practices of ‘dis-location’ are not necessarily negative or dysfunctional; on the contrary, it may be very functional for those employees situated in a co-located office, as it helps them to negotiate both sameness and difference. This also suggests that future research on co-location could address how collaboration in such buildings is shaped by questions of identity.

Finally, this chapter contributes more broadly to the literature studying how organizational space is enacted in and through practices (e.g. Hernes et al., 2006; van Marrewijk and Yanow, 2010; Vaujany and Mitev, 2013), claiming that territoriality is an insightful concept to study how such spaces emerge, develop, institutionalize or change over time. Future studies can unveil this development of new organizational spaces over time (e.g. Vaujany and Vaast, 2014) further by studying how new territories emerge or old ones are breached. Such a development will not happen without any contestation, and indeed the notion of territoriality could reveal more about the political and spatial dimensions of new spaces. In a similar vein, changing forms of organizational spaces produce new forms of organizational control (Dale, 2005), and territoriality could provide the means to study how such forms of control are spatially and materially resisted and with what effects.