To be (alike) or not to be (at all): aesthetic isomorphism in organisational spaces

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Abstract: Applying insights from neo-institutional theory to an analysis of two case studies – the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs (IMFA) and the Open University of Israel, both recently relocated to new award-winning buildings – this study suggests regarding organisational aesthetics as an important actor in isomorphic processes and exploring the processes of translating and editing, which evolved in the architectural decisions made in relocating to newly designed buildings .The contribution of the paper is in combining concepts used in studies of organisational aesthetics (especially Lefebvre's theory) and concepts of the neo-institutionalism. This theoretical combination is offered to better understand the architectural fashions and trends, which have become popular in contemporary organisational architecture, and to explore the adaptation processes.

Keywords: organisational aesthetics; isomorphism; organisational identity; translation; editing; diffusion; decoupling; managerial fashions; Lefebvre.

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1   Introduction

In the last two decades, organisational aesthetics has received increased theoretical attention in various research fields: organisational symbolism, environmental psychology, organisational culture, organisational identity, critical and post-modern theories and even communication studies (Clegg and Kornberger, 2006; Dale and Burrell, 2008; Elsbach, 2004; Elsbach and Pratt, 2007; Gagliardi, 1996; Hancock and Tyler, 2000; Hatch, 1990; Kornberger and Clegg, 2004; Linstead and Hopfl, 2000; Rafaeli and Pratt, 2006; Taylor et al., 2005). Though the importance of organisational aesthetics has already been investigated in constructing organisational image/identity (Dutton et al., 1994),[1] it is usually not treated as an important actor in organisational strategy, and it is rarely

conceptualised in neo-institutional terms as part of an environmental adaptation to accepted fashions and which is aimed at gaining legitimacy (see Rafaeli and Pratt, 2006).

Organisational aesthetics is defined as "knowledge created from our sensory experiences" (Taylor et al., 2005) and is perceived as an important factor in designing our thoughts and emotions due to its implicit effects and its influence on taken-for-granted assumptions. For this reason, it is often manipulated by management and designers to brand a new image for organisations, especially when accompanied by relocation to a new building. Organisations seeking to arouse specific emotions in their clients, workers or other visitors are able to achieve such effects by choosing colours, shapes and materials that are associated with the emotions or values that the organisation seeks to support. Moreover, specific styles of design have become more acceptable and popular than others and have generated new fashions in organisational architecture, which are spread through discourses and through shapes and colours in common use. Nevertheless, such fashions are not automatically adopted by organisations, and they tend to adapt and translate these environmental demands into practises that fit their specific context. On the basis of the Lefebvre's (1993) theoretical framework, I will attempt to explain the process of aesthetic isomorphism and its translation into a specific context by using Lefebvre's three spaces: the conceived space, the perceived space and the lived space.

The French philosopher Henri Lefebvre formulated a theory regarding the production of space and regarding the social relations involved in this process from a neo-marxist point of view (Lefebvre, 1993). His philosophy was recently implemented in studies of organisational aesthetics (see Dale and Burrell, 2008; Tyler and Cohen, 2010; Taylor and Spicer, 2007), especially his distinction between three kinds of spaces: the conceived space, the perceived space and the lived space. The first, the 'conceived space', is defined as the discourse of planning and the conceptualisation of space by architects and managers regarding the desired identity that the space is meant to project. The second, the 'perceived space', is the enactment of the architectural discourse translated into material artefacts and bodily gestures. The third, the 'lived space', which refers to the interpretations of the space given by those present in it, is influenced by the two other spaces, though without necessarily being identical to them (Wasserman and Frenkel, 2011).

On the basis of the distinction among these three spaces – the conceived space, the perceived space and the lived space – I argue that all three spaces are involved in aesthetic isomorphism and in the translation of architectural fashions into specific organisational contexts, in such a manner that the first two are more dominant in the diffusion and resemblance processes, and the third in the editing and translation processes involved in adapting an aesthetic fashion into a specific organisation. In other words, organisations tend to talk about aesthetics in a similar way (the conceived space) and might look alike (the perceived space), but they usually tend to interpret their aesthetics in a more particularistic way so that it will fit their desired identity.

Architectural fashions and trends are diffused both through architectural discourses, which are often backed up by managerial discourses (the conceived space), and through actual shapes and styles of design common in contemporary organisations. This disposition was documented in Dale and Burrell's recent book (2008), who refer mostly to fashions in the conceived space, that is, architectural discourses, which have trickled into organisational discourse and have become popular (such as transparency, openness, and so on), but they do not regard the similarities in shape (the perceived space). Moreover, though they point at a very important phenomenon in contemporary

organisational architecture, they do not regard it in terms of neo-institutional theory, which provides us with useful insights in understanding these fashions and their adaptation to specific contexts.

Neo-institutional theory has long introduced the idea of mimetic isomorphism used by organisations to legitimise their conduct and even their existence (Tolbert and Zucker, 1996; Scott, 2001; Meyer and Rowan, 1977), and much effort has been invested in understanding what is imitated, when, by whom and for what reason (Boxenbaum and Jonsson, 2008). Such mimetic processes are appropriate to organisational structures, practises, strategies, discourses and even symbolism (Glynn and Abzug, 2002; Zilber, 2002), but aesthetic isomorphism was not considered an independent actor in these organisational processes. In the following paragraphs, I will relate to the latest developments in neo-institutional theory through Lefebvre's three spaces, which might be useful to explain architectural fashions and their diffusion.

The contribution of this paper is twofold:

- for organisational aesthetics studies, this paper adds insights from neo-institutional theory, which is the most suitable theoretical framework for exploring managerial and architectural fashions and trends in designing organisational spaces.

- for neo-institutionalism, this paper suggests the applying of symbolic isomorphism to spatial representations and to examine the diffusion of fashions and trends in organisational architecture.

This study demonstrates not only how organisations choose aesthetic means to gain legitimacy in their professional field but also how, simultaneously, they translate and edit these fashions to fit their own context. The role of architects and designers in diffusion processes was not explored in neo-institutional theory, though their importance in constructing organisational identities and images is constantly growing.

2   Theoretical background

Early neo-institutional theory grew out of the idea that organisational structures, practises and procedure tend to take similar form when they seek an optimal fit to their environment (Aldrich and Fiol, 1994; DiMaggio and Powell, 1983). They conform to 'rationalised myths' in society about what constitutes a proper organisation, and these myths emerge as acceptable solutions. As more organisations conform to these myths, they become more institutionalised and legitimate, which subsequently leads to institutional isomorphism and to further diffusion of ideas. Such conforming is usually accomplished by three kinds of isomorphic mechanisms: coercive isomorphism, mimetic processes and normative pressures. These are not always distinct and may overlap (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983). Coercive isomorphism results from power relationships and politics that force organisations to adapt specific practises; mimetic processes arise primarily from uncertainty that cause organisations to imitate successful models and normative pressures pertain to what is widely considered a proper course of action and usually is the result of a similar educational background of the professionals. While the first stems from above (the regulations of the state), the other two stems from peer organisations (Boxenbaum and Jonsson, 2008).

Even though DiMaggio and Powell (1983) suggested three types of isomorphism, most of the studies thereafter have focused mainly on mimetic isomorphism and on diffusion processes (Mizruchi and Fein, 1999). Most of the research presupposes a homogenous environment that is being imitated, but recent studies take into account the multiple institutional pressures that often result in conflicting pressure for conformity. Moreover, some researchers have indicated a more agentic approach where actors can manipulate institutional pressures or adopt only partially (or differently) the pressures to conform. Such processes are facilitated through various processes, which may be categorised according to the extent of similarity to the original model that is being imitated. On the one hand, we can place decoupling, which refers to organisations that achieve legitimacy through the seemingly adopting a model or fashion, but in their actual practise, they are decoupled from the outer structure (Brunsson, 2002). While Meyer and Rowan proposed that decoupling consists of a defence action, recent literature suggests that decoupling is akin to impression management and includes not only structures but also images, decisions, discourses and policies (see Elsbach and Sutton, 1992).

On the other hand, when a practise or structure is implicitly adapted to local institutions, it is broadly referred to as translating or editing, terms which stem from Scandinavian institutionalism and which suggest a more interpretative angle to study organisations. According to this tradition, practise is always mediated by the interpreter, whether deliberate or not, and therefore ideas and practises always change in new contexts due to the interpretations of the institutional actors and their attempts to make sense of these models (Czarniawska-Joerges and Sevón, 1996; Sahlin-Andersson, 1996; Sahlin and Wedlin, 2008). This line of inquiry was a result of the critique against the homogeneity of the environment and the global culture, which the original neo-institutionalism presupposed (Czarniawska and Sevón, 2005). Many of these studies were based on Latour (1993) and Callon and Latour (1981), who coined the phrase 'translation' and paved the way for questions regarding the change of ideas when travelling between various contexts. Instead of asking which idea was accepted and which was rejected, the translation perspective focuses on the transformation (either by translation, editing or hybridisation) of ideas, practises and discourses in different social contexts (see example of 'glocal' hybridisation in Frenkel, 2005a, 2005b).

The focus on the dynamic nature of ideas and models redefines the meaning of imitation because imitating according to this line of inquiry is not to copy, but to change and innovate, and therefore may lead not only to homogenisation but also to variation (Sahlin and Wedlin, 2008). Imitation is conceptualised as a performative process, and ideas that are spread are not necessarily ready-made fashions, but rather subject to repetitive translation and flow (Czarniawska-Joerges and Sevón, 1996; Czarniawska and Sevón, 2005). According to neo-institutional writers, following a fashion is both an act of conformism and creativity, and this dynamics between differentiation and imitation provides the driving force for diffusion (Rovik, 1996).

Since actors tend to imitate those they want to resemble, imitation is always akin to identification and identity construction (Brunsson and Sahlin-Andersson, 2000). Organisations act according to a logic of appropriateness and when they want to perform a rational and modern appearance, they may adopt a fashion that would place them in a more central location in their field. When imitating, they seek to make sense of the new ideas based on their appropriateness to their desired identity (Cappetta and Gioia, 2006). Though identity is unstable and not intrinsic, organisations tend to develop their identity while picking up ideas from those who they imitate. Following these fashions does not

mean they copy them, but rather translate them into something that fits their identity. The adoption of fashions is driven both by the need for differentiated identity and by the need to conform to expectations and practises of others. Simultaneously, an opposite process takes place, so that imitation shapes identity, since "it constructs new relationships, references and identifications for comparison and for creating new identities. In this way, fashions and trends largely form through processes of imitation" (Sahlin and Wedlin, 2008).

In the flow, ideas are translated into objects, such as artefacts, books and architectural shapes, and these ideas are carried by various actors (architects, designers, managers, and so on), who translate and reconstruct the meanings of these ideas (Scott, 2008). Recent studies emphasise the role of various actors in constructing meaning systems and translating them to a specific context (see review in Zilber, 2008); however, the role of architects in this processes was never explored.

At the same time, the carriers of ideas and fashions have become part of a fashion setting community that set rules regarding, which images and identities are more appropriate for self-presentation of an organisation. The spread of fashions and the meaning they carry are often intensified by the carriers' 'institutional work' (Lawrence and Suddaby, 2006), which further institutionalises these trends and fashions and reframes them into widely anchored belief systems (Perkmann and Spicer, 2008). Discourses, theoretisations, translations and materialisations are all complementary ways to think about meanings in institutional processes, and they may offer us an interesting perspective to explore how architects and managers 'join forces' to make sense of reality and gain legitimacy for their actions.

The growing interest in organisational aesthetics (Clegg and Kornberger, 2006; Linstead and Hopfl, 2000; Kornberger and Clegg, 2004; Strati, 1999; Taylor et al., 2005) and its role in constructing identities (Dale and Burrell, 2008; Schultz et al., 2006) are very useful in grounding a better understanding of the role of aesthetics in institutional processes. Organisations use artefacts and aesthetics to express organisational identity (Cappetta and Gioia, 2006), and sometimes organisations even succeed in creating an association between a specific colour or shape and a specific organisation (Schultz et al., 2006). Most of the studies in organisational aesthetics did not use neo-institutionalism as a theoretical framework in their research and did not refer to the aesthetic similarities in designs of contemporary organisations. Though theorists of neo-institutionalism highlighted the importance of symbols, meaning and discourses in institutions (Scott, 2001) as well as the similarities in symbolic means, they treated it as part of a 'symbolic isomorphism' (Glynn and Abzug, 2002).

Symbolic isomorphism relates to a wide variety of artefacts. For example, Glynn and Abzug (2002) examined organisational names in a legitimacy gaining attempt; Fiol and O'Connor (2006) examined the medical black bag and the physicians' white coat as meaningful artefacts, which are perceived as 'appropriate' and therefore as legitimate. Zilber (2007) explores the role of organisational stories in maintaining institutional order. None of the research refers to architectural similarities, and the existing literature on institutional fashions does not refer at all to aesthetic isomorphism and to its carriers.

The above-mentioned Lefebvrian differentiation between three kinds of spaces – the conceived space, the perceived space and the lived space – helps us to shed light on the role of architects in shaping identities and meaning systems, which are materialised into architectural shapes and aesthetic discourses, and thus become institutionalised fashions.

The conceived space, which represents the architectural discourse, is one of the main routes through which architectural ideas are spread, since it provides a professional vision regarding what is considered to be an appropriate (and aesthetic) design. The conceived space is always anchored in the values, tastes and interests of powerful groups and is usually openly expressed in architectural books, design magazines, interviews in newspapers and even TV programs. Such an abundance of channels for expressing architectural ideas eases their diffusion among fashion followers. When designing a new building for an organisation, managers frequently join forces with architects in envisioning and conceptualising the future organisational space and provide meaning for the chosen structures.

The perceived space, which represents the space as materialised in practise, relates to the translation of the conceived space into shapes, colours, materials and the organisation of space. Architects and other professional designers assist in translating managerial ideas into shapes and design styles, and the result is a construction and reconstruction of well-accepted associations between managerial ideas and specific materials, such as efficiency and steel or transparency and glass (Guillén, 1997).

The lived space, which comprises the experiences and interpretations of the space by its users, relates to the gap between the original idea or fashion and its activation. It enables a more agentic point of view and points at the limitation of those in power (the fashion carriers) to enforce ideas and identities. Moreover, it emphasises the particular context of meaning systems and the work of meaning made by actors as well as the incomplete character of institutionalisation.

On the basis of the two case studies, I will examine the role of organisational aesthetics as a specific type of symbolic isomorphism, which became, in both cases, the heart of labour disputes. These cases demonstrate aesthetic isomorphism executed by two organisations in different fields in a process of identity change aimed at gaining legitimacy in their professional sphere. On the basis of the Lefebvrian three spaces, I will try to explore the role of architects and managers in the diffusion of architectural and managerial fashions as well as the translation made by the various actors to these fashions and trends.

3 Methodology

Research in organisational aesthetics is usually grounded in qualitative methods and is based on various methodologies, such as landscape interpretation, observations and interviews (Yanow, 2006). From an epistemological point of view, qualitative methods and neo-institutional theory have much in common, as they both adhere to a constructionist perspective (Scott, 2001). Qualitative methods are particularly appropriate for studies in which one or two case studies are investigated in depth to examine a broader phenomenon or to formulate a new insight regarding social reality or theory generating (Eisenhardt and Graebner, 2007; Yin, 1994). Moreover, in aesthetics research, these case studies often allow for the juxtaposition of the researcher's interpretations of space with those of the various organisational participants: workers, managers, clients and designers (Stake, 1994; Yanow, 2006, 2009).

The current research is based on two case studies in organisations, which were recently relocated to new highly praised buildings (and which also received prestigious prizes). The first site is the IMFA in Jerusalem and the second is the Open University of

Israel in Ráanana. Organisations undergoing aesthetic changes often challenge taken-for-granted assumptions since they arouse public discussion and debate about the architectural decisions. For this reason, the debates concerning the aesthetic appearance of their organisation are still intense and easy to discern.

3.1   The first site: the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs (IMFA)

The relocation of the ministry from a kibbutz-like compound to an ultra-modern building took place in 2002 and was supposed to project a new updated Western image for Israel. Contrary to the former compound, which consisted of several modest asbestos-roofed huts, set amidst well-tended gardens and with a relatively egalitarian distribution of space – all symbols associated with the 'old Israel', the new building is modern, technologically advanced, intended for show-off is sectioned according to rank and is symbolically associated with other high-tech buildings (see Figure 1).

Figure 1   The Ministry of Foreign Affairs: (a) the former building and (b) the new building (see online version for colours)

The former building   The new building
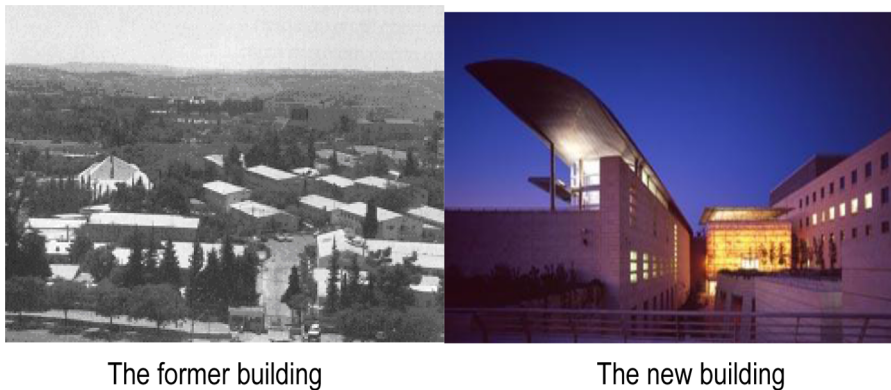
Though the new building was, in 2004, awarded the prestigious AIA prize and was crowned "one of the ten most beautiful buildings in the world", the employees rejected the new image the building was supposed to project. Resistance against the new building focused mainly on its hierarchical messages as well as on the inauthentic presentation of the contemporary nationality. This bitter resistance laid the ground for prolonged labour disputes, which are still fierce 9 years after the relocation.

3.2   The second site: The Open University building

The Open University was relocated in 2004 from a small, crowded building next to Tel-Aviv University to a new, impressive and spacious building located in Ráanana, a city in the periphery (but still prestigious). The relocation was supposed to solve both physical overcrowding in the former building and the poor image from which the University suffered. The new building is, therefore, much larger than the former building, covered with huge concrete platforms, architecturally sophisticated and much more hierarchical (see Figure 2). As opposed to the former building, in which departments were located in a diffused manner, the design was eclectic, not harmonious and there was

severe overcrowding, but at the same time, there were closed interactions and a feeling of intimacy between people from different departments – the new campus is spacious, departments are separated by floor and management is located in a separate area, not with the academic departments. Since the new building is far away from the central city (Tel Aviv), employees (from the academic sectors) tend to work at home and avoid coming to the new campus. The new buildings are therefore relatively empty and fewer spontaneous interactions take place.

Similar to the Foreign Ministry, the prestigious prize awarded to the Open University architect did not ease the relocation and did not reduce the employees' emotional resistance to the design style. Nevertheless, in this case, resistance was focused against the alienation attributed to the new building and against the 'non-academic' agenda, which employees ascribed to its planners.

Figure 2   The Open University: (a) the former building (b) the new building (see online version for colours)

The former building   The new building
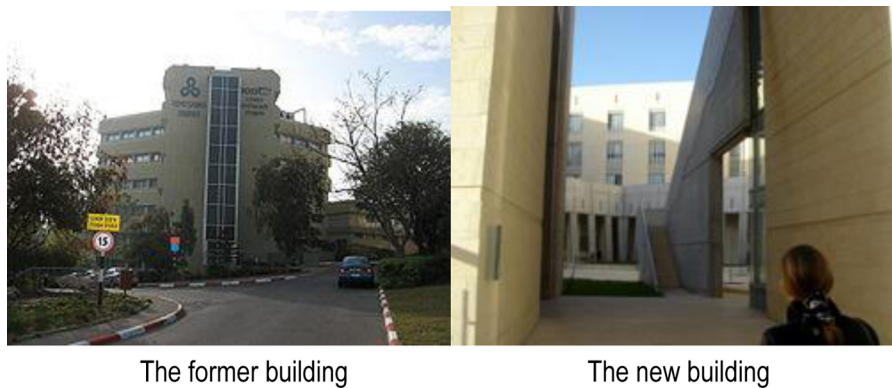
3.3   Data collection and analysis

Data was collected in three stages: The first was focused on the conceived space and sought architectural and managerial explanations for the design of the two buildings. Since both buildings evoked vigorous public debate, architects were frequently interviewed in newspapers and expressed their ideas explicitly. Other organisational texts that were directly related to the buildings and their aims were also collected: books that were published about the new building of the ministry, the programs that detail the organisations' needs and the 'spirit' of the desired design, interviews with architects and managers who were involved in the planning and the construction of both buildings (with the aim of examining if and how they translated their ideas about the desired identity into aesthetic markers). These abundant materials were used to discover the ways in which architects and managers conceptualise their architectural buildings as part of an adaptation process to their environment.

The second stage was aimed at detecting the perceived space, that is, the materialisation of the ideas in shapes, colours, materials and style. A field diary documented 20 observations of 30−60 min in length carried out at several sites in both buildings (cafeterias, corridors and halls, work stations, entrances, parking lots and so on). The aim of the field diary was to document the material artefacts in space, random chats in the corridors, materials in use and the habits of occupying the various spaces.

The third stage of data collection involved studying the lived space, that is, the interpretation users gave to their building. I interviewed 50 users in both buildings over the years 2003−2007 to capture the translation of the architectural ideas into an actual daily representation. The questions were relatively open, asking employees and managers about their thoughts and feelings regarding their new building.

The analysis was based on a constructive-critical perspective supported by cultural-symbolic theory. The various data collected was analysed according to a hermeneutic reading, which involves searching for repetitive patterns to decipher concealed meanings (Lincoln and Denzin, 1994).

Following Yanow (1995, 2006), the analysis was based on a comparison between the two sites trying to identify repetitive words, phrases and ideas that were dominant in each site. After a first reading of the interviews, central categories and themes were identified to track down the architects' and managers' ideas about the appropriate organisation and the way in which it should be presented aesthetically (the conceived space).

In the second stage, I identified similarities and differences between the two sites in shape and discourse (such as transparency, efficiency, openness, professionalism) to understand how the conceived space materialised into the perceived space. Field diaries, as well as observations, were used to corroborate the results collected from interviews and used to explore the spatial vocabulary and syntax (including shapes, height, colours, materials and style).

The next stage focused on the lived space and was conducted through a number of thorough readings of the interviews with the users, who interpreted their built environment and tried to make sense of its aesthetic symbols. These readings were aimed at deciphering major themes in translation of the conceived space into the perceived space and the way this translation is experienced by the users of the buildings. The analysis of these interviews follows the methodological process, which was put forward by Strauss (1987) and the stages of 'open coding' (the identification of general central themes), 'axial coding' (coding according to the axes of the analysis based on the initial characteristics identified in the first stage) and 'selective coding' (integrating data with categories while reexamining them and organising the data into a theoretical structure through the categories).

4   Israel, made in China: negating the national distinctiveness

Governmental architecture has an explicit goal, which is to express the values and processes of the dominant regime as well as of the national identity. Choosing how to present the nation reveals not only architectural fashions and contemporary trends but also political authority and social relations. This is never a simple task, but it seems even more complex in a young and perplexed country like Israel, where identity is so disputable, fluid, unstable and dynamic. The Israeli place is a site of ambivalence: it has to do with belonging to the place as well as alienation; a place of symbolic history and actual realisation. Zionism did not formulate a clear physical image of the territory that was handed to it, and the existing landscape was perceived as a symbol of backwardness and the hostility of the 'other'. The local landscape was perceived as the landscape of the natives, a site, which is identified with the Middle-Eastern culture of the enemy. Therefore, most of the government buildings were built in a modernistic style, which

enabled Zionism both to negate the Orient as well as to construct a new, local and modernist Israeli version. The kibbutz architecture, which until 2002 was chosen as a representation of Israel, allowed for the representation of both modernisation and of a new link to the local land. Though disputable, this architectural representation in the national 'front stage' (i.e., the Ministry of Foreign Affairs) was exceptional, unique in the world and symbolised a national distinctiveness.

Relocation to the new building raised questions and dilemmas regarding representation of the nation, but this time, the dominant discourse was focused on 'normalisation', fashions of design and 'being like others' and not on distinctiveness. For example, in an interview with N., a senior manager who was involved in the planning process, claimed:

> "We wanted to be like all other normal countries. It was not possible to stay with the kibbutz, which was very special, I admit. If we want to be part of the Western world, we cannot stay with the kibbutz … it should appear very technological, organised and orderly, like similar buildings I saw in the States or in Europe, and not like a pile of leaking huts … kibbutz modesty and egalitarian values are not relevant anymore in the Western world, and the former buildings looked like we were a third world country."

N expresses a managerial desire for 'normalisation', which he interprets not only as being Western, but also as giving up national distinctiveness ("like similar buildings I saw in the States or in Europe"). 'Western-ness' is understood in a monolithic manner and is translated to technological advancement, order and hierarchy. Not adopting an outer appearance that 'fits' the so-called 'Western standards' means to be excluded from the diplomatic fellowship, and therefore imitation of the Western style is perceived as essential for gaining legitimacy from the diplomatic hegemony. These pressures to assimilate and imitate other Western buildings were further reinforced through the professional-architectural discourse (i.e., in the conceived space), which articulated Westernisation as an inevitable move not only in the diplomatic corps but also in the architectural community. These architects used fashionable images, which they translated into professional terms. These images and terminologies were tailored according to the managerial aspirations for a new updated identity and had great appeal among the managers who were involved in the planning process.

On the professional level, architects used images that have long become widespread and even banal in contemporary architecture, such as openness and transparency, communality and intimacy, open communication and aesthetic pleasure (Dale and Burrell, 2008). One of the IMFA's architects said in an interview:

> "The buildings were designed as a campus … the general idea was to create by transparency an open atmosphere, so that even in a governmental institution one can feel good … We wanted to avoid the alienation that is so typical of such buildings, and to bring modernity to the public sector. The open space cubicles are part of this modernity and open communication which we wanted to encourage here."

The 'campus design' image, which became prevalent in many other workplaces, is inspired by urban terminology, such as 'streets', 'parks', 'junction' and so on, and is meant to encourage informal interactions as well as spontaneous confluence between people and ideas. These images are common in the architectural discourse, and they represent a modern and contemporary professional agenda. Imitating these images

enabled not only professional legitimacy for the architects themselves but also for managers of the Ministry since they echo new fashions of organisational ideas, such as commitment and employee identification, which supposedly challenge the traditional bureaucratic image of governmental organisations. Imitating such ideas presents the ministry as 'updated' in terms of managerial discourse as well as in architectural technologies and thus enhances organisational/professional legitimacy.

Architectural terminology was translated in this case into diplomatic terms when architects emphasised cosmopolitan ideas and declared that their aim was to represent an advanced and modernised country to be part of the Western world. Locality and its representation was not part of that array, and therefore it was excluded by emphasising the global context, not homeland history and local memories. In two books published about the building, written by the architects, the building was described this way:

> "Unlike the Supreme Court building next door, where one can find deliberate references to history, the architects here made no such references, and they succeeded in achieving a monometallic sensation without relying on historical models … The Ministry of Foreign Affairs stands out in its restraint and its moderation and offers a clear and logical reading, with no stories, no memories and no embellishments …"

Israel, according to the new architectural representation is utopian, sterile and matches ideals of so-called 'global beauty', cleanliness and order. In Foucault's (1986) terms, it is not a heterotopian space, which enables an interaction between various people, but rather a kind of 'homotopia', which does not allow for the invasion of alternative images or places. Israel is represented as purified of itself, of its conflicts and of its uniqueness. The new representation supplies an imagined product to an imaginary audience, so that it becomes a commercialised representation, a kind of 'simulacra' (Baudrillard, 1994) that is aimed at 'selling' to an audience a supposedly normalised, organised and safe place, exactly like all other Western countries.

This architectural interpretation of Westernness was easily accepted by the diplomatic management since editing out the local complex context eases the diplomatic work and has therefore a great appeal for the diplomatic employees, who make tremendous efforts to be accepted as part of the Western 'normalised' community.

A second translation of the architectural ideas was performed by the materialisation of these ideas into shapes, materials and design style. For example, Westernness was translated into cold materials, such as glass, zinc, concrete and marble floors. Professionalism was translated into expensive and luxurious materials in representative areas and the areas where diplomats are located are more formal, orderly, spacious and private. Representativeness was emphasised through the use of unique materials (such as onyx, zinc, marble and glass floors) and transparent materials, which highlight a metaphor of the display window. These expensive and technologically sophisticated materials were used in the areas that visitors see and were supposed to create a luxurious appearance, especially in those areas that are oriented outwards. Moreover, the local Jerusalem stone is concealed in most of the representative parts, which is a violation of the local law that requires a more significant use of Jerusalem stone in local buildings. These choices were not coincidental, and the architects have made it clear that the local stone is perceived as a symbol of tradition and past memory, which are associated with the 'holiness' of the city, and therefore must be excluded from the new modern national

ethos exhibited in the national display window. This is how one of the architects describe the stone:

> "Jerusalem has the heaviness of stone as a burden … the Ministry was also built according this rule … this is a Jerusalem building, but with no nostalgia … one of the main problems in building in Jerusalem is that you have to use stone, and not glass, like in Tel Aviv. Tel Aviv is America. You can do whatever you want there, but in Jerusalem you can't … Only here you have to build with stone- nowhere else… that's why the stone we chose is machine-processed in order to relieve the burden of tradition … the zinc roof and the onyx stone, on the other hand, express the New-Age spirit, and this was more suitable for the representative building. Stone is associated with heaviness and weightiness."

The local stone is conceptualised as a 'disturbance' in the architectural planning since it makes it difficult to represent a contemporary and sterile place. Analysing the architectural texts illustrates the intention to construct a new Israeli identity that is 'freed' from the heavy burden of historical context, though this new identity is becoming anonymous, sterilised and alienated from Israeliness itself. The actual result is that paradoxically the representation of Israel is made by imported material from China and not local, as we would expect in a Ministry of Foreign Affairs. In other words, the local context was perceived and conceptualised as a constraint, which makes it more difficult to follow global fashions in management as well as in architecture and was therefore edited out.

Though the literature treats translation processes as an act of adaptation and adjustment of fashions to local contexts, examining the lived space in this case shows that partial and poor translations might cause new dysfunctions. Employees interpret the new design as a symbol of alienation in labour relations. N., an employee in the Protocol and Official Guests Bureau said:

> "The building is not Israeli. Not at all. We, the Israelis, are much more open and warm. This building is the opposite of the Israeli character. It is more European or American. Everything is cooler, more restrained … They wanted a building like all other Western countries, not something local or Israeli."

In a similar vein *A*, a junior manager in one of the diplomatic departments, said:

> "This was designed as a museum that could have been anywhere in the world. They wanted so badly to be part of this Western world that they forgot us, the people who work here, our culture, our habits…"

These quotations are only a small sample of many other complaints expressed by employees about the new building. Most of these employees not only complained about the inauthentic representation of Israel but also could not accept the new ideas, which originated from both the managers and architects and reacted with various tactics of rejection and resistance to the new identity and its translation to materials and shapes (see Wasserman and Frenkel, 2011).

The evidence shown above explores the ways in which the struggle over meaning involved in institutionalisation is especially apparent when comparing the lived space (i.e., the interpretations of space given by the users) with the conceived space (the managerial and architectural ideas) and examining the discursive efforts of the competing institutional actors. Though globalisation and universalism are powerful factors impacting mimicry, especially in peripheral nations, such as Israel, which seek

legitimacy in the global world, the 'normalisation project' promoted by managers and architects was denied by employees and is still being negotiated at present, almost nine years after relocation.

5   The closed open university

Although in the former case-study, the translation of design fashion was based mainly on the editing-out of certain aspects in the adaptation process, in the next case-study, the Open University, the translation was based mainly on hybridisation of two models/fashions as well as on some decoupling (i.e., a gap between formal structures and policies to actual organisational practises to gain legitimacy from external constituents). These processes took place in all three of Lefebvre's spaces as well as in between them. The following sections will first explore the hybridisation in each space separately and then between the three spaces.

In the conceived space, hybridisation was carried out in several modes, all of which demonstrate the impact of the architectural discourse on managerial ideas. The relocation of the Open University from its central location near Tel Aviv University to a more distant city was accompanied by extensive promotion efforts that were aimed both at preparing and softening employees' resistance as well as promoting in the public a new image for the largest (but not most prestigious) university in Israel. An examination of these discourses demonstrates that the relocation was supposed to generate a new image for the university and improve its status in the academic field. Therefore, similar to the former case, the updated 'campus design' terminology was repeatedly emphasised both in the architectural discourse and in the managerial typical talks.

Other fashionable images borrowed from urban and rural geography were intertwined in the architectural discourse and then translated into the managerial discourse to symbolise the movement and flexibility, which is supposed to characterise contemporary organisations. These images are evident in the next quote, cited from the intra-organisational newspaper (a website paper), where the architect's ideas of planning are presented to the public (seen on 28.1.2010 at the Open University website: http://www.openu.ac.il/Adcan/adcan42/adcan-42-2.html):

> "[the site is planned as] an internal street that starts at the highest point of the site and goes down to a town square, where all public functions of the university are brought together; a green valley which flows from the town square and ends in an open amphitheatre … this way a dialog is created…"

The architectural images of flow and movement, which are associated with the vivid streets and town-squares, are aimed at projecting new 'updated' ideas of organisational conduct and at challenging the traditional bureaucratic models. They are often translated into a more flexible organising model that promotes free communication, creativity, fast change and spontaneous interactions.

Nevertheless, the university did not give up its desire to brand itself as a powerful and important actor in the academic field and made tremendous efforts to be considered a 'normal' university (and to become institutionalised). M., one of the participants on the transfer committee, said:

> "The whole idea was to be like all other normal universities. After all, it is the largest university in Israel, and not an appendix of Tel Aviv University. A lot of people I meet told me that they always thought the [former] building of the Open University was part of Tel Aviv University or the Broadcast University [which was located nearby, V.W.] … The new place is supposed to brand the university as an autonomous entity and as a university like all other universities, or even a better university."

The two ideas – flexibility and institutionalisation – were not perceived as contradictions, and they were simultaneously promoted even though they reflect different managerial attitudes. Moreover, in the 'normalisation project', the university had to give up its unique characteristics, which could also threaten its desire for separateness and for an independent identity. R., an academic representative on the relocation committee, explains:

> "On the one hand, the Open University is not like all universities since it is an accessible and friendly university, and we wanted to express its unique feature in its architecture and separate it from being an appendix of Tel Aviv University, but on the other hand, the university wanted to be big and meaningful, to be seen so by all other universities, and therefore chose branding itself in its size and prestigious materials. This way, it stops being so special, so I cannot understand this decision. The architects did not see any problem with it, neither did our CEO."

This citation reflects an intrinsic conflict within the Open University between being 'open' (i.e., being accessible for all kinds of populations) and being a 'university' (as opposed to a college, i.e., being elite-oriented and condescending). These two contradicting identities were intertwined in the architectural discourse by talking about these two ideas simultaneously and provided a route for doing the same in the managerial discourse.

This mixture between uniqueness, independency and flexibility on the one hand, and normalisation and power on the other hand, were also materialised and translated into the perceived space. On the one hand, expensive materials, spacious public and other architectural forms that symbolise power and potency were chosen to impress visitors from the outside, signifying its size and importance in the academic field. As a result, the architecture is 'dramatic and exclusive' (quoted from an architectural critic in a daily newspaper), loaded with military symbols, such as fortresses, shooting slits, italic concrete arcades and other symbols popular in commemoration sites.

Simultaneously, along the angular and dramatic forms, round and pleasant shapes were chosen to soften the effect of the powerful and dramatic architecture, such as grassy lawns and beautiful gardens. However, these soft symbols were blended with bureaucratic symbols and created a hybrid space that reflects both ideas. For example, the park and its grassy lawns are located beside the buildings and not between them, as one would expect in a 'normal' university; gardens are always vacant and almost invisible due to their distance and do not look like a typical university space; the buildings are beautiful but are large and covered mostly with concrete, which contradicts the idea of accessibility and pleasantness; management is located separately from academia and there are therefore fewer spontaneous meetings between them; most of the space is assigned to administrative functions and not for academia, and therefore a more bureaucratic action mode is emphasised; in accordance with the planning managers' order, there are not many meeting rooms or lounges to facilitate quiet and intimate talks,

and as a result the building functions more as a bureaucratic organisation than as a 'flexible' university.

These examples demonstrate that the impact of the architects in the diffusion of their 'modern' ideas is more extensive in the discursive level (i.e., the conceived space) since conservative ideas of bureaucratic management had greater effect on the perceived space, and most of the aesthetic forms and shapes are focused on conventional ideas of management.

Examining the lived space provides further support for these conclusions, and the employees' interpretation of space reveals the negotiations of the new identity and the process of 'sense-making' of this identity. Examining the employees' interpretations reveals complex reactions: on the one hand, many workers stated that the new architecture reflects alienation and stiffness that are not suitable for a flexible university. For example, D., a female employee, said:

> "They wanted so badly to show that it [the Open University] is a large university so that they have built a monster that doesn't fit anything. Well, they succeeded, but the problem now is that it doesn't look like a normal university as they wanted it to, but rather like one of the prisons nearby… All this concrete and huge buildings, no green areas… And this is supposed to be an open university? It's completely closed. Who would want to enter such an unpleasant place?… It's not welcoming. At the very best, it looks like other high-tech buildings in the neighborhood… A friend of mine told me that he was sure that the building was a branch of the nearby prison…"

Or O., another female employee, who said:

> "From the outside, it [the building] might be anything and anywhere. It could also be the building of Social Security in Iceland. All its appearance is saying is: we are a bureaucratic organisation – which we actually are – but I don't think that is a successful way to brand the university… the Open University should be located in the middle of town, without fences or any other borders- this would better reflect its accessibility to the public. Now it's isolated as a remote destination."

On the other hand, many other employees reported feelings of pride regarding the new identity and the branding of this identity. B., a female employee declared:

> "I know that many people here don't feel good in the new building, but I think that the university is now positioned much better in the academic field, and now nobody can ignore our existence … the building is visible, it's amazing, it's big and impressive, and makes one feel much more proud about one's workplace … Something to show my friends …"

These citations demonstrate that the dialectics between institutionalism and flexibility is not only reflected in all three Lefebvrian spaces, but is also fostered simultaneously by various actors. Moreover, a comparison of the three spaces, especially the conceived space (the architectural and managerial discourses) and the perceived space (the aesthetic materialisation of these ideas) reveals an additional hybridisation. While in the conceived space, an 'appropriate' discourse was adapted from the architectural terminology (such as community, movement, dialog, which were translated into popular organisational terms as closeness and familiarity, intimacy and informal communication, autonomy and creativity), in the perceived space, the university mainly imitated common bureaucratic models and did not change its daily practises. Though not defined through spatial terms,

doing one thing in the conceived space and another in the perceived space, is conceptualised in neo-institutionalism as a 'decoupling' process, which is defined as a gap between practises and formal structures. When organisations are pressured to adapt to rationalised myths about what is appropriate to do, they might abide only superficially by institutional pressures and adopt a fashion only partially without implementing its practises. Adopting a bureaucratic model was in this case, probably the safest and the easiest alternative for the university. Not only have such models already gained legitimacy in organisational domains and may provide a broader consensus for the exceptional university, they also may better suit a university that is based mainly on junior academic staff and an extended administrative sector that has to manage a very complex system. However, the pressures to conform contemporary fashions in architecture and in management require an adaptation of these practises, even if only in the conceived space (i.e., on the discursive level). Decoupling makes it easier for management to meet some of the environmental pressures to enhance their legitimacy and even their chances of survival, but management still persists on its former mode of action, which might be more efficient for it. In this case, decoupling was not a defensive act, but rather an act of impression management (see also Elsbach and Sutton, 1992).

To sum up, the case of the Open University demonstrates the dynamic interplay between 'identity' and 'image' (which are always debated and negotiated) and exemplifies the complexity of identity change in light of growing competitiveness (Gioia and Thomas, 1996). Resistance and cynicism were not long in coming, and employees are still mocking the resemblance between the new building and the nearby prison (6 years after relocation), and by doing so, they show their doubt of the managerial and architectural interpretation of the 'open' element in the university's identity. Such cynicism is typical in decoupling processes, and it is derived largely from different interpretations of various actors, but it is still regarded as an unintended effect that may affect morale and motivation.

6 Concluding remarks

On the basis of neo-institutionalism, and on the three Lefebvrian spaces, this paper presents two case studies, which are aimed at putting forward a comprehensive analysis of aesthetic mimicry in workplace architecture as an isomorphic process aimed at gaining legitimacy. Drawn on data collected from space analysis, text analysis and interviews, I have offered two different forms of translation and isomorphism. In the case of the IMFA, translation was carried out by editing-out and negating local/national markers to assimilate into the Western diplomatic field. In the second case, that of the Open University of Israel, isomorphism was applied by translating the intrinsic conflict of the university between flexibility and institutionalisation into hybrid aesthetics.

In both cases, an identity change was involved with branding efforts, and in both cases, the architectural representations reflected the changes in organisational purpose and aspiration: In the case of the IMFA, we evidenced the conversion from the kibbutz life-style of old Israel to urban modern Western-ness, and in the case of the Open University, this change was focused on independence and not settling with being substitute.

Moreover, in both cases, the architectural discourse (the conceived space) had a great impact in the diffusion processes, but they differ in the translation of these fashions into

the perceived space. Distinctiveness and uniqueness were perceived as organisational disadvantages, which must be removed (even if only ostensibly) in the institutionalisation process and aesthetic isomorphism was alleged to enable this.

Empirical evidence was presented to demonstrate that 'normalisation' was translated into fashionable aesthetic symbols and/or discourses. By 'normalising' their outer appearance, both organisations wanted to avoid their ambivalence and their uncertain environment to be more compatible with habits and rules acceptable in their field, even though such 'normality' does not apply to these unique organisations. However, while in the case of the Open University, uniqueness was not completely denied, and the impact of the architectural fashions was limited, in the case of the IMFA, the architectural discourses had a greater impact on daily practises as well as on the materialisation.

These two cases allow us to expose the various and complex ways in which organisations translate architectural fashions into both into managerial fashions as well as to materials, shapes and design styles. Such a translation, as is evident in both cases, is subject to a process of interpretation and sense-making of all institutional actors and is therefore exposed to the struggles and negotiations over the meaning and interpretations of their new identity. These cases demonstrate the interplay between identity, institutionalism and space, and exemplify its complexity rather than its consistent nature (Albert and Whetten, 1985).

Though both organisations belong to different fields and differ in aims, modes of actions and organisational culture, they look alike and talk alike. Architectural fashions are spread through both conceived and perceived spaces when architectural images are repeated and echoed as managerial and professional ideas and in shapes and materials. On the basis of the Lefebvre's differentiation between the three spaces – the conceived space, the perceived space and the lived space – this paper offers a better understanding of the ways in which architectural discourses are spread, diffused and translated into a specific organisational context.

In juxtaposing the spatial-discursive processes as an aesthetic isomorphism, I have been able to contribute to the understanding of the role of organisational aesthetics and workplace space in the adaptation process of organisations. Literature in organisational aesthetics and in neo-institutional theory does not regard aesthetic mimicry as part of the isomorphic phenomenon, though many organisations use architecture for image-constructing and sometimes even draw on relocation for changing their organisational identity. At the same time, future research should take into account the role of architects in diffusion processes and explore their institutional work, that is, in creating and maintaining institutions and even transforming the institutional order. Such a theoretical focus should relate not only to power and control but also to resistance and the limits of power.

Acknowledgement

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Note

[1]Identity is usually defined as "those features of organisation that members perceive as ostensibly central, enduring and distinctive in character that contribute to how they define the organisation and their identification with it" (Albert and Whetten, 1985). Image is generally defined as "how members believe others view their organisation" (Dutton *et al.*, 1994). Because of the specific context of the cases examined in this paper, the terms will be used interchangeably.