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Rethinking the culture-economy dialectic

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chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

Culture is a little like dropping an Alka-Seltzer into a glass – you don't see it, but somehow it does something.

Hans Magnus Enzensberger (Quoted by Hans Haacke, *New York Times*, January 5th, 1987)

Culture has become the plaything of journalists and historians, the Barbie-doll of sociologists, the Toys-'R'-Us of the cultural anthropologists. It is an idiot's delight.

Melvin Lasky 2002, p. 81

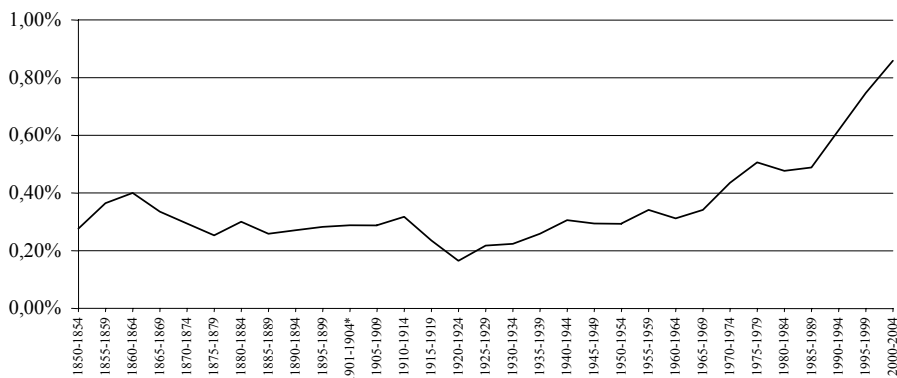
1 / 1 / the culture - economy dialectic

Over the past decades, the popularity of culture as an explaining factor in economic geography, economics, and management and organisation studies has grown steadily. Slowly it has become more or less common practice to point at culture whenever more traditional explanations have failed. At the same time the expanding toolkit of cross-cultural psychology provided an ever-growing data set on (aspects of) culture. Hofstede (1980) is probably the best-known and most influential example hereof. In the 1990s the social sciences, geography included, experienced what is now called a 'cultural turn' (e.g. Barnes 2001). Increasingly, culture was used to explain regional and (inter-) national differences in, for instance, wealth and economic growth. Some twenty years earlier, in the 1970s, Marxist approaches in social science induced interest in the opposite relationship: the economic 'mode of being' as an explanation for social and cultural difference.

The concepts of "culture" and "economy" have played a key role in (the development of) social science. 'In much of twentieth century discourse, "culture" and "economy" have been represented in juxtaposition, if not indeed as an outright contradiction of terms' (Kockel 2002b, p. 1). Especially in social scientific theorising "culture" and "economy" are (nearly) dichotomous concepts. Social reality tends to be divided into two mutually exclusive categories: culture, and economy (e.g. Castree 2004). This dichotomy co-determined the organisation of social science itself: sociology studies society or culture, economics studies the economy. The concept dichotomization and the (conjectured) relationships between culture and economy represent a *dialectic* (see § 2.5 on the concept of "dialectic"): the 'culture - economy dialectic' (hereafter abbreviated **CED**).

The CED is at least as old as social science; some (conceptually) related dialectics, often difficult to distinguish from the CED itself, are, however, much older. The history of the CED as a dialectic of *social* categories started in the 18th century with (among others) Montesquieu, Vico and Smith. It continued throughout the 19th century with Marx, Tylor, Morgan, Durkheim and Simmel; the early 20th century: Weber, Tawney; and exploded in the second half of the 20th century. Figure 1.1 and table 1.1 illustrate the late 20th century rise of "culture" and its popularity (and that of the CED) in contemporary discourse.

figure 1.1: "culture" or "cultural" in book titles in WorldCat database by year of publication



All data relative to total number of books in WorldCat database published in that period.

note (*): the year 1900 is excluded because all undated publications are also filed under this year.

source: WorldCat database (www.oclc.org/worldcat), August 2004

table 1.1: "culture" and "economy" in titles and on the internet (June 2004)

	Online Contents ¹	WorldCat ²	Google ³
"culture" ⁴	197927	380898	50,8 m
+ "economy" ⁵	2925	12000	6,0 m
relative (row 2 / row 1)	1,48 %	3,15 %	11,9 %
"concept of culture" ⁶	125	420	43500

notes:

- (1) words or phrases in *article* titles in over 17000 scientific journals. www.oclcpcia.org.
- (2) words or phrases in *book* titles of over 42 million books. www.oclc.org/worldcat.
- (3) words or phrases in *internet* pages and documents. www.google.com. (m = million)
- (4) including "cultures" and "cultural" in OLC and Worldcat search (*not* in Google search).
- (5) including "economic" in OLC and Worldcat search (*not* in Google search); subset of row above.
- (6) including "the culture concept" and "definition of culture" in OLC and Worldcat search (*not* in Google search).

While the CED is at least two centuries old and CED-based thought has been foundational for many of the social sciences, its introduction into geography is of much more recent date. Only in the second half of the 20th century, did the CED oust the traditional man - environment dialectic, which was a defining characteristic of classical geography. With the introduction of the CED into geography and the rising interest in culture in general, the field of geography became increasingly dependent on fuzzy concepts (Markusen 1999; Rodríguez-Pose 2001). The same is also true for the other social sciences, albeit that in those the conceptual framework of the CED was already present at their 'births'.

"Culture" itself is probably the best example of such a fuzzy concept. With its increasing popularity, the concept of "culture" became increasingly ambiguous and increasingly contested. Cross-cultural psychologists, for example, measure the core value orientations they regard to be the essence of culture, while post-modernists (and many others) claim that culture is fundamentally immeasurable. It may be the case that 'the challenges of studying culture have little to do with unique measurement constraints, and more to do with persistent conceptual confluences that hamper our ability to produce consolidated knowledge' (Jepperson & Swidler 1994, p. 369). Consequently, the scientific value of the concept of "culture" (and of the CED) may be rather limited in its current state of chaos. However, 'a project linking economic with cultural analysis (...) is supported by an embarrassingly rich array of intellectual resources, which only the blinkers of conventional economic thinking prevent us from fully using' (Peet 1997, p. 46). Therefore, a thorough analysis of the CED, its concepts and theories, is needed.

1 / 2 / the research project

This book is the result of a research project on the history, meaning and implications of the culture - economy dialectic (CED). The focus of the project was on the (historical) development of the relationships between the concepts (and – to some extent – also the phenomena) of "culture", "economy" and "entrepreneurship". Its main question was not so much a question about actual cultural influence on the economy or vice versa itself, but about *what it means to ask this kind of question* and why this seems to be so important in and to social science. There were a number of interrelated goals (or parts) in the research project to answer this research question; most importantly: (part 1) to compare and analyse the existing theories of the CED, (part 2) to review their empirical (dis-) confirmation, (part 3) to construct some kind of synthesis and, finally, (part 4) to consider the relevance and implications of all of this to geography and social science in general.

Comparison and analysis of theories (part 1) starts with an analysis of the concepts used in these theories. To compare and analyse, and certainly to attempt a synthesis (part 3), theories have to be written in some kind of common language first. The same is required for

testing the theories (part 2): without a common language, without a set of *translation rules*, it is impossible to compare theories to empirical results. However, in the social sciences, common languages are rare, especially when culture is concerned. Hence, conceptual analysis is necessary to construct a common language for comparison, testing and synthesis of the (theories of the) CED.

There are some additional arguments in favour of a conceptual analysis of the CED in general and the concept of "culture" in particular. These are (2) the existing conceptual contestation and confusion regarding the concept of "culture" (see §§ 1.1 and 1.2.1); (3) the importance of the CED in the origins and disciplinary divisions of social science (see §§ 1.1 and 1.2.2); and (4) the strong relationships between language and culture (see § 1.2.2).

1 / 2 / 1 / conceptual contestation and confusion

The abundance of theories and empirical studies on the CED has led to a growing conceptual contestation and confusion, which is not necessarily damaging to the productivity of a field or social science as a whole, but which is very damaging to its theoretical foundations and to inter-theoretical communication. Concepts are used differently in different fields and different theories, and 'the almost exclusive reliance by social scientists on the use of terms derived from ordinary language usages results in an extreme proliferation of the meanings in which the most commonly used words are employed, thus producing a polysemantic jumble which appears to defy all normalizing efforts' (Dahlberg 1978, p. 142). Hence, 'concept reconstruction is a highly needed therapy for the current state of chaos of most social sciences' (Sartori 1984b, p. 50).

In 1952 Kroeber and Kluckhohn reviewed 168 definitions of "culture". This was years before "culture" became a buzz-word and the number of definitions, operationalisations and interpretations exploded (see figure 1.1). By now the word can mean almost anything. The problem is nicely summarised by Bohannan (1973): 'We define culture by whatever purpose we ascribe to it in our theorizing, and are hence allowed to continue on our way without examining it' (p. 358). This in itself would not be an insurmountable problem if the concept would be relatively unambiguous within the CED at least, but unfortunately this is not the case. The CED can be split up in two parts: (1) the influence of culture on economic development; and (2) the influence of the economy on culture. Both parts have been prey to conceptual contestation and confusion as illustrated below.

The *locus classicus* for the first part, culture and economic development (see e.g. Fukuyama 2001 for a brief introduction), is Weber's (1905) study on the relationship between Protestantism and entrepreneurship. Dominating this part of the CED in the last decades of the 20th century was empirical research based on Hofstede's (1980) measurement of cultural differences in value orientations. Kockel's *Regional culture and economic development* (2002a), an example of economic anthropology or ethnology, on the other hand, more or less equates culture to informal economy. These three examples are all

part of the research effort and literature on 'culture and economic development'. Nevertheless, "culture" seems to mean religion in the first case, value orientations in the second and is an extremely broad concept including informal economy in the last case. Moreover, especially anthropologists and ethnologists tend to define "culture" so broadly that it also includes institutions, which would imply that, for example, the literature on the relationship between economic freedom and economic growth is part of the CED literature. (On the other hand, institutionalists sometimes define "institutions" that broadly that the concept includes culture.)

Research on the second part of the CED is strongly influenced by Marx's (1859) 'historical materialism', but while the part of historical materialism most elaborated and most emphasised by Marx himself only claimed that the mode of production (as a part of the institutional arrangement of the economy) in a society determines (to some extent) the legal and political institutions of that society, many of his followers have broadened historical materialism to include all possible influences of the economy on culture. In the last decades, researchers, some of them from a Marxist background, some not, have claimed, for example, that wealth influences individualism (*e.g.* Lewis 1955; Franke, Hofstede & Bond 1991), work-ethic (Bell 1974) and post-materialism (Harris 1973; Inglehart 1977). As was the case with culture and economic development we can see that both "culture" and "economy", although not all theories of the CED are phrased in these terms, are interpreted very differently by different theorists.

To make matters even worse, the conceptual confusion surrounding the CED is reinforced by the fact that some scholars refer to earlier and other research without considering the differences in interpretation and/or operationalisation of the key concepts used. By now we can safely conclude that the core concepts of the CED, "culture" and "economy", are used and misused as buzz-words covering almost everything. As scientific concepts this has made them nearly useless. This does not necessarily mean that the theories and empirical research using these concepts are useless or meaningless, but merely that meanings have to be established, analysed and compared more rigorously than has thus far been customary. The fact that the concepts of the CED are used differently by different theorists in different theoretical contexts makes translation rules necessary for meaningful communication, but also makes final definitions impossible. Part of the goal of this study, therefore, was to provide a common language and a set of translation rules to be able to compare different theories and empirical findings within a single conceptual framework.

1 / 2 / 2 / language, culture and social science

The third and fourth arguments for conceptual analysis of the CED (§ 1.2) were: (3) the importance of the CED in the origins and disciplinary divisions of social science; and (4) the strong relationships between language and culture. Both arguments will be dealt with in detail later, but a brief explanation may be useful here.

In the eighteenth century, two competing worldviews, Enlightenment and Counter-enlightenment (or Romanticism), the first associated with reason, universalism and "civilisation", the latter with passion, tradition and "culture", gave birth to both the CED and to the – by now widely accepted – disciplinary divisions in social science. Especially the division between economics and sociology (or between economic and cultural geography) is the product of these two different worldviews (more on this in § 3.2.2). A thorough (conceptual) analysis of the CED may reveal the rationale or lack thereof behind these disciplinary divisions.

The fourth and final argument for conceptual analysis is based on Winch's (and others') claim that studying culture itself is conceptual analysis (*e.g.* Winch 1958). "Culture" is sometimes defined as meaning (*e.g.* Geertz 1973; Hall 1995; see also § 4.3.4) and the conceptual categories a group of people uses to classify reality, may be the most defining characteristic of its culture. Winch (1964), for example, asserts that 'in any attempt to understand the life of another society, (...) the forms taken by such concepts – their role in the life of the society – must always take a central place and provide a basis on which understanding may be built' (p. 324; more fully quoted and explained in § 2.2.2). Investigating another culture implies analysing the meaning and social role of core concepts of/in that cultural group. (see also §§ 2.1.1 and 2.2.2) Hence, studying conceptual analysis as a method for (a.o.) analysis of the history and theoretical implications of the CED (see § 1.2), may also result in a methodology for studying the influence of conceptual categories, as manifestations of culture, on economic behaviour (and the other way around).

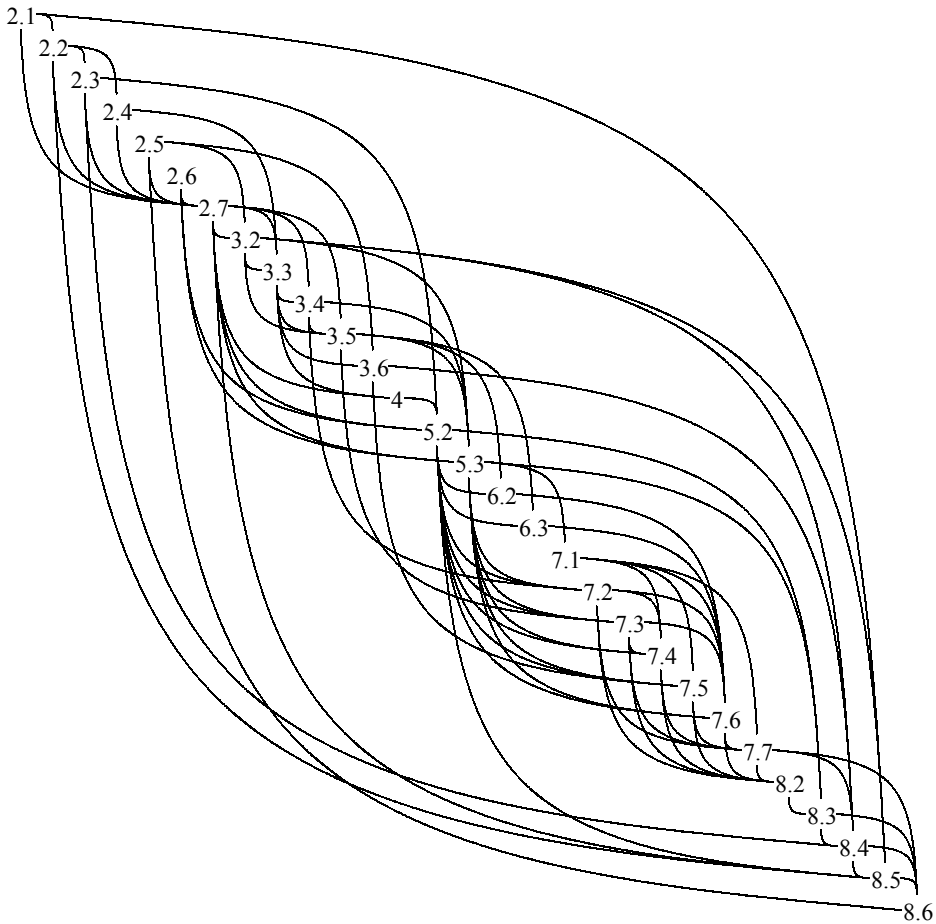
The fourth and ultimate part (or goal) of the research project is to investigate the value and implications of the CED for social science, more specifically: to determine the consequences of a (conceptually) cleaned up, integrated and – if possible – tested version of the CED for social science. This part of the research question is especially relevant to human geography as the CED is a relatively new conceptual framework in this discipline. CED-based thought took over from traditional geographic thought in terms of the man - environment dialectic only in the second half of the 20th century (also see above and §§ 3.6.2 and 8.4.1).

These implications may be of rather diverse natures. Most obvious, of course, are the implications for research on the CED itself, but as the CED is so strongly related to the disciplinary division and core concepts of social science itself, the implications may run deeper. If, for example, a thorough conceptual analysis of "culture" and "economy" does not result in a clear and objective demarcation between these concepts, this might be an argument for (inter-) disciplinary integration or a broader approach within (sub-)fields of social science at least. More practical implications may have to do with questions about (the possibility and methodology of) measurement of culture, economy and related categories, or, especially relevant to human geography, with the spatial scales of the CED.

1 / 3 / reading this book

Although the reader could, of course, choose to read only parts of this book and to read these parts in any possible order, there is a natural order in its contents. This is the order of the research project itself and the order in which the book was written. The structure of the book is illustrated in figure 1.2.

figure 1.2: *the structure of this book*



Lines represent main lines of thought on section level.

Purely introductory or summarising sections excluded; chapter 4 represented as a single section.

Chapter 2 describes the different approaches to conceptual analysis and concepts in philosophy, linguistics and a number of other scientific fields. The goal and final result (in § 2.7) of this chapter is an integrative methodology for conceptual analysis in social

science, grounded in the literature and applicable to the problem at hand. Chapters 3 to 5 apply the methodology developed in section 2.7 to (the concepts of) the culture - economy dialectic (CED). Chapters 3 and 4 focus on the historical development and different variants of the concepts and the dialectic itself, while chapter 5 is an attempt to (re-)construct a common language or a set of translation rules, based on the preceding chapters, for analysis and comparison of the theories of the CED. Chapter 6 attempts to operationalise and measure some of the categories in the framework proposed in chapter 5 for testing in chapter 7.

Chapter 7 evaluates and compares the theories of the CED with the help of the common language developed in chapter 5, with the ultimate goal of some kind of synthetic theory of *and* on the CED in chapter 8. Regarding the latter, chapter 7 will deal with some empirical test already published and add some new tests. It must be noted, however, that (this kind of) testing itself is not the main goal here and that, therefore, this will remain incomplete. Chapter 8, finally, deals with synthesis, with the evaluation of the implications thereof for geography and social science in general, and with some further theoretical considerations based on the findings of this study on the CED and social science.

1 / 3 / 1 / a note on reference

Whenever the historical context of theories or ideas is important, it is preferable to refer to the books in which these theories or ideas were formulated first by their original year of publication. When writing about Vico's *New science* for example it does not make sense to keep referring to it as Vico (1984), while the original publication in the first half of the 18th century is what matters. Applying the standard 'Vico (1984)' reference would therefore necessitate the addition of further dates, for example: Vico (1984[1725/44]). This however would result in very long references in the text. The most obvious alternative and the option chosen here, is to refer to books and articles by the date of their original publication. If there are (completely) revised later editions that had considerable impact, this second date is added. The before mentioned example of Vico's *New science* then will be referred to as Vico (1725/44) as 1725 is the year in which the first edition was published and 1744 is the date of the revised and more influential third edition. Unless noted otherwise it is always the latest edition, which is referred to. Letters are referred to by the year they are written. For example, Engels's letter to Joseph Bloch in Königsberg of September 21st, 1890 is referred to as Engels (1890). In the references at the end of the book the year of publication of the edition used, if different from the first mentioned year, is added after the name of the publisher. For example:

Vico, G. (1725/44), *The new science of Gianbattista Vico: unabridged translation of the third edition (1744) with the addition of "Practic of the New science"*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984

Quotations in this book are as close as possible to the original. English, German, French and Spanish quotes are given in the original language. Quotes in other languages are translated into English. Italics in quotes are copied. What is printed in *italics* here was printed in italics in the original. What is not printed in *italics* here was not in the original. Quotations from classical texts of which many editions are available refer to paragraph numbers (if available) rather than page numbers.

1 / 3 / 2 / symbols, formalisations and abbreviations

In some parts of this book formalisation is used to rigorously summarise theories or arguments presented in the text. These formulas are not part of the basic argumentative structure of the book, but are used as a tool to help comparison and synthesis of theories and arguments. Table 1.2 specifies set-theoretical, logical and special symbols that are not introduced in the text and are used throughout the book. All other symbols used are introduced, explained and (generally) defined in the sections where they are used first. (The symbols used in chapters 2 to 4 are introduced in chapter 2; the symbols used in chapters 6 to 8 are introduced in section 5.2 (mostly in box 5.1).)

table 1.2: *symbols used throughout the book*

$x \stackrel{\text{def.}}{=} y$	x is defined as y
$\{\dots\}$	set
$\langle \dots \rangle$	ordered set
\in	element
\subset	subset
\cup	union
\cap	intersection
$\forall x [\dots]$	all x such that ...
$\exists x [\dots]$	there is a (at least one) x such that ...
$\{ x \mid \dots \}$	the set of x such that ...
\wedge	and
\vee	or (inclusive)
$\neg x$	not x
$x \rightarrow y$	if x then y
$x \leftrightarrow y$	if and only if x then y (or vice versa)

Most of the formulas presented make some use of set-theoretical notions. (Most of the – relatively rare – logical formulas are based on sorted first order logics with identity.) Ordered sets are especially important in the first part of the book. The difference between 'normal' sets and ordered sets is that in the latter type a change in the order of elements

changes the set. For example, the set of numeric symbols $\{0,1,2,\dots,8,9\}$ is not dependent on the actual order of these numbers and is, therefore, not an ordered set. The most elementary form of an ordered set is an ordered pair. The variables in the relationship $x>y$, for example are an ordered set $\langle x,y \rangle$. As $x>y$ is different from $x<y$, $\langle x,y \rangle$ differs from $\langle y,x \rangle$. Ordered sets are used in this book mainly to formalise the ordered structure of 'things'. If it is assumed, for example, that all objects are essentially a combination of shape S and substance U, this could imply a definition: "object"_{def.} $\langle S,U \rangle$. The specific type of object "book" then could be defined something like: "book"_{def.} $\langle bound_sheets, paper \rangle$. Order is important in this example to represent internal structure in the definition of an object and its species (e.g. "book").

Two of the most basic symbols in set theory are \in denoting set membership and the subset symbol \subset . $x \in A$ means that x is an element of set A. For example, 1 is an element of the before mentioned set of numeric symbols. $A \subset B$ symbolizes that A is a subset of B. This means that all elements of A are also elements of B, but not necessarily the other way around. For example, $\{1,2,3\}$ is a subset of the set of numeric symbols. The symbols \cup and \cap represent the set-theoretical operations of union and intersection respectively. The union of two sets is the set of all elements that are in at least one of these sets; the intersection is the set of all elements that are in both. For example, $\{a,b\} \cup \{b,c\} = \{a,b,c\}$ and $\{a,b\} \cap \{b,c\} = \{b\}$.

The other symbols presented in table 1.2 are logical symbols. The symbol \forall is the *universal quantifier*. It is used in logical formulas to introduce variables. For example, the formula $\forall x[Bx]$ should be read as 'all x-s are B'. \exists is the *existential quantifier*. Its use and meaning are similar to that of \forall : $\exists x[Bx]$ means 'there is a (at least one) x that is B'. The notation $\{x|\dots\}$ is superficially somewhat similar to quantifiers, but it is used to specify the *conditions for set membership* rather than for introducing variables. (It may, however, be used to introduce a set.) For example, $\{x|Ax\}$ is the set of all things that are A.

\wedge and \vee mean 'and' and 'or' respectively. Hence, $\forall x[Bx \vee Cx]$ means: 'all x-s are B or C or both' and $\exists x[Bx \wedge Cx]$ means that there is at least one x that is both B and C. The symbol \neg is used for *negation*. $\forall x[\neg Bx]$ then means that all x-s are not B. \rightarrow and \leftrightarrow are used to symbolize logical implication. For example: $\forall x[Bx \rightarrow Cx]$ is the symbolic equivalent of 'for all x-s, if these are B, then they are C', or shorter: 'all x-s that are B are C'. The difference between \rightarrow , the *conditional*, and \leftrightarrow , the *biconditional*, can be interpreted as a difference in the 'direction' of the implication. $\forall x[Bx \rightarrow Cx]$ implies that all things that are B are also C, but not vice versa. Hence, things can be C without being B. On the other hand, in case of $\forall x[Bx \leftrightarrow Cx]$, all things B are C and the other way around, which may make B and C more or less equivalent. In normal language statements on logical implication, the biconditional "if and only if" is often abbreviated "iff".

Formulas are numbered by chapter and coded T for theories and hypotheses or D for definitions. **D2.3** is the third formal definition in chapter 2. However, the number of some formal definitions and/or theories is marked by an asterisk: **D2.4***. The asterisk means that

this formalisation is *not* the final version of the definition (or the final formalisation of that theory). It will be adapted (or refuted) later in the text. If a number of a formula is indexed R it is repeated.

Double quotation marks ("...") are used only to refer to concepts only. Hence "culture" refers to the concept of "culture", not to the phenomenon of culture. In all other cases single quotation marks ('...') are used.

Throughout this book recurring terms are often abbreviated. These abbreviations are mentioned in the text. The "culture - economy dialectic" is generally abbreviated CED. Most other abbreviations are only used in a single chapter or (sub-) section (such as CA for "conceptual analysis" in chapter 2) and are introduced in these chapters or (sub-) sections.

