Career management: Place, space and social enclaves

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Geography influences life chances. This article examines how career-management is situated. What we refer to as 'respect', 'freedom' and 'confidence' are differently experienced in different locations. The term 'place-and-space' is used to frame these realities. In illustrating how work-life is managed differently in different places, this article uses the concept of 'enclave' to refer to the place. It points to how varying language voices experience, and illustrates what that does to making a claim to a stake in society. The article also shows how opportunities in any place can be expanded, creating space to accommodate unforeseen hopes. And it suggests implications for the organisation of professional systems around these ideas. In particular it suggests a rebalancing in the importance attached to career-development expertise, in favour of career-management experience.

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Introduction

In current conditions public-service careers work needs to find a new way forward. Those conditions are products of economic, political and commercial change. Careers work is entering yet another phase in a long and fruitful history of importing new thinking to meet new conditions.

A significant part of the new thinking is afforded by geographer Danny Dorling (2010). He documents how much of what is voiced as individual identity can be mapped as different in different areas. He produces a cartography of the places, and shows how the space affects chances in life.

Dorling's account of life chances will come as no surprise to careers workers familiar with the culturally-located ethnographies of Willis (1977), Williamson (2004) and Bright (2011). Contrary to conventional careers-work thinking they find that, though psychologically different, the lives they document are bound together by shared experience belonging to what - with hindsight - we can call 'place and space'. Careers work now needs better to understand whether what has been readily attributed to social class can be more usefully attributed to place and space.

Direct evidence in support of Dorling comes from Leander, Phillips and Taylor (2010) whose research shows how learning lives are located, positioned, and emplaced in ways that influence access to opportunity. What people do is, therefore, usefully understood in its geographic social-and-cultural context. What people learn to believe, value and expect is situated.

To adopt such ideas would modify conventional careers-work thinking. The phrase 'post-code' lottery is used to argue for universal entitlement. Space-and-place thinking points to post-code realities. Careers work needs both perspectives, because what in conceptual terms might be characterised as universal rights, will in practical terms need to be locally negotiated. The day-to-day experience, for example of respect, freedom and confidence, calls for different help, in each different place, with its different culture, each expressed in a different voice.

In a sane society nobody would be in a better position to work on these issues than careers workers. But a shift of focus away from social class, and from universal entitlement, leaves careers work with a great deal of

space in need of re-mapping. [1] For example, how is it that what is learned in one place becomes useful in another? How are beliefs, values and expectations differently situated? How do differently located programmes define success and organise themselves for it? And what operational processes are we talking about? Claims that we are talking about 'markets', 'niches', and 'enclaves' are all defensible - more or less.

Enclaves

Sociologist Mary Douglas (1966) uses the term 'social enclave' as part of her understanding of how people respond to social change. An enclave is a map-able location, a place where people look to each other for whom they can trust. It is a response to fracturing societies, where both congenial families and protecting hierarchies are weakened. Enclaves are bounded by the limits of where people can gain recognition, find affirmation and claim membership. Such gains are also features of work-life; it would not, therefore, be surprising to find that what people do in enclaves has parallels with what they do about work. Indeed a work place can be an enclave - where, that is, there is trust.

Where there is trust then clubs, networks, neighbourhoods, parishes and families are enclaves. Where trust is absent, a person needs a signpost to where it can be found. As Colm Tóibin (2012) vividly illustrates in family upbringing, in an enclave what is group-shared feels like personal remembrance. So the term enclave does not refer merely to a post-code, but to the thoughts-and-feelings that inhabit that location. Shared talk about what is worth believing, worth having, and worth doing tells a person, when things get bad, whom she can count on. Pierre Bourdieu (1991) similarly speaks of cultural acquisitions, where inhabitance cultivates habits-of-mind which equip for participation. In all these respects the reports are of tangible proximity, sharing and conversation - all space-located imagery.

Enclaved variability

One of the most useful features of Douglas's term

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1   These and other issues are examined in more detail in a longer place-and-space article (Bill Law 2012a).

is that it is possible to talk about virtual enclaves. On-line life has assembled itself around enclaves. Sometimes linked locally, sometimes globally, on-line life is increasingly shaped by the approach-and-avoid dynamics of 'we like' and 'like us' (Law, 2012b). Both Bourdieu and Douglas show how such enclosure can limit life chances.

Enclaves are felt to cushion risk. On-line, on-the-street or on-the-make they are, like niches, a refuge. But, also like niches, they attract predators. Dorling's underlying concern is for access to chances in life. And some enclaves are able to offer their membership competitive advantage. But where the enclave increases another's risk, Douglas shows how any one is capable not just of protection but of aggression.

There is much here that might invite careers workers to look again at what their clients and students do, and to reframe what they know in situated terms. Table one is a thought experiment which suggests some possibilities for that work. It is not research based, but suggests what research might be able to detect, were it to take enclaved career management seriously.

Each of the enclaves listed in Table 1 calls up a more-or-less distinct way of managing work-life.

Such analyses cannot be more cleanly discrete than the realities they represent. However the core concepts on the left are spatial, the behavioural characterisations on the right are probabilities - and they do not exclude the possibility that a clique can get nasty. Each has its own assessment and management of risk. What is recognised as real and useful in one enclave may be seen as alien and irrelevant in another.

Career talk

A significant part of what Douglas brings to place-and-space thinking is the idea of culture. Ethnographers speak of culture when they document what people tell and show of…

- what they believe to be true
- who and what they value as worth knowing and having
- what they can expect to result from any action they take

Table 1: Places and spaces as enclave

What to find	What it might be like
clique	sequestered – sometimes cosmopolitan – people informally approach each other – comfortable – excluding others – making valued contacts – holding each other in-view
association	religious or other cultural membership – favouring a distinctive activity – offering advantages not available to others – with procedures and requirements for joining, leaving and exclusion
on-line location	formed by following and seeking followers – sharing preferences and aspirations – visitors appear because they identify with the inhabitants – or are spying – or preparing to exploit
sub-neighbourhood	nurturing, overseeing and protecting the place – or, where it is damaged or disowned, neglecting or defiling it – approach and avoid local sub-neighbourhoods on the basis of congeniality
housing estate	inhabited because it can be afforded – may be economically-similar but can be culturally diverse – there is an awareness of the way in which post-code affects life chances
territory	a felt need to defend the place – which involves making alliances and demanding allegiance – there may be no-go areas – pushing out those seen as invaders – occupying as if besieged

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Table 1 sets out variations on such beliefs, values and expectations. The cosmopolitan in a protected enclave wants that sequestration preserved. People able to advantageously negotiate want that freedom, and the well connected value money-savvy memberships. But life is not like that for everybody. Least of all for people whose experience has taught them to see life chances in terms of how effectively they defend their territory. In all cases career will depend less on psychological profiles and social origins, more on what enclaved experience teaches.

Experience can be a compelling teacher. The talk people learn to talk signposts the walk they are able to walk. Career thinking has an awareness of the importance of situated talk. Moore and Hooley (2012) show how different vocabulary shapes the concepts that students and clients bring to career interviews. And Arulmani (2007) relates careers provision to local semiology. These are culturally-rooted habits-of-mind, which he refers to as 'pride and prejudice'. In both cases the task is to use talk which can make a careers service more recognisable, accessible and trusted to its students and clients. One might say that these movements are part of a process of a service seeking to form an enclave.

Personal to planetary

Concerns for the vocabulary and semantics of career development focus how career is voiced. Arulmani demonstrates that it enhances programme design. But its origins and ownership are in other people's experience – what they see as recognisable, accessible and trusted. It is their property – free of capture, used with consent, and for purposes they recognise as worthwhile. Arulmani draws on that, but he knows he's on licence from the people whose situated experience he depends on. Enclaves do not speak of careers worker's career-development expertise, but of their students' and clients' career-management experience.

In Table 1, that recognition stretches from the cosmopolitan to the territorial. Contemporary culture, and the technologies which shape it, make it possible for people to find and make use of information in their own terms – with or without careers-work support. And those terms reach beyond the individually up-close-and-personal – familiar to conventional careers work. They reach into the out-there-and-pervasive – touching on contacts, locations, a regional work-life, and a continental position in a global economy.

The evidence confirms Douglas's expectation that enclaves seek to protect their own parochial interests, and defeat capture. But recent evidence shows that some want to improve the lot of others - in both their own and other people's enclaves, both nearby and far away (Law, 2013).

An enclave is a system, in the sense that it accommodates a cause-and-effect dynamic which is in exchange with its environment. What can happen, in terms of protection or improvement and for its own or other people's benefit, are at the same time spatially located and systemically active. Moreover, with a reach from the personal to planetary, place-and-space thinking needs system thinking which can accommodate enough to represent such a scale. There is such thinking, though as we shall now see, it seems to have escaped the interested attention of at least some careers-work thinkers.

Interrogating a system

Among careers-work commentators Audrey Collin (2012) proposes system thinking as sufficiently accommodating. She suggests a reach from genetic inheritance to social class. Systems specialist Donella Meadows (2009) defines systems thinking in terms that resonate well with table-one reach. She characterises systems thinking as setting out a complexity which can be mapped and interrogated. It probes hierarchical-arranged elements - some bigger some smaller. And it seeks patterns which link what otherwise would be mistaken as random and disconnected - or wayward.

How do we find these elements? Research into careers work ranges, at the extremes, from tick-box quantification to ethnographic storytelling. However, some form of narrative is needed to convey the variable, layered, overlapping and unfolding confusion that makes systems thinking both possible and necessary. Williamson's work is notable in this way. He follows-up his original sample after more than twenty years, tracking how work-life has interacted with all aspects of people's lives. It means that they are able to voice distinctively situated in place-and-space experience in variable, layered, overlapping and unfolding terms. They can be hierarchically arranged in levels of disclosure.

Careers work needs to hear the voice of experience; speaking of career management rather than of career expertise. Setting that voice in a system-thinking frame can show how one experience dynamically connects to another. But there must be no loss of contact with the place-and-space location of the experience. In what is, again, a thought experiment to imagine the possibilities, table two supposes that somebody asks such progressively deepening questions about how those experiences unfold.

Table 2: Questioning ethnography

1. Why do smart kids sideline school, settle for routine work, turn to crime, and resort to drugs?

'I think I knew when I was younger that I was heading that way – I knew I was going to spend some time in prison – given what I was doing it was bound to happen sooner or later – wasn't it?'

2. Why do they find that so predictable?

'I knew I was going to do an apprenticeship but I did not know whether that was what I wanted to be doing – because I'd not experience of anything – you know, I might have liked to be a social worker or a solicitor – I just don't know'

3. Why are they so short of ideas?

'I knew somebody somewhere was having it – I assumed it must be in London, or New York or America, or whatever – but I didn't have the background, the contacts, the things you needed to be part of it'

4. Why do they have that sense of separation?

'I lost my job because I just couldn't be bothered working – I found that thieving with these boys was much more fun – you didn't have to get up in the morning and it was more um… lucrative'

5. Why are they so ready to run that risk?

'Danny has been good to me over the years – same as Ted, when I needed them – that is what it is about really – you make them kind of friends only once in your life – you do things together when you are younger – and so, when you are older, you know everything about each other'

Each answer formulates each next question, building a layered account of learning from experience. In this example each next answer is a different person's. They are quotes from Williamson's ethnography. Their talk has the feel of a shared territory - although apparently free of aggression. But neglect can be as damaging as attack.

The answers are notable for their unwillingness to evade or deny responsibility. They speak in terms which suggest a sense of doing what, in their place-and-space, they were best in a position to do. And this seems to have given them a belief in their ability to speak for each other. Douglas's use of the term enclave - with its connotations of trust and reciprocated help - seems appropriate. There is what Tóbin characterises as shared memory. The experiment does not show that such a result is inevitable, only that we need research which can detect it and an analysis which will accommodate it.

And it suggests, in Meadows's terms, the possibility of finding and interrogating a map-able pattern, which other people might dismiss as random and disconnected. The five say little of school. But we are entitled to ask what might be achieved by a learning programme offering enough recognition and accessibility to be trusted.

New place in the making

Leander, Phillips and Taylor (2010) refer to a learning programme as a 'new place in the making'. When policy speaks of improving that place it urges structural change. But the balance of evidence does not support the creation of new free schools or academies. There is stronger evidence (Hattie, 2009) for the quality of the exchange between students and teacher.

That exchange can be expressed as:

input - 'what goes in?' > process - 'what goes on?' > outcomes - 'what comes out'

This is system thinking at its simplest. It allows boxes to be readily ticked, evaluations to be easily reported, and certificates to be confidently awarded. Such simplicity also serves some interests.

Hegemonic interests are, by definition, less interested in what people need to know and more interested in

what they want people to believe. There are dramatic examples. For example, Mark Peel (2011) documents political attitudes persuading helping professionals that people in need of care must, in some way, have themselves to blame. It seems that centrist power can systemically distort professional commitment.

But where they can maintain independence of such pressure professional careers workers have their own indicators for helping the wayward. They show that life chances are improved where feedback, expectations and models are expanded (Law, 2009). However, that thinking needs re-thinking. It is framed by social-class structures, and alert to the danger of entrapment by family dynamics. Place-and-space thinking allows that the structures are more complex and the dynamics wider-ranging.

And change is complicating the already complicated. What is learned never corresponds to what is taught. Education is not 'telling them so they know'. People recognise different aspects of what is going on as interesting, useful, relevant and worth the effort. Place-and-space thinking shows how those recognitions are learned in enclaves.

Arbitrary pressure aside, without an appreciation of such complexity and volatility it is not possible to understand what a learning programme can do, how it can be assessed, and how it can enlarge place into space. Least of all is it possible to understand how that can work out differently in different enclaves. It seems worthwhile to set out (Law, 2013) what could be the practical implications for using enclaved bases to enlarge a-new-place-in-the-making, using systems thinking…

resources	expanding from bi-lateral into multilateral partnerships, engaging both education and community resources, and adding to economics and psychology the inputs of social-and-cultural research
processes	re-forming partnerships across curriculum and in community agencies, reflecting the range of career-management experience in a stage-by-stage programme, enabling critical thinking to interrogate experience
outcomes	moving on from starting points, letting go of what hinders, holding on to what is

valued for sustainable and fulfilling action, realising a stake in society, clearly voiced and speaking of nothing as inevitable

Any person who wants not to be bothered by such layered and inter-woven complexity should stay away from curriculum. Conventional careers work has rarely found much of a need to grasp the complexity of learning with any depth or dynamic. It needs to now.

And it is needed now. The planet is peppered with governments which find it less troublesome to curtail learning and contain voice. As that happens people are not in a position to voice their experience, and legitimate interests are overwhelmed by the manoeuvring of the well positioned. And UK careers work is a party to all such issues. Space-and-place thinking is capable of framing a pervasive case for human rights: to learning for life, to stakeholding in society, and to a heeded voice. This is not what careers thinking has characterised as universal rights, but few commitments have a deeper and wider connection with that broader conception of rights than the independent enablement of career management.

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