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Economic sociology discovering economic geography

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Economic Sociology Discovering Economic Geography

By Patrik Aspers, Sebastian Kohl, and Dominic Power

Introduction

This short article is an introduction and a brief overview of economic geography. In addition, the article aims to find out what sociologists can learn from geographers. There are two roots of economic geography. The first is economics and the second is geography (e.g., Peet 2002; Barnes 2001), and the relation between the economists and the geographers can either be described in terms of rivalry, or in terms of a dialogue (Duranton/ Storper 2006). Economics studies production, distribution, consumption and exchange. Geography studies man's habitat and spatialities, and the similarities and differences between spaces. It also studies the circulation of people, things and ideas between areas. A simple and easy-to-grasp-definition of economic geography is, "an inquiry into similarities, differences, and linkages within and between areas in the production, exchange, transfer, and consumption of goods and services" (Thoman 1968: 123). One basic idea of economic geography is to find a model that integrates opposing notions as convergence/divergence and centrifugal/centripetal forces, and to find out how they are related. Geographic questions can deal with describing distributions in space, for example, to explain how they are coming about or to show the consequences certain distributions have for other phenomena. The pivotal notion is space, and research questions revolve around how spatiality *affects* and intertwines with economic activities. Thus, as already Torsten Hägerstrand pointed out, most geographers are not interested in the relation between man and the surface of the earth, which the prefix geo- denotes. This refers to the domain of physical geography which is of no interest here. It is the relation between humans who are positioned differently in space that is of interest (Hägerstrand 1967: 6). He reminds us how essential space is for any social scientist:

In a society where there are no appreciable time or cost obstacles preventing one individual from coming into contact with any other individual, relations within social space *cannot be appreciably modified by the constraints of geometrical space…then we would approach the conditions of a* one point society, *in which case the spatial interpretation of social phenomena would become quite uninteresting. So far, such conditions do not exist; therefore, spatial analysis has not completed the playing of its role (Hägerstrand 1967:7).*

Due to the two traditions of the discipline, economics and geography, one may speak of a *tension* within economic geography. This tension is even institutionalized; the *Journal of Economic Geography,* which is the economic geography journal with the highest impact factor, is divided into two parts – one run by economists and one run by geographers.1 Given that the field of economics was covered in the last Newsletter, we focus on the geographical branch of economic geography.2

Space is a theme in several disciplines, including sociology. Durkheim functionally integrated the division of labour and geometric variables like the population density in his sociological explanations. In his discussion of suicide he also makes use of maps to indicate the distribution of variables through space.3 He claimed, however, that geographic differences would only accidentally determine the direction of the specific division of labor. The classical sociologist who had perhaps the clearest conception of space is Simmel ([1908] 1983), whose ideas in this respect are related to Kant. In Simmel's discussion of sociology and the forms of *Vergesellschaftung* (the process when form and content come together and create a two-way directedness of influence), he specifically stresses the spatial dimension of social interaction, and spaces' profound role for analyses (Simmel [1903] 1983).4 Max Weber, whose brother Alfred was to become a leading figure in economic geography, explicitly paid great attention to geography. This is noticeable in the text based on Max Weber's ([1923] 1981) lectures on economic history. He stresses geography as a factor when explaining different economic outcomes and variations in European capitalism (Swedberg 2005: 105). The Chicago school of sociology has a strong focus on space, especially urban spaces, and urban sociology naturally deals with space. In fact, urban geography has its roots in urban sociology (Duranton/Storper 2006:3). Jane Jacobs's (oder Jacob's) works have also influenced geographers. The field *city planning* can be seen as an intersection of sociology, geography, and also architecture. Fur-

thermore, the sociological literature on globalization, *initiated* by Immanuel Wallerstein's world system theory, is more or less occupied with space and spatiality. Also economic anthropology, which was discussed in this *Newsletter* in the fall of 2007, has of course a strong tradition of discussing space. It will therefore be of special interest to identify the similarities and dissimilarities between economic geography and economic sociology, only then can we be informed about what economic sociologists can learn from economic geographers.

The starting point of geography is the assumption that spatial differences matter.5 This means that explanations of economic behaviour or structures have to take spatial conditions into account. Whereas ancient authors still considered the world as being construed in a holistic way6, the modern distinction between a natural and social sphere also invaded geography. Though geological features in space will not be of concern to us here, in a world more and more co-authored by technically-orientated human behaviour, also political, social, cultural or economic geography must include artefacts.7

One can divide the economic-geographical field into a theory-building, and an empirical and a political-engineering part (Schätzl 1974). It is also possible to identify a number of topics that have been researched. These reflect the history of economic development, ranging from the classical agricultural (resource-) and industrial geography, to service and marketing geography. Today the field covers a wide variety of topics and reflects a plethora of divergent approaches. Nonetheless, it can be suggested that some of the central issues the discipline is concerned with are: globalization, regional change, industrial districts, knowledge, innovation, gender, and consumption. But geographers have also addressed more general questions of capitalism.

In this article we firstly sum up geography's historic development as a scientific discipline and the themes it was concerned with. We then present some of the classical ideas as well of the development of *New Economic Geography* and its relation to economic geography rooted in the geography tradition. Finally, we discuss the relation between economic geography and sociology, and suggest some themes around which the disciplines can learn from each other.

A Brief History of the Economic Geographic Field of Research

Geography, and economic geography, has, as any science, been affected by the society in which it is embedded. The precursors of geography are Herodotus, Strabo or Ptolemy and the early travellers' attempts of cartographies. The term itself goes back to Aristotle's *De mundo*. Modern geographic thought, however, began to develop more systematically in the age of discovery, when conqueror, discoverer, and scientist often was one and the same person. Equally important was the scientific revolution. Traditionally, geographical thoughts were founded on a notion of a given nature that was only to be revealed by God. One can speak of Humboldt as the founding father of modern geography (Livingstone 1990: 748). He replaced the theological geography with experimental scrutiny asking what the exact state of the given nature is and why it came about. In the pre-disciplinary period, ethnographical, geological, political, and sociological questions were still deeply intertwined. Furthermore, geographical questions were explicitly addressed at the same time that capitalism came to be more dominating. The importance of colonies in this context added to the propulsion of the geographical discipline. From a scientific point of view, ideas of a teleological, natural determinism had a strong impact on social scientists in the 19th century.8 Human and cultural geography developed in opposition to these views, claiming that a settlement structure, for example, was not only to be explained by the environmental factors, but by independent cultural factors as well.

In the 19th century, and most explicitly with the founding in 1830 of the *Royal Geographic Society* in London, the *discipline* was promoted by civil geographic societies, which combined a scientific interest in geography with the curiosity about terrae incognitae. Geography gradually developed from being cartographic, exploration-oriented, and chronologic to be an explanatory science. The first chairs at universities in geography were introduced in 1871 (Schätzl 2003: 14). It was during this period of emergence of disciplines that economic geography entered into a division of labour with classical economics. Economics moved from the rather holistic approaches that had been developed since Smith, in an abstract theoretic direction, geography took a more empirical-inductive course moving within a naturalist-deterministic framework until the 1920s, when it was more influenced by the social sciences.

If we take a look at how economists had viewed space, it becomes clear that it was natural for thinkers even before Smith and Ricardo (Schumpeter [1954] 1981:373-376) to take into account geographic conditions like different distributions of production factors. They discussed how countries can have comparative trade advantages, and how transportation cost is reduced with a centralized production. When Alfred Marshall, the father of the idea of industrial districts, discussed this notion, be it in the context of textile industry in the UK, or the world of fashion design in Paris, he included geographical issues in his analyses. But he also explicitly relates the geographical dispersion of resources in the US, which triggers movement by people, to the country's ability of developing in not only economic aspects (Marshall 1920).

When Keynes discussed direct regional planning, he enhanced the discipline's importance and pointed to inductive theory building. After the *Second World War* geography as a whole came into a profound crisis.**9** The study of regions, which largely was idiographic, was more or less abandoned, and it was only in the 1980s that it was revived. In the US and Sweden, theory-building was given priority: there co-evolved a quantitative-nomological spatial analysis propagated by William Garrison and the so-called regional science initiated by Walter Isard which integrated the spatial dimension into the neoclassical equilibrium model.**10** Both these approaches are based on the *homo oeconomicus* as the ultimate unit of analysis, though one should see it as an attempt, at least by Isard, to bring geographers and economists together (Barnes 2004). It is thus clear that behavioural economics, already in the 1960s, tried to enrich the *decision tree* with components such as learning, information access, and usage ability (Pred 1967). Economists, however, did not pay much attention to geographical issues until the 1990s.

In Europe, much more than in the US, the traditional ideographic approach has remained as one form of research, and many have rejected the analytical equilibrium theory.**11** As a first approach we mention some ideas in development theory, such as circular and cumulative causation, that entered the field of economic geography. The basic idea of cumulative causation of investments is that once a region receives capital, a process of steady prosperity is triggered, in which the results of a first event lay the fertile foundation for the occurrence of a second. The same logic might apply to phenomena like poverty as well. Hirschman ([1958] 1967) broke with what he considered a too formalist mainstream economics and opened the perspective for the feedback – and complementary effects setting in once a latent capital resource is activated. Then, secondly, in the 1960s a Marxist way of radical economic geography (Harvey 1985) emerged, which centred on themes such as urbanization, structural crises or developmental inequalities that previously had been largely disregarded. Within this regional political economy paradigm (Sheppard 2000: 109ff), space is an endogenous outcome of economic processes, which are often determined by struggling interests and are accompanied by disrupting disequilibria. In this line of thought falls also Wallerstein's *World System Theory*. A third critical European response to nomothetic approaches could be labelled humanistic geography (Johnston 2001: 6195). It includes a range of phenomenological, idealistic, and existentialist ideas. Finally, in the 1980s, criticism of the highly structural way of theorizing as well as a declining interest of distributional questions weakened the Marxist research-stream. Giddens' (1984: 110ff) epistemic approach**12**, allowing both a superstructure and individual practice, strongly influenced several descriptive locality studies, returning to industrial-districts-approach in Italy or investigating inter-industrial networks in California (Scott, A. J. 2000: 27).**13** Out of Giddens' work developed a social theory strand of economic geography – as opposed to the spatial sciences – that emphasizes the interaction of space and social actors and integrates a variety of poststructuralist elements.**14**

At about the same time as globalization became a theme within geography, the transformation of the Fordist-production economy into a knowledge-based economy opened new paths to economic research. In the 1990s, economic geography encountered the theme of increasing returns, which, put simply, means that the bigger you are in a market, the more money you make (the more efficiently you produce – the profit still depends on the market structure), which has at least occasionally been the case in the software industry.**15** These ideas had already influenced theories about the new industrial organization, growth- and trade-theory (Krugman 1998). The development of this so-called *New Economic Geography* is almost a one-man-show by Paul Krugman, whose (1991a) work is the cornerstone of the new paradigm.**16** On the one hand, this formal approach to the subject-matter stands in opposition to a more substantively orientated economic geography (Peck 2000). On the other hand, this approach still seeks for acceptance by mainstream economics (Krugman 1998). Moreover, and although much theoretic model building has been done, the approach lacks empirical testing.

In opposition to the imperialistic tendencies of formal economics in geography, much interdisciplinary research has been conducted since the 1980s, some of which has used the institutions of post-Fordism as a general starting point (Peck 2000: 67). This is also sometimes referred to as the interpretative *cultural turn*, which one can identify across most social sciences. This turn has meant, within geography, that many economic-geographical phenomena have been redefined as specific cultural constructions or discourses to be analysed in an ethnographic or semiotic way (Thrift, Nigel 2000) or at least in relational terms (Harvey 2006:146). Others speak of a *relational turn* within the discipline (Boggs/ Rantisi 2003; Yeung 2005; Dicken/ Malmberg 2001); a notion which most sociologists recognize. As a consequence of these turns, the disciplinary borders become quite blurry**17** and ideas have been imported from postmodernist approaches. In the next section we try to identify a number of approaches and central ideas within the more recent economic geography, all of which must be seen in the light of the development just described.

Theoretical Views from the Classics to the New Economic Geography

It is, as indicated, possible to divide economic geography into theory-building, empirical studies, and application. Whereas empirical research has generated a vast suite of case studies covering all manner of themes and places, an all embracing macro-theory of spatial systems has not been developed (Ritter 1998:1). Rather the discipline has often consciously avoided attempts at macro theorising and focused on addressing the specificities of contemporary places and processes. This may be partly explained since normative, or policy, implications may be stronger than in sociology. Since many theories can be interpreted (rightly or wrongly) to imply an optimum (equilibrium) distribution of entities in space, and because geographers are often concerned with specific regions' particularities, problems and planning, economic geographers have been widely invited into normative advice in regional planning (e.g. at the EU level).**18**

Let us turn to the subject matter. The earliest model in economic geography explaining economic distributions in space can be traced to von Thünen ([1803] 1826).**19** His model reduces abstract space to the distance between one core city and its surrounding area. Transportation costs make distance a relevant notion in Thünen's model. If one assumes that the periphery provides the city with qualitatively different goods, then distance determines the location where these goods are produced. Geographic location determines the specialization of an area. The underlying law of spatial distribution is the return on the land, which has to be equal everywhere in a stable state. Consequently, the city will be encircled by rings with the cheapest product being produced just outside its borders. While many of these assumptions draw a quite idealized picture both of the economy and of space differences, the basic question and approach remained the same when Christaller, Lösch, and much later Krugman, attempted to deal with location theory problems.

Alfred Weber, when he wrote his work in 1909, used location theory but included the idea of the entrepreneurial decision. The optimal location for one's industry can be deduced from three given parameters: differentiated costs of immobile labor, transportation costs depending on distance and weight, and the assumed positive agglomeration effects. Once a transportation-cost minimizing point is located, location is shifted in direction of places where the savings in labour cost exceed the disadvantages of higher transportation costs. Finally, a multitude of other firms is admitted, shifting the optimal location point once more in the direction of most agglomerated areas. Weber's view was innovative considering that he not only combined formerly macroeconomic matters with geographic themes, but it also pointed to empirical studies on localization decisions. His line of thought was continued by Walter Isard and David Smith.

Location theory is mainly based upon the two pillars (Gorter/ Nijkamp 2001), transportation and agglomeration, resulting from externalities,**20** and associated with location decisions. Both can be considered to have a theoretical kinship with industrial organization and trade theory. The latter deals with another major theme in economic geography: economic growth and regional development in a wider sense. There are several sub-disciplines, ranging from neoclassical and new growth theory, regional science, development theory, to Marxist and postcolonial approaches, each with its own perspective on economic growth and regional development. Whereas classical economic theory held the view that unrestrained flow of labour and capital would lead to an equal growth according to the laws of capital accumulation, Myrdal argued that one could discern processes of cumulative causation of economic and non-economic factors that could lead to vicious cycles of poverty. Actually, the rather optimistic

modernization theory never really entered into geography – core-periphery models and a Marxist way of thinking around 1980 were more in fashion (Glassman 2001). Marxist studies mainly accentuated the unevenness of income and power distributions across both the international and national landscape. Within developing countries one could observe a divide between primate urban centers, former locations of colonial administrations, and hinterlands. Whereas the latter remain backward, the urban centres witness a tremendous economic growth with the parallel problems of overpopulation and pollution.21 The Marxist concern to avoid *spatial fetishism*22, i.e. taking geographical and not social factors as the cause of social outcomes, opened new doors to consider such variables as gender, race or ethnic origin in geographical studies. In the Marxist view, space is the product of social relations, which are effects of the material relation of production. The interspatial relations between different societies are to be considered in categories of exploitation, which tends to increase inequalities. Finally, Marxist geographers emphasize the alienated relation between capitalist production and human interaction with nature (resources) that will be a decisive factor in changing the production system. Marxist ideas are also the starting point in the *Global Commodity*/ the *Global Value Chain* literature, which substantially draws from sociology, political economy and geography. This literature refers to the role spatial connections and flows play for development and the distribution of gains and losses.

Cultural geographers share the critique of environmental determination views, but they also oppose the structural bias of the hitherto mentioned literature. Instead a subjective view was suggested considering that "people tend to be regional geographers in their everyday consciousness" (Wood 1968). Whereas its early founding father Carl Sauer was concerned with the way people themselves conceive the space they live in, for example, the cultural differences of perceptions along the US-Mexican border, the literature after the linguistic turn worked in the framework of treating landscape as text, writable, re-writable and interpretable like a sheet of paper (see e.g. work by James Duncer). Former Marxist cultural geographers defetishized an objectivist notion of culture and hinted at the underlying processes of social constitution (Cosgrove 1985). Others have interpreted the geographical literature as a cultural representation with its own context. In this literature, there is a variety of themes (Pratt 2001), such as the investigation of the close link between place- and identity-construction in ghetto-cultures. As people dwell in a certain place, they begin to form collective representations about this place that becomes their neighbourhood. These representations are symbolized by the place which becomes an attribute of the people living there. When people from outside perceive this community and its locally symbolized self-interpretation, they either want to adhere or remain outside. Thus, representations of places and their objectivation propel the dynamics of segregation. Another theme is the role representation of a land via maps helped to construct modern states or influenced the way colonizers thought about very remote countries.

In recent years, a key preoccupation in economic geography has been its relationship to others claiming the title of *economic geographers*. From economics a number of authors have addressed what they consider central concerns for the development of an *economic geographical* approach to the economy. These *new* economic geographers have caused considerable debate and reflection within those circles that consider themselves representative of an *older* economic geography tradition. Whether these new authors have been seen as symbolic of cross border invaders ignorant of the fertile fields they are stepping into or as important contributors to a developing dialogue on economic geography is subject to debate (Martin 1999a; Krugman 2000; Martin 1999b; Martin/ Sunley 1996; Power 2001).

Whilst working in the epistemological framework of economics Krugman differs from mainstream economics in the emphasis he puts on increasing production returns (decreasing marginal costs) resulting from economies of scale, agglomeration effects, etc. This leads to imperfect competition, and as a result, further clustering and international polarization. From a sociological point of view, we may see this as somewhat in line with the Marshall-Chamberlin-Whitean idea of monopolistic competition and the emergence of niches, though Krugman stresses space as a way of creating niches. Krugman's core-periphery-model can be considered as a reference point for economic models taking into account possible spatial differentiation and increasing returns (1991b). He assumes a two-region economy with immobile agriculture producing with constant-return having costless transportation and mobile manufacture producing with increasing returns23 and iceberg transportation costs.24 Model oriented theorisations that are heavily reliant upon relatively fixed assumptions and ideas of immobile factor conditions have deeply troubled many geography-based economic geographers. In particular, there is the worry that the *new economic geography*

approach is too laden with abstracted universalism, reductionism, and mathematical determinism. As Power notes: "It fails to critically engage with the complexity and realities of the spatial economy, and the result is that it can tell us little to help deal with such pressing problems as uneven development, less favoured regions, and urban redevelopment" (Power 2001: 55).

Much of geographer's critique of new variants of location theory as well as an observable shift away from the Marxism that characterised much of economic geography in the 1970s and 1980s seems to stem from geographers' concern to address the dynamic post-Fordist phenomena that do not easily fit into either perspective. Phenomena such as the parallel internationalization of production and finance, the setting-up of entirely new industrial places, the rise of developing countries, and growth in virtually mediated spatial processes are not easily grasped by pure core-periphery models. Towards the end of the 1980s a growing recognition of the complexity and inconsistencies of spatial flows and processes in an era of globalisation was combined with a resurgence in interest in regional dynamics and in the idea that these dynamics can be interrupted and even reversed (Scott/ Storper 1986). Storper suggested that we need to re-examine our understanding of region and that the black box of entrepreneurial decision making had not been sufficiently opened. He claims that regionalization is not a by-product of the economy, but is part of a new way of coordination that implies an uneven development of regions. Central to his idea is the fusion of geographical organization and territorial development views. The idea is that a firm's initial location attracts more firms, with additional services. This leads to urbanization with growing markets and, as a consequence, higher prices in the centre. This feeds back to the production organization and incites further disintegration and geographical dispersion of subunits involving cheap labour. This also promotes a more specified division of labour in line with Adam Smith's argument. Simultaneously, these processes lead to higher *transaction costs* (cf. Storper/ Scott 1995) that induce new processes of agglomeration. As a result the territorial development and patterns describe in detail how social processes lead to capitalism (Storper 1989: 10). Besides industrial organization and territorial aspects, technology is suggested as a decisive factor in bringing about change both in the production regime and its spatial distribution.

Work such as Storper's feeds directly into a central question in contemporary economic geography: why is it that despite globalisation and advances in communications there seems to be an increased role in the global economy for regional sectoral concentrations and agglomerations? Perhaps unsurprisingly certain globally powerful but relatively specialised regional hubs have fascinated economic geographers: e.g. Hollywood (Scott 2002; Currah 2006; Scott 2005; Christopherson/ Storper 1986), the finance district in the City of London (Thrift, N 2000; Thrift/ Leyshon 1994; Tickell 1996; Tickell 2000), Silicon Valley (Saxenian 1994; Angel 1991), and Cambridge biotechnology (Cooke 2002; Keeble, et al. 1999; Lawton-Smith, et al. 2001). In recent years, much of this interest in dynamics and foundations of regional agglomeration has been linked with notions of regional competitiveness. In this respect Michael Porter's cluster framework has become extremely influential, though often controversial, and generated both theoretic discussions as well as a wealth of empirical literature (Porter 2000; Malmberg/ Maskell 2002; Malmberg/ Power 2005; Malmberg/ Power 2006; Martin/ Sunley 2003).

Whether work has focused on spaces conceived of as clusters, industrial districts, regional innovation systems, localised milieus, competence blocks, regions, global cities, etc. there has been an overwhelming focus on the importance of knowledge, and innovation, in spatial processes – and space's role in knowledge and innovation processes. There is no doubt that economic geographers have made substantial contribution to our understanding of how knowledge and place are connected and how knowledge and innovation are deeply connected to different spatial processes (Gertler 2004; Amin/ Cohendet 2004; Gertler 2001; Gertler 2003; Malmberg/ Maskell 2002; Bathelt/ Malmberg/ Maskell 2004; Weller 2007; Braczyk/ Cooke/ Heidenreich 1998; Feldman 2000), (Maskell/ Malmberg 2007). There are, of course, also review-oriented articles on knowledge, which may be of great interest to anyone researching the topic (Gertler 2003). Issues of upgrading in supply chains have also been widely discussed and analyzed by economic geographers in journals such as *Economic Geography*, *Journal of Economic Geography* and *Global Networks*.

Beyond the above mentioned economic geographers have engaged with so many other topics that it is difficult to summarise or group them. However, in recent years there have been certain notable themes and industrial foci: cultural economy and cultural industries (Banks, et al. 2000; O'Connor 1998; Power/ Scott 2004; Pratt 1997; Rantisi 2004; Scott 2000); alternative exchange and trading sys-

tems (Hughes 2005; Leyshon/ Lee/ Williams 2003); project based working (Grabher 2002a; Grabher 2002b; Grabher 2001b; Grabher 2001a; Vinodrai 2006); consumption (Aoyama 2007; Crang 1996; Crewe 2000; Crewe 2001; Crewe/ Beaverstock 1998; Crewe/ Gregson 1998; Jackson, et al. 1998; Wrigley/ Lowe 1996); the firm (Taylor/ Asheim 2001; Yeung 2001); gendered work and economic spaces (McDowell/ Court 1994; McDowell 1997; Leslie/Reimer 2003; Crewe 2001); biotechnology clusters (Cooke 2002; Mattsson 2007; Waxell 2005); global commodity and value chains (Power/ Hallencreutz 2007; Leslie/ Reimer 1999; Hughes/ Reimer 2004).

These are, of course, only a small sample of the issues, places, spaces, and phenomena that economic geographers have studied. There are nonetheless issues and phenomena that economic sociologists have also looked at, and we may wonder if the two disciplines interact to the extent that they should.

Interaction

Our concern with this article, as mentioned, is less to achieve a complete overview of the issues and work that economic geography encompasses but rather to stress the importance of interdisciplinary exchanges. Such exchanges are nothing new to economic geography and even the briefest glance at its recent history reveals that the discipline is far from passive in seeking out new exchanges and imports. However, much of the interaction between the two disciplines has seemed to be from the geographers side who have imported much from economic sociology. This is not to say that sociology is indifferent to the spatial dimension. Giddens' work, for instance, drew upon time-geographical themes that were both abstract and themselves already quite close to social theory.**25** Polanyi, though not being a sociologist, was also highly aware of the spatial dimension and his substantialist critique can also be directed to sociological concepts (e.g. class determinism). Bourdieu, with the idea of field, stresses the spatial distribution not only in society, but, for example, between art galleries at *the left bank* and *the right bank* of Seine. Furthermore, abstract trade theory can hardly validate any hypotheses if it does not consider the size and historic development of the specific economy or the specific goods traded, and Polanyi says, "Such differences could be ignored by theory, but their consequences could not be equally disregarded in practice." (Polanyi [1944] 2001: 216).

Space has since the cultural turn of the 1980s, been seen as socially constituted, and this suggests that one can even speak of a sociologization of geography**26**. It was, however, not until the early 1990s that culture became a factor in explaining spatial difference, as well as a topic of research in its own right, and only then did it make a significant impact in economic geography (Scott 2004:488).

There is also a more phenomenological idea of space that is common in sociology, which can be used for analyzing geographical concerns with space and spatiality. This idea can be most clearly seen in the works of Alfred Schütz, who speak of provinces of meaning. A province of meaning is defined by its *cognitive style* and the *chocks* that people experience when moving between different provinces (Schütz 1962: 230-234). This is a form of cognitive-spatial approach.

For an outsider the many different conceptions of space that one finds in economic geography make it harder to extract a clear idea that can be imported (as for example the structural notion of network has been exported to geography from sociology). Notions of space in economic geography range from ideal notions, to ideas of concrete objectively given containers, and their relative-systematic arrangement or subjectively constituted spatial reality (Wardenga 2002). It is in this light we see a connection between the somewhat more metaphorical and often more sociological use of space that some geographers use (e.g., Hauge 2007), and sociological ideas about knowledge and meaning that often are spatially distributed (Aspers 2006). In fact, the great variation in meaning that the notion *space* captures, suggest that it is increasingly seldom seen as physical, which means that the question of *what is space* in the words of David Harvey, is "replaced by the question *how is it that the different human practices create and make use of different conceptualization of space*" (Harvey 2006:126). This sociological idea suggests that some of the things that geographers investigate may often be more directly addressed without the detour of space (Harvey 2006:119-120).

The sociologization of geography can also be observed if one looks at the texts that geographers cite. It is not only our impression that sociologists are, relatively speaking, frequently cited by economic geographers, this is also a finding by insiders (Boggs/ Rantisi 2003:109). Some have even explicitly discussed developments in economic sociology. Grabher (2006) has traced the use of networks by economic geographers to its development in sociology.

The United Kingdom seems to be an especially fertile ground for cooperation between geographers and sociologists, see for example the volume edited by Gregory and Urry (1985b).

We agree that one may view economic geography as a *synthetic, transdisciplinary field* (Peet 2002: 387). This has both positive and negative consequences for sociologists who want to enter the field to learn more about the economy. We are, perhaps, somewhat more sceptical about the theoretical net benefit a sociologist might have by entering the field of economic geography than, for example, economic anthropology. Mere ideographic descriptions of spatial distribution are informative, but may offer less in terms of theoretical surplus. To take spatial distributions as effects of social activity or to consider their consequences on social variables requires the theorist, however, to rely once more on broader sociological frames: at least for those who do not claim to be interested in the objective flows or movements per se. The main reason why we, by this short review, have found fewer ideas to bring back to sociology is that economic geography at least in the past has been more object-driven than theory- or methodology-driven. Another reason is the size of the fields; geography is clearly smaller than sociology.**27** There is no doubt that space is important and that economic geographers have made important contributions to our understanding of the economy in respect of globalization, innovation, knowledge, and many other fields. The transdisciplinarity also has the positive consequence that economic geography is relatively accessible to sociologists. The general view that space and spatiality are central aspects is of course correct, and it is clear that economic sociologists can learn much from geographers. Economic geography with its history of different methods is especially apt for sociologists who want to get new insights but are not willing or able, to make larger adjustments to their world-view.

One conclusion, is that there are many similarities in terms of topics of research; it may be the social science that stands closest to sociology, at least when it comes to the study of the economy. There are, in addition, many theoretical viewpoints that economic sociologists and economic geographers share. The communication, in other words, should not be very difficult given that there are so many questions that need detailed and careful attention.

Let us therefore look at two questions that are crucial to both geographers and sociologists. It is painfully true that economic sociologists have not been able to solve the issue of what is *economy*, and what is not *economy*; this central theme has simply been assumed in economic sociology (Sklair 1997). This basic question is probably best addressed by people with different disciplinary backgrounds who can interact with each other. And given that it is the presupposition of all the disciplines that study this o*bject*, it should be an obvious target of research.

The other question is not restricted to the economy, though it is central also in studies of the economy. The question is as simple as it is hard to address: *what is time?* This question becomes urgent to address because the economy is so much about timing, innovation, uncertainty, and expectation, all of which are connected to this basic question. One geographer who explicitly tried to integrate the role of time into the study of space, in what is called time-geography, was Torsten Hägerstrand (1967). Though one may question Hägestrand's more naturalistic approach, which makes it hard to treat time and space in anything but objective categories, it is clear that the inclusion of time into the analysis of innovation is a major achievement since it views space and time as resources (Mattsson 2007).

From a more philosophical perspective, but also from the perspective of geography (Harvey 2006:123), is it wise to follow Hägerstrand and analyze time and space together. Hence, space is one of the most central notions in the social science, and is like time of such complexity that one discipline cannot address it alone. This complexity of the notion is emphasized by Harvey: "space turns out to be an extraordinarily complicated key word. It functions as a compound word and has multiple determinations such that no one of its particular meanings can properly be understood in isolation from all the others. But that is precisely what makes the term, particularly when conjoined with time, so rich in possibilities" (2006:148). We see a great opportunity for collaborative work between sociologists and geographers in the analysis of the two basic issues of time and space. Such collaboration might avoid the Kantian aprioristic route, and instead build upon a Simmelian approach in which space and time is necessarily connected with the social. There are also philosophers who we can line up as candidates for understanding the ontology of time-space (cf. Harvey 2006). One philosopher stands out, Martin Heidegger ([1927] 2001), as he stresses how space is connected to being, and of course with time. Heidegger naturally cannot guide researchers in terms of how to conduct empirical research, but his thinking is a way to understand the ontology of space. This route, as far

as we are aware, has not yet been tested in relation to understanding socio-spatial economic processes.

More generally, it is our impression, after having studied economic geography, economic anthropology, economics, and indirectly sociology, that all disciplines are constrained in their thinking by their own histories, in which the disciplines have created regional ontologies which still keep the disciplines tamed, and make it harder to come up with new ideas. All disciplines, moreover, are caught within a scientific-explanatory ideal, which is deeply rooted in an observer-centred worldview. Maybe the spellbound can be broken by an approach that has a method to clarify the foundation so that we can become aware of the restrictions. By taking this phenomenological route it may be possible to uncover what has been covered by layers of taken-for-granted reasoning and ideas that the social sciences have generated over the last 100-150 years, all of which may not be to our benefit. We want, in short, to get back to the things themselves.

Traditions:

German Social Geography

British Human Geography

American Cultural Geography

French Marxism

American Regional Science

Key People:

J.H. von Thünen (1783-1850)

August Lösch (1906-1945)

Walter Christaller (1893-1969)

Alfred Weber (1868-1958)

Torsten Hägerstrand (1916-2004)

David Harvey (*1935)

Paul Krugman (*1953)

Key concepts: space, place, environment

Journals:

Journal of Economic Geography

Economic Geography

Global Networks

Annals of the Association of American Geographers

Antipode: A Radical Journal of Geography

Geographical Review

Journal of Regional Science

Environment and Planning

Regional Studies

General Reference Literature:

The Dictionary of Human Geography

The Oxford Handbook of Economic Geography

The Blackwell Companion to Economic Geography

Endnotes

1See for example the four highly divergent and often polemical reviews of Krugman's approach in the January issue 2001.

2The highly entangled world of approaches after the 1980s, however, restrains our intention. The lack of clear-cut borderlines of the geographic discipline might be due to the fact, that it constructs a dimension (space) and not *traditional* objects (like the society) in its scientific endeavour. Putting it in these terms of non-objectivist science reveals the ambivalent character one can assign to space.

3See also Durkheim's exchange with Paul Vidal de la Blache, who established la géographie humaine. One could claim that the division of sociology and geography was simultaneously established at that time (Gregory/Urry 1985a). Although Durkheim's project of sociology was an interdisciplinary one, another of his rival sociologist groups, Le Playist, began a research in "social geography" (Lukes 1973: 394).

4Simmel, however, did not discuss the notion of space explicitly in relation to economic issues.

5Even in the most virtual telemediating services geography still plays a role. See some business examples (Goddard/Richardson 1996; Graham 2008; Zook 2005; Graham/Marvin 1996). There is no evidence for an end of geography, a thesis that is sometimes posed in globalization contexts.

6Saunders (1987) notices that the classics treated *space* not as a central concept, but rather en passant.

7Latour's non-human agents are well-known in cultural geography (Pratt 2001).

8From the early environmentalists, who claimed a deterministic influence of the environment via the senses on the individual, deterministic thought continued in Darwinism and in modern mechanic location-optimization models as well.

9See for a post-war history review (Scott, A. J. 2000) and therein more literature about the discipline's history.

10 There is also talk of the *Quantitative Revolution* in the 1960s.

11Though it is somewhat outside the scope of the paper, the mainly US-American spatial sciences are more quantitatively orientated and deal pre-eminently with location theory. They provide more practical applications such as the Geographical Information System (GIS).

12Giddens intended explicitly to intertwine different disciplines and actively consulted geographic literature.

13Storper discerns three different schools that rediscovered the importance of regions (see Storper 1997: 1-26)

14David Held and Göran Therborn are other sociologists who have dealt with globalization from a spatial point of view.

15Increasing returns refers here to the Chamberlin tradition of monopolistic competition in which market size result in higher profit. Increasing returns is opposed to one of the laws that Say postulated: The more one produces, for example the more workers one employs in a factory, the less is the contribution of one extra worker. Not even economies of scale creates conditions that changes this "law" (Schumpeter [1954] 1981:584-588).

16See also a newer restatement of their approach (Fujita/Krugman/Venables 1999).

17See (Barnett 1998) for a critical review of the cultural wave. Buttimer (2001: 7064) remarks that humanistic, critical, radical, or social geography often intersect and they mostly share a subjectivist view a some normative undertone.

18Like in anthropology the history of the geographic discipline is ambiguously interwoven with the imperialistic movement. See (Friedman 2003: 109) for literature recommendations. This concerns much of what one could refer to as political geography. Ratzel, for example, invented the term *Lebensraum*, a specific environment adequate mainly for one ethnic group. Within the Nazi-regime this term was re-interpreted as a geological (Sprout 1968) concept.

19Born in 1783, von Thünen had already early (1803) developed the basic equilibrium model of his Isolated State (1826). He not only made contemporary discoveries on his own, but can be considered the forerunner of Malthus and Ricardo. Partly because he wrote in German, due to von Böhm-Bawerk's less favourable interpretation of him, and because of von Thünen's ambivalent doctrine of a natural wage, his works remained underestimated. There are both geographers and equilibrium-economists who could claim his works as belonging to their discipline. See Samuelson (1983) for these points, further literature and a reconstruction of von Thünen's basic model. This model, however, makes up only the first part of Thünen's whole oeuvre (including many letters) which contains an abundance of institutionalist (cooperative production, profit-sharing) and normative social-philosophical ideas as well (Engelhardt 1993). Thünen's own manor served him for practically testing out his ideas and providing him equally with data for one of the first social analyses even before Engels.

20See Marshall's ([1920] 1961) discussion of external economies.

21This being one domain of urban geography.

22In that the geographic discipline is itself put under suspicion of ideology if they naturalize *false* social constructs.

23This model is a derivative from the standard model of monopolistic competition (Dixit/Stiglitz 1977).

24Due to modelling specificities transportation costs are assumed to be increasing, as if the transported good was a melting iceberg (Samuelson), thus constantly devaluating.

25He found a common ground with time geography through the understanding that the life path of ordinary, everyday practices constitutes the basis of the overall organization of social systems. Space in Giddens' view is both constraining in that for example the body can't get out of it and enabling in that it is only in space that interaction takes place.

26Of the four fields of research that have been in play in the three issues, anthropology, economics, geography and sociology, geography is the smallest, and therefore most likely to *import* ideas. One way to measure the size of a field is to count the number of journals listed in the Social Science Citation Index: 175 economics journals, 93 sociology, 53 anthropology, and 39 geography journals are listed. If we exclude economics, we have not identified the number of journals that are oriented to economic issues, but an estimate is that about 5-15% of the journals, are more or less central for researchers that focus on *the economy*.

27According to Warf (2001) it was social theory that made geography a theoretical science.

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