

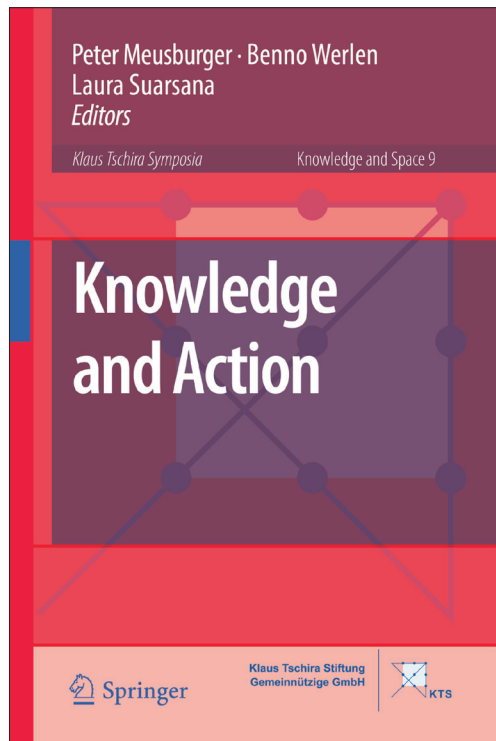
Meusburger, P., Werlen, B. and Suarsana, L. (eds.): *Knowledge and Action*. Dordrecht, Springer, 2017. 300 p.

There have been several attempts to question disciplinary borders over the last decades, marked by, for example, different 'turns', such as the 'spatial-turn' in social sciences or the 'affective-turn' in social sciences and geography, and the emergence of sub-disciplines such as behavioural economics. Yet, attachment to disciplines as well as disciplinary agendas and disciplinary 'pride' are still limiting research, so collaborations, such as the volume to be reviewed here, are important contributions to a more out-of-the-box way of approaching research. "Knowledge and Space" is a book series focusing on the relationship between knowledge and power, and the spatial disparity of both. Within this series, the volume "Knowledge and Action" aims to collect a variety of papers from different disciplines, including psychology, geography, philosophy and anthropology, in order to discuss the interconnected nature of knowledge, space and action. The volume draws on the idea of Nico STEHR (1994) that "parts of knowledge can be defined as ability, aptitude, or

'capacity for social action' and on the concept "that the production and dissemination of knowledge are always embedded in specific environments (spatial context, spatial relations, and power structures)" (p. 1). I believe that the book series, and especially this particular volume, can also provide refreshing inquiries for research in post-Socialist countries and (semi-)peripheral contexts in general by suggesting a more critical approach to the existing status quo and the dominance of 'Western thought'.

The geographers Peter MEUSBURGER and Benno WERLEN, who are both editors of the volume, start the introduction with highlighting the shortcomings of the traditional 'Rational Choice Theory' and the 'Homo Oeconomicus' concept. Their critique is based on the ethnocentric nature of these theories, their neglect of the spatial dimension, their lack of empirical foundation, and their psychologically unrealistic approach. MEUSBURGER and WERLEN also link the insufficiency of these concepts to the general subordination of 'space', to 'time' in modern social theory, and they call for research questions that are more integrative, in terms of both space-time relations and disciplinary background. Drawing on GIDDENS (1984), they highlight that time is overemphasised at the expense of the spatial dimension and even when "space is taken into account, the word 'space' is often not understood as a theory-dependent term, but rather as a given fact" (p. 4) and space in this sense is seen as a container, without considering its socially constructed nature. While following the works of GIDDENS, BOURDIEU or SOJA, social sciences claimed to take a 'spatial turn' and to overcome the "spatial ignorance identified in their field" (p. 4), the editors of "Knowledge and Action" argue that in fact, the spatial turn is incomplete and in its current state may even lead to 'geo-determinism'. As they suggest, the mere appropriation of the spatial dimension without its re-conceptualisation from the perspective of social sciences will not improve social research, but only "falsify the real nature of sociocultural realities" (p. 5). With reference to MEUSBURGER's earlier work, they argue that "an environment's impacts on action must not be regarded deterministically [and] an environment should not be thought of as an independent variable that directly influences all relevant actors through a direct cause-and-effect relation (if A, then B). It depends on processes of evaluation based on learning, knowledge, and experience whether spatial structures, physical space, or social environments have an impact on human action" (p. 13).

The fifteen studies presented in the volume are disciplinary diverse, and approach the central topic



of the book on different scales, from individual micro-scales to global macro-scales, and while some authors look at “knowledge as a social construct based on collective action”, others “as an individual capacity to act” (p. 8). Chapters 2 to 5 and Chapter 7 focus on macro-scale analysis; Chapters 6, 9 and 10 investigate the micro-scale; Chapters 11 and 12 are taking a philosophical approach to knowledge, whereas Chapter 13 studies the bodily ways of knowing through an artistic approach. Finally, in the last two chapters knowing as cognitive capacity is discussed in relation to mobility in space. One of the major strengths of the book are the research questions the editors put forward in the introduction, including the following ones: “To what extent is knowledge a precondition for action? How much knowledge is necessary for action? How do different representations of knowledge shape action? How rational is human behaviour? What categories of rationality should be distinguished? Why do people occasionally act against their knowledge?” And more specifically in relation to space: “Which concepts of space and place are appropriate for analysing relations between knowledge, action, and space? How much are the spatial conditions of actions exposed to historical transformation? How does the digital revolution change the historically established society–space relations? What are the spatial implications for the formation of knowledge?”

Many of these questions are addressed throughout the individual studies. In the second chapter, which follows the introduction, Benno WERLEN further details the shortcomings of the ‘spatial turn’ in social sciences and calls for more integrity among disciplines that are more reflective of the ‘digital age’. His focus is on the corporeality of the actors and the difference between mediated and direct experiences and communication, in order to highlight the “socially constructed relations of space” (p. 16). This has become particularly important in the new digital age, he argues, where socio-spatial conditions are inevitably redrawn.

Huib ERNSTE provides in Chapter 3 a historical overview of the transformation of the philosophy of rationality. The chapter starts with introducing the early stages of the separation of rationality and reason in philosophical thought by drawing on Immanuel KANT, and continues with the critique of positivist rationality, underlining that there is not a single type of rationality, but there are different types, “which cannot be reduced to each other” (p. 58). By reflecting on phenomenological schools (of geographical action theory and language pragmatic approaches) and poststructuralist theory, ERNSTE argues that „rationality could be reconstituted as a culturally contingent phenomenon, and critical geographical analysis could again contribute to concrete problem-solving, albeit in a culturally much more informed and embedded way than hitherto” (p. 16).

Gunnar OLSSON in Chapter 4 similarly takes a historical approach on philosophical thought focusing on functionality and rationality in planning and social engineering in Sweden during the 1950s and early 1960s. He begins with discussing the influence of the central place theory and location theory of CHRISTALLER (1933) and LÖSCH (1954[1943]) in Nazi Germany and the “principles intended to forge a happy marriage between scientific knowledge and political action” (p. 66). OLSSON points to the similarly positivist thinking and mathematical calculation of the politically motivated Swedish experts of planning, who “took it as their mission to turn Sweden into a People’s Home, a state of rationality in which the maximizing principles of utilitarian ethics were institutionalized” (p. 69).

In Chapter 5 Richard PEET provides a neo-Marxist analysis on a global scale by looking at the role of expertise in financial institutions. Drawing on Marx, Engels, and Gramsci, he emphasises that knowledge production serves a class interest and that class forces lead, direct, and control the production of knowledge. He refers to this form of knowledge (production) as perverse expertise, as the bright minds of the financial sector, who do the intellectual and practical modelling and are well paid and respected for doing so, accumulate knowledge to maintain the existing social order. While the elites are practicing perverse expertise, masses remain in social unconsciousness maintained by trivialising their life to overconsumption. PEET concludes that the “intersecting economic and environmental crises will continue *ad infinitum* because the existing hegemonic knowledge cannot guide effective social action” (p. 91).

In Chapter 7 Nico STEHR also discusses the role hegemonic knowledge plays in the production of spatial disparities (although he does not discuss hegemonic knowledge *per se*). According to STEHR “significant asymmetries of knowledge exist” and “knowledge gaps are growing”, and he rejects “the interpretation that nonknowledge is the opposite of knowledge”, aiming to avoid falling into a theoretically and empirically unproductive dichotomy. He instead sees knowledge as a “context-dependent anthropological constant representing a continuum”, and there are only “those who know something else” (p. 123). Therefore, the problem or the difference arises from the usefulness of the knowledge one possesses in a given situation, and thus, the key sociological question from this perspective is how to address the issues of “knowledge asymmetry and knowledge gaps in various spheres of modern society, such as the economy, politics, the life world, and governance” (p. 123).

Chapter 6, 8, 9, and 10 are covering psychological researches that address questions on knowledge and action from the perspective of the individual actor. In Chapter 6 Joachim FUNKE poses the ques-

tions: how much knowledge is necessary for action, whether action is possible without knowledge, and why people sometimes act against their knowledge. In other words, FUNKE focuses on problem-solving that he understands as the intentional generation of knowledge for the ability to act. His research is based on the 2012 cycle of the worldwide PISA study and suggests a clear connection between the generation of knowledge and action, and his final conclusion is that “it is not possible to act *without* knowledge, but people can act *against* their knowledge” (p. 109). Frank WIEBER and Peter M. GOLLWITZER take a slightly different perspective, as they approach the question from a goal-attainment perspective, while also emphasising the direct connection between knowledge and action. They distinguish between spontaneous and strategic planning, from which the later explains processes similar to that in FUNKE’s study, thus, processes involving the systematic search of knowledge for critical situations, whereas spontaneous planning means the activation of the existing goal-relevant knowledge.

Ralph HERTWIG and Renato FREY investigate the way different representations of knowledge influence human action. Their focus is on the comparison of description based and experience based knowledge in relation to decision making. They suggest that neither research on description based or experience based knowledge should be prioritised, but instead attention should be given to the difference between the two as the “contrast between the two is enlightening” (p. 19).

Chapter 11 addresses the relation of knowledge and action from a philosophical perspective. Tilman REITZ misses the mutual reflection on the understanding of knowledge between social sciences and philosophy and suggests that in fact both have overlooked “the spatial dispersion of knowledge” (p. 21.) REITZ’s main interest, however, is “which understanding of knowledge makes sense in what kind of everyday circumstances” (p. 189).

The last two chapters focus on the link between knowledge and mobility in space. Thomas WIDLÖK (in Chapter 14) studies the relationship between rationality and action in the movement of Southern African and Australian hunter-gatherer societies and argues that the rationality of the movements in the researched context cannot be sufficiently described through categories of Western (ethnocentric) philosophical thought as it is contained in the features of the environment. The psychologists Heidrun MOLLENKOPF, Annette HIEBER, and Hans-Werner WAHL (in Chapter 15) scrutinise the way different factors, such as age, mental and physical handicaps, personal resources and environmental conditions can separate actions from intentions. Based on their interviews with older adults about their out-of-home mobility three times over 10 years, they argue that

out-of-home mobility remains important throughout and have a strong effect on overall life satisfaction.

As it has been outlined, the volume “Knowledge and Action” covers a variety of ways to approach its focus of topic through 15 chapters. This unavoidably means that its strength is also its weakness. “Knowledge and Action” incorporates different scales, approaches and disciplines to address the relationship between knowledge, action and space, and consequently power. Yet, most of the individual chapters do not talk to each other significantly due to the wide scope of the issue, and they tend to remain within their own discipline, what often makes it challenging for readers outside of the field to deeply engage with the text. Limited communication between different fields in both the academia and practice is, however, not the shortcoming of this volume *per se*, but a general burden of contemporary science that requires more attention and more works similar to this book, and with even more disciplinary self-reflexivity and openness.

The volume raises important questions and inspires further research, even in the Central and Eastern European region, where the hegemonic production of knowledge, both in space and on disciplinary basis, could constitute exciting research topics. Amongst others, Judit TIMÁR (2004) for instance, highlights inequalities in the production of geographical knowledge focusing on East-West relations and the general hegemony of Anglo-American knowledge. Other areas of research may include social movements studies (in terms of both acting and non-acting), migration studies (in relation to both immigration and emigration, domestic and international) or the extensive use of public spaces for both political propaganda and commercial advertisement – just to mention the most conspicuous issues currently affecting the region.

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