



Covid-19 and the Economy: Forms of Life and the Tensions between the Biological, the Biographical and the Environmental

John R. Bryson FAcSS,
Professor of Enterprise and Economic Geography,
Birmingham Business School,
E-mail: j.r.Bryson@bham.ac.uk

Health Education England Webinar, 10 November 2020

The Growth Mantra and Inclusive Growth

- Core concepts that drive economic planning: Growth, Development and Productivity.
- Growth can never be sustainable and tends to marginalise cohorts of the population.
- Is development ever inclusive?
- Productivity – measurement problems, but really another way of defining productivity is around the concept of optimization.

Optimization enhances risks and reduces resilience.

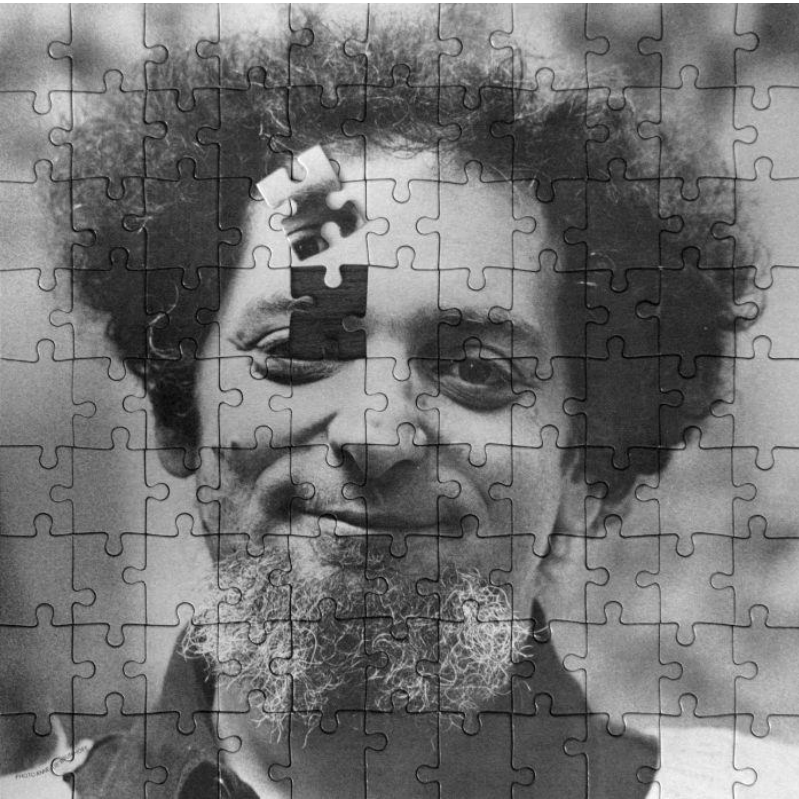
The “Doughnut Model” for Economic Recovery

- A call for systemic change.
- An alternative definition of prosperity.
- The challenge is the application at a local or even national level.
- Is this the correct starting point to shift towards an alternative economy?

Forms of Life: An Alternative to the Doughnut

1. How do we understand the heterogeneity of the '*forms of human life*' as well as appreciating differences in place and between places and between people?
2. A form of life – a shared human experience between a societal cohort with great inequalities between cohorts.
3. A distinction must be made between the '*universal*' and the '*particular*' or between 'the biological', 'the environmental' and 'the biographical'.
4. These are interrelated – air quality influences the biological that shapes the biographical and vice versa.

Intersectionality and Perec



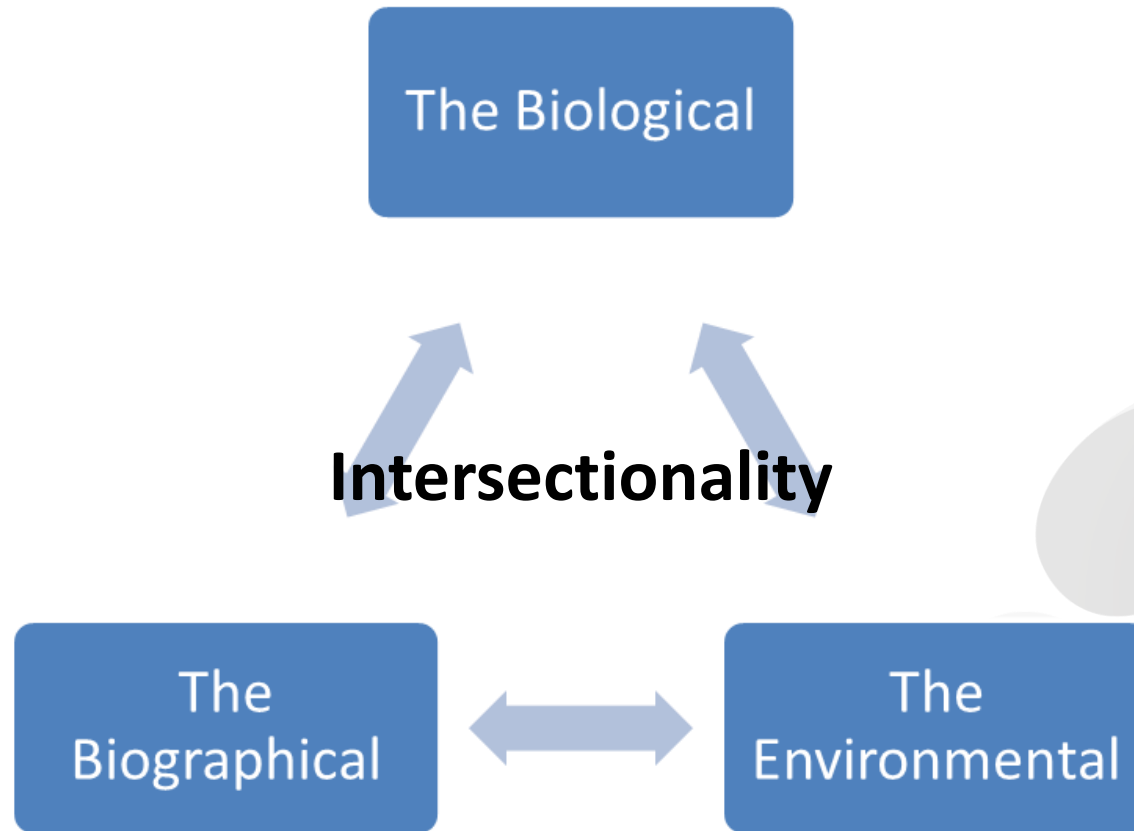
Perec – *Life: A User’s Manual*:

“in isolation, a puzzle piece means nothing . . . as soon as you have succeeded in fitting it into one of its neighbours . . . The two pieces so miraculously conjoined are henceforth one” (Perec, 1978).

Kimberlé Crenshaw:

Intersectionality – overlapping and interdependent systems of disadvantage (race+ class+ gender +)

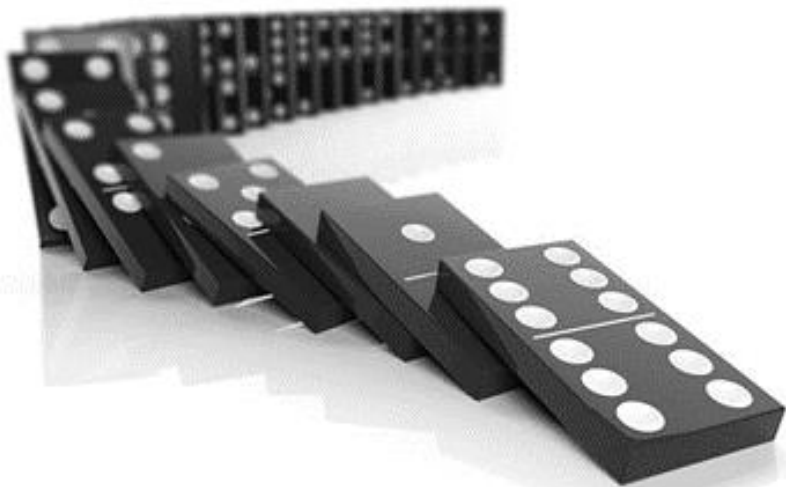
Forms of Life Plexus (FLP)



The Forms of Life Plexus Challenge

- To understand the interrelationships between the biological, the biographical and the environmental and different forms of life – different lived experiences.
- How to develop a sustainable approach to balancing the biographical with the environmental?
- How to reduce the negative feedback loops from the biological, biographical and environmental?

Forms of Life and Managing Risks under the new Epoch of Jenga Capitalism





COVID-19

- A major disturbance that has rippled across the world's population and central nervous system or global supply chains.
- A pandemic was expected, and the surprise is that people were surprised.
- Other events that resulted in disturbance can be identified – SARS (2003), eruption of Eyjafjallajökull, Iceland (2010), Japanese Earthquake (2011).

Enhanced Global Risks and Uncertainty

Three linked drivers behind enhanced global uncertainty:

- 1) **Growth** in human population & **increased density**.
- 2) **System Convergence** – digitalization including the Cloud. Any disruption in any one system given system convergence has the protentional to result in a domino effect or a chain reaction.
- 3) Enhanced **place-based connectivity** – disease anywhere is potentially disease everywhere.



A New Era of Jenga Capitalism and the Pandemic Century

With Jenga Capitalism a problem in one system, or place rapidly is transmitted to other systems and places.



For businesses and governments the key challenge is the management of risk and uncertainty under Jenga Capitalism?

The future -

Expect more pandemics and system disturbance.

System Convergence (Extra-network risk)

- More connections between different systems.
- Anyone system becomes less resilient as does the complete system.
- Converged systems come saturated with unknown risks.
- A future pandemic could trigger the collapse of water, financial, security, food and energy systems especially if keyworkers are unable to work. Tightly coupled systems increase risks.

An Example: Norsk Hydro

Manufacture of aluminium.

June 2019 – ransomware cyber attack involving 22,000 computers located across 170 sites in 40 countries.

Best in class response – went public and did not pay the ransom.

Production lines switched to manual functions, but cost to the company was over £45m.

Coping with Jenga Capitalism - Convergence

- 1) Identify exposure to system convergence. What are the threats and what are the controls in place?
- 2) Manageable and unmanageable risks.
- 3) Balance optimization against risk. System convergence is partly driven by a concern with optimization. Thus, it comes with many benefits including enhanced productivity, monitoring and control, but also risks. Identify and control for these risks. Assume complete system failure.

Coping with Jenga Capitalism - Convergence

Backup systems in place that are in no way linked with converged systems.

Risk grids – but more risk planning needed. Set up a group to assess exposure to system convergence and alternatives to maintaining output if system failure occurs. Identify risks related to converged/linked systems. Apply this to cohorts.

Risk Planning

Avoid linear approaches to managing risk as with convergence and connectivity risk is not a linear process.

Focus on contingent-based planning and scenario-informed planning.

Think the unthinkable and consider controls and solutions.

Release the power of the people.

Responsible Inclusive Prosperity: RIP

Towards citizen-led alternative-substitute place-making.

A new form of planning in which citizens are placed at the centre of the process.

This is an inclusive approach to planning that recognises that urban environments are impermanent and adaptable and novel forms of inclusive place-making should be encouraged.

- Andres, L., Bakare, H., Bryson, J.R., Khaemba, W., Melgaço L., & Mwaniki G.R., (2019), '[Planning, temporary urbanism and citizen-led alternative-substitute place-making in the Global South](#)', Regional Studies, published online
- Andres, L, Bryson, JR, Stevens, SD, Bakare, H, du Toit, K & Melgaço , L 2020, 'Calling for Responsible Inclusive Planning and Healthy Cities in Africa', Town Planning Review, Oct 2020.

For Discussion

1. Should not return to business as usual. Balance risk against chasing short-term profitability.
2. SARS was the Covid-19 pilot and Covid-19 will be the pilot for the next pandemic.
3. Risks and the Forms of Life Plexus.
4. Place people at the centre of the discussion.

Covid-19: Journal Papers

- Andres, L, Bryson, JR, Stevens, SD, Bakare, H, du Toit, K & Melgaço , L 2020, 'Calling for Responsible Inclusive Planning and Healthy Cities in Africa', *Town Planning Review*, Oct 2020.
- Bryson, J.R., & Vanchan, V. (2020), '[Covid-19 and Alternative Conceptualisations of Value and Risk in GPN Research](#)', *Tijdschrift voor Economische en Sociale Geografie*, 111:1: 530-542
- Bryson, J.R., Andres, L. & Davies, A. (2020), '[Covid-19, virtual church services and a new temporary geography of home](#)', *Tijdschrift voor Economische en Sociale Geografie*, 111: 3: 360-372
- Bryson, J.R. and Andres, L. (2020), '[Covid-19 and rapid adoption and improvisation of online teaching: curating resources for extensive versus intensive online learning experiences](#)', *Journal of Geography in Higher Education*, 44:4: 608-623