

## ***Interactive comment on “Contributions to economical geography-making” by J. E. Van Wezemaal***

**Anonymous Referee #1**

Received and published: 13 January 2006

Referee comment

This paper aims at outlining a theoretical and methodological framework that could contribute to the analysis of 'economic geography-making', as the author labels it. This framework is very much based on the principles of the so-called action-oriented geography but also some other philosophical-theoretical traditions are brought into the frame. The author uses the reference literature effectively but, frankly, the literature used in the paper could have been broader and more up-to-date. To take but one example, the major references to the English-speaking critical literature on spatial approach are from the 1980s (much of this literature was on the geographies of production; the 1990s witnesses the rise of the geographies of consumption). While the author's suggestion to study the geographies of production is thus not fully novel, the approach chosen by the author is exciting and could clearly contribute to the ongoing theoret-

S1

ical work and discussion on the action-oriented geography in the German speaking countries. Similarly it could also inform the audiences outside of this linguistic context. Action oriented research is a neglected area e.g. in the English speaking world,

The author develops some conceptual approaches in the paper, mainly by bringing together and circulating the ideas that other scholars have developed earlier in other disciplinary (and geographical) contexts. Among the most important sources of inspiration are the works of some economic geographers, sociologists and philosophers. One important source of inspiration that in a way 'mediates' these disciplinary backgrounds are the action oriented works of Benno Werlen, particularly his ideas on everyday regionalization. Werlen's theorizations on everyday regionalizations are very useful for this paper but also outside of the German speaking world a number of scholars have been reflecting the regionalization and region-building processes since the 1980s (not merely Giddens). In journals such as *Progress in Human Geography*, *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, etc. a number of papers have been published during since the 1980s that could help the author to broaden his approach.

Due to its methodological sources that emerge from the tradition of (German) social geography this piece fits well into the scope of the journal 'Social Geography' and it also addresses relevant questions. The manuscript provides a more or less novel synthesis of the existing ideas but it does not end to any explicit and firm conclusions. One background for this might be the lack of concrete illustrations. The author cites Haast/Thomi on the first page of the paper to suggest that economic geography too often suffers from an enormous discrepancy between theoretical claim and empirical realization. The author of this paper further states how the development of theoretical approaches is best realized in interaction with empirical research. The backgrounds of this paper are seemingly empirical observations on action strategies in the Swiss housing industry but these observations are unfortunately not used in this paper in any constitutive way. Indeed this mainly theoretical paper then suffers itself from this discrepancy: there is no empirical contextualization or illustration of the conceptual ideas

S2

developed here. The author could well use some of these earlier empirical observations to put empirical flesh on the conceptual bones.

Some questions can be addressed on the balance between the individual sections of this paper. At first, the paper draws intensively on the theorizations produced in German speaking geography and English-speaking sociology. This is not a problem, of course, but a more problematic is the fact that author starts rather firmly from some ideas of Wolfgang Hartke and accentuates a lot of their importance for the development of current framework. Indeed, I wondered how important Hartke's ideas actually were in developing the arguments of this paper. The fact remains that after a rather isolated and general discussion on Hartke's main idea (chapter 2), there are only a few other references to his work and, indeed, the author does not really reflect later Hartke's ideas profoundly in the context of this paper (neither takes this place in the conclusions). My suggestion is that the author should present and reflect Wolfgang Hartke's ideas more deeply and then relate them to his/her own ideas, especially as he/she seems to be very much indebted to Hartke. This again raises the question about whether the 'missing' empirical observations would be the material to make explicit the link between Hartke and the theoretizations presented in this work?

On the other hand, while bringing together a number of diverging materials the reader might be a bit worried about the somewhat eclectic nature of these points of departure – that is the concept of theory followed in this paper remains partly unclear. I was wondering whether the author is following (to use the labels of Andrew Sayer: Method in Social science) the "ordering framework" approach, which is normally a review of existing literature or theory as conceptualization where theorizing means active construction of theoretical categories. This paper is, to my mind, somewhere between these two strategies. This makes it a bit complicated to show (or identify) explicitly the own contribution of this paper. Its value as a source for further discussions remains to be seen.

The author could also have been more explicit with his idea on 'geography-making'.

S3

While this idea is seemingly crucial for the author's ideas and it is referred to a number of times in the paper, is it not really discussed analytically. My impression is that he/she has been forced to reflect the key dimensions of this idea in his/her respective broader empirical works (that are briefly mentioned in the introduction) but in the theoretical framework discussed in this piece this idea are taken somewhat for granted. A careful discussion of these dimensions would clearly benefit this paper and specify the arguments so that also the reader could gain a deeper impression of the usefulness of this approach. The figures presented in the paper would also become more informative if some empirical illustrations could be used in the text. I would encourage the author to reflect the theoretical arguments in the context of his/her observations on Swiss housing industry.

All in all, this paper still needs some work but might then be a nice contribution that could give a spark to the further debates on the nature of economic geography.

---

Interactive comment on Social Geography Discussions, 1, 1, 2005.