

*Urbane Rationalität. Eine stadtanthropologische Studie zu Ujung Pandang (Makassar), Indonesien.* By Christoph Antweiler Kölner. Ethnologische Mitteilungen Band 12, Berlin: Reimer Verlag, 2000. 500 pp.

This book consists of three main parts: firstly, a discussion of rational choice theory and how to apply this perspective to an empirical analysis of “natural decision-making” in an urban setting (Chapters 2 and 3); secondly, a detail discussion of South Sulawesi and Ujung Pandang covering its history and the present socio-economic as well as cultural and political conditions (Chapters 4 and 5); and thirdly, an empirical analysis of household decision-making with regard to habitat and intra-urban migration (Chapter 6). However, as the relation between the diverse information provided and the main line of argumentation is not always fully spelt out, the huge amount of interesting material can sometimes become an irritation to the reader.

The study aims to analyse the life- and thought-styles in the city of Ujung Pandang in South Sulawesi. Its assumption is that due to specific experiences within an urban socio-cultural environment, an “urban knowledge” and rationality is formed and expressed in decision-making processes. Using an ethnological methodology, the empirical analysis focuses on decision-making with regard to intra-urban migration which is closely linked to a different level of social organization, namely, the family, household, the ethnic group, and overall social and cultural pattern. In addition, it is possible to link the micro level of social acting with a macro level of socio-cultural organization. Here, rational choice theory is, according to Antweiler, an appropriate approach to integrate the macro as well as the micro level, because although a decision is an individual issue, utility and reason are determined by society and culture. Furthermore rational choice allows for systematization.

Antweiler follows an ethnological agenda and thus his main focus concentrates on “natural decision-making” within a given surrounding. One main problem of rational choice approaches is the generalization of findings without taking into sufficient consideration the dimensions of decisions and the reach of their implications. From a literature survey, Antweiler points out seven main categories from which he deline-

ates twenty-six dimensions (Table 3, p. 80). These are taken as the basic dimensions for the analysis of decisions with regard to intra-urban migration (Table 4, p. 81) forming the basic structure of questionnaires and interview guides. His methods are described and their usability discussed in detail in Chapter 3 (pp. 91–126). One of his main methodological instruments is decision-tables. Antweiler convincingly shows that decision-tables are more useful compared with decision trees, because conditions and options can be linked directly and emic perspectives can easily be integrated.

After presenting the broader social context of decision-making quite extensively in the Chapters 4 and 5 (pp. 127–324), Chapter 6 deals with empirical data and findings on rationality of habitat and intra-urban migration. Antweiler presents detailed qualitative case-study material on multiple aspects of decision-making. For systematization and comparison, Antweiler uses and develops further decision-tables following his approach as described in Chapter 3. While the qualitative material, resembling features of a thick description, makes for interesting reading and provides a vivid understanding of the situation within the research area (Rappocini), the quantitative data presented in decision-making tables (especially Tables 51f. and 55ff.) are quite difficult to comprehend. What the “rules” are and how the “rules” are related to the decisions made and options structured are not spelt out. In a similar vein I could not understand Table 59, which indicates preferences related to habitat-options and socio-economic position. This table could have been transformed into a common cross-tabulation, which would have made the analysis easier to understand.

In the final synthesis of Chapter 7, Antweiler creates a model of rationality in which the actors-perspective with socio-cultural structures are integrated, based on empirical findings. The second part of the conclusions comments on urbanization and dynamics of urbanism in Southeast Asia. In Rapocchini cultural restrictions do not play a role for selecting the place to live or for migration. In general, spatial mobility is high within southern Sulawesi and among the ethnic groups residing there. In fact, moving to another place is a common strategy among households to improve their circumstances. However, agency is severely

constrained and restricted by other structures, namely, the purchasing capability, social differentiation (in particular, shame resulting from the contact with people with different social backgrounds), and the biographical position. The predominant motive for migration was the improvement of living conditions, formulated as “security”: security against violence and crime, as stability of money income, security of employment, and so forth. Intra-urban migration is understood as an extension of activities and social relations through changing the place to life. Thus old social bonds are not severed, but rather new bonds are added.

The study focuses on decisions as the empirical tool for analysing rationality. In this context I find it surprising that Antweiler does not refer to Mary Douglas. Even though Mary Douglas is no “rational choice” theoretician, decisions and how these are linked to institutions are one of her main concerns. Furthermore, her work on classifications provides important means for systematizing. Antweiler points out that often it is not taken into sufficient consideration that a decision does not only imply acting, but that one might as well decide not to act. Here, following Mary Douglas, one has to add that a decision as a selection of one possibility always implies rejection of all other options. Accordingly, the analysis of rationality from decisions should not only be concerned with the rules and conditions favouring the decision for one option, but also why all the other options are negated. Of particular interest then are the rejections of other possible options.

In the first chapter Antweiler speaks of “urban knowledge” and “urban rationality”. He mentions the controversy between Scott and Popkin on “peasant rationality” (pages 2f.). Certainly, this is a study of rationality in a city, but does the space or location make rationality urban? Antweiler indicates the importance of aspects related to urbanism for decision-making, like ethnic heterogeneity, rapid population growth (increase of density), spatial mobility, reduced direct social control, and higher living standards. These aspects are close to the old description of the city by Wirth through “dimension, density and heterogeneity”. It is not surprising that people in a city take aspects of their urban environment into consideration for decision-making, but does this make the rationality urban? I expected it to be spelt out in detail in how far an

urban rationality differs from a peasant rationality, and what are the specifics of an urban rationality.

The extensive ethnological study of one-quarter of Ujung Pandang provides a lot of interesting material. Besides the theoretical discussion of rational choice approaches and research methodology, Antweiler discusses the history of South Sulawesi and Ujung Pandang from the early beginning until the present, the socio-economic conditions within Ujung Pandang and Rapoccini, norms, values and behaviour standards within the region, and so forth. However, in the holistic presentation the reader easily loses the main line of argumentation. Consistency might have been improved if some of the 500 pages were excluded. This drawback is, from another point of view, an advantage: Certainly, the book is an important study of Sulawesi and Ujung Pandang comprehensively presenting and discussing current scholarship. For this reason I regard it as the most crucial deficit that it is written in German. This makes access to it rather difficult for the majority of scholars working on Southeast Asia.

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