### LOCATING INSTITUTIONAL WORK:

## THE ROLES OF PLACES IN CREATING HOUSING FOR THE HARD-TO-HOUSE

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Studies of institutional work have begun to explore a wide range of its facets, including its motivations, strategies, and the heterogeneity of institutional actors. A key issue has, however, been overlooked – the locations in which institutional work occurs. Although accounts of institutional work almost always explicitly locate it geographically (though often in a disguised manner), the role of places in institutional work has not been systematically examined. We address this issue by focusing on the domain of housing for the hard-to-house and exploring the role that places played in two instances of institutional work: the establishment of Canada's first residential and day-care facility for people living with HIV/AIDS, and the creation of a municipal program to provide temporary overnight accommodation in local churches. In examining these cases, we find that places played three key roles: places mediated, places contained, and places complicated the forms of institutional work observed. These findings highlight three different ontologies of place: places as instances of abstract categories, as social spaces, and as embedded objects.

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#### INTRODUCTION

Institutional work – the efforts of actors to create, maintain and disrupt institutions (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006) – always occurs somewhere. This might seem a trivial observation, but its rootedness in particular places is prominent in much of the research on institutional work: maintaining the British class system through rituals at Cambridge University (Dacin, Munir, & Tracey, 2010); boundary work and practice work in coastal British Columbia forestry (Zietsma & Lawrence, 2010); creating new regulatory structures for the control of chemicals at UN meetings in Montreal, Nairobi, Geneva, Bonn and Johannesburg (Hardy & Maguire, 2010); altering academic authority at San Francisco State College (Rojas, 2010). Moreover, institutional work as a concept highlights the situatedness of actors' efforts to shape institutions (Lawrence, Suddaby, & Leca, 2011): central to its development has been the idea that institutional work involves practical action that draws on and is constrained by the context in which it occurs (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006, Battilana & D'Aunno, 2009, Lawrence, Suddaby, & Leca, 2011). Despite the importance of context to institutional work, however, the role of places in institutional work has not been systematically examined or theorized.

Places are more than geography – a place represents the intersection of a geographic location, a set of meanings and values, and a material form (Gieryn, 2000). Places are social products with geographic and material features, and thus embody institutionalized beliefs and values of those for whom the place is meaningful (Pigg, 1992). Places have a complex relationship with institutions. Places are not always institutions but that they can be, or can become, institutions – so infused with value that they "take on a life of their own" (Molotch, Freudenburg, & Paulsen, 2000). Places can also play an important role in supporting institutions by enabling the mechanisms – regulative, normative and cognitive (Scott, 2008) that underpin

institutions (Gieryn, 2000). The connections between places and institutions suggest that places may be an important element in institutional work. In particular, places may shape our understandings of, relationships to, and abilities to affect the institutions that are that targets of institutional work.

In this paper, we explore the role of places in institutional work in the context of actors working to create novel forms of housing for the "hard-to-house" in Vancouver, Canada. By hard-to-house, we mean individuals with complex health and social needs who have difficulty in maintaining stable housing and risk becoming or are homeless and are often stigmatized and misunderstood by the wider community (Popkin, Cunningham, & Burt, 2005). Drawing on two cases studies in this domain – a mat program that provided individuals in need of shelter with overnight accommodation in church halls, and the Dr. Peter Centre which is Canada's first HIV/AIDS day health program and supported-living residence for people with HIV/AIDS – we explore the roles that places played in a series of instances of institutional work as these innovations were being developed.

Our study provides a foundation for contributions to our understanding of institutional work and of the relationship between institutions and organizations more generally. First, to the study of institutional work, our study provides a systematic exploration of the roles that places can play in actors' attempts to shape institutions. More than simply providing the backdrop for institutional action or even sets of resources and constraints, places in our study were highly influential in shaping those attempts, their impacts and the experience of those working to affect institutional arrangements. Just as importantly, places played different roles in different instances of institutional work, sometimes connecting institutional work to targeted institutions by acting as mediators, sometimes containing both the institutions and the work done to shape them, and at

other times complicating institutional work by introducing unexpected complexity into the process. These findings provide a foundation both for further examination of places and institutional work, and more generally for research that would explore the role of other contextual elements in institutional work, such as material and social technologies (how institutional work is effected), its temporality (when and over what period it occurs), and demography (who engages in institutional work).

Second, our study contributes to research on the relationship between places and institutions, more generally. This relationship has emerged as an important theme several strands of institutional research, including work that focuses on communities (Wry et al., 2010, Christopher Marquis, Lounsbury, & Greenwood, 2011) and on nations (Peng, 2002, Carney, Gedajlovic, & Yang, 2009). These literatures highlight the ways in which the differing institutional qualities of specific places affects organizational action, but have been subject to criticism calling for greater attention to issues such as agency, creativity and individual cognition in understanding the connections between places, institutions and action (Wilkinson, 1996, Carney, Gedajlovic, & Yang, 2009, Lim et al., 2010). Our study responds to such calls by focusing explicitly on the interplay of places and actors' creative, purposive efforts to shape institutions. Our findings suggest that some current research efforts on place and institutions may be somewhat misplaces. Rather than trying to define the dimensions of community or the most important institutional dimensions of a nation, we would suggest that communities, nations and other places are likely to exist with distinctly different ontological properties depending on the action undertaken in relationship to them and the broader context in which the action occurs. In our study, places existed as instances of conceptual categories, as bounded, organized social spaces, and as complex, embedded material objects, the existence of which were triggered by

various processes and which had specific sets of impacts on the actions and beliefs of organizational actors.

Finally, we contribute to the relatively dispersed and nascent literature focusing on the relationship between place and organization (Taylor & Spicer, 2007, Larson & Pearson, 2012). Although places are often mentioned in organizational research, as locations for events studied and samples collected, or objects of comparison (primarily in international or cross-cultural research), the concept of place itself is relatively under-examined and its heterogeneous roles in organizational process largely overlooked. Thus, our study provides a theoretical and empirical foundation for future work in this area by providing a conceptualization of place in relation to organizations and institutions, and an analysis of the specific roles that places play in a set of organizational processes.

We present the paper in five main sections. First, we review the literature on institutions, institutional work and place to develop the research question that guide the study. Second, we describe our research methods. Third, we present our findings, focusing on three key roles that places play in social innovation. Fourth, we discuss the implications of our findings for research on institutional work. We conclude the paper with a discussion of its limitations and some directions for future research.

## INSTITUTIONS, INSTITUTIONAL WORK AND PLACES

In this section, we develop the research question that guides this study based on a review of existing literature. First, we review research in an institutional tradition that has incorporated place as an important phenomenon. We then examine research on institutional work with respect to its treatment of place. Finally, we introduce the sociological literature on place as a foundation for our research question.

## **Institutions and Places**

Although much research in the institutional tradition has situated itself in relatively abstract contexts, such as fields and types of organizations, there has also been a long-standing tradition of locating institutional research in specific places (Selznick, 1949, Hinings & Greenwood, 1988), and an emerging interest in understanding the relationships between institutional processes and the places they occur, particularly in terms of communities (Christopher Marquis, Glynn, & Davis, 2007, Wry et al., 2010) and countries (Kostova, 1999, Peng, 2002, Phillips, Tracey, & Karra, 2009).

In a review of the research examining the interplay of institutions and communities, Marquis et al. (2011: xi) define communities as "local relational systems" and argue that they affect a broad range of organizational outcomes and processes, such as corporate governance, innovation, and foundings. Key to this definition is the idea of "localness", which distinguishes communities from other network forms. A key issue for studies of community and organizations is how communities affect organizational and institutional processes. A dominant approach to this question focuses on geographical proximity among organizations, both in defining community and understanding its effects. Marquis and Battilana (2009: 286), for instance, define a community as "the populations, organizations, and markets located in a geographic territory and sharing, as a result of their common location, elements of local culture, norms, identity, and laws". Similarly, Marquis et al. (2007: 927) define communities as "local geographic environments", and operationalize an organization's community as "the metropolitan statistical area (MSA) in which its headquarters is located". The impact of local geographic environments, argue Marquis et al. (2007: 927), stems from the impact of "local understandings, norms, and rules [serving] as touchstones for legitimizing corporate social action", and from the local

connections between organizational leaders and the communities in which they reside. Wry et al. (2010: 153) echo this approach, examining variations in the production of technological knowledge across communities, based on the ideas that "communities have different knowledge creation cultures that lead to systematic variation in the types of technological knowledge that they produce".

A second approach to understanding community and institutions focuses on concept of institutional logics, suggesting that community itself constitutes a logic or that different communities are associated with specific sets of logics. Thornton, Ocasio, and Lounsbury (2012) identify community as an institutional order associated with a specific logic in the same vein as Alford and Friedland's major institutional orders, such as the state, the corporation, and the family. The idea of community as an institutional logic highlights "meaningful and affective relationships based on shared experience or interests (rather than as geographic colocation among different types of organizations)" (Christopher Marquis, Lounsbury, & Greenwood, 2011: xiv). From this perspective, organizational action is informed and governed by principles of community – loyalty, affective relationships, localness, etc.. Alternatively, communities might be associated with specific sets of logics, such that action is informed and governed by principles specific to a geographic or social space. This latter approach is exemplified by Seelos et al.'s (2011: 333) examination of variation in social entrepreneurship across communities, in which they argue that "variation of local institutional mechanisms shapes the local 'face of poverty' in different communities and how this relates to variations in the emergence and strategic orientations of SEOs".

The research on institutions and community highlights several important issues with respect to an exploration of places as important institutional phenomena. They highlight the ways

in places shape an organization's opportunities and action through local relationships and resources (Galaskiewicz & Burt, 1991, Wry et al., 2010), as well local norms, customs, rules and beliefs (Christopher Marquis, Glynn, & Davis, 2007). Research on community also highlights the possibility of multiple conceptualizations of specific kinds of places, such that community can be examined terms of location-specific institutional qualities but also as an institutional category itself with particular logics of action and evaluation (Hinings & Greenwood, 1988, Thornton, Ocasio, & Lounsbury, 2012). Marquis et al. (2011: xviii) also highlight the importance of attending to agency when exploring the intersection of community and institutions, pointing to questions about "how and under what conditions actors are able to draw upon and instantiate community logics".

A second major stream of research that has explored the intersection of institutions and place focuses on a comparative analysis of institutions at the national level. This line of research was significantly sparked by the economic success of East Asian businesses which "emphasizes the variety of viable enterprise structures and suggests the need for a comparative analysis of how they develop and operate in different societal contexts" (Whitley, 1990: 47). This research develops an "institution-based view of business strategy" (Peng, 2002: 251) that builds on cultural approaches to understanding business differences across countries (Chung, Shepard, & Dollinger, 1989, Hall & Xu, 1990) by incorporating formal and informal institutions, including place-specific "social and political arrangements rather than merely ... belief system[s]" (Wilkinson, 1996: 421). This approach has also been applied to understanding the strategies of firms in "transition economies" (Peng, 2000) – states moving from planned to market economies, such as Eastern Europe, the former Soviet Republics, and China – with findings showing that a lack of organic and acquisition opportunities lead to network-based growth strategies (Peng &

Heath, 1996). Two important insights regarding places and institutions emerge from this literature – that places bring with them particular sets of resources and constraints which actors work to leverage and overcome, and that the institutional qualities of places change in ways that can dramatically affect the opportunities and actions of organizations and individuals.

Applications of institutional theory to country-level comparisons provide an important foundation for understanding the connections between places and institutions. They suffer, however, from a somewhat determinist account of the relationship between institutions and organizations, and thus between places and organizational action. Wilkinson (1996: 442), for instance, argues that institutional accounts of East Asian firms overlook the roles of interests and agency in shaping the distinctiveness of these firms as well as their similarity to firms inside and outside of East Asia, as well as "concealing differences of interests and values within populations". Recent work has moved to refine our understanding of the role of institutions in shaping business strategies across countries by incorporating newer concepts from institutional theory (Kostova, Roth, & Dacin, 2008, Carney, Gedajlovic, & Yang, 2009, Phillips, Tracey, & Karra, 2009) and integrating institutional ideas with a theory of individual-level cognitive processes (Lim et al., 2010). Carney et al. (2009) argue that the overly determinist institutional account of strategic variation across countries can be remedied by including the more active, creative accounts of institutional action that have emerged. Lim et al. (2010) extend this direction by examining how an entrepreneur's cognitive scripts mediate the relationship between the institutional qualities of a country and the entrepreneur's venture creation decisions. Together, this work highlights the roles of actors' cognition and behavior in shaping the influence of country-specific institutional qualities on organizational action and structure.

#### **Places and Institutional Work**

Writing that incorporates place into institutional research points to the need for further exploration that includes explicit attention to how place itself is understood and how the institutional qualities of different places are translated into organizational thought and action. Connecting places to institutional work may provide a foundation for advances along these lines. At a general level, studies of institutional work have often included place as an important contextual factor, but one that is left relatively untouched in terms of systematic, theoretical examination. Dacin et al.'s (2010) study of dining rituals at Cambridge University, for example, includes explicit descriptions of Cambridge University, and especially its colleges and college dining halls as important places. Of the Cambridge college, they write:

[it] is where students live, eat, and socialize [and] the place where students receive small group-teaching sessions known as 'supervisions.' Each college is an independent institution with its own property and income and brings together staff and students from many different disciplines. (Dacin, Munir, & Tracey, 2010: 1398).

## Of the dining halls:

Students typically sit at long refectory tables for dinner several nights a week. At the far end of the hall, usually on a raised platform above where the students are seated, is the High Table, where the Master and Fellows of the college sit. (Dacin, Munir, & Tracey, 2010: 1398)

The dining halls are so important to the story of institutional work told by Dacin et al. (2010), they include a photograph of one so that the reader can more easily locate the rituals that are the centre of the analysis. Similar extended descriptions of place are found in such studies as

Zietsma and Lawrence's (2010) examination of institutional work in the British Columbia coastal forestry industry, Marti and Mair's (2009) analysis of the institutional work needed to support entrepreneurship in Bangladesh, and Rojas' (Rojas, 2010) investigation of the San Francisco State College president who through organizational restructuring and challenging norms of student conduct gained significant power.

What these studies suggest is that places play a key role in institutional work: places seem to provide resources and shape strategies, protect and expose incumbents, and align and facilitate coordination among challengers, as well as provide the stages upon which institutional dramas take place. The institutional effects of formal dining rituals are hard to imagine outside of Oxbridge university dining halls (Dacin, Munir, & Tracey, 2010); the institutional work to support entrepreneurship is distinctive of the Bangladesh context (Marti & Mair, 2009); the ways in which First Nations, environmentalists and citizen groups collaborated to disrupt commercial forestry practice depended significantly on the physical and social geography of British Columbia's coastal forests (Zietsma & Lawrence, 2010). What these studies leave relatively unexamined, however, are the systematic sets of relationships and mechanisms through which places have these effects, and the dimensions or kinds of place that might be important.

To remedy this oversight requires an explicit conceptualization of place. The idea of place seems simple enough – a distinct geographical location, such as a room, building, neighbourhood, city or country – but the experience and impact of places are complex and multifaceted (Lippard, 1998). Gieryn (2000) provides a useful conceptualization of place, as constituted by three interrelated elements: a geographical location, a material form, and a set of meanings and values. The locational aspect of place is critical. Although the notion of place is often used metaphorically, when we speak concretely of places, we always refer to somewhere.

The physical form is also important. People encounter places not as abstract sets of coordinates, but as concrete clusters of material: "whether built upon or just come upon, artificial or natural, streets and doors or rocks and trees, place is stuff" (Gieryn, 2000: 465). Finally, places are meaningful. Whether the personal meaning of a home, office or birthplace, the societal meaning of a church or parliament, or the functional meaning of a marker on route to somewhere else, the meaning of places raises them up from being strictly of the physical world to being also part of the social world (Pigg, 1992).

A consistent emphasis in writing on places is the potential for powerful connections between people and places. Individuals form profound emotional attachments to places (Tuan, 1977, Sibley, 1995). Places can be important sources of individual and community identity (Relph, 1976, Rose, 1995, Block, 2008) and feelings of belonging (Block, 2008). Places connect people to their memories (Beatley, 2004, Cresswell, 2004) and to their aspirations (Zukin, 1993, Lippard, 1998). Places can provide individuals with security and a sense of order (Bauman, 1995). The connections people make to places have powerful social effects. People ascribe particular attributes to places, such as, "ours or theirs; safe or dangerous; public or private; unfamiliar or known, rich or poor" (Gieryn, 2000: 472), which enable comparisons and identify boundaries. Places help people distinguish between "here and there" and appreciate "near and far" (Gieryn, 2000: 464), as well as determine what and who is "in-place" and "out-of-place". At the extreme, "insiders" perceive "outsiders" as a form of "pollution" that can damage the "purity" of a place (Sibley, 1995: 59).

In the rest of this paper, we draw on this three-part conceptualization of place to explore the connections between institutional work and places. The attention that places have received in the literature on institutional work has led to an understanding of them as contextual factors, with little direct examination of how specific places shape institutional work or its effects. In contrast, our interest is in what places do in the context of institutional work. Thus, our analysis is guided by the question of what roles places play in institutional work.

#### **METHODS**

#### **Research Context**

To investigate the role of places in institutional work, we conducted a set of two qualitative case studies in the domain of housing for the hard-to-house in Vancouver, British Columbia. The hard-to-house are individuals that landlords, housing providers, neighbourhoods and governments experience difficulties in accommodating either because they lack the necessary resources and/or because of their discriminatory attitudes towards these individuals' needs (Gurstein & Small, 2005, Goetz, 2009). Housing for the hard-to-house has emerged as an important, intractable problem in British Columbia over the past decade, as indicated by BC Housing's waitlist of 13,400 applicant in May 2008 (Campbell, Boyd, & Culbert, 2009). The problem is amplified by significant local opposition to initiatives to provide housing for the hardto-house, dramatically illustrated by the NIABY (Not In Anyone's Back Yard) website, which is the product of a "community of hard working, tax paying, concerned citizens" in Metro Vancouver to oppose "addiction and mental health community treatment solutions proposed for residential neighbourhoods". These dynamics play out against a backdrop of a national policy of deinstitutionalization of mental hospitals, dramatically increased local availability of crack cocaine, a shortage of addiction services (e.g., Detox), and significant barriers to access the available services (e.g., "being clean").

Housing for the hard-to-house represents an appropriate context for our study because

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> NIABY. (n.d.). About Us. Retrieved from http://www.niaby.com/about.cfm?ArticleID=51

prevailing beliefs, attitudes and regulations mean that creating housing for this population were likely to involve significant institutional work. This context is also appropriate because housing for the hard-to-house is a social problem for which the role of places is integral. The hard-to-house are individuals defined by their inability to secure a particular type of place. It is their experience of placelessness that can have devastating impacts on psychological well-being (Fullilove, 1996, May, 2000) and lead to lives "forced into constant motion" (Kawash, 1998: 327).

Case 1: The Tri-Cities Mat Program. Known locally as the "Mat Program", this program involved providing individuals in need of shelter with overnight accommodation in a church hall. They received an evening meal, a mat to sleep on, breakfast, and a bagged lunch. The program started in December 2007 and continued to run over the winter months. It was a community response to an increasing number of individuals identified both as homeless and dealing with alcohol and drug addiction. The Mat Program was distinctive among other similar programs for several important reasons. First, it was designed and implemented in a suburban area, the Tri-Cities, that had not had until recently any history of homelessness. Second, the mats were moved each month to a different church; five in total, all located in residential areas.

The initial idea for the Mat Program was met with considerable opposition by the local community. The public hearing in one municipality lasted over 7 hours with many residents presenting arguments against it. There was considerable fear about providing accommodation in churches to homeless people, especially those dealing with addictions. These fears were not realized: once implemented the Mat Program was associated with significant change in beliefs about homelessness and the hard-to-house for a number of individuals and organizations.

Stereotypes of homeless people were broken down by close contact. Even previously vocal

opponents spoke out in support of the program and a few became active in developing more permanent solutions. It also made a practical difference to those it served: of the 350 people that used the service in its first two years, 69 individuals were able to access housing, detox and recovery services.

Case 2: The Dr. Peter Centre. The Dr. Peter Centre opened in 2003 as Canada's first day health program and supported-living residence for people with HIV/AIDS. Located in a residential area of Vancouver's West End known as Mole Hill, its participants would be perceived by many as hard-to-house since 100 per cent of the participants have complex health issues, 98 per cent have overt mental health symptoms, 54 per cent are poly substance users, and 30 per cent are homeless or have extended and/or frequent periods of homelessness. The establishment of the Centre and its subsequent operation has been associated in Vancouver and more widely with transforming attitudes and behaviours towards those perceived as hard-to-house, especially those living with HIV/AIDS.

The work to change attitudes towards those living with HIV/AIDS that culminated in the Dr. Peter Centre began 11 years before the Centre opened. A young gay physician with HIV/AIDS was given the opportunity to educate others about the disease by sharing his experience of it on TV. On a prime time news hour, Dr. Peter Jepson-Young presented over 111 "diaries" to a public which previously had little exposure to those living with HIV/AIDS, a program that is celebrated as having changed attitudes toward homosexuality and those living with HIV/AIDS. Before Peter died, he launched a Foundation that would work to provide "comfort care", a level of support to those living with HIV/AIDS inspired by the care Peter received from his friends and family. The Foundation translated Peter's vision into practice, engaged diverse agencies to design and implement a new service, and adapted itself as the face

of HIV/AIDS changed. As the dominant populations infected with HIV/AIDS shifted to include intravenous drug users as well as gay men, plans for the Centre were changed to accommodate people dealing with multiple health and social needs as well as HIV/AIDS. Today the Centre is recognized as transforming the quality of life of its participants and residents, and serving as a model to others who visit from around the world.

### **Data Collection**

Interviews. We<sup>2</sup> conducted 72 interviews (58 different individuals) between February 2009 and March 2010 (see Table 1 for a summary of the interviews by interviewee type), most of which lasted approximately 1.5 hours, and all were transcribed. Interviews were chosen based on media reports, identification by other interviewees, and our previous knowledge of the cases. Interviews included organizational leaders as well as front-line staff and volunteers, those with a public profile and those working behind the scenes, and individuals that had worked in the area for many years as well those who had engaged more recently. When trying to understand particular events, we interviewed individuals who seemed to play central roles, as well as people who observed them in action as bystanders (see Table 2 for a summary of experience of interviewees in each innovation).

Insert Table 1 about here
Insert Table 2 about here

**Table 1: Interviews by Interviewee Type** 

Interviewee Type re: Mat Program	Number of Interviews	Number of Interviewees
Task Group Chair	2	1
Task Group Members		

<sup>2</sup> All original data was collected by the first author. We use the terms "we" and "our" for the sake of readability.

16

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Provincial or Regional Roles (Public agency staff)	3	3
Municipal Roles (Councillors and City employees)	8	8
Nonprofit Representatives (Staff and volunteers)	6	6
Business Representatives	2	2
Community Groups (Staff and volunteers) & Individuals	6	6

Interviewee Type re: Dr. Peter Centre	Number of Interviews	Number of Interviewees
Executive Director, Dr. Peter AIDS Foundation	10	1
The Board & Founding Members	6	5
Staff & Volunteers	19	18
External Stakeholders (public, private, nonprofit and community sectors)	10	9

**Table 2: Interviewee Experience of Each Innovation** 

Interviewee experience re: Mat Program	Number of Interviewees
At the meeting when the Mat Program was created	3
Attended public meetings about the Mat Program (in support and opposition)	18
Attended public hearings about the Mat Program	24
Involved in the delivery of the Mat Program	12
Had been a client of the Mat Program	1

Interviewee experience re: Dr. Peter Centre	Number of Interviewees
Knew Peter (Family, friends and colleagues)	5
Watched the Diaries	20
Involved in creating the Centre at St Paul's	5
Worked to establish the Centre in Mole Hill	8
Work in the Centre today (Staff and volunteers)	21

The interviews were a dynamic and iterative process as we learned about the experience of interviewees in relation to each case and the meaning of that experience. Within 24 hours we wrote a "contact summary" of the interview, a two page bulleted list of key events, activities and notes relating to the role of places, which informed the interview protocol for the subsequent interviews. In the Dr. Peter Centre case, we interviewed the Executive Director every few weeks to get a more "real-time" sense of the challenges of creating housing for the hard-to-house. We also carried out the bulk of the interviews for this case at the Dr. Peter Centre site. For the Mat Program, we were able to observe the Task Group every month in its weekly meetings to get a detailed understanding of its work. We interviewed the Chair of the Task Group at the beginning and middle of the field work to gain insight into the activities taking place behind the scenes and explore the significance of particular activities and events. Interviews of Task Group members were conducted in a range of locations, including homes, offices and coffee shops.

Observations. We spent from February 2009 to March 2010 in the field observing the context for both cases and the work of different actors (see Table 3 for a summary of field observations). In the early stages, we observed as many activities as practically possible. For example, at the first meeting of the Task Group we immediately accepted an invitation to attend a meeting that evening of the group that had originally opposed the Mat Program. In the later stages of the research our observations became more focused, as when we spent a week in the residence of the Dr. Peter Centre. We observed formal meetings, such as the monthly Task Group meetings and a strategic planning session of the Dr. Peter AIDS Foundation's Board, as well as informal interactions, such as often occurred while waiting to meet people for interviews. We tried to engage with the cases in a variety of ways, including, for example, walking to the Dr. Peter Centre from different directions to better understand its geographical and social location,

and visiting the area where some of the homeless camped. The Mat Program was run in churches close to where the first author lived, making it easier to understand its context and visualize the settings in which work had been carried out.

Insert Table 3 about here

**Table 3: Summary of Field Observations** 

Observations related to the Mat Program	Events
Regular Meetings of the Task Group	9
Sub-Committee Meetings	6
Special Events (e.g., Training evening, an "Open House", Homeless Action Week Events, and public hearing)	6
Additional Meetings (e.g., Mayor's Action Team on Homelessness)	7

Observations related to the Dr. Peter Centre	Events
In-house events (Volunteer Training, Board Meeting Strategy Session)	2
Public events (Symposium on Harm Reduction held at the Centre and BC Supreme Court hearings re: Insite where Dr. Peter AIDS Foundation had Intervenor status)	2
Meetings and presentations (HIV/AIDS Regional Task Group meeting and presentation in Victoria)	2
Days in the Residence	5

Internal and external documents. Our third main source of data was documents that provided information on each case and its context. Internal documents included minutes of meetings and internal reports. External documents included publicly available reports on homelessness or HIV/AIDS, which helped to situate and connect the cases to other actors and potential influences. Documentary evidence was particularly important in the early stages to sensitize us to the issues and prepare for interviews. We also accessed websites (e.g., of the Task Group and the Dr. Peter AIDS Foundation) and watched video recordings of the public hearings

of the Mat Program in one municipality. The other municipalities had audio recordings for their public hearings to which we listened and made notes of the 8 hour meeting in Coquitlam City Hall. For the Dr. Peter Centre, we watched all 111 "diaries", two related documentaries, and a video of Dr. Peter speaking a few days before his death, and examined his parents' albums that recorded many of the written responses to Peter's diaries. We gained access to one individual's personal archive of media articles and other important documents relating to HIV/AIDS in Vancouver collected over 30 years, which was very helpful in understanding the context of the Dr. Peter AIDS Foundation and its work.

# **Data Analysis**

To analyze the data we adopted a seven stage approach (Marshall & Rossman, 2010) that divided into three phases: getting to grips with the data; detailed analysis; and broader interpretation. In practice data analysis was an iterative process one that moved back and forth between the stages and motivated further data collection. Our aim in the first phase was to generate a description of "what is going on" in each case and incorporate as many "vantage points" as possible (Wolcott, 1994: 16). This phase involved three stages. First, we organized the data using an NVivo database and a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet to build a chronology of key events. Second, we immersed ourselves in the data, developing a more detailed chronology for each case that included more events as well as the work of different actors. Third, we generated categories and themes, particularly identifying within each case a set of "mini-cases" (Stake, 2005) each with clear defining events, six mini-cases in the case of the Dr. Peter Centre and five in the case of the Mat Program.

In the second phase, we focused on detailed analysis of the data – a process of "panning in", to identify "essential features and the systematic description of interrelationships among

them – in short, how things work?" (Wolcott, 1994: 12). The first stage of this phase involved coding the data for each of the 11 mini-cases. For each, we coded around the following topics: the features of the housing being created; what made it novel and contested; how did it actually come about (who, what, where, and when); the role of places; what did the process seem to enable or constrain; and random (a category for things that seemed important but did not quite fit). This resulted in 11 mini-case reports, averaging 35 pages including references and quotes. The second stage of this phase focused on writing analytic memos in order to provide an "intermediate step" between the coding and the interpretation/write up of the data (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2010). The memos tended to focus on two or three key events for each of the 11 minicases.

The third data analysis phase was spent developing a broader interpretation of the data, which involved "panning out" from the data to explore the question "What is to be made of it all?" (Wolcott, 1994: 12). The first stage of this phase focused on offering interpretations that would bring meaning and coherence to the themes and categories (Marshall & Rossman, 2010). This involved first re-combining the mini-cases into two overarching narratives that would help readers to "live their way into an experience that has been described and interpreted" (Denzin, 2004: 456). We then applied an institutional lens to develop a more "theorized storyline" (Golden-Biddle & Locke, 2007: 7), and narrowed our focus to explore in more detail particular places and their roles in the stories. The second stage of this phase involved searching for alternative explanations, by working further with the data, engaging with existing literature, and checking our interpretations with participants in the study and other academics. In approaching interviewees to check our findings, our approach was a selective one. For each of the individuals who were our original points of contact and who had an overview of the innovation process, we

sent them a case write-up and met with them to get their feedback, which included minor changes and clarifications, as well as more substantive comments concerning the ordering of particular events and their significance.

### Limitations

Every study has limitations and ours has three major ones. The first stems from our design. Drawing on two case studies presents practical challenges, particularly with respect to data collection. As Stake (2005, p. 453) points out, case study research takes a lot of time and "even the ordinary is too complicated to be mastered in the time available". Even based on over a year's fieldwork, there were more people that could have been interviewed and more documents that could have processed. Second, the findings of each case are situated within very specific contexts that limit any attempts to generalize these insights to other such cases. The motivation of this research study was not about providing definitive, universal findings regarding the role of places in social innovation, but rather providing a generative set of insights regarding the relationships among places, institutions, institutional work. Third, formal interviews were not conducted with users of the Dr. Peter Centre or the Mat Program. Although we have attempted to capture the experience of individuals who organized and implemented each innovation, we have had to rely significantly on indirect and second-hand accounts of the experience and impact of these solutions on their users. We made the decision not to interview users consciously and for ethical reasons. Our study was focused on how the innovations had been organized and, while we were interested in the impact on those using the service, we could collect a significant amount of information from less obtrusive methods. Moreover, a serious ethical challenge in approaching those with complex health and social needs is ensuring informed consent: although we had many informal conversations and interactions with users, and all those we spoke to were

told we were university researchers, we could not be certain they understood the implications. Finally, there is already a considerable amount of research that describes the challenges and experiences of homelessness and living with housing instability (O'Reilly-Fleming, 1993, Snow & Anderson, 1993, Crowe & Baker, 2007, Wasserman & Clair, 2010) and a considerable amount of research that is specific to Vancouver (Baxter, 1991, Allen, 1997, Amster, 2008).

#### **FINDINGS**

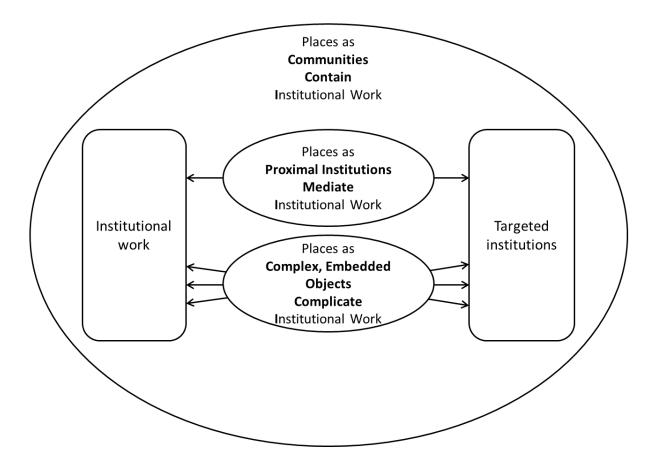
The research question that guides this paper asks what roles places play in institutional work. In examining the institutional work associated with establishing the Mat Program and the Dr. Peter Centre, we found that places played three main roles: places mediate; places contain; and places complicate.

#### **Places Mediate Institutional Work**

In the institutional work literature, places typically play a scene-setting role where innovators and their solutions take centre stage. Our findings suggest this image of places significantly underrepresents the importance and complexity of their roles. Our first major finding is that places *mediate* institutional work: places act as interpretive filters that connect institutional work and targeted institutions. (See Figure 1 for an overview of our findings.) To illustrate this role, we focus on one example: Dr. Peter's apartment.

Insert Figure 1 about here

FIGURE 1: PLACE AND INSTITUTIONAL WORK



Dr. Peter's apartment. The Dr. Peter Centre is named after Dr. Peter Jepson-Young, who in September 1986, at 29 years old, was diagnosed as HIV-positive. At the time, fear over HIV/AIDS led to significant social costs for those with the virus, including travel restrictions, and lost jobs and homes. Peter was fortunate to have a supportive family and the opportunity to enrol in a pilot project prescribing azidothymidine (AZT). He completed his medical training without disclosing his HIV status beyond close family and friends. A few years later, struggling with the onset of blindness from the disease, Peter and a medical colleague approached the CBC, Canada's national television broadcaster, about developing "an AIDS diary" – a series of three-minute segments on the 6 o'clock news in which Peter would share his experiences with HIV/AIDS. The first "Dr. Peter's Diary" aired on September 10, 1990. Five diaries were

planned, but the overwhelmingly positive reaction led to the airing of 111 Diaries, broadcast every Wednesday for the nearly two years. They focused on issues previously little discussed on television, including HIV transmission and treatment, health and social effects of the disease, and sexuality

Place was key to the Dr. Peter Diaries. In particular, Dr. Peter's apartment played a central role, shaping the program and people's reactions to it. In the first minute of the first Diary, Peter is seen sitting in his apartment. It is seen in over half of the remaining 110 diaries. Scenes of Peter in his apartment's living room, kitchen, dining room, bedroom and bathroom presented recognizable, comprehensible images to viewers who might have been struggling with the topics discussed. Viewers witnessed Peter engaged in a range of practices associated with the idea of home. In his kitchen, Peter prepared a meal with his nine year old niece. At the dining room table, Peter looked through old family photos with his mother. In his last few diaries Peter is seen in bed, with a now familiar blue and white china tea cup resting on a side table. The apartment's features suggested permanence as Peter's physical condition deteriorated. Each Wednesday, the Diaries brought Peter's home into thousands of homes around British Columbia.

Peter used his connection with viewers to address difficult issues. He talked about receiving the devastating news he had AIDS. From his living room chair, he spoke openly about his sexuality at a time when you "couldn't say condom on the radio or television" (Interviewee). The normalcy of the place and Peter's ability to communicate issues in an accessible way helped humanize those living with HIV/AIDS. A journalist at the time wrote, "Not only did [Peter] bring his homosexuality out of the closet ... but he also took AIDS out of the closet" (Parton, 1992). The connections to home amplified his disruptive message. In one Diary. Peter sat on his bathroom floor bathroom surrounded by pots of paint with a paintbrush in his mouth while he

used his hands to tell which parts of the canvas were wet, chuckling while he cleaned his brush in the toilet. As the bright pink water swirled away in the toilet basin, viewers were challenged by the disruptive combination of a creative young man who was blind, gay, living with a feared terminal illness, and looked in many ways the "boy next-door".

Peter's apartment facilitated connections but also limited the ability of the Diaries to shift prevailing views. The apartment's layout limited interactions with others, which might have helped dispel fears around HIV/AIDS. It was also limiting in terms of portraying the types of people living with AIDS. The familiarity and comfort of Peter's home may have made it possible to accept Peter as an exception and ignore his "deviant" sexual behaviour. In a biography of Peter, Gawthrop (1994: 250) argues that among Peter's viewers were many who, "[did] not want to admit that their hero contracted AIDS through sex ... [and] would rather see his 'gayness' as a matter of personal style and manners, completely divorced from bodily experience". The apartment also located AIDS in a middle-class setting at a time when HIV infections were rising dramatically among injection drug users in the poorest part of the city.

The mediating role of places in institutional work. The role that Dr. Peter's apartment played in the Diaries suggests that places can mediate institutional work by providing an interpretive lens through which people understand the institutions actors are working to affect. The example of Dr. Peter's apartment suggests that the way they that places do this is shaped by the geography of everyday life. Places play an important mediating role because they represent classes of objects with which people are familiar and comfortable. From an institutional perspective, Peter's apartment evoked the concept of "home" as a powerful interpretive lens for the actors involved, shaping people's understanding of HIV/AIDS. The concept of home differs from HIV/AIDS in many important ways, but what seems critical here is the familiarity, comfort

and intimacy with which people understand the concept of home versus HIV/AIDS.

From an institutional perspective, we argue that home represents a "proximal institution" – a shared idea, rule or belief with which actors in a community are immediately familiar and in frequent contact. In contrast, the concept of HIV/AIDS is an institution with which most viewers of the Dr. Peter Diaries were much less familiar and had much less direct experience. These "distal institutions" represent shared sets of ideas, rules or beliefs, but ones which are a much less common object in the discourse of a community, so that members of the community might consider them only infrequently and with less direct experience than proximal institutions. What we see in these cases is the proximal institution of home mediating community members' understanding of distal institutions – HIV/AIDS and homelessness. In the case of the Dr. Peter Diaries, the proximal institution of home provided a way for many viewers to connect to someone describing and illustrating an unfamiliar and threatening set of ideas – HIV/AIDS and homosexuality. Peter's apartment played a key role in facilitating a powerful connection to Dr. Peter Diary viewers. Peter's life in and around his apartment provided a connection to viewers through their shared experience and understanding of the everyday institution of home.

The mediating roles of Peter's apartment suggests that certain kinds of places are more likely to play mediating roles in institutional work. In particular, places that represent proximal institutions, as these places represented the notion of home, may be especially powerful mediators as actors will be able to draw on readily available understandings and feelings to help them make sense of social problems and proposed solutions which are unfamiliar and may be threatening. Also important, however, is that the proximal institutions evoked by places provide frames through which social problems or novel solutions can be sensibly interpreted (Weick, 1995).

#### **Places Contain**

Our second major finding is that in the cases of the Dr. Peter Center and the Mat Program places "contained" instances of institutional work. Places established and maintained boundaries around institutions and the efforts of actors to affect them. These boundaries, discursive and material, both connected ideas and people and isolated them. To illustrate how places contain institutional work, we focus on one place – the "Tri-Cities".

The Tri-Cities. The Tri-Cities comprise Coquitlam, Port Coquitlam and Port Moody, contiguous municipalities situated in the north east part of Metro Vancouver. Although the cities are independently governed, their boundaries are largely invisible when travelling around the area. As the cities' populations expanded to each other's borders, their residents came to share scenery, climate and facilities. Many local residents describe themselves in relation to the Tri-Cities, rather than an individual municipality, as do organizations such as the local newspaper and the Chamber of Commerce. The name reflects how integrated these cities are in terms of their geography, economics and everyday life.

Between 2002 and 2010, the Tri-Cities came to contain both the problem of homelessness and efforts to address the issue. Homelessness as a Tri-Cities problem emerged significantly through a series of homeless "counts". In January 2002, a count of homeless people in Greater Vancouver documented more than 1,100 homeless people but only 13 in the Tri-Cities (Woodward et al., 2002). In 2004, a Salvation Army count of homeless people and identified over 100 homeless people living by the Coquitlam River. A second Greater Vancouver count in March 2005 showed 38 homeless people in the Tri-Cities (Social Planning and Research Council of BC, 2005). In 2005, the Hope for Freedom Society, a nonprofit organization that advocated for clients dealing with addictions, engaged in an intensive count that involved 1,500 hours of

work and identified 177 homeless people in the Tri-Cities, the majority of whom were "camped" within one kilometre of downtown Port Coquitlam (Thiessen, 2006). According to interviewees, this last report "was very, very pivotal to what happened … because it created an alarming picture of homelessness in the Tri-Cities, much greater than most people suspected" (Interviewee). Together, the counts were instrumental in constructing homelessness as a problem in the Tri-Cities, and Tri-Cities as a place gave the problem form and established its boundaries.

The development of efforts to address this problem was also contained by the Tri-Cities, in that it established and maintained boundaries around potential solutions and connected people and ideas. The homelessness counts, and especially the 2006 Hope for Freedom Society report, catalyzed the "Tri-Cities Coalition" to take the lead role. The Coalition, a group of local Christian churches, a Jewish congregation, and several community groups, co-hosted a public forum on homelessness in the Coquitlam Council Chambers with more than 200 people present, which led to the formation of the "Tri-Cities Homelessness Task Group". At the Task Group's first meeting, they articulated a vision statement that described: "A future where all citizens of the Tri-Cities have access to appropriate housing and supports and no one is homeless" (Tri-Cities Homelessness Task Group, 2007). Within six months, the Task Group had made significant efforts to change the ways homelessness was understood and managed in the Tri-Cities. It worked to involve agencies from all levels of government and connected with senior representatives from the three municipalities. It built on the interest created by the public forum to provide a point of contact to government for all who "cared about the homeless and not just to get them off the streets" (Interviewee).

The Task Group also managed a set of sub-committees, including the Facilities sub-committee in which the Mat Program was originally developed. The Mat Program was explicitly

understood as a Tri-Cities program. Whereas previous mat programs in Greater Vancouver were typically run out of one location, this program was designed to operate in five different Tri-Cities churches, rotating monthly from November through March. Unlike most other mat programs, located outside or at the edge of established residential areas, the churches used in the Mat Program were in residential Tri-Cities neighbourhoods. Users of the Mat Program were also expected to come from across the Tri-Cities, with the Hope for Freedom Society providing bus transportation to the churches.

The containing role of places in institutional work. The role of the Tri-Cities in the development of the Mat Program suggests that places can contain institutional work by establishing and maintaining boundaries around institutions and efforts to affect them. It further suggests that places do this at least in part through their connections to people's identities and to sets of existing routines and resource flows. Although some people might experience some places as conveniences or transitional spaces, others may experience places as key markers of their identities. This was clearly the case for many residents of the Tri-Cities, which marked a geographic and political space in which people and organizations identified themselves. People's identification with a place affects the salience and relevance of situations that might be constructed as social problems: in the Tri-Cities, homelessness began as a problem associated with other communities, but through the work of actors engaged in homelessness counts constructed as a Tri-Cities problem, and thus a problem for many of the individuals and organizations located there. Places also contain institutional work through the connections that are established between institution, institutional work, and a place's pre-existing routines and resources. In the Tri-Cities, homelessness became connected to the routines of government agencies, churches and non-profit organizations all of which identified as Tri-Cities

organizations (as well as having more local geographic identities, such as Coquitlam). The connections between homelessness, the Mat Program and Tri-Cities routines and resources shaped the responses of local actors, and bounded the scope of how the problem was defined, the solutions proposed, the stakeholders consulted, and the actors enrolled in implementing the Program.

From an institutional perspective, the Tri-Cities represents a bounded, organized social space whose members participate in a shared discourse (Berkenkotter & Huckin, 1995, Suddaby & Greenwood, 2005), share a set of norms and rules (Van Maanen & Barley, 1984) and recognize their affiliation and mutual obligations (Lawrence, 1998, 2004). It is these qualities – boundedness and organization – that enabled the Tri-Cities to act as a container for institutional work. Writing on communities (Gusfield, 1975, Douglas & Wildavsky, 1983, Block, 2008) has noted that the meaningfulness of a social group depends significantly on the status of its boundaries. The clear, meaningful boundaries associated with the Tri-Cities, both in terms of physical separation and social distinctions, shaped residents response to the social problem of homelessness. The homeless counts illustrate this dynamic. As different methodologies were employed by different agencies, the problem of homelessness in the Tri-Cities became increasingly visible and meaningful to Tri-Cities residents. That the agencies involved in the counts along with other local agencies used the Tri-Cities as their reference point for understanding the scope of the problem established the boundaries of to whom the problem would be most visible and meaningful.

The Tri-Cities as a bounded, organized social space also significantly shaped responses to the problem of homelessness by triggering the organization of place-specific responses to the problem, including the Tri-Cities Homelessness Coalition and the Tri-Cities Task Group. These

groups were rooted in networks of Tri-Cities organizations, drew on Tri-Cities resources the churches, funding and volunteers, and connected with Tri-Cities government agencies. The Tri-Cities also defined the scope of the Mat Program. It was designed and implemented explicitly as a Tri-Cities solution, despite the extra challenges this entailed, including working with three separate municipal governments and implementing bussing for users to access the churches.

# **Places Complicate**

Our study suggests that places play one more role in institutional work – they complicate it. By this we mean that places introduce unexpected complexity to the processes through which actors work to affect institutional arrangements. We draw on two places from our study to illustrate this complicating role: the Dr. Peter Centre and the churches that housed the Mat Program.

The Dr. Peter Centre. The Dr. Peter Centre is located across from St. Paul's Hospital on a residential street in the West End neighbourhood of Vancouver. The building has 24 bedroom suites as well as common rooms for art, music, watching TV, and eating meals. An enclosed courtyard with a small garden sits at the back of the building. The relatively simple physical layout and features belie complexity of the meanings and identities associated with the Centre and the way these shape people's experiences of it. The Centre has been described as a hybrid – a residence and day centre – with an eclectic group of residents, participants, staff and volunteers. It is a working out of Dr. Peter's idea of "comfort care", which describes individuals suffering from HIV/AIDS receiving personal and familial attention similar to what Peter received throughout his battle with the illness. It involves a combination of ideas and practices associated with both health care and home. The combination is evident in building's mix of nurses' stations, treatment rooms, lounges, quiet rooms, and balconies. It is seen in practices

where staff remember both treatment regimens and birthdays, and respect clients' needs for attention as well as privacy and freedom of movement. One of the most striking complexities of the Dr. Peter Centre is its integrated supervised injection service, which was established in response to a nursing need to provide reasonable care to patients addicted to intravenous drugs.

A story that one staff member told us illustrates this complexity and the emotional and practical challenges it creates. The staff member had spent the evening with a young resident of the Centre,

"doing puzzles and ... helping her with her English". "Then she goes to do whatever and she comes back with knapsack and jacket, and she says, "I'm going out." It's about midnight, and ... all of a sudden you switch from playing games, to helping with school, to "OK, do you have clean needles in your knapsack? Do you have condoms? Do you have warm enough clothes?" ... Then off she goes and then coming back at three or four in the morning and her neck is red and she's having a hard time breathing and she's in pain and it's because the john she hooked up with at some motel was into choking her during sex. You go through sitting with her while she cries through the shame of prostituting. ... Getting her in her pj's and sitting there holding her hand until she falls asleep. (Interviewee)

The churches. A second set of places that illustrates how places complicate institutional work comprises the churches in which the Mat Program was housed. Like the Dr. Peter Centre, the churches complicated the process through their hybridization – the multiple meanings, values and practices that would be associated with them through their employment in the Mat Program. Unlike the Dr. Peter Centre, they complicated the process in ways that involved conflict over their legal/regulatory status and their physical locations, as well as their uses.

The proposal to run the Mat Program in local churches quickly encountered bureaucratic troubles. City planners from the municipalities informed the Task Group that the Mat Program would require a "rezoning" of each church site. While churches were associated with humanitarian work, their zoning designation did not permit people to stay overnight. There was no zoning category for a temporary shelter, so each city had to create and approve a new type of activity and then make a legal/administrative connection to each church address. Such a change of use required amending city bylaws which in turn triggered a process of public consultation through a formal public hearing. The Task Group found itself dealing with three different sets of municipal systems and public responses. The Task Group hired a building code consultant who produced a report with recommendations for each building that was initially rejected by Coquitlam city staff, leading to frantic discussions with planners and councillors as the required renovations to the church buildings would make the program unfeasible. Planning fees of around \$4,000 per city also had to be negotiated. These were waived although Port Coquitlam made the Task Group purchase the signs to advertise their public hearing. Task Group members met with as many councillors as possible while city planning staff worked as quickly as they could on the necessary reports for their different councils. Although a typical rezoning process often took several months, all parties were under pressure to achieve the church rezoning in the few months left before winter.

The churches' involvement in the Mat Program also complicated life inside them. The difficult meetings church leaders had with their neighbours highlighted the need for the churches to improve their communication with local residents. Although the churches were by no means homogenous in terms of denomination, size or age, the Mat Program seemed to provide them with a way to "enact their values" and show compassion to those in need. Some members of

these congregations would open up basement suites and start to build long-term relationships. A few of the homeless started to join these congregations. Although the impacts on the church communities are still unknown, the Mat Program was certainly educational to some church members: "I got questions about 'If Buddy sits beside me in the pew on Sunday morning, and he's got HIV, am I going to get it?' I'd have to say, 'Well, unless you're doing something really inappropriate in church you're not going to get it' (Interviewee)

The complicating role of places in institutional work. The Dr. Peter Centre and the churches used in the Mat Program both illustrate how places can complicate institutional work by introducing unexpected complexity. Places seem to introduce complexity by virtue of their "concreteness" in the sense of their geographic location, their physical materiality, their association with day-to-day routines and practices, and their status as instantiations of abstract categories. The Dr. Peter Centre complicated the connections between ways of thinking about HIV/AIDS and the development of a new health facility by incorporating practices and physical structures that bring in unexpectedly complex images of who is living with HIV/AIDS, how they are living with it, and what needs they have. The churches in the Tri-Cities complicated the connections between homelessness and the Mat Program by triggering a regulatory process regarding what services could legitimately be provided by a church, and a broader debate centered on the appropriateness of shelter facilities located in suburban residential neighborhoods.

The Dr. Peter Centre and the Tri-Cities churches represent phenomena the impacts of which are relatively rarely examined in institutional research. Both the Dr. Peter Centre and the churches can be described from an institutional perspective as complex, embedded objects. Such objects are complex objects in that they are instances of abstract categories that are used for or

are proposed to be used for purposes that span institutional domains often understood as separate, such as religious worship and overnight accommodation, suburban housing and shelter for the homeless, disease treatment and injection drug use. They are embedded in the day-to-day lives and routines of other organizations or communities. The Dr. Peter Centre was deeply connected to a host of regulators, including the City of Vancouver (as a zoned, land use and physical facility), the Province of Vancouver (as a supportive housing facility), and Vancouver Coastal Health (as a provincial health facility). The churches were connected to a set of congregations (as places of worship, communion and fellowship), a set of municipalities (as zoned land use), and a set of neighborhoods (as prominent, non-residential multi-use facilities). Thus, we argue that places as objects are more likely to complicate institutional work to the degree their purposes or uses cross institutional domains, and the degree to which they are embedded in multiple sets of routines, practices and relationships.

Thus, we argue that some places are more likely to complicate institutional work than are others. The key dimension along which places vary is the degree to they are hybrids – the degree to which multiple sets of meanings, beliefs, values, and practices, which generally cluster around how places are used. The experience of places with multiples sets of meanings and practices may engage people in thinking about social problems or novel solutions in new ways. People who experience, for example, the integration of a supervised injection site into a health care facility at the Dr. Peter Centre might re-examine the legitimacy of such a hybrid as a template for other health care facilities. For parishioners and pastors at the churches, the Mat Program opened up a complex web of ideas and possibilities with respect to the roles that churches might play in their communities and their relationship to those not previously connected to their churches. Concrete places not only house solutions or social problems, but also introduce individuals to disruptive

combinations of meanings and practices.

#### DISCUSSION

Does it matter where institutional work occurs? Our study suggests it does and for more, and more complex, reasons than suggested by previous writing in the area. We found that places mediate, places contain, and places complicate the relationship between institutional work and targeted institutions. Places mediate institutional work in ways that are shaped by the geography of everyday life. The places that individuals repeatedly engage with activate certain institutions, which we refer to as proximal institutions, through which they understand less frequently activated, less well understood institutions. Places contain institutional work by establishing and maintaining boundaries around institutions, actors and the efforts of those actors to affect the institutions. These boundaries can concentrate attention on a social problem or a novel solution in ways that can both spark action and suffocate it. Places complicate institutional work by introducing unexpected complexity to the process. They seem to do this primarily by complicating people's concrete experience of this relationship and by introducing complications in the form of unexpected connections to existing sets of practices, routines and rules. Thus, places play a variety of roles in institutional work, with places themselves exhibiting different ontologies depending on the action to which they are connected, and the impacts of places depending on the degree to which they have certain characteristics tied to these ontologies. In the remainder of the paper, we consider the implications of each of our three main findings for how we understand institutions and institutional work. (See Figure 2 for a summary of our findings.)

Insert Figure 2 about here

FIGURE 2: THE ROLES OF PLACE IN INSTITUTIONAL WORK

What places do in institutional work	Ontological status of places	Kinds of places likely to play this role	Examples from the study
Places <b>mediate</b>	Symbolic (instances of institutionalized categories)	Representative of "proximal institutions"  (familiar, easily related categories)	Peter's apartment
Places <b>contain</b>	Geographic Social (social spaces)	Bounded, organized social spaces  (places with strong membership rules, clear boundaries and developed routines and resources)	Tri-Cities
Places complicate	Practical, material (complex, embedded objects)	Complex, embedded objects  (places used or proposed to be used for purposes that span institutional domains)	Dr. Peter Centre Churches housing the Mat Program

Our first main finding was that places mediate institutional work – bridging sets of ideas through which people come to understand institutions and the work done to affect those institutions. Places in this role are conceptual phenomena – they are a part of "the categories, relationships and theories through which we understand the world and relate to one another" (Phillips & Hardy, 1997: 167). This role, therefore, locates places squarely in the institutional tradition, which argues that it is through institutions that people understand and interact with their worlds (Berger & Luckmann, 1967, Friedland & Alford, 1991, Jepperson, 1991). Institutional studies have identified how ideas, roles and stories can mediate practice (Lawrence & Phillips, 2004, Blacker & Regan, 2006, Zilber, 2009). Our study adds to the idea that institutions mediate between action and broad cultural understandings in two ways. First, and

most simply, we add the idea that places can play this role, alongside other already studied phenomena. Second, and more importantly, we identify the quality of places, and perhaps other kinds of concepts, that is associated with this role. We found that it is "proximal institutions" – institutions that are familiar parts of the everyday lives of people – that are especially powerful in shaping how people come to understand new, threatening or less well understood concepts, categories and phenomena. institutions. The idea that some institutions are proximal and some distal in social life may help to explain how institutions become selected and are prioritized by individuals. It may also provide a way to explore the relationships between institutions and their effects on each other, moving beyond either treating all institutions as having equal weight, and extending discussions about the interplay of institutions beyond ideas of competition and contradiction (Seo & Creed, 2002, Hargrave & Van de Ven, 2009). Research focusing on this issue, we argue, should focus on the geography of everyday life in order to recognize the mediating role of institutions.

Our second major finding was that places contain institutional work. This finding highlights places as social spaces and taps into a central issue in institutional studies of organizations – how institutions, actors and action are embedded in networks of relationships. This issue has traditionally been addressed through the notion of a field (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983, Wooten & Hoffman, 2008) and more recently through examinations of communities (Christopher Marquis, Glynn, & Davis, 2007, Wry et al., 2010) and countries (Peng & Heath, 1996, Kostova, Roth, & Dacin, 2008). The example on which we focused here – the containing role of the Tri-Cities in the development of the Mat Program – is consistent the emerging stream of research on communities and institutions, which has thus far highlighted such issues as isomorphic pressures in communities (Christopher Marquis, Glynn, & Davis, 2007), inter-

community institutional competition (Lounsbury, 2007), and the impact of community on locally disruptive events (Glynn, 2008). We contribute to this stream of research by highlighting the mechanisms through which social spaces contain institutional work and the qualities of social spaces that enable this to happen.

In our study, we show that places contain institutional work through their impacts on the identity of actors, motivating and shaping their action, and on the resources and routines drawn on by actors to establish a novel solution. Our study suggests two qualities of social spaces as important to establish these connections. First, in looking at the Tri-Cities example, it seems that for a place to contain institutional work depends on there existing a boundary that aligns with a community of actors whose identity is significantly tied to the place. This alignment provides the emotional energy that is required to locate a social problem within a place. The Tri-Cities represented a political boundary that aligned with, and indeed was borne of, the lived experience of its residents, and so was tied to the identity of those residents. Residents "lived in" the Tri-Cities just as much or more than they lived in one of the three constituent municipalities. Second, for a place to contain institutional work, it seems to require a set of actors who have the resources (physical, social, financial) to invest in the efforts required to shape local institutions. The Tri-Cities was a relatively prosperous community with enough resources distributed across its residents to allow for the organization of multiple collaborations among residents and local agencies aimed at addressing the problem of homelessness in their community. This would not, of course, be the case in all, or perhaps even most, communities with serious social problems. Communities with serious problems of poverty, ill health or crime may be unlikely to possess the social and financial capital to spontaneously and endogenously organize novel solutions to those problems. So, a major challenge in understanding places as containing institutional work is

understanding how those places are connected to actors with the agility and resources to engage in the demanding, often unpredictable work of shaping institutions. .

Finally, we found that places can complicate institutional work by introducing unexpected complexity to the process. This capacity, we argued, is tied to places as complex, embedded objects. The complexity of places in terms of the multiple sets of meanings, practices and values tied to their physical forms complicates institutional work by forcing actors to manage potentially conflicting sets of interpretations with respect to how places are meant to be used, and who they are meant to serve. That people draw on established categories to make sense of their worlds is well established in institutional studies (Scott, 2008) and categories are linked to creating institutions (Greenwood, Suddaby, & Hinings, 2002), maintaining them (Fox-Wolfgramm, Boal, & Hunt, 1998), and disrupting them (Clemens, 1993). What our study shows, however, is how in places these ideas become connected and mix: in places, cultural categories of place and the unique experience of a place combine. Similarly, the embeddedness of places complicates institutional work by forcing actors to manage potentially conflicts between practices they are working to establish and existing routines, practices and rules tied to the places involved. Although the importance of material objects in institutional analysis has recently been recognized, their presences remains significantly under-examined (Pinch, 2008, Friedland, 2009). Our study suggests that places represent important instances of material objects for institutional processes, and that their impact on those processes may depend significantly on the complexity of meanings associated with them and the degree to which they are embedded in existing networks of actors, practices, routines and rules.

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