From Rules to Order: Post-Print of University Library Learning Space Conflict Governance

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Abstract

Purpose/Significance: Under the "involution"-style academic competition landscape, university library readers' territorial behaviors toward learning spaces persist despite repeated prohibitions, with resulting spatial conflicts causing serious harm. Resolving these conflicts is of great significance for improving the utilization efficiency of spatial resources.

Method/Process: This study combines qualitative and quantitative research. Textual data were obtained through a knowledge Q&A platform, and grounded theory was employed to reveal the connections between three major influencing factors—reader intentions, public moral consciousness, and rule consciousness—and spatial usage order, thereby constructing a theoretical model and proposing research hypotheses. Based on these hypotheses, a scale was developed, a survey was conducted, empirical data were obtained, and the research hypotheses were verified.

Results/Conclusion: The irreconcilable contradiction between territorial behavior and spatial resource scarcity constitutes the prerequisite for spatial conflicts. Proceeding from a rule-based perspective, we should define violations, extract governance concepts, formulate governance measures, coordinate governance intensity and costs, guide and cultivate readers' internalized public resource consciousness, and establish and maintain a rule-based, orderly learning space environment.

Full Text

Preamble

From Rule to Order: Governance of Learning Space Conflict in University Libraries

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Abstract

Under the intensifying pressure of "involuted" academic competition, university library readers repeatedly engage in enclosure behaviors toward learning spaces, despite prohibitions. The resulting spatial conflicts cause serious harm, making conflict governance crucial for enhancing spatial resource utilization. This study employs a mixed-methods approach combining qualitative and quantitative research, drawing data from the Zhihu Q&A platform. Using grounded theory coding techniques, it reveals the connections between three major influencing factors—reader self-intention, moral constraints, and rule constraints—and spatial usage order, constructing a theoretical model and proposing research hypotheses. Based on these hypotheses, a scale was developed and empirical data were collected to verify them. The irreconcilable contradiction between enclosure behavior and scarce learning space resources constitutes the premise for spatial conflicts. Therefore, starting from rules, the study proposes defining violations, refining governance concepts, formulating governance measures, intensifying governance efforts, and ensuring governance costs, aiming to guide and cultivate readers' intrinsic public resource consciousness to establish and maintain a rule-based, orderly learning environment.

Keywords: Learning space; Spatial conflict governance; Spatial rules; Spatial order; University library

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Introduction

While product supply can be increased through expanded production, physical space—unlike producible goods—cannot have its absolute supply increased through productivity gains. In densely populated areas, physical space is a scarce resource essential for survival. In the context of "involution," where individual intellectual and non-intellectual factors are relatively homogeneous, students' learning outcomes improve with longer possession of fixed learning spaces, increasing their chances of success in the competition and securing better futures. Consequently, for individuals with similar internal attributes, the key external variable separating them from promising prospects is the ability to possess learning spaces for extended periods. In reality, at universities with severe "involution," student demand for long-term learning space possession is intense. For instance, in 2019, an incident where a university library discarded students' belongings from reserved seats, leaving a student crying while searching for her books, went viral online [**?**]. In 2021, students at another university queued outside the library from 5 a.m. to secure seats for postgraduate entrance exam preparation [**?**]. In 2022, a female student assaulted another over

a seat dispute in the library [**?**]. While calls to increase learning space capacity frequently emerge to prevent such incidents, the quantity of learning spaces is objectively limited by physical constraints and cannot be flexibly adjusted to meet demand. Thus, learning spaces represent a scarce resource coveted by "involution"-driven readers.

Enclosure behaviors to seize scarce resources manifest as placing personal items on seats or leaving notes to claim usage rights. However, students sometimes occupy resources without actually using them, forcing later arrivals to "offend" the original occupant to gain access. Such "offenses" can escalate into verbal or physical conflicts, triggering heightened anxiety among library users, eroding public consciousness, reducing identification with the library, and deepening feelings of alienation. These negative consequences impair the performance of library learning spaces and create governance challenges.

Literature Review

Library learning spaces are public spaces with inherent public resource attributes, and conflicts occurring within them fall under the category of public space conflicts. Public space conflicts refer to disputes among stakeholders in public spaces over management, usage, occupation, and behaviors that unreasonably impede others' rights to enjoy public space benefits. Such conflicts feature multiple actors, complex causes, diverse behaviors, and significant harmfulness [**?**]. The direct root of public space conflicts lies in the objective contradiction between the scarcity of public space resources and the exclusivity of individual interests, making them essentially inevitable [**?**]. Domestic research has proposed various governance strategies: from the perspective of optimizing resource allocation, some scholars suggest allocating public space resources through "virtual transactions" to ensure fairness [**?**]; from the angle of optimizing management methods, information systems such as seat reservation systems assist in managing learning space resources, enabling managers to allocate resources, optimize reservation systems, and adjudicate disputes, while bearing corresponding allocation, supervision, and adjudication costs, and requiring readers to abandon the "first-come-first-served" rule in favor of "reservation-based" usage, along with compliance costs [**?**]; from the viewpoint of enhancing readers' rule consciousness, scholars advocate cultivating readers' awareness of rights, proper procedural consciousness, self-restraint, and social morality [**?**]; and from the perspective of proactive governance, government intervention can improve regional non-economic public service supply levels and narrow supply gaps in both short and long terms [**?**].

These studies provide rich theoretical guidance for public space governance practice. However, conflicts over learning space usage or occupation persist in real-world scenarios, including university libraries, indicating a gap between current governance and the goal of consciously and orderly usage of learning space resources. In university libraries, where learning space usage rules are relatively mature, the key challenge is fostering readers' voluntary compliance with rules

and translating rules into order. This represents a valuable exploration toward achieving high-quality governance of learning spaces, upholding the principle of providing universal and equal services [**?**], enhancing reader satisfaction through the perception-construction-evaluation pathway [**?**], improving library learning space performance, deepening the value realization of "library as place" [**?**], and pursuing the ultimate goal of creating smart spaces that deliver vivid, efficient, and high-quality experiences [**?**].

Therefore, this study focuses on learning space conflict governance in university libraries, employing mixed-methods research to reveal the intrinsic connections among university library readers' (primarily student groups) intentions, public moral consciousness, rule consciousness, and orderly usage of learning space resources. It constructs a theoretical model and conducts empirical testing to provide references for maximizing the value of library learning space resources.

Research Methodology

This study adopts a mixed-methods approach combining qualitative and quantitative research. Data were collected from Zhihu Q&A platform posts and replies between January 2019 and June 2022, totaling 110,000 characters. After removing content posted by library vendors and discussions about public library seating, 80,000+ characters of valid text discussing university library seat usage were retained. Grounded theory coding techniques were applied to analyze the valid text through open coding, axial coding, and selective coding to present, summarize, and analyze the causes, manifestations, influencing factors, and governance approaches of learning space conflicts.

Three-Level Coding Process

(1) Open Coding. Through line-by-line reading, the researcher extracted and reorganized the original textual data, ultimately obtaining 26 categories. For example, "academic competition" was extracted from text such as "During this period, prospects outweigh everything… Without a seat for postgraduate exam preparation, people panic… Everyone around me is working harder than me…"; "unfair competition" from "…reservation system hacks…"; and "ideal place" from "When studying in the library, looking up, I see almost everyone working hard… The library atmosphere is more conducive to learning, and I feel inspired to work harder…"

(2) Axial Coding. The 26 categories from open coding were further grouped and abstracted into 8 main categories. For instance, "academic competition" and "unfair competition" were grouped under "sufficient competition"; "ideal place," "alternative place," "public resource," "scarce resource," "advantageous resource," and "resource utilization" were grouped under "resource imbalance."

(3) Selective Coding. The focus of selective coding is identifying the core category. The storyline emerging from axial coding is: Under the premise of

intense academic competition (sufficient competition), ideal learning places become scarce learning space resources. For readers, obtaining or occupying such resources through "enclosure" or other unfair competition methods (resource imbalance) stems from their "rigid needs." Readers who "lose" resources in competition call for "rational thinking" (self-intention), questioning whether moral transgressions should be constrained (moral constraints), whether allocation rules are reasonable, and whether violators are punished (rule constraints). Readers who "possess" resources to maintain their hold may refuse to yield even when facing conflicts or resistance, though most readers choose compromise and retreat (conflict behavior), instead calling for rights protection and a harmonious spatial atmosphere (conflict feelings), demanding that managers govern learning space conflicts (conflict governance). See Table 1 .

Table 1 Coding System

Open Coding	Axial Coding	Selective Coding
Academic competition, unfair competition	Sufficient competition	Under intense academic competition, ideal learning places become scarce resources
Ideal place, alternative place, public resource, scarce resource, advantageous resource, resource utilization	Resource imbalance	Readers obtain/occupy resources through enclosure due to rigid needs
Rigid need, enclosure intention, rational thinking	Self-intention	Moral transgressions should be constrained
Moral transgression, moral constraint	Moral constraints	Rules should be reasonable and violators punished
Allocation rules, disciplinary punishment	Rule constraints	Resource competition triggers conflicts
Dispute conflict, spontaneous resistance, compromise retreat	Conflict behavior	Conflict causes deprivation, unfairness, negative emotions
Rights deprivation, violation of fairness, negative emotions	Conflict feelings	Conflict governance requires 5 dimensions

Open Coding	Axial Coding	Selective Coding
Behavior definition, governance measures, governance concept, governance intensity, governance cost	Conflict governance	

Research Hypotheses

Based on the above analysis, this study constructs a theoretical model of university library learning space conflict, shown in Figure 1 [Figure 1: see original paper]. The theoretical model shows that sufficient competition and resource imbalance constitute the premise of learning space conflict. It is understandable that resource imbalance can trigger resource competition and conflicts. However, if readers were not "involved" in academic competition, or in another extreme scenario, if readers did not study at all, they would not generate strong demand for learning spaces, or any demand at all. Thus, "resource imbalance" alone may not produce learning space conflicts. This study emphasizes that only when "sufficient competition" and "resource imbalance" coexist do they constitute the premise for learning space conflicts. Only under this premise do conflict phenomena occur, necessitating further research on conflict influencing factors and governance strategies.

The theoretical model also reveals that readers' self-intention, moral constraints, and rule constraints are influencing factors of learning space conflict. Conflict behaviors manifest as dispute conflicts, spontaneous resistance, and compromise retreat. Those disadvantaged in conflicts experience feelings of rights deprivation, violation of fairness, and negative emotions. Conflict governance strategies include five dimensions: behavior definition, governance measures, governance concept, governance intensity, and governance cost.

To maintain logical completeness, the theoretical model framework has presented and argued for the conflict premise, which is reasonable and empirically verifiable. Therefore, this study does not test the relationship between conflict premise and conflict influencing factors but focuses on hypotheses regarding relationships between influencing factors and conflict phenomena, and between conflict phenomena and governance:

- **H1:** Readers' self-intention positively influences learning space conflict behavior.
- **H2:** Readers' moral constraints positively influence learning space conflict behavior.
- **H3:** Spatial rule constraints positively influence learning space conflict behavior.

- **H4:** Readers' self-intention positively influences learning space conflict feelings.
- **H5:** Readers' moral constraints positively influence learning space conflict feelings.
- **H6:** Spatial rule constraints positively influence learning space conflict feelings.
- **H7:** Learning space conflict feelings positively influence conflict governance.
- **H8:** Learning space conflict behavior positively influences conflict governance.

Scale Development and Testing

3.1 Scale Development and Analysis

To verify scale validity, this study follows the procedure of item development, sample selection, data collection, item purification, factor analysis, factor naming, and reliability and validity testing [**?**].

3.1.1 Item Development Based on the theoretical model obtained through qualitative research, items were designed. After small-scale pilot testing and adjustments, a preliminary questionnaire was developed. The questionnaire covers three dimensions: reader intention, moral constraints, and rule constraints, comprising 32 self-report statements using a 7-point Likert scale. Item order was randomized to minimize exposure of the designer's intent and avoid influencing respondents.

3.1.2 Sample Selection and Data Collection The questionnaire was distributed to faculty and students at a "Double First-Class" university, including 65 undergraduates and 50 postgraduates. Between early and mid-March 2023, 115 questionnaires were collected via Wenjuanxing platform, with 110 valid responses (95.65% validity rate).

3.1.3 Factor Analysis SPSS factor analysis yielded a KMO value of 0.893 (KMO ranges 0-1, with values closer to 1 indicating stronger inter-variable correlation) and a significance probability (Sig) of 0.000, below the 0.005 significance level, indicating the sample data were suitable for factor analysis. Principal component analysis revealed that six factors cumulatively explained 74.15% of total variance, confirming that extracting six factors was acceptable.

3.1.4 Factor Naming Factor analysis results showed: - **Factor 1** included items about partitioned seats reducing disturbances, protecting privacy, preferring wall/corner seats in open spaces, and discomfort when strangers sit nearby, summarized as "self-intention." - **Factor 2** included items about willingness to

comply with reservation systems despite operational hassle, systems promoting fair resource use, and seat occupation violating public resource attributes, summarized as “rule constraints.”

Similarly, the remaining four factors were named “moral constraints,” “conflict behavior,” “conflict feelings,” and “conflict governance.” See Table 2 .

Table 2 Factor Analysis Results and Factor Naming

Self-Intention	Rule Constraints	Moral Constraints	Conflict Feelings	Conflict Behavior	Conflict Governance
Studying in partitioned seats reduces unnecessary disturbance	.847				
Partitioned seats better protect personal privacy					
In open study areas, I prefer wall or corner seats					
Strangers sitting nearby make me uncomfortable					

Self-Intention	Rule Constraints	Moral Constraints	Conflict Feelings	Conflict Behavior	Conflict Governance
Willing to comply with reservation rules despite hassle					
Reservation systems promote fair resource use					
Seat occupation violates public resource fairness					
Well-educated people should have better public consciousness					
Feeling uneasy about occupying seats without using them					

Self-Intention	Rule Constraints	Moral Constraints	Conflict Feelings	Conflict Behavior	Conflict Governance
Personal items can remain on public seats indefinitely if administrators do not intervene					
Using stationery to reserve seats is low-cost					
Accepting that placed items indicate seat ownership					
Moving occupied items when no seats available					
Fear of trouble prevents moving occupied items					
Experienced physical conflict over seats					

Self-Intention	Rule Constraints	Moral Constraints	Conflict Feelings	Conflict Behavior	Conflict Governance
Experienced verbal disputes or resistance					
Seat occupation violates public resource principles					
No need to clear seats if occupants are studying					
Library study more effective than other venues					
Cumulative variance explained: 74.15%					

3.2 Large-Scale Survey and Reliability/Validity Testing

3.2.1 Data Collection and Demographic Analysis To test scale reliability and generalizability, a large-scale survey was conducted in early April 2023 via the Credemo platform, targeting library users from universities of different regions, levels, and types. By mid-April, 363 questionnaires were collected, with 343 valid responses (94.49% validity rate). Demographic information is shown in Table 3 . Respondents were widely distributed nationwide: 107 from "Double First-Class" universities (31.20%) and 236 from non-"Double First-Class" universities (68.80%); 224 students and 119 faculty/staff; 178 with major exam plans within the year (51.90%), 107 with promotion plans (31.20%), and 105 with research tasks (30.61%).

Table 3 Demographic Statistics of Survey Respondents

Category	Subcategory	Percentage
Monthly library visits	Almost daily	4.66%
	10-20 times	22.74%
	1-9 times	24.20%
University type	Double First-Class	31.20%
	Non-Double First-Class	68.80%
User type	Student	65.31%
	Faculty/Staff	34.69%
Exam/Promotion plans	Important exams	51.90%
	Promotion plans	31.20%
	Research tasks	30.61%

3.2.2 Reliability and Validity Testing Cronbach's α measures scale reliability, while Average Variance Extracted (AVE) assesses convergent validity. Results are shown in Table 4 . All six factors had Cronbach's $\alpha > 0.7$, indicating acceptable reliability. AVE values all exceeded 0.5, demonstrating good convergent validity. Composite Reliability (CR) values calculated via SPSS all exceeded 0.6, indicating good internal quality. Overall, the scale demonstrates satisfactory reliability and validity.

Table 4 Cronbach's α, AVE, and CR Results

Factor	Cronbach's α	AVE	CR
Self-Intention	>0.7	>0.5	>0.6
Rule Constraints	>0.7	>0.5	>0.6
Moral Constraints	>0.7	>0.5	>0.6
Conflict Behavior	>0.7	>0.5	>0.6
Conflict Feelings	>0.7	>0.5	>0.6
Conflict Governance	>0.7	>0.5	>0.6

Hypothesis Testing

4.1 Model Fit and Hypothesis Verification

Model fit is a necessary condition for evaluating consistency between theoretical models and empirical data. This study employs path analysis to verify the hypothetical model, using a series of regression analyses to explore causal structures among multiple variables. AMOS 24.0 was used to calculate model fit indices, shown in Table 5 . Except for RMSEA (0.188), which was less than ideal, all other indices met standards, indicating overall acceptable model fit.

Table 5 Model Fit Indices

Index	Standard	Value
CMIN/DF	2< ^{2}/df<5	
GFI	>0.90	
AGFI	>0.90	
NFI	>0.90	
CFI	>0.90	
RMSEA	<0.05	0.188

The path diagram generated by AMOS 24.0 is shown in Figure 2 [Figure 2: see original paper], and hypothesis test results are presented in Table 6 .

Figure 2 Hypothesis Testing Path Diagram

Table 6 Research Hypothesis Results

Hypothesis	Standardized Path	Result
Self-Intention → Conflict Behavior	0.152	Supported (P<0.05)
Moral Constraints → Conflict Behavior	0.282	Supported (P<0.001)
Rule Constraints → Conflict Behavior	0.207	Supported (P<0.05)
Self-Intention → Conflict Feelings	0.211	Supported (P<0.001)
Moral Constraints → Conflict Feelings	0.427	Supported (P<0.001)
Rule Constraints → Conflict Feelings		Not supported (P>0.05)
Conflict Feelings → Conflict Governance		Not supported (P>0.05)
Conflict Behavior → Conflict Governance		Not supported (P>0.05)

Results show that H1, H2, H3, H4, and H5 received empirical support, while H6, H7, and H8 failed significance tests. H1 (Self-Intention → Conflict Behavior) was significant at P<0.05 (β=0.152), indicating reader intention significantly affects conflict behavior. H2 (Moral Constraints → Conflict Behavior) was significant at P<0.001 (β=0.282), demonstrating moral constraints significantly impact conflict behavior. H3 (Rule Constraints → Conflict Behavior) was significant at P<0.05 (β=0.207), showing rule constraints positively influence conflict behavior. H4 (Self-Intention → Conflict Feelings) was significant at P<0.001 (β=0.211), and H5 (Moral Constraints → Conflict Feelings) was significant at P<0.001 (β=0.427). However, H6, H7, and H8 had P>0.05, indicating no support for the hypotheses that rule constraints affect conflict feelings, or that conflict feelings and behavior positively influence governance.

4.2 Discussion

Hypotheses H1-H6 concern influencing factors of learning space conflict, examining how self-intention, moral constraints, and rule constraints affect conflict behavior and feelings. Results indicate that all three factors significantly influence

conflict behavior, suggesting that making reader intentions explicit, strengthening public moral consciousness, and scientifically formulating and strictly implementing rules may reduce or mitigate conflicts. Additionally, self-intention and moral constraints significantly affect conflict feelings, but rule constraints do not. Intention, morality, and conflict feelings coexist within readers' internal psychological levels, corresponding respectively to the origin, process, and outcome of emotional consciousness in conflict situations, sharing close internal connections. However, rule constraints originate externally and do not directly affect this internal psychological process.

In practice, public management mechanisms tend to adopt conflict governance measures to address actual conflict behaviors and feelings rather than remaining passive. However, the non-significant results for H7 and H8 suggest that conflict governance in learning space management may be insufficient, warranting examination of governance concepts, measures, intensity, and costs.

Conclusions

This study explores the mechanisms of learning space conflict in university libraries, treating conflict governance as an outcome variable. It expands research content on learning space governance and enriches related studies on university library learning space services. Using mixed-methods research, the study constructs and tests a theoretical model. Grounded theory coding techniques were employed to build the theoretical model, based on which a scale was developed and tested via structural equation modeling. Key conclusions follow.

5.1 Premise of Learning Space Conflict

"Involuted" academic competition drives university library readers (primarily students) to enclose learning spaces. Meanwhile, learning space scarcity is an objective reality. The contradiction between enclosure behavior and resource scarcity constitutes a supply-demand conflict that is difficult to reconcile under current social and campus environments, forming the prerequisite condition for learning space conflicts.

5.2 Influencing Factors of Learning Space Conflict

Influencing factors include readers' self-intention (rigid needs, enclosure intention, rational thinking), moral constraints (moral transgression, moral constraint), and rule constraints formulated by space managers (allocation rules, punishment rules, violation costs). Reader groups divide into "enclosure camps," "anti-enclosure camps," and "rational thinking camps" that both sympathize and criticize. Enclosure camps satisfy self-interest at low violation costs, anti-enclosure camps condemn moral transgressions and call for strict punishment, while rational thinking camps sympathize with genuine learners who occupy seats but condemn those who waste resources. Empirical results confirm that self-intention, moral constraints, and rule constraints significantly affect conflict

behavior, while self-intention and moral constraints significantly affect conflict feelings.

5.3 Learning Space Conflict Governance Strategies

In governance practice, the three major influencing factors must be fully considered when defining violations, refining governance concepts, formulating measures, intensifying efforts, and ensuring costs.

5.3.1 Defining Violations Scientific, reasonable, and feasible learning space usage rules must serve as enforcement bases. "Scientific" means correct theoretical foundations; "reasonable" means logically consistent rules without contradictions; "feasible" means considering actual circumstances, including readers' acceptance of restrictive clauses, with appropriate buffer zones to avoid rigidity. Governance processes must recognize the internal connection between "learning space" and "future prospects" in readers' subjective intentions, achieving empathy-based rule-making that balances rules with reason.

5.3.2 Refining Governance Concepts Governance concepts provide overarching guidance for practice, implying governance goals and effectiveness positioning. The ideal goal is internalizing rules in readers' hearts and externalizing them in actions, achieving collective, spontaneous, and orderly resource usage. Rules are designed to prevent conflicts; compliance reduces conflicts and generates collectively established and supported order. Governance practice must both enforce regulations and cultivate readers' intrinsic public resource order consciousness.

5.3.3 Formulating Governance Measures Measures implement governance concepts by specifying methods. A rule-based, orderly learning environment itself educates readers about public morality. When 99% comply, the remaining 1% either leave or adapt. Therefore, establishing and maintaining such an environment is essential. University libraries should develop and consistently enforce reward-punishment measures regarding rule compliance, supplemented by public moral education to leverage readers' internal moral constraints, thereby establishing and sustaining an orderly environment.

5.3.4 Intensifying Governance Efforts Governance intensity refers to resource support for implementing measures, including human, material, and financial resources. Human resources involve capable leaders and executors; material resources involve physical infrastructure for superior spaces and governance implementation; financial resources are the core support convertible into the other two. The most realistic challenge is increasing space supply. With adequate resources, additional public spaces like classrooms, cafés, and corridors could be coordinated as supplementary learning spaces [**?**]. Given dense populations, absolute 1:1 supply is unrealistic. Stakeholder organizations (libraries,

student associations, property management) can form cooperative governance networks to investigate and address "occupied but unused" spaces, improving utilization efficiency.

5.3.5 Ensuring Governance Costs Governance costs are substantially higher than violation costs. Occupying a seat requires only a book or note, but governing violations demands human, financial, and material investment (e.g., management staff, reservation systems). However, even near-zero violation costs can cause enormous conflict harm. Therefore, necessary governance cost investment across all stages is essential to produce long-term order and prevent conflicts, forming the basic guarantee for maintaining both the physical learning environment and readers' internal environment.

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Note: Figure translations are in progress. See original paper for figures.