

Preface

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Deciding where to live—this is a fundamental issue for individuals and society alike, and it is also a great subject for interdisciplinary research because of the many complex aspects to this seemingly straightforward question. What makes this book original and rich is primarily that it looks at this issue from so many sides, with intersecting angles of approach and an interdisciplinary grounding. Rather than being a series of chapters in which each discipline sets out its point of view, with its questions and methods, one of the features of great interest in this book is that all the chapters are written by several hands, most of them involving three or four separate disciplines. This approach implies forms of “negotiation” among the authors, who have managed to put across didactically what each discipline has to contribute to the question of deciding to move and choosing where to live. Almost all the chapters are co-signed by geographers and psychologists, reflecting the backgrounds of the two editors of the book. This underlying interdisciplinarity is enhanced by the outlooks of economists (also associated with very many chapters), neurologists, sociologists, linguists, and a physicist (one of the editors began his academic career in theoretical physics). Each of these outlooks illuminates the others. Three aspects of the work seem to me worth highlighting:

- the approach is resolutely *multiscalar* and *multidimensional*: on an individual level consideration is given to individuals’ neurological and psychological workings, their inheritance and past experience, their mode of evaluation and rationality; the effects of context influencing their decision-making process are contemplated in all their dimensions (family, environment); lastly, the dynamics of residential spaces and planning strategies are addressed on the collective

level of society and territory. Each level is addressed per se and in terms of its mutual interactions with the others.

– The approach is a *systemic* one and the concept of system, which is a pre-eminently cross-disciplinary one, is mobilized in several chapters. The systems and interactions at work in deciding where to live are highly diverse, some being intra-individual, with the various components of emotion (physiological, behavioural, and cognitive) and the executive cerebral system (emotional, cognitive, and motivational processes); some inter-individual and inter-locational, with the spatial system bringing into play interactions among places, accessibility, migratory flows, and more generally among individuals, groups, and the environment with respect to the system of relations between the residential setting, the way inhabitants perceive it, and their satisfaction with it. The concepts relating to the systemic approach such as feedback (e.g. between individual behaviour and collective references), emergence (especially urban patterns, segregation patterns), and self-organization (e.g. in the phenomenon of periurbanization) are explained from the point of view of theory and are mobilized in several chapters on varied topics.

– The *theoretical underpinnings* of the book are robust and manifest themselves in two ways: (1) within each chapter, with theory serving a line of argument that is followed through to the end, for example, that of evaluation of an environment or the psychological context of residential choice; (2) in a more transversal approach that consists in explaining and comparing theoretical frameworks through which to describe and model complex systems, account for a decision-making process, examine the objects of observation, or juggle with the questions of uncertainty and imprecision. Accordingly, the interest of this book extends beyond the theme of deciding where to live, and the conceptual thinking proposed here could readily be extended to other topics.

The introduction to the book presents the chapters in the logical sequence chosen by the authors. However, it seems to me that the various chapters can stand alone while at the same time contributing to the collective work and can be read in other orders, depending on the reader's own interests. This approach is facilitated by the frequent cross-references that make it easy to navigate among the chapters.

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