

## **Decision-making processes between romantic and baroque complexity: the case of housing investments and their repercussions on urban and regional development**

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In their quest for understanding urban areas and their development and for a long time of their history, economic and urban geography used to emphasise spatial patterns and general principles of spatial distribution, which they mainly based on physical proximity and Euclidian geometry. However, since the 1980's it became increasingly obvious that such essentialist perspectives of urban areas could not (or no longer) adequately describe and explain the (increasing) complexity and multiplicity of processes, which constitute contemporary urban realities.

Relational urban geography as developed in the work of Ash Amin, Doreen Massey, or Nigel Thrift challenges essentialist approaches to urban regions and takes on the task of developing a more adequate view of the urban by stressing the (social and economic) relations which constitute urban geographies. Their perspective becomes clear in Amin's notion that "cities and regions possess a distinctive spatiality as agglomerations of heterogeneity locked into a multitude of relational networks of varying geographical reach. As such, they express [...] the most intense manifestations of propinquity and multiple spatial connectivity" (Amin 2004, 43). Urban regions are viewed no longer as objectively identifiable, integrated economic and social systems, but rather as spaces of complex layering of multiple social relations; each of them having their own space-time dynamics and scalar reach. Hence a place can no longer be seen as a distinct physical entity; rather it is materially experienced as a significant conjunction of multiple webs and thus as a nodal point of various networks. These networks usually follow different paces of change, relate to different scopes and to different systems of values. Or put the other way round: the analysis of places leads to an ever increasing complexity of relations, making it a hard task to know when or where to stop the breakdown.

Relational (urban) geography thus scratches the field of complexity theories. John Law has developed a helpful differentiation between an "upward/romantic" and a "downward/baroque" perspective of complexity. He notes without explaining it any further that "[Max] Weber's ideal type tool was, precisely, a way of imputing a limited coherence to the unknowable", and that it therefore belongs to both perspectives of complexity. Since one of the main downsides of social science notions of complexity is its difficulty do deal with them empirically, the presented paper focuses on the viability of Weberian ideal types as an interface between romantic and baroque complexity, as Law suggests. It empirically draws on the multiplicity of varying networks, into which residential real estate investors as key agents of urban and regional development are embedded and to which they refer in strategy formation as well as in everyday coping. Law's two perspectives on complexity are used to connect the "downward" complexity of decision-making processes with the "upward" complexity of the decision-maker's systems integration and the regional repercussions of real estate investments.