

PLACE AND MOBILITY IN CAREER GUIDANCE



DANISH SCHOOL OF EDUCATION
AARHUS UNIVERSITY

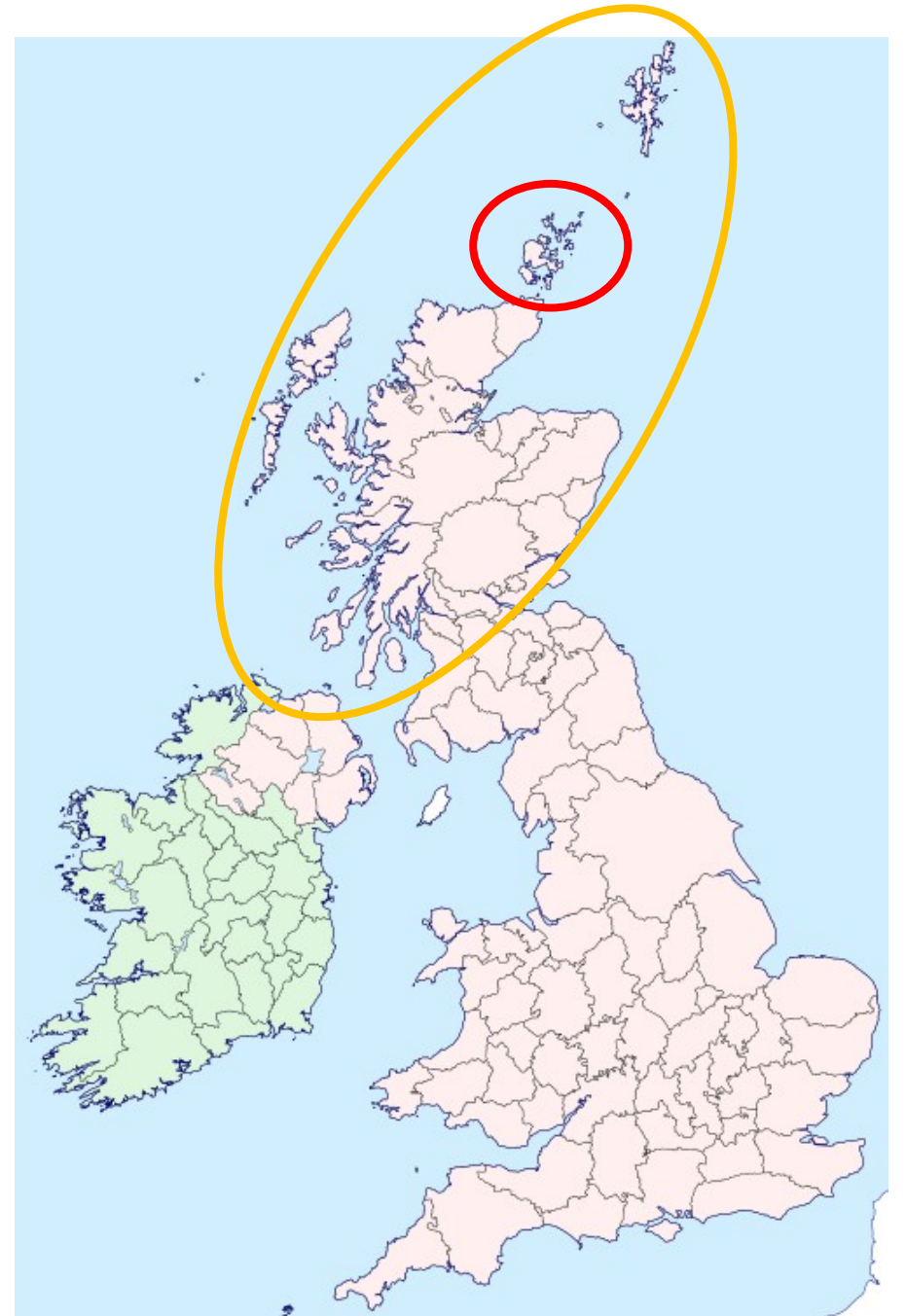
GREENLAND VEJLEDNINGS KONFERENCEN
9. SEPTEMBER 2026

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POSTDOC



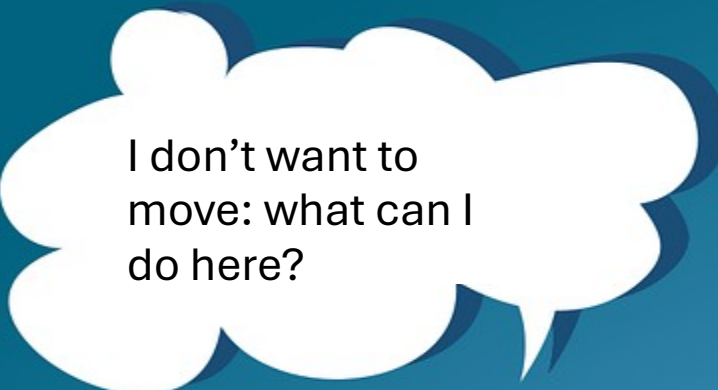
Background

- I come from the Orkney Islands in Scotland
- I worked as a careers adviser for 15 years:
 - In schools in the islands
 - With NEET young people
 - With adults
 - I also worked for the regional university (University of the Highlands and Islands)

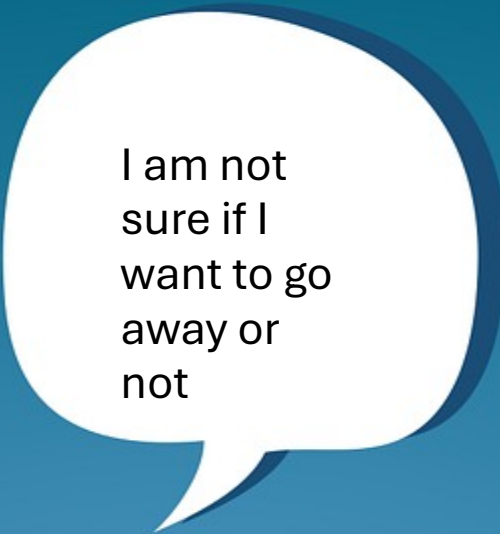




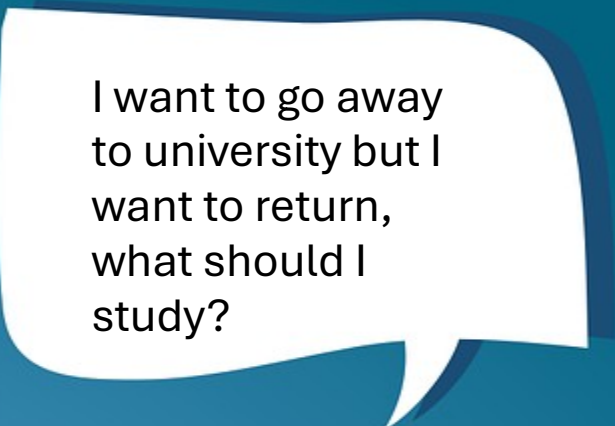
This is Orkney



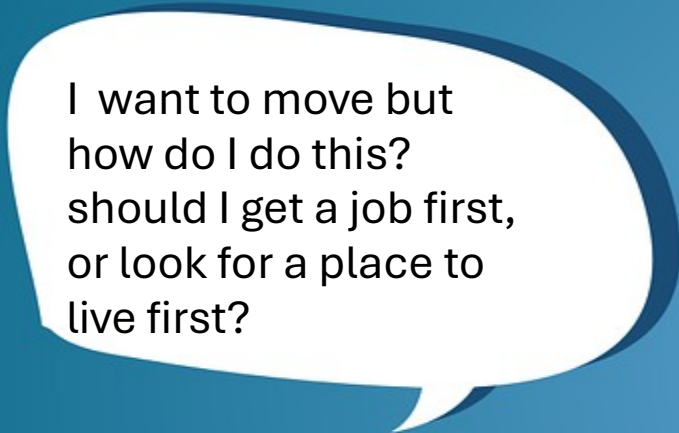
I don't want to move: what can I do here?



I am not sure if I want to go away or not



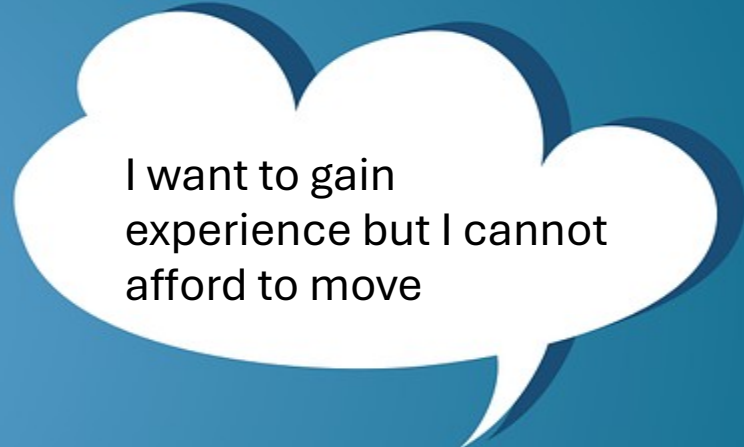
I want to go away to university but I want to return, what should I study?



I want to move but how do I do this? should I get a job first, or look for a place to live first?



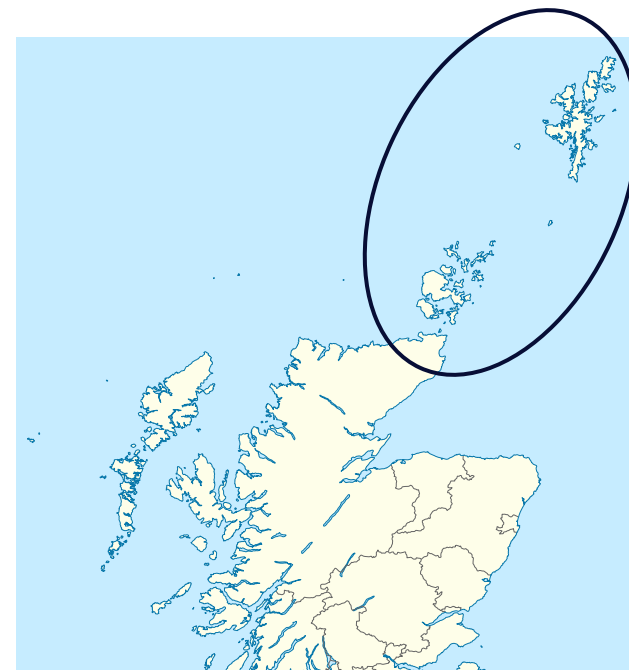
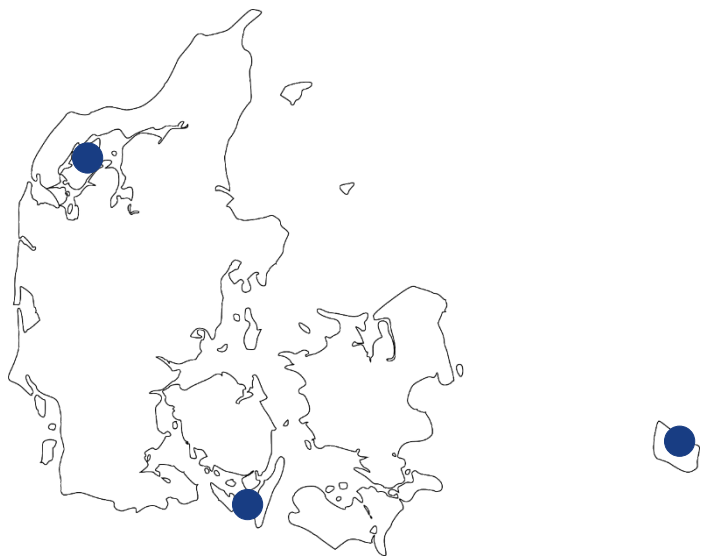
I have a degree in business what can I do here?



I want to gain experience but I cannot afford to move

Research

- PhD: Career and migration routes of higher education students from the islands of Orkney and Shetland



- Post doctoral: Developing spatially sensitive career learning and guidance provision (in Denmark) (SpaCIIS project)



Funded by
the European Union

How place influences career: traditional theoretical ideas

Either:

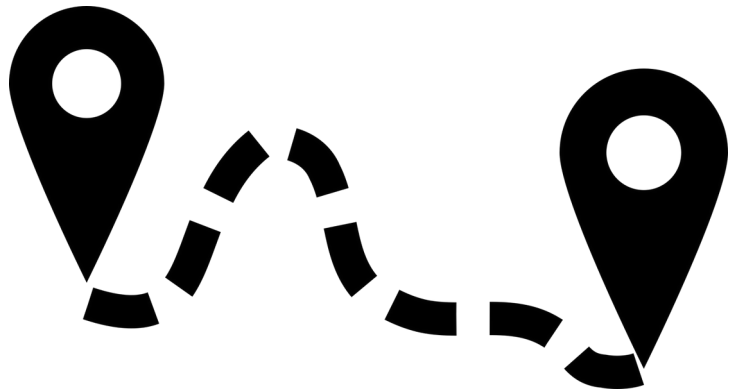
- “Environments” in which decisions are made. Often social contexts, sometimes community contexts e.g. Law’s Community Interaction Theory

Or

- “Labour Markets” as constraints on opportunities. E.g. Roberts’ (1977, 1997, 2009) Opportunity Structure Theory and Schein’s (1990) Career Anchors explores the ‘lifestyle’ anchor

Limitations

- Tendency to view place in limited ways: as a context or labour market, typically as a limitation. Could place be important beyond this?
- Static understanding of place as an influence at a point in time. How do we take into account mobility?

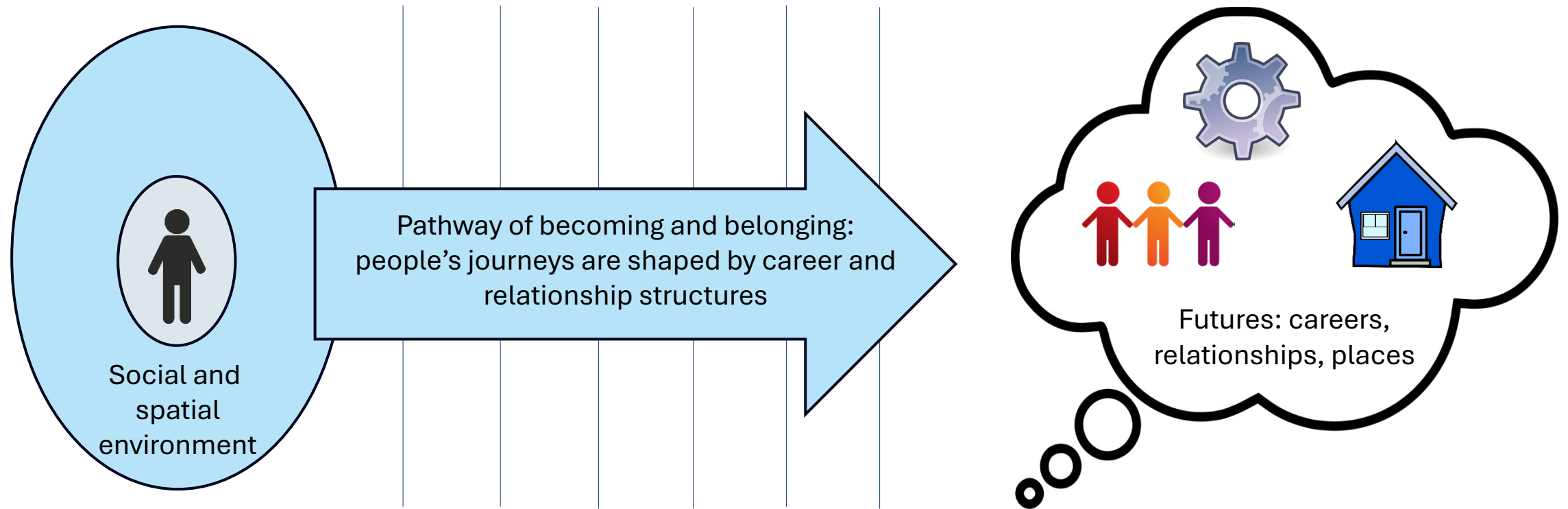


Can we imagine career
as an embedded
process across time
and place?



The journey is “the commonest career metaphor of all” (Inkson, 2004: 3).

A new model of career development



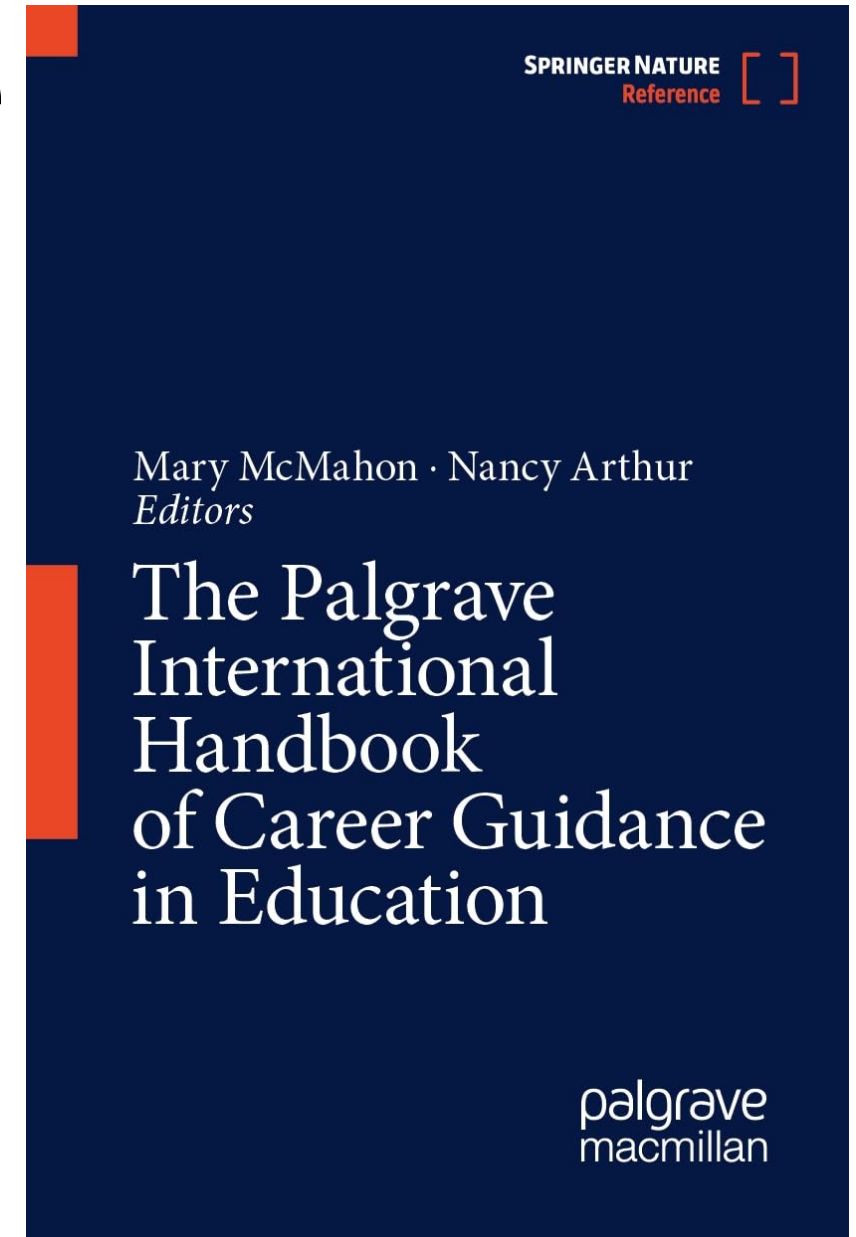
Based on Alexander (2024, 2022)

What does this mean for career guidance?



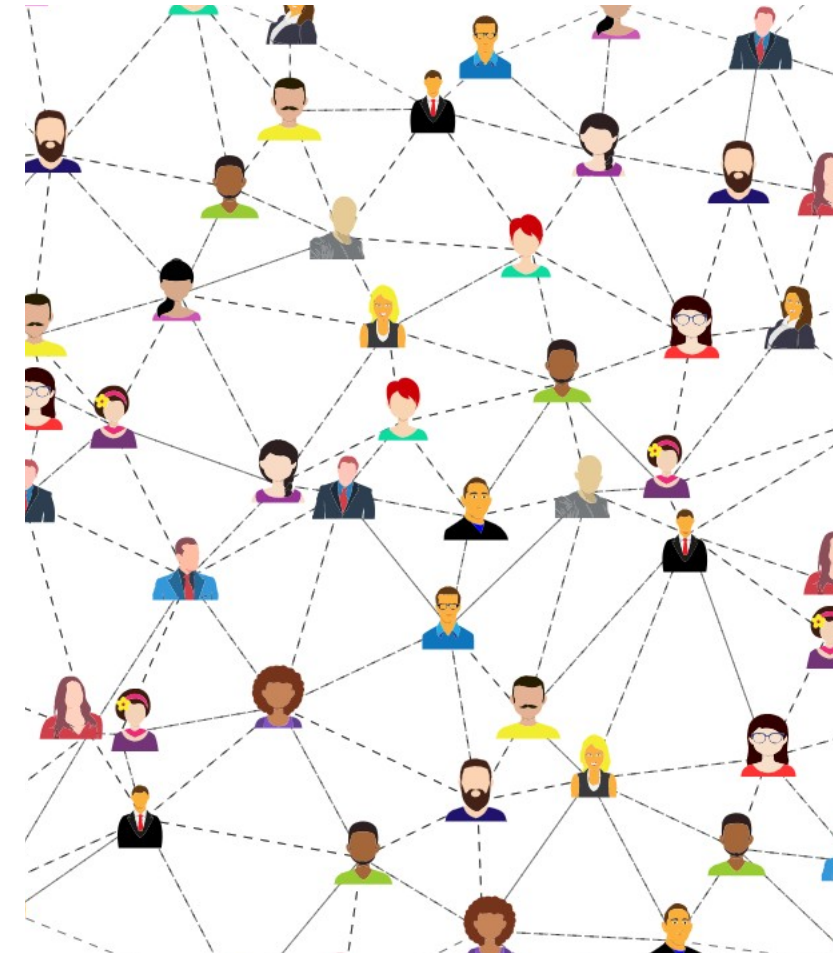
6 key points for practice

1. Embedding provision in local communities
2. Addressing spatial inequalities
3. Understanding spatialised experiences of career and career development
4. Recognising the validity of spatial aspirations
5. Focusing on processes and practices of mobility
6. Addressing social justice



1. Embedding provision in local communities

- People are embedded in communities and through relationships
- And guidance practice can be embedded too:
 - Taking guidance 'out' into community spaces (Thomsen, 2013)
 - Engaging with wider networks: partnerships with employers, public employment services, education providers.



2. Addressing mobility and spatial inequality

- To provide access to different opportunities beyond the immediate locality is important:
 - Information
 - Visits
 - Online experience
- But care should be taken not to present some careers or spaces as better than others.
- “beyond urban geographies” – non-traditional moves do not necessarily mean compromising career pathways



3. Understanding spatialised experiences of career and career development

- Career planning and “career matching” : ideas based on larger labour markets
- CVs / job search approaches vary in smaller and larger labour markets.
- Skills valued in the workplace vary: generalism or specialism, localized networks, language skills



4. Recognise the importance of place and aspiration

- Directly address a person's relationship and spatial aspirations: how do you see your future? How do place and career figure in this?
- Understand that choosing to remain in a place or close to a loved one is a valid choice, even if it means compromising career prospects.



5. Focusing on processes and practices of mobility

- Directly address feelings about mobility
- Explore mobility resources: networks, confidence, places of familiarity
- Identify and / or advocate for practical support that may be valuable



6. Addressing social justice

For clients:

- Advocating for resources for clients in different locations
- Advocating for different (more inclusive) understandings of career and career development

For services:

- Evaluate accessibility of services across spaces
- Advocating for improved or more equitable access to career guidance



Conclusions

- Career pathways are embedded in spaces – the places we live in and move to
- Place is very important in aspirations (often more so than career) – being in a place we feel we belong, close to family and friends, and in our culture
- Career guidance practices should be embedded in local communities while also exposing young people to options in other communities
- Career guidance should take into account where someone wants to live, and / or how they feel about moving.
- Career guidance models tools and resources from other (larger) communities may not always be appropriate, and need to be adapted
- We need to work together to give rural people and communities a voice, and advocate for better understanding of rural career development, and more resources to support rural populations.

Further reading

- Alexander, R (Accepted) 'Geographic and Spatial Location and Career Guidance in Education'. In McMahon and Arthur (eds) *Palgrave International Handbook of Career Guidance in Education*. Palgrave.
- Alexander, R (Accepted) 'Place and Space: Urban and Rural Differences' in Solberg; Hooley & Chong (eds) *Elgar Encyclopedia of Career Development*. Edward Elgar
- Alexander, R (2024) *Higher Education, Place and Career Development: Learning from Rural and Island Students*. Routledge, Society for Research into Higher Education (SRHE) book series
- Alexander, R., Fuqua, M. (2024) 'Ruraling career guidance research and practice: learning from rural perspectives'. *International Journal of Educational and Vocational Guidance* <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10775-024-09699-y>
- Alexander, R. (2024). 'Career development: A geographical perspective'. *Journal of the National Institute for Career Education and Counselling*, 52(1), 82–93. <https://doi.org/10.20856/jnicec.5207>



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