

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

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Final author comment on anonymous referee nr.2

This referee acknowledges that the paper deals with important shifts in theories and research on agency and space, and that it proposes a stimulating approach to empirical research in the field of economic geography. The suggestions for the revision are clear and I agree on the second and the third one. I have discussed my strategy to introduce these suggestions, which also have been put forward by the first referee in these interactive comments, in my comment on referee nr.1.

As I understand, the referee also criticises that

1. the paper does not contribute anything new to the debate on the development of economic geography,
2. the paper has a strong tendency to a self-referential jargon, and that

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3. important references to the subjectivity/objectivity dualism are missing.

In these points I do not agree. I will briefly address those criticised issues.

1. What is said is not really new

It is true that I did not invent the concept of ideal types (I want to retain my friendly terms with Max Weber), nor do I believe that I (instead of Giddens) did contribute much to the debate on action, unintended consequences or the question of intentionality. But in regard of a contribution to the development of economic geography, I think that the paper is an original contribution in two points.

1 I propose to use structuration theory as a social scientific foundation of economic geography. This seems necessary, since approaches such as relational economic geography define economic relations and “action” instead of space as the topic of the discipline, but they only insufficiently reflect the ontological and epistemological basis of their shift. Therefore e.g. agency is underdetermined and power as a key concept of the social sciences is not related properly to concepts of action. As an example, in the relational approach collectives are taken as agency and power structures seem to exist as something cortically to actors.

2 Furthermore the paper applies ideal types in order to make available (traditional) economic (geographical) theories for an action oriented economic geography. This bridges the gap between the cultural turn in human geography and the rich tradition of geographical research in the field of economic problems. The use of explanatory approaches in the function of ideal types as a connexion contemporary human geography and other traditions is an original contribution to the debate. I have called this key concept “docking of explanatory theories”. This leads to the next criticised point.

2. Jargon

The transfer of traditional approaches from an explanatory position in the research design onto an ideal type function is a crucial idea of the framework discussed in the

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paper. Therefore it deserves a denomination: “docking” is not a jargon, but a concept.

The referee writes that the meaning of the “combination of action and structuration theory and the docking of explanatory theories allow the construction of a research framework” is not clear in regard of a research strategy. Rather such sentences are understood as a tendency to a self-referential jargon. Maybe the nature of the research strategy will be more clear when I present an empirical example in the revised paper (see also author comment on referee nr.1). I will briefly try to make my point more clear. Structuration theory provides the basic concepts for a situation analysis. Thus the research questions are formulated in a structuration theory perspective. In the housing theory example we asked if Swiss housing as a system of reproduced practices is altered due to changed modes of action (and thus system reproduction) in connection with processes of global economic change (see Van Wezemael 2004 and 2005, and the comment on referee nr.1).

Structuration theory aims at resolving the antagonism between micro- and macro-perspective by questioning the relation between structure and action. It succeeds well in doing so on a theoretical level. But in respect to empirical research, working with the theory of structuration is tricky because ultimately the micro/macro antagonism is being transferred into empirical research. Research led by structuration theory can methodologically be bracketed either by institutional analysis or by the analysis of strategic conduct. While the former treats structural properties as chronically reproduced features of social systems, the latter focuses upon modes in which actors draw upon structural properties in the constitution of social relations. (Giddens, 1984:288) Giddens states “no clear-cut line can be drawn between these, and each, crucially, has to be in principle rounded out by a concentration upon the duality of structure.” (Giddens, 1984:288) As an action oriented approach the framework presented in the paper chooses the analysis of strategic conduct. This is realised using models of social action. In this, ideal type constructions are a crucial research instrument. In the field of housing research we can refer to management approaches or explanatory

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models such as the filtering theory. The deviations of the empirically observed action and the expectations from the model are the object of research. In the housing example I choose the change of management approaches towards resource-based management. If we combine such approaches with organisation theory we can formulate hypothetical modes of action for agents on specific firm positions and thus retrieve hypotheses, which guide the empirical research (document analysis, problem-centered interviews, etc). The deviation of the empirical modes of action leads to a typology of action. This typology structures the housing branch and retrieves the differentiated impact of global economic change to the “local” housing market. Drawing on the change of the modes of regionalisation, the changes in the (re-) production of geographies can be studied. Moreover, the referee states that e.g. “the tools for the question of inter-subjectivity” are missing, whereby he or she refers to the important statement in the paper that there is a strong inter-subjective pre-interpretation of action in economic fields. This can be discussed similarly to the statements above.

3. Missing references

As a last point I would like to comment the following point. The referee misses references on the traditional discussion on the subjectivity/objectivity dualism. I believe that this is based on a misunderstanding. I consider that I can e.g. refer to David Harvey, without discussing Marx, or to Michael Porter, without debating Marshall. If this is true I can also refer to Giddens and Werlen, who both base a good deal of their work scrutinising the very classics of phenomenology, as an adequate way of referring to the social science tradition aiming at overcoming the subjectivity/objectivity dualism.

References

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