

In the Business of Economic Geography

Trends and implications of the movement of economic geographers to business and management schools in the UK



Mike Bradshaw, Neil Coe,
James Faulconbridge, Al James,
Catherine Souch

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www.egrg.rgs.org/business-of-econ-geog/

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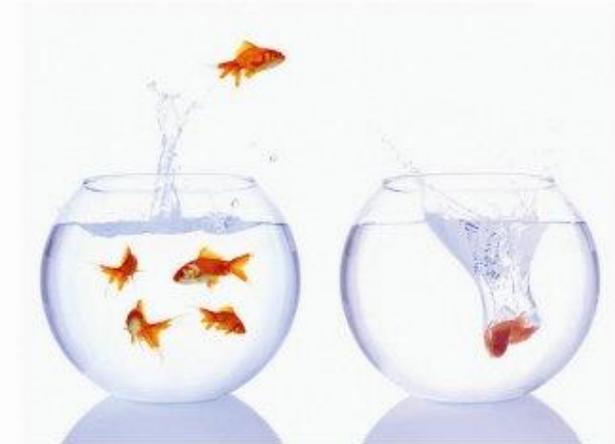
EGRG Project Overview

- **CONTEXT:** Recent years noticeable migration of EGeers from Departments of Geography to Business and Management and related research centres.
- **AIM:** to assess (a) scale of this trend; (b) its broader implications for teaching, research and capacity building in EG; and (c) its consequences for HumGeog in UK.
- **Phase 1: Build database of movers 2000-** (includes RAE2001, RAE2008, REF2014) (via EGRG email list, EGRG membership records, UK Heads of Schools) (autumn 2015) (N=87, 92% of whom moved 2000 onwards)
- **Phase 2: Web-based survey of movers** (N=54, 65% response rate; motivations, consequences, subsequent 'infill') (winter 2015, spring 2016)
- **Phase 3: In-depth interviews** (n=25, typically 45-60 mins, purposive sample targeting movers at different career points, across multiple institutions, female and male movers; plus senior commentators) (spring/summer 2016)
- **Interview transcription by RGS interns:** Marie Gallagher, Emily Brunton, Jemma Hulbert, Patrick Chorley, Douglas Jenkins, Arif Hussein, Isabelle Green. Also Anna Geatrell in Phase 1.



1. Size and Scale of this Migration?

- 87 movers identified (92% of whom moved 2000-15)
- C.f. benchmark data: e.g. 150 UK contingent attendees at Oxford Global Conference in EG 2015; 106 EGRG members with declared UK academic affiliation
- Survey (N=54): movers evidently leaving from all levels of EG career structure:
 - Professors (10%)
 - Reader (6%)
 - Senior Lecturers/Associate Professor (8%)
 - Lecturers (15%, half fixed-term)
 - RA/Research Associate (31%, two thirds fixed-term)
 - Doctoral Researcher (27%) → LACK OF JOBS!
- Survey (N=54): successive waves of movers:
 - 1980s: 1%
 - 1990s: 13%
 - 2000s: 40%
 - 2010s: 44% (steady drip feed of 1-4 EGers every year 2000-15)
- Key institutional clusters of EGers in Bus/Man Schools: Centre for Business in Society (Coventry University); Southampton Business School; Birmingham Business School (City Region Economic and Development Institute)...



2. Major Motivations for Moving?

PUSH

- Lack of EG job openings in Geography Depts – too many fixed term positions
- EG retirements not replaced
- Limited promotion prospects in Geography Depts
- ‘Research agenda not taken seriously by colleagues’ (post cultural turn)

PULL

- Perceived better pay and conditions
- Research funding makes EGers sought after (some headhunted)
- Better research and conference resources
- Research valued – topics and publications because of ABS List*
- Perception of better potential for career progression

MEDIATING MECHANISMS

- Colleagues as role models who already moved
- Tendency for inter-disciplinary working makes move relatively easy
- Transferability of EG papers to Bus/Man REF returns (ABS list)
- ‘Bus/Man Schools are booming’ (higher numbers of UG students mean more posts) – the growing ‘gravitational pull’ of Bus/Man

OUTCOME

- One way flow – little or no evidence of any return moves; ‘ratchet effect’

2. Motivations for Moving / Mediating Structures – Example Quotes

‘My primary motivation for moving was to find a permanent job after I finished my doctorate. The labour market for economic geography jobs was so dire, a good week was seeing a job advertised that I could apply for, let alone being invited to interview...’

‘The size of the business field has some unique effects on the labour market. Most business students move into business as practitioners, so there is a lack of student flow to MSc and PhD, and a shortage of good, qualified academic staff that can do research. Given... a substantial student body, there is very strong demand for staff. Some recruits can easily gain an SL role, when they wouldn't be even shortlisted for a lectureship in geography. This leads to rank and pay inflation, and offers a quick journey to a Chair for junior Faculty, or a pay bump for a prof in geography and a larger conference budget’

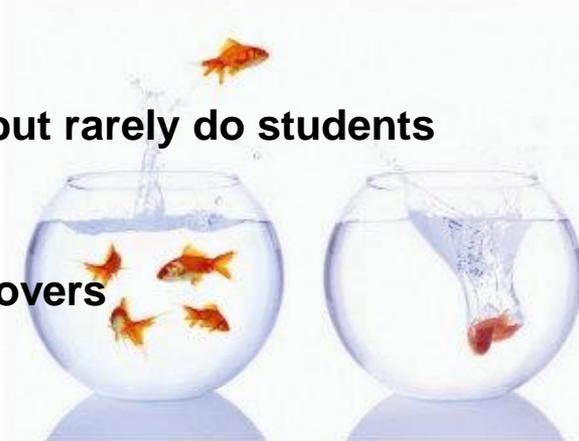
2. Motivations for Moving / Mediating Structures – Example Quotes

‘I was looking for posts; a lot of the roles seemed to be around social and cultural geography and that seems to be a perception of what the students and departments want...’

‘I feel more valued within this research centre than the previous research centre because they recognise the value of economic geography’

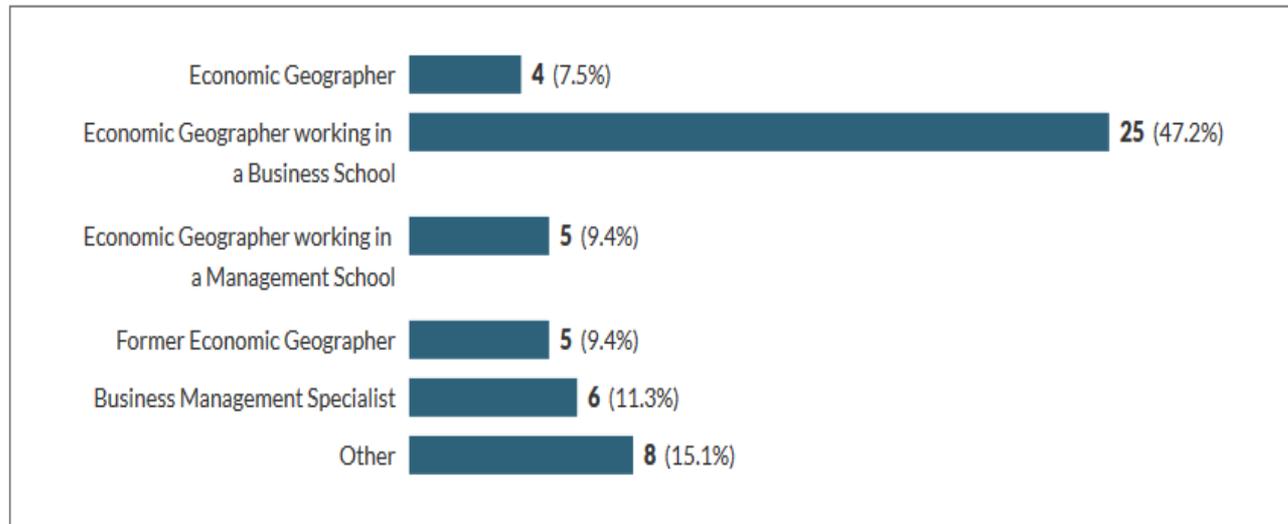
3. Colleagues' Experiences of Moving

- **Disciplinary Identity**: 'Economic Geographer' identity remains strong (64.1% of respondents), but with majority (73%) reduced affinity to Economic Geography
- **Research**: majority (64%) evidence greater research network collaboration with Bus/Man colleagues over EG colleagues; 42% able to apply more frequently for grants c.f. previously in Geography
- **Publication**: tendency to 'boundary span' between EG and Bus/Man journals; but unplanned/unintended 'creep' towards more Bus/Man
- **Teaching**: typically no change in load; some EG content but amongst Bus/Man core content
- **Conferences**: Majority (66%) respondents report less frequent attendance at EG conferences (22% no longer attend EG conferences at all)
- **PhD Supervision**: some topics that could be seen as EG, but rarely do students identify with EG (even if they read some literature)
- **Subsequent 'infill'**: 82% of EG posts previously held by movers in Departments of Geography not subsequently replaced

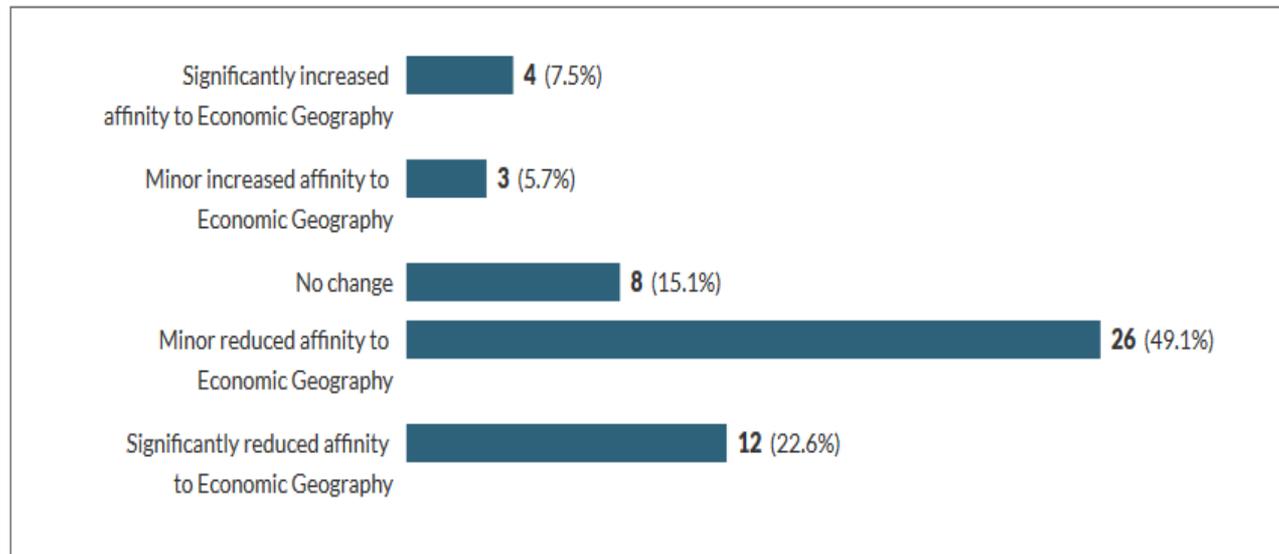


Shifts in Identity / Affinity as Econ Geographers

5 Which of the following best describes your current academic identity?



5.b To what extent do you feel that your academic identity as an Economic Geographer has changed as a function of moving into Business / Management?



3. Colleagues' Experiences of Moving

– Example Quotes (Publishing, PhD Students)

'I think you get into a mind-set of the ABS, you know my school they're not that concerned about it, but I do think you get into a mind-set, and also looking at where colleagues are publishing work as well and responding to some of the things that they're writing about'

'So my most recent one [PhD student], he's doing about university spin-offs...This guy's doing about the Birmingham region, so he has to do something about the geography of the region, but it's not, in no sense is the theory from economic geography'

4. Wider Consequences/Points for Discussion: Sustaining Economic Geography?

(i) EconGeog Alive and Well?

- EG as a (reasonably healthy) cross-disciplinary nexus of research activity that stretches beyond Departments of Geography
- ‘Doesn’t matter where EG research is being done’
- What *would* have happened to EG *without* these opportunities to move?

(ii) ‘Hollowing Out’ of EG in Departments of Geography in UK?

- e.g. lack of EG posts for new EG PhDs, non replacement of former EG posts or rehiring to other HumGeog sub-disciplines, other senior EG colleagues moving into university management
- EG benefits intellectually from *being* in Geog Depts: interfacing with other HumGeog sub-disciplines c.f. loss of interface in Bus/Man?
- Some EG sub-fields more amenable to Bus/Man move (e.g. the firm, some labour geog); certain kind of EG is ‘left behind’

(iii) Not a New Phenomenon: Pattern pre-dates 2000; but c.f. positive portrayals of earlier phases of migration (‘too many EconGeogers’, ‘wealth of opportunity’)



4. Wider Consequences / Points for Discussion: Sustaining Economic Geography? – cont.

(iv) UK Specific Phenomenon?

- ‘It wouldn’t happen in the US!’ (US Bus/Man Schools as less heterodox/‘more picky’)
- UK moves tend to be to certain types of Bus/Man schools

(v) Sustainability of Pipeline?

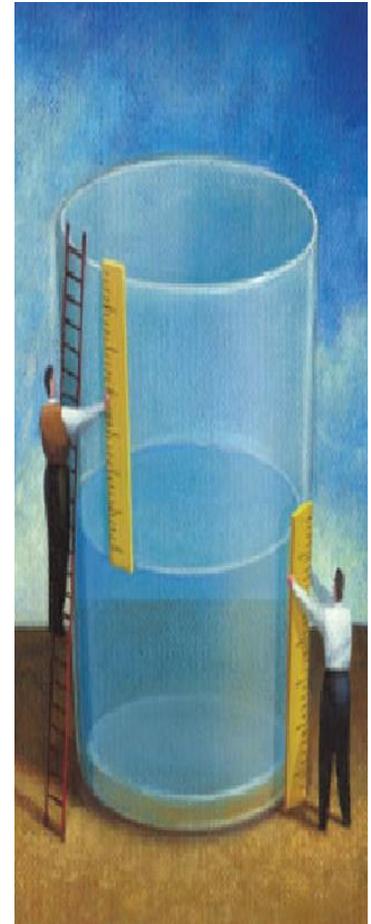
- Not an infinite supply of EGers to move – pipeline will dry up
- Limits to reproducing next generation of scholars who identify as ‘Economic Geographers’? PhD training as ‘credentialed practitioners’ in EG c.f. Bus/Man practitioners?

(vi) EconGeog Crisis of Relevance?

- Inevitable Post-Structuralist Hangover? ‘Mainstream’ EGers isolated in HumGeog? Losing ground to Urban Geography?
- Need to reclaim ‘uneven development-firms-territories’ agenda in EG?

(vii) Need for RGS-IBG Strategic Intervention?

- Targeted support to ensure reproduction of EG sub-discipline within Geography Depts.? Institutional collaboration with Bus/Man Schools?



4. Wider Consequences of Moving – Example Quotes

'I think economic geography (in geography departments in the UK) is in terminal decline unless something drastic is done. It is actually flourishing in other parts of the world where the rest of geography hasn't given up on it! ... The main reason that a left political economist like me (my current title is professor of urban and regional political economy) is in a business school is that there are more interesting heterodox people to discuss the economy with - and I have had more than [enough] of human geographers who like to discuss the shape of frogs faces in seminars while the world is burning...'

'Sadly I think it comes down to money and without investment from universities economic geography could thrive or become extinct at least in the UK - because that is the other option. Economic geographers might prefer to move elsewhere or change career'

Panel: Sustaining Economic Geography?

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Panel Responses & Discussion

- Nick Henry (Coventry University)
- Jennifer Johns (University of Liverpool)
- Andrew Cumbers (University of Glasgow)
- Ron Martin (University of Cambridge)

(→ AREA PAPER 2017)

Changes in Teaching Load

16.a How has your overall teaching load changed as a function of moving from Geography into Business / Management? 

