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Thinking space: Space as a provocation with a pragmatic, yet playful, approach with two feet on the ground

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Introduction

In this paper, Bristol, in the southwest region of England, offers the context and I begin with a vignette of narratives of social change in this city-region. Bristol is one of the first cities awarded the UK’s Social Enterprise status, as well as being successful in the bid to be the 2015 European Green Capital. Those supporting both initiatives offer stories of alternative forms of practices for social change in the city/region. For instance, those promoting the social enterprise status narrative portray the city as a hub for creative industries and ethical organizations such as the Soil Association, Sustrans and Triodos Bank and advocate ‘it is a golden opportunity to promote the city’s green credentials’ (Guardian, 2013). So too do those promoting the European Green Capital initiative including the films to promote the initiative and to support the bid shown to the European Green Capital jury (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K9hGttziaOM). This narrative conceives space geographically as organizations clustering in close proximity to one another. In support of the social enterprise status, it is widely quoted to be ‘home to over 600 social enterprises, employing over 10,000 people’. To put in some context, the population for Bristol is approximately 500,000. As such, this narrative of social enterprise can be seen as a marketing tool of interlinked ideas: creative industries, ethical organizations, green credentials and numbers of those in employment.

The Green Capital narrative also poses the ideal of creating employment, in this instance linking social innovation through technological change and creating green jobs. Thus, in advocating their initiatives both make use of the economic narrative of entrepreneurship in order to gain legitimacy. There are though differing narratives from those promoting each initiative. As reflected in referencing ‘green’, environmental issues underpin the Green Capital narrative – particularly climate change. Transport is a problematic issue in Bristol; lowering car usage and thus carbon emissions and promoting the alternatives of walking and cycling, is posed as the solution in the public narratives. Yet, the decisions taken in shaping the transition of social change are more complex than suggesting the actions taken in 2015 will offer a complete solution to the numerous problems inherent in living in a city-region. The purpose of this paper is to critically examine the notion of a ‘thinking space’ (Beyes and Steyaert, 2012; Hubbard 2012) with which to think through ideas beyond place and region to encourage new political imaginings.

The stories offer a vignette in time, in that Bristol has a history and a city identity for ‘alternative living’ (Brownlee, 2011). In addition to these two groups, there is a myriad of narratives and projects including but not exclusively those of other activist groups, think tanks, businesses, and the local council. Public narratives of the Green Capital initiative, for instance Bristol 2015 speaks of those in the city preparing for an ‘opportunity to take the next step’ (http://www.bristol2015.co.uk). So saying, the dominant narrative is of a low carbon city. As this narrative is prioritized, others are (possibly) neglected. For instance, another aspect of city identity in the Green Capital video derives from the drawings of graffiti. This practice was initially seen as anti-establishment and problematic, but paradoxically now acts as a potential draw for tourism and generates, and is a marketing device for, local business - particularly since the Banksy exhibition in 2009. Each story holds experiences and credibility and there is collaboration between some of these initiatives. Yet, practitioner anecdotes suggest that information and practices are not shared and that the city is developing in pockets of activities. Local women featured in the public narrative are shown to have been key to the history of Bristol and the emancipation of slavery (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UWHuLV57kPE). Bristol’s historical buildings, also seen as images within the Green Capital videos, are portrayed as challenging in that the Victorian plumbing infrastructure is seen to waste water - something that can be fixed. Like other cities, Bristol holds aspects of its past in name of streets, such as Black Boy Hill and White Ladies Road, and buildings The Tobacco Factory, reflecting its sugar, tobacco and slave trade history; names whose original significance today’s shoppers are perhaps oblivious to. This later aspect of history is also notably absent from the public aspects of the ‘green’ and ‘social enterprise’ narratives. Whilst these societal aspects are not easily reconcile-able to such images, in considering transformation, they are key as a societal context of what is not voiced.
Nicholls and Cho (2006, p.115) are frequently cited for their comment of social entrepreneurship as lacking ‘compelling theoretical foundations’. Muñoz (2010) found a gap and called for more research from a geographical perspective. From the review, with a few notable exceptions of published work (e.g. Amin et al., 2002, Amin, 2009, Birch and Whittam, 2004; Maclean et al. 2012), theorizing space seems little evident in the social entrepreneurship narrative. My intention here is to offer a provocation to those in the field of study that it has still to come to terms with the ‘spatial turn’ influenced by theorizing of the social production of space from Soja, Harvey and Lefebvre. There are guides. A decade ago, Steyaert and Katz (2004) outlined a framework to consider entrepreneurship in terms of social change and transformation and, as such, more than the economic. More recently, Steyaert working with Beyes (2012, p.47) say space has ‘reverberations’ for researchers:

rethinking of space as processual and performative, open-ended and multiple, practiced and of the everyday. [...] But this is about more than ‘just’ a change of expression. If we consider organization to be performative and processual, we need to recognize that scholarly work itself is embedded in embodied practices of spacing and is thus itself performative.

From the opening vignette, this paper sketches the beginnings of an empirical study. Here I am drawing primarily upon public narratives with which to investigate the notion of space and how transitions are enacted in the entangled narratives of everyday practice, political transformation and socially imagined spaces. My approach is very much influenced by the provocations of others, including Steyaert and Beyes, that participants use space to constantly make choices emphasizing not simply opposition, but also patterns of political transformation and imaginings of social change (Soja 2003; Steyaert and Katz, 2004; Massey, 2005). In part, it also arises from a conversation over my kitchen table years ago of the flâneur in literature. I reflect upon flânerie, the act of wandering and wayfaring of the flâneur as in traditional literature - the flâneuse in more recent feminist studies. The image has stayed with me and the question, whilst I write over the same table years later is, ‘Does the notion of wandering and wayfaring – and by extension space itself - offer something to align with stories and everyday experiences and offer the creation of such ‘places’ to consider fresh ways of understanding social entrepreneurship?’.

Thus critiquing notions of space say it is abstract and thus not a robust means of analysis (Taylor and Spicer, 2007; Ingold, 2011). Perhaps that is so, perhaps not. The playful allusion here is of connecting these lofty notions more solidly with the ground. It is though more than being playful to wonder ‘Whose voices are heard and prioritized’? What insights might there be in the steps of resistance? Why have narratives developed as they have and how they might lead to alternatives? It is not simply of the narratives but also of reflecting. Thus, my aim is to reflect upon and trace how Massey’s (2005) ‘stories so far’ might be negotiated by the act of wandering and wayfaring.

In the following, I first outline theorizing of space. I attempt to trace these narratives through the imagery of wandering and wayfaring, that of flânerie, and loosely related narrative threads of entanglement and debates of duality in power and opposition. The intention of the paper is to contribute to the narrative of those engaging in these concepts to address the site of entrepreneurship as transformation within the city-region in order to recover everyday phenomena by offering three theoretical reflections. Related to this intention is to focus upon the process of transformation and of how to generate commitment for a wander. It concludes by drawing together notions of space, wandering and social entrepreneurship and for understanding what are the limit of these ideas.

**Theorizing of space and wandering**

The idea of space is drawn upon for how it might help in considering and evaluating multiple ways of imaging and enacting alternatives for transformation. Beyes and Steyaert (2013) find these notions as having long been considered by human geographers and organizational theorists to consider the organization of the city – such as David Harvey’s rise of urban entrepreneurship. What theorists such as Lefebvre (2002) and Massey (2005) bring to the argument is space is considered as lived experience. This follows the line of others, such as De Certeau (2011), arguing for the everyday practice of entrepreneurship, or as Steyaert and Katz (2004, p.190) say is ‘seen ‘taking place’ in the everydayness of our life, in social interactions and in everyday practices’.

It is said ‘In the past few decades it has become somewhat conventional ... to claim space and spatially are social and cultural, as well as quasi-material, productions’ (Merriman et al., 2012, p.4). Yet markedly, theorizing of space is argued and interpreted differently (Beyes and Steyaert, 2012). Where Massey (2005) wrote ‘for space’, Ingold (2011) writes ‘against space’. Both though agree saying theorizing of space is ‘abstract’ and ‘lofty’. What stands out is that space is constructed along what might be seen a flow of strands of thinking, or as Merriman et al. (2012, p.4) note ‘as abstract and concrete, produced and producing, imagined and materialized, structured and lived,
relational, relative and absolute.’ So saying, Lefebvre’s (2002) seminal piece of the ‘urban problematic’ is often a foundation for others, such as Taylor and Spicer (2007), of how to conceive contrasts and contradictions within the city with regards to contemporary and future society. Lefebvre (1991) argued space is produced by three processes including: 1) the practiced - walking and how people move through space, 2) the planned nature of the city – linked to power and control, and 3) the imagined. To follow this logic through, Beyes and Steyaert (2012) found theorists rely the static aspect of Lefebvre’s classification. They seek to ‘connect’ with and ‘extend’ theorizing of space. This is no longer simply geography of place and talk of scale as being national, regional and local.

Here I turn to De Certeau (2011) who linked the activity of walking to creating a narrative in that the turns of paths are equivalent to turns of phrases. This resonates with Ingold’s (2007) notion of wandering and wayfaring being ‘topian’; that we are creating place. Where the linear progression of modernity, the grand narrative, is posed as ‘utopian’ - an ideal [of some] being portrayed; in contrast is that of postmodernity as ‘dystopian’. These groupings map on to the work of Beyes and Steyaert’s (2013) three narratives – celebratory narrative, counter-narrative and prosaic narration – conceiving entrepreneurial cities. Similarly those theorizing of narratives as the grand, counter and little, which has become more commonly utilized in the field of entrepreneurship/social entrepreneurship (Steyaert and Hjorth 2005; Hjorth 2007; Dey and Steyaert 2010). For example, Dee’s (1998) spectrum, which is discussed below, is posed as illustrative of the grand narrative in social entrepreneurship (Seanor et al, 2013). To extend to Tim Ingold’s construction, the grand narrative can be mapped to the ‘utopian’. The dystopian, seen as a fragmentation to open up the grand narrative, as two lines of argument, two ways of organizing or relationships, can be aligned to the counter-narrative. And like the little narrative, or Soja’s (1996 cited in Beyes and Steyaert 2012) construction of a spatial vocabulary of ‘heterotopic’ in order to ‘direct scholars of organizational entrepreneurship towards “specific”, “potential” or “other”, spaces and timings, which (...) allow transition and transformation’. In a similar narrative thread, to offer what Olwig (2002) said ‘Perhaps it is time we move beyond modernism’s utopianism and postmodernism’s dystopianism to a topianism that recognizes that human beings, as creatures of history, consciously and unconsciously create places’ (cited in Ingold 2007, p. 167).

First reflection: wandering, wayfaring and flâneuring

The narrative threads of space and wandering or wayfaring are entwined, for instance, De Certeau’s ‘walking rhetorics’, Lefebvre’s (2002) walking, and echoed in the playfulness of wandering around urban environments of popular British psychogeography - such as Will Self and Ian Sinclair. Might wandering offer a pragmatic grounding to more abstract aspects of theorizing space in relation to social change?, Or, at the very least, might it offer the opportunity to consider space for negotiation of differing identities, practices and imaginings? Though here Lefebvre’s concept of whom walks and who are the decision-makers is of little use as he conflated these to be inhabitants with the working class. As Purcell (2002, p.106) says, ‘the agenda that inhabitants will pursue cannot be presumed; rather it must be negotiated through a complex politics of scale, identity, and difference, among other struggles’.

The pattern of Ingold’s (2007) ‘flowing line’, Figure 1 re-drawn below, of wandering nicely gives imagery to De Certeau’s (2011, p.97) statement that the ‘intertwined paths give their shape to spaces. They weave places together’ as seen in Figure 2.

Figure 1: Ingold’s flowing line

The act of the flâneur is a borrowed from literary narratives as a role Benjamin devised to highlight the rapid rise of industrialism and capitalism. Wandering here is apt as flânerie, the flâneur’s movement through the city, is unplanned, unprescribed and of continually exploring the in between spaces of the city. The flâneur is a complex role, it is though problematic, in that historically, the flâneur is a male figure [note: so too are almost all of the prominent theorists of space and entrepreneurship] where found in early literature studies such as Benjamin’s arcades, the female flâneur took on the guise of the male traveler. More recently, the role is that of women in narratives of ideas based upon walking (shopping and observing others) is sited in shopping malls. What these two roles of the flâneur/flâneuse hold in common is an urban explorer and observing the movement of the city offering
ways of understanding everyday routines and rhythms looking for meanings and traces of power relations. In response, this notion can frame not only to the impact of market place and capitalism, but also patterns from these influences. Seen as slightly out of step with ordinary activities, she/he offers fresh ways of theorizing. The notion thence offers taking an empathetic and reflective approach, but more a means to influence others to join him/her in transformation. A problematic aspect is an emphasis upon capitalism. People are not simply classified by this but by differing identities and interest. Another problematic aspect of the flâneur is the solitary nature of the role. This role might be that of the researcher. Perhaps though it is that of the social entrepreneur. As Pink (2012, p.48) argues that it is not solitary events but those with others which is crucial for ‘interpreting how practices shift’ and ‘comprehending the nature of practice as potentially transformative’ that can ‘inform an understanding of the potential of creating interventions’. Flânerie provides insightful ways to reconsider conceptual issues of political and ethical positions in terms of where we are located in relation to modernity. The key act is in wandering and wayfaring - to literally try out differing transgressions in differing paths taken by different walkers.

The basic act of placing one foot on the ground, and then the other is a physical means of engaging with practitioners. The method of walking is not new to practitioners. In Bristol various walking events have occurred to examine ideas and practices. For instance, Networking southwest states their walking events ‘offer you and your business the opportunity to go deeper than you might do at a regular networking event, and with the combination of fresh air and movement thrown into the mix, access untapped creative thinking. These walks, offer a powerful process for facilitating change faster, simply by stepping out of our offices and away from our usual routines’. It is the choice to emphasize ‘faster’ in relation to the speed of change. The notion of wayfaring aligns perhaps more with theorizing of flow and movement – what Beyes and Steyaert (2012) highlight of slow motion and rhythms of everyday life, like wandering, as means of exploring everyday life (De Certeau, 2011; Lefebvre, 2004; Ingold, 2011). Underpinning Steyaert and Beyes’ thesis is the performative aspect and drawing upon the cultural arts. ‘In the city series’ was a four-day event of walks led by Artists of how people change their views of the city (http://www.parlourshowrooms.co.uk/walking-in-the-city-a-four-day-event-exploring-bristol/). Whilst the two walking events share an emphasis upon creative thinking, the later drew upon dreams, water, wolves and cycling routes to re-imagine new alternatives. These ‘walks’ are closer to the notion of wandering and wayfaring, seen to differ significantly from walking, in that rather than following a map and setting a destination, the wandering is of movement and thinking and remembering as one moves through a space (Ingold, 2007). Thus, appear the benefits of flânerie, that of slowly wandering, of teasing out and tracing threads of stories in relation to enabling us to re-think the abstract notion of space with practitioners.

**Second reflection: entangledness and whose story is prioritized**

The imagery above, Figure 1, of the ‘flowing line’ is further developed by Ingold (2011) to consider a ‘meshwork’, here returning to Lefebvre’s thinking of meshwork, to frame a multiple, overlapping ‘knot of stories’ of a place, or what Massey (2005) neatly termed the ‘stories so far’.

![Figure 2: Meshwork of overlapping stories](image)

Ingold (2011, p. 103) argues for entangledness

For inhabitants, however, the environment does not consist of surroundings of a bounded place but of a zone in which their several pathways are thoroughly entangled. In this zone of entanglement – this meshwork of interwoven lines-there are no insides or outsides, only openings and ways through.
Based on the observation above, it is not just of moving through the space but an argument of entangledness is proposed by way of exploring new ways of imagining and enacting possible alternatives in transformation. Here too Beyes and Steyaert (2012, p.54) have been, but to remind the researcher to be mindful of their own entangledness: ‘Enacting geographies of organization implies acknowledging a scholar’s irreducible entanglement and his/her own participation in transforming the texture of things, however marginally’.

Yet, the stories of social change, as highlighted in the opening vignette, are not simply entangled narrative threads; one is prioritized. The low carbon narrative appears prioritized within the Bristol city-region narratives. It is not simply a query for entrepreneurship, as Smith and Stirling (2010) pose the question ‘Whose sustainability gets prioritized?’. As Smith and Stirling highlight sustainability is of course influenced by a globalized agenda. An important source of countervailing pressure lies in favorable events beyond the city-region. There is high public profile of others calling for lowering carbon emissions, which for some stakeholders lends legitimacy to this city-regional narrative. As Smith and Stirling state at such times ‘Rather, it requires the arena to develop a capacity for positioning itself favorably in the light of ongoing political processes, mobilizing support, influencing agendas, and redirecting investments and other commitments away from incremental repair work and toward more radical transition goals’ (unpaginated). They link these aspects to questions of power and liken the process to social movements creating niches and alternative spaces.

This thinking lends itself to reflecting upon Arthur et al. (2009) and creating ‘alternative social spaces’. Arthur and his colleagues wrote of resistance to mainstream practices as ‘deviant main-streaming’ in terms of service provision or of influencing the way mainstream services are delivered. They too call for the need to look toward the actions of social movements. Moreover, they described alternative spaces as places redistributing power, where contention is perceived as an opposition to power and underlies achieving social change through time. They do however acknowledge that these spaces might not ‘overthrow’ the mainstream ways of thinking and doing things, but to enable spaces for alternative practice. More recently, Shaw and de Bruin (2012) pick up this thinking to consider the how social enterprise can challenge the mainstream entrepreneurship discourse. Their argument being might social enterprises ‘play into the hands’ of neo-liberal governments (Shaw and de Bruin 2012 offer a wider discussion of social enterprise and of how capitalism might be reconsidered). The thinking of both is framed as a ‘dichotomy’ between mainstream-alternative. From examining the narratives within Bristol, it might be that the low carbon story overly-simplifies the complexity of other entangled sustainability stories. To be mindful of the use of terms in this narrative, ‘Might the notion of sustainability be held hostage to the political and economic?’. In this way, the narrative of sustainability limits the other stories and responses to other significant issues. This echoes Steyaert and Katz’s (2004, p.186) call to attend to ‘integrating discourses’ in that some stories are privileged and limit ways we can consider other perspectives. Much like Ingold (2011) and O’Doherty et al. (2013), a key question they raised was what other openings to alternative discourses can emerge.

Being mindful, in reconsidering Figure 2 of the meshwork, it appears perhaps too regular in depicting the web and weave, the knots connecting the stories and the spaces. Massey (2005, p.130) considered ‘the non-meetings-up, the disconnections and the relations not established, the exclusions. All this contributes to the specificity of place’. De Certeau (2011) too said space might too be ‘articulated by lacunae’ (p.107) – what is missing and hence not said. De Certeau’s ‘theoretical picture’ of practice highlighted fragmented spatial stories and voids (he considered not only the flow but also the boundaries of spaces arising from where a city is divided such as north from south – for sure in Bristol the public transport system does not well link the two sides of the city, and from physical boundaries – such as roads, the motorway and the harbour). Thus, the flow of movement and the space of void appear as lapses, ‘what is not seen or spoken’, which also might align with practitioners’ views of everyday practices (Please see Beyes and Steyaert 2012 for a critique of analysis of space). What are the stories practitioners will tell of what used to be here, but is no longer. What are their imaginings that have yet to, and might never, occur.

Third reflection: alternatives to an either/or debate

It seems that many researchers in the field have co-constructed a narrative within an ‘either/or’ debate. For instance, the phrasing of analogical spaces of social enterprise is notably contradictory in nature - as a hybrid between boundaries (Doherty et al., 2014) or as being at the crossroads between mainstream and margins (Defourny and Nyssens, 2006). This is illustrated as mapping exercises with social enterprise/social entrepreneurship as points on a Venn diagram where the third, public and private sectors overlap; or to trace the historical routes taken and the space where there is an assumed meeting up of these differing trajectories (Spear et al., 2007). One represents harmony, the other frames choices made between differing orientations. Implicit in this
imagery is of walking between different places, often as orientations of organizations between the differing sectors spoken of as holding different values. Frameworks and language thus often embody tensions between two contradictory elements (social mission and economic profits illustrated by Dees’ 1998 social enterprise continuum) for instance, in identity work (DiDomenico et al., 2009; Smith and Lewis, 2011). In the narrative of hybrid nature of social entrepreneurship, equilibrium and blended value (Alter, 2004; Emerson and Bonini, 2004) is offered as a means to move forward from the past and charitable aspects of practice to a more entrepreneurial way of practice in this new world of modernity. This metaphor though is also used by those arguing against such a narrative as the promotion of entrepreneurial as negative and a sense of loss of the ‘social’ aspect (Seenan et al., 2013). It is a loss of the older recognized ways of working and hence is mobilized as a rejection of change. In consideration of how to continue, we seem caught in a backward-looking/forward-looking debate - highlighting the temporal aspect of space.

In considering entrepreneurship as movement, within the city-region as a process of organizing, it is here that I return to Soja (2003) and marginalized ‘entrapment’ to isolate the subject to the system. Steyaert and Katz (2004), caution in regards to adopting Harvey’s thesis of the ‘entrepreneurial city’ to encourage a view of how these narratives offer ‘economic competitiveness’ and are key to drawing in further funding and resources. Instead they argue not to subsume multiple narratives to the economic. Not to simply oppose the economic, but to make open the process and make more complex. Rather than placing it as opposed between the mainstream and margins, they pose to ‘an open theoretical universe or multiverse, that can situate entrepreneurship in the middle of society and everyday life’ (p.189).

Further, Soja (2003) refused to conceive matters as ‘either/or’ dichotomies or binaries - what he refers to as ‘the sort that insist that an unbending choice be made between’ one thing and another (p.271). For Soja (2003), these ideas proved the synthesis of what could be imagined as ‘an-Other’, a rejection of binary divisions in theorizing of space. Others concur. Pink (2012, p.4) found duality ‘increasingly irrelevant’ and specifically reconsider resistance as something other than the duality of opposition - control. Massey (2005) too argues participants use space to constantly make choices emphasizing not simply opposition, but also patterns of political transformation and social actions. O’Doherty et al. (2013) in highlighting the double meaning of ‘sites/sights’ pose ‘Instead of this confrontational and head-on approach of the dialectic, the double meaning is an intentional devise with which to ‘re-view’ the ‘movement-in-organization’. Perhaps, the double meaning of this paper is wondering/wandering and of giving pause to re-consider movement in social entrepreneurship. Scholars of space say it offers the potential for questioning duality, either as grand – counter; utopia – dystopia; power – opposition. Massey (p.159) posed an alternative approach would examine not simply the negotiations of juxtaposing views as ‘with stories “they” (read practitioners) tell of themselves’, but, and this is the key, of a way to depart from the more commonly assumed views to find alternative spaces. To return to the opening vignette, this provokes queries of how to move from the seemingly economic grounding of these narratives. I move from reflections to how to engage practitioners in such conversations.

Thinking-space ... where to begin and how to interpret

For those social entrepreneurship theorists noted earlier whom have taken a geographic approach, some have focused upon spatial patterns of scale at local and/or regional place-based levels (please see Taylor and Spicer 2007 for discussion of spatial analysis). For others network analysis was central. For instance, Amin et al.’s (2002) work examined four cities in England, including Bristol, and found development is influenced by differing ways that policy is enacted and urged the need to be sensitive to socially embedded context, especially within local networks. Others critiquing networks argue that they are ‘insufficiently subtle’ (Massey, 2005; Ingold, 2007; O’Doherty et al., 2013) and analysis as lacking a means of understanding the ways actors attribute meaning and patterns of power and resistance (Taylor and Spicer, 2007). The notion of thinking-space was borrowed to construct a means to explore process. Beyes and Steyaert (2012, p.54 citing McCormack) that ‘becoming affected and inflected by encounters with and within distinctive kinds of thinking spaces—where thinking-space is both a processual movement of thought and a privileged site at which this movement is amplified and inflected by novel configurations of ideas, things and bodies’.

From examining the choices of others: It is not a ‘constrained walk’ exploring the city, as in psychogeography (Nicholson, 2011). Nor was the decision was taken to follow that of a walk drawn from a pattern on a map (O’Doherty, 2013). Graffiti, mentioned in the opening vignette, though utilized by Sinclair in his books of walks around London as offering clues to an ‘alternative reading’ of a place, was not chosen as a this too was to follow a route. Whilst appreciating the inclination to draw upon the Arts, the problem being solitary walks. Beyes and Steyaert’s (2013) story of wearing headphones and following the walk of performance art in Berlin – is an
intervention with voices narrating a space of past events. But again, this did not entirely lend itself, as the intent is to encourage people to speak with one another of possibilities. But more than this, to hold true to the notion of wandering and wayfaring, there can be no destination. In choosing not to follow a map or plan a destination, it also serves to consider the potentials and limits to such an approach. To quote Thrift (1996), as cited by Hubbard (2012, p.25), ‘we cannot do much better than . . . arguing for politics and epistemologies of location, positioning and situating, where partiality and not universality is the condition of being heard to make rational knowledge claims’.

By serendipity or chance, I was ambling round the harbour pondering how I might begin the wander. It had begun steadily raining and to get out of the weather I called in to the exhibition ‘The Promise: a dialogue between the city and its people’. Like the event that I shall be part of in September, the exhibition was housed at the Arnolfini Art gallery. The gallery itself has a story behind it, as once a derelict warehouse on the Waterfront, Bush House, and was one of the first regeneration projects of Bristol harbourside. The programme highlighted the ‘increasing importance of green issues as Bristol takes on the title of European Green Capitol in 2015’ and states: ‘if we understand the city as more than place, and more than a shared infrastructure ... how we see and create a story for a city’ (http://www.arnolfini.org.uk/whats-on/the-promise). As Massey says (2005, p.111), ‘So an argument for an element of chance in space chimes with the current Zeitgeist’. Upon wandering round, I came across Gabriel Lester’s work examining ephemeral experiences of spaces in and around Bristol. In reading an installation board, his title ‘Vayu-vata’ borrows the two words from Indo-Iranian and means ‘space and time’ as well as ‘wind and atmosphere’. It is a reminder of the differing aspects of space. Lester’s work, returns to O’Doherty et al.’s provocation of double meanings.

Thinking-space ... generating commitment to go for a wander

It seemed not only pragmatic that in order to generate interest and commitment, narratives must resonate with their intended audiences (Hjorth and Steyaert, 2004). The intention of generating commitment from practitioners is that insights from the wanderings are hoped to be instructive, particularly for identifying alternative narratives. In the act of wandering with others, there is the potential to enact a means of influencing the context of the wander, seeking to better understand the flows through these situations, i.e., the insights from actions and resistance (and acceptance) to change.

To return to the two narratives in the vignette, Bristol Bath Social Enterprise network (BBSEN) was created in 2012 with support from the Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP). It was to run as a pilot as a networking platform to support the development of mutually beneficial relationships between social enterprises in the region. This seems to reflect Muñoz (2010) suggesting it as a role for social enterprise to bring together different groups that would not otherwise come together in the working environment. BBSEN states a remit to create a market space for opportunities linked to accessing resources to create businesses. For example, a recent event explored business models templates and best practice for developing self-build and affordable housing (BBSEN, 2014). Their process of engaging though appears to have changed and July 2014 began a new event, ‘Good People. Good Business’, promoted as ‘This is not your usual networking event - we cast aside the businesses presentations and invited 3 people leading change in the region through business to talk openly about why they do what they do, how they got there and what they'd overcome on the way’ (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jwFD5ChRqRs&feature=youtu.be). During the writing of this paper, I attempted to meet with those from Bristol and Bath Social Enterprise network, but this proved problematic in that the arranged meetings were cancelled due to circumstances. It transpired that funding had come to an end. This situation leaves BBSEN in a vulnerable transition itself of how to continue to offer a narrative of continuously enacting transformation.

Concerning the Green Capital narrative, and meeting with Darren Hall, executive director for Big Green Week and former manager of the Bristol Green Capital Partnership, the notion of wandering and wayfaring resonated with plans for an upcoming conference. The conference is an interim event to continue a conversation for the annual Big Green Week festival next year, marketed as ‘A celebration of inspirational green thinking and ideas’ (http://biggreenweek.com). The company was formed to develop the European Green Capital bid and this event is a CIC (hence a social enterprise itself, yet, social entrepreneurship is not a central thread of their narrative). Invitations to wander in a part of the city are to be as a workshop for the event. The theme of housing had been previously chosen. ‘Might this work for your purposes?’ he asked. Darren explained that there is a broad rhetorical consensus for more housing. The West of England has been named as a top location to invest in property by the Centre for Cities (BBSEN, 2012) with people identifying a shortage in supply and a demand for affordable, quality homes with the option for self-build. However, this neglects the underlying complex issues of housing such as participation and social exclusion. In practice the topic is contested, as no one wants more houses build near to his
or her home. Some schemes are being developed on disused sites; for instance, a closed Bingo hall in the south part of the city has been torn down to make space for a housing development. But Darren said there are no longer unused ‘brown field’ sites in Bristol, meaning Greenfield sites with associated problems of taking green belt out of the area and increasing the spread of urban areas in the region. Darren reflected that government policy appears silent to this aspect of the housing crisis, implying more of a city-region responsibility. The intention of the wander would be to examine insights and suggest what the alternatives might be to what is shaping up as a contentious issue not addressed in the Green Capital narrative. Darren’s notion was to call the wanderers ‘Big Green Narratives’ in order for these to stand out from the other narratives, and in order to connect various stories (https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/big-green-narratives-tickets-12723431125). It is not without a little wry ironic smile that this term – big - should resonate with a practitioner when the literature of Steyaert, Dey and Hjorth is of small. However, this holds meaning for the practitioner in that these stories appear intriguing and different from the utopian narratives of creating green jobs, attracting more funding to the region, of reducing the carbon footprint. As he said, these are the ‘what if’ type stories. Hence, this draws attention to how might we discuss a plurality of visions in everyday entrepreneurship and find favoured pathways as alternatives.

Alternative constructions of space, wandering and social entrepreneurship

This paper has illustrated how social entrepreneurship researchers might engage in theorizing of space and supports the call of Muñoz (2010) and before that of Steyaert and Katz (2004). Space, social entrepreneurship as a process of change, and the role of wandering in this process are utilized here in order to suggest how transitions of social change might be enacted and imagined in everyday practices. I have also sought how and when to utilize wandering and stories to break from the more normative approaches to theorizing in social entrepreneurship. The beginnings of an empirical study have been outlined. From narratives, both private conversations and public materials, it appears the low carbon narrative is prioritized with work and travels a focus; others are (perhaps) neglected. One such entangled narrative is of life – not simply the physical aspects of creating housing, but the social aspects of living and creating homes. We appear in an either/or impasse concerning where, of place, and of how to build greener homes. It is key not to neglect the political aspects of whose voices might be marginalized and their needs and those more privileged in the narratives. Somewhat of an ‘us’ and ‘them’ scenario, or as a young person said he was not from the ‘posh places’, but he too is concerned about sustainability. His story is voiced as an example of inclusion of community cohesion (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G1sK08bk0tM).

In looking at everyday life, wandering seems to have reverberations with rhythms, especially slowness. Those living in Bristol seem to enjoy the notion of moving at a slower pace than those in other cities in England. Rather than seeking fast solutions to these complexities, wandering slowly is at a pace for considering new possible ways. Rather than direct confrontation, how might we instead tease out and trace threads of stories in relation to enabling us to re-think how to create a way through. There is that which make spaces to reflect and conceive new political imaginings of social change in Bristol. Yet, in terms of the BBSEN itself being in transition, this narrative appeared vulnerable. Hubbard (2012) highlights the political aspect is neglected from discussions of space. Seemingly, though the idea arose from the field of human geography, it has been somewhat lost in these narratives. Might current constructions represent a lack of imagination for the consideration of ‘political’ spaces (Dey and Steyaert 2012)? Dale and Burrell (2007) cautioned their reservations of the ‘free choice’ implied by narrative frameworks of space and how these stories are enacted in daily practice. They associate enactment with the negotiation of the ‘performance’ of identity in relation to spatial aspects of power. So too does Purcell (2002) asking what will people do with decision-making powers; he finds the literature has not considered the ‘undetermined outcome’ of these politics that will result in either greater urban democracy or new forms of political domination’ (p.106). Pink (2012 p.37) also considers such ideas related to power and queries: ‘How do practitioners engage in creating these spaces, if not by opposition might it be by hidden/quiet resistance?’ and ‘Who contests this? And at what stake?’ In addition to her questions, others might include: ‘Where does space show itself not only in practitioner stories but in observations?’ ‘What does alternative space look like to practitioners?’ ‘How do practitioners negotiate meanings?’ Theorizing of space perhaps offers a means to better understand how interwoven tensions of various - seemingly contradictory elements - are negotiated and co-exist over time (Soja 2003; Massey 2005).

In concluding, I go back to address thinking in terms of ‘provocation’ and ‘playful’ as posed in the title. Smith and Anderson (2004, p. 131) say entrepreneurial stories are not meant simply to ‘legitimize entrepreneurial actions’; rather they are told to ‘provoke us, challenge us, and transform us’. The actions associated to the Green capital initiative hold the potential for desirable and undesirable social changes for the city-region. The provocation of this paper is to stimulate debate around what might transformation look like that we have neglected to consider. It seems some of our conceptual models are constructed within the logic of ‘either/or’. Instead, of the utopian or
dystopian, might the notion of ‘topian’ and of creating an alternative place be considered in how such city-region ‘transitions’ are enacted? My caution is to be mindful of rather than attempting to control the walk as well as to ensure the method - wandering - does not lead the research query. There are three immediate foretold limitations in taking this approach, which I have sidestepped here. As briefly alluded to the first is the gender issue. Second, in seeking to consider double meaning, and to take an interdisciplinary approach, there is the problem of shared meaning. Third, Space is but one means of examining social entrepreneurship; there is that of what is offered and what is lost in taking such an approach. To consider the question posed at the beginning of the paper, ‘Does the notion of wandering and wayfaring – and by extension space itself - offer something to align with stories and everyday experiences and offer the creation of such ‘places’ to consider fresh ways of understanding social entrepreneurship?’

Perhaps more questions have been raised, rather than this being answered. Theorists speak of seeking ways to change the world, especially when being playful with ideas and considering new possibilities (Beyes and Steyaert, 2012). I have played with the ideas of narrative and meaning rather like O’Doherty (2013, p.213) ‘... and from one pattern to an, as yet, unknown shape might take place’. So too with Rajchman (2001 p.17 cited by Massey p.159), ‘What kind of lines of flights of thought take off when we start to depart from ways we have been determined to be towards something other, we are not yet quite sure what...’. In considering it is not so much a walk as wandering, perhaps a romanticized view, offers the opportunity to be the narrator of rhythms including those that are jarring. It is an unknown - it could all go terribly wrong. Whence, to end on words from the practitioner Darren Hall that stay with me ‘If we are not having fun, why would anybody else join in?’.

References


