Rural futures

Inclusive rural development in times of urbanisation

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Esteemed Rector Magnificus, dear colleagues, family, and friends

Urbanisation has a long history. Some scientists refer to the middle ages as the start of city life in Europe; others consider urbanisation to coincide with the start of industrialisation. So urbanisation as such is nothing new. What is new, is the speed and scale in which cities enlarge today, absorbing other towns and villages, and expanding into metropolitan areas. This process is generally perceived as a sign of modernisation and development – and welcomed and encouraged by policymakers, who expect the prosperous cities to push development in the country as a whole. At the same time, there is growing concern about the ability of cities to accommodate the increasing population and to respond to their needs inclusively and sustainably. There is also fear that unceasing urbanisation will concur with the decline, depopulation, and desertification of rural areas.

Compromising rural vitality impairs the quality of life of rural residents. However, in the longer run, it will affect all of us - as the fulfilment of various human needs depends on rural areas; for food, energy, housing, and recreation but also fundamental needs as fresh air and clean water. More insight into the interrelation between urbanisation and rural development and the preconditions for realising sustainable societies is, hence, important. In the following, I will give a concise overview of current research, discuss what we already know, and identify significant gaps in knowledge and theoretical understanding. I will pass from there to my ambition to conceptualise rural development relationally and present my plans for research.

The current state of research

The question of how urbanisation affects our way of life and, with it, the functioning of our societies, has been an essential question for sociologists for centuries. While the early sociologists tended to look into modernisation and its effects on society at large, Georg Simmel focused on urbanisation. Already in 1903, he expected

a fundamental change in our personality and lifestyle due to the spatial concentration of large numbers of residents (Simmel, 2012: 11). This "*intensification of emotional life*" produced in his view a distanced, blasé attitude, intellectualism and individualism – to be distinguished from the mental life in rural areas "*which rests more on feelings and emotional relationships (…) due to the slower, more habitual, more smoothly flowing rhythm of (…) small towns and rural existence*" (ibid: 12). [1]

Simmel considered the rural and urban as separate spaces with clearly distinguishable material characteristics and different cultures. This separateness of the urban and rural is highly questioned today. In part, this may be explained by the fact that rural and urban populations have become more intermingled with "*increasing interdependence and interpenetration of space*" (Brown & Shucksmith 2017: 4). Cities have expanded, urban and rural residents' mobility has increased, and modern infrastructure literally bridges rural and urban life (a.o. Kooi 2003). [2] Besides, there is more acknowledgement of the sociocultural construction of rurality and urbanity; not geography but social practices and the lived experience of residents, define the identity of places (Macnaghten & Urry 1998; Cloke & Little 1997). Some scientists argue that we should, therefore, let go of the distinction between rural and urban altogether. I will leave this question for some other time. For now, I want to argue that urbanisation significantly affects the configuration of social relations in society at large and with it, the relation between those areas that we usually identify as rural and urban. Generally speaking, we can see today that cities do not only grow in size but also become more powerful. The status of rural areas is, for example, increasingly being defined by the urban needs they serve. In the European context, this has been discussed as a shift from a countryside of production to a countryside of consumption (Marsden 1999) with housing and recreation opportunities for urban dwellers becoming the primary purpose of rural areas – instead of the production of food.

[1] *It is interesting to see that Hartmut Rosa (2018; Rosa & Henning 2018) refers to Simmel's metropolitan personality as the first sign of the alienation that characterises modern life today, that he views as the result of contemporary society's ongoing pursuit for growth, acceleration and innovation. Following Rosa, it erodes the basis for a good life which requires us to connect with others and to be emotionally engaged. Rosa argues at the level of society at large and uses Simmel's distinction of rural and urban lifestyles as a representation of good and bad lives, rooted in resonance or alienation.*

[2] *Connectivity has been crucial for urbanisation in the Netherlands and access to different types of infrastructure has played a decisive role in the growth of cities; proximity to big rivers and estuaries was crucial in the middle ages. In the 19th century, it was access to the railway system which decided the destiny of cities, followed by the connection to roads with the growing importance of automobility in the 20th century (Abrahamse & Rutten 2011).*

Looking at this distinction now, we may wonder if the rising need for sustainable energy may reverse this trend with many rural areas becoming again areas of production. More generally, we know now that it is more accurate to speak of a process of rural differentiation (Murdoch et al. 2003). Rural areas are developing in divergent directions and increasingly vary in terms of their economies, populations, and identities. Some areas are prosperous whereas others marginalised.

Their physical and networked relationship with urban regions plays an essential role in this context. Research has shown that spatial location and urban vicinity affect development opportunities of rural areas and with it the quality of life of their residents. In general, rural areas 'in reach' of the bigger cities tend to prosper as the inflow of urban residents and tourists strengthens the local economy and, with, it the cost efficiency of public and private services (see Halfacree 2012 for the global North and Beauchemin 2011 for the global South). Such rural areas include peri-urban areas that are well connected and within commuting distance to cities.

However, also more remotely located rural areas may be 'in reach' (Woods & Heley 2017), for instance through the vicinity of highways, (international) airports, and the presence of high-speed internet networks. At the same time, real and potential interests of urban dwellers encourage investment in such infrastructure to facilitate travel to and from the metropolitan areas and with it close socio-economic relations. Furthermore, the perceived beauty of the rural regions is an essential factor encouraging urbanites to visit and move to specific rural areas, for instance upon retirement (Brown & Glasgow 2008). These rural areas are often gentrifying, and are, as it were, included in the urban lifeworld – even if located at a considerable geographical distance.

The situation is different for rural areas that are 'out of reach' and either cut off from infrastructure or considered to be far away and unattractive. Identifying a region as 'out of reach' or 'peripheral', hence, also reflects indifference to connect to this region. Many of those areas experience depopulation and run the risk of continuous decline in living conditions. The current wave of rural outmigration may be explained in different ways. The attraction of the rural youth exerted by the city seems to be universal. They move to the city for higher education, a successful career, and fun and adventure in the vicinity of likeminded others. Some, in particular girls, search to escape from the high levels of social control in rural communities and expect to find more liberty and independence in the anonymity of bigger cities (Rahaut & Littke 2016). In the global South it is also poverty and famine caused by climate change, natural disasters, and political unrest which may push people to leave home and move – to other rural areas as well as to cities, and across borders (for a critical discussion see Flahaux & De Haas 2016). In the global North, it is often

unemployment and lack of public and private services which motivate people to move into urban areas (Kühn 2015; Bock, Osti & Ventura 2016). However, also where depopulation is the dominant trend, there are people who stay; some because they are unable to move; others because they are attached to the place and the local community, and enjoy living outside the bustle of the city and close to nature (Stockdale & Haartsen 2018). There is also evidence of a 'return to the land' (Wilbur 2014); in particular in Southern Europe urban youth seem to leave the cities and to redevelop deserted villages and farms (Gkartzios 2013).

A similar trend may be witnessed in Japan. Depopulation and decline are, hence, not omnipresent features of rural areas. What is experienced as remote differs, moreover, between countries, regions and social groups; and is influenced, among others, by the availability and affordability of infrastructure. It may also change, as the resources a place has to offer may gain and lose value.

Larger processes of societal change play an important role here. Among the latter, the globalisation and mobilisation of our society are significant developments that amend some of the traditional disadvantages geography poses. Also, rural areas are nowadays embedded in global networks of relations (Woods 2007), and many rural residents travel extensively for work, education and leisure and move in between rural and urban areas (Bock, Osti & Ventura 2016; Bell & Osti 2010).

The improvement of material and digital infrastructure has played an essential role in this and has produced a more intensively connected and networked society (Castells 2000). In other words - geography still matters but not straightforwardly anymore (OECD 2014). The situation in the Netherlands may serve as an illustration here. All five Dutch 'shrinking areas' include urban centres and are located at a distance of max 300 km from the central metropolitan area. Nevertheless, they are perceived as peripheral and out of reach for those who aspire to an urban lifestyle. Some of these areas include an important city with institutes of higher education that attract newcomers from beyond the region and the national borders (e.g. Groningen and Maastricht) – however, generally only temporarily. These cities have, therefore, been described as 'escalator cities' – they are just a stepping stone or stopover, and not the final destination of the students on their way to the metropole (Latten, Das & Chkalova 2008).

Policy plays an important role as well, impacting on the presence and value of local resources, reflecting the appreciation of places and affecting either their development or their marginalisation. Current research, therefore, argues that development and marginalisation are also resulting from political decisions (Amin, Massey & Thrift 2003; Hadijmichalis & Hudson 2014). An example of this is the inability of policymakers in Europe to organise the accessibility of high-speed internet in rural

areas (Salemink, Strijker & Bosworth 2016). The design of infrastructure for transport, which furthers the connection of some and allows for the disconnection of other regions, presents another example of the political co-construction of remoteness (Naumann & Reichert-Schick 2013; Tordoir, Poorthuis & Rennoy 2015). Besides, policies often unintendedly impact rural areas (Shortall and Alston 2016). Recent development in health care regulation in the Netherlands provide an exemplary case – the mandatory presence of ten specialists in internal medicine threatens to result in the closure of the Intensive Care Units of regional hospitals; here the intention to assure high-quality health care risks seriously impairing the accessibility of health care for citizens in the periphery. At the same time, it reflects policymaker's tendency to design national policies tailored to the metropolitan context without taking into account how they might fit or not fit the situation in other parts of the country.

It also underlines the dynamic character of rural development – the destiny of rural areas is not given and changes in time. To give just one more example - the establishment of an airport for low-cost carriers lead to an enormous push of the development of the Dordogne as it encouraged UK citizens to buy second houses, for weekends or holidays or to move to upon retirement in search of '*la vie en rose*' in France (Ferbrache 2011). More recently, the looming doom of Brexit and the loss of free mobility within Europe have reinforced this '*escape to the continent*'. It has led to a considerable increase of British immigrants in rural France and a rise in house prices. How and why rural development unfolds, has been captured in various theoretical approaches to which I will turn now.

Shifting theories of rural development

Rural development has been an important area of research for a long time, with shifting issues and approaches dominating the agenda (Bosworth *et al*. 2015; van der Ploeg & Long 1994; Leeuwis 2000). Until the seventies, ideas of top-down, exogenous development were most popular with state and science playing an essential role in modernising agriculture and rural society. Professor Hofstee, the first professor for rural sociology at Wageningen University was a highly respected representative of this approach (Lowe 2010). Although his ideas may seem outdated today Professor Hofstee was an engaged scientist who considered it the task of rural sociology to contribute to the welfare of the rural population through empiric research. His goal was "*to enlighten the minds of citizens in general, and those who are in power in particular, even if these people do not like that (..) so that the future society may develop without too much suffering, violence and injustice*" (Hofstee 1968: 252).[3]

The start of the eighties witnessed a shift in perspective with endogenous, bottom-up and participatory development remaining the dominant paradigm ever since (Bosworth *et al*. 2015). Again a professor from Wageningen, Professor van der Ploeg played a central role in elaborating and promoting this approach, in science as well as policy, in Europe and beyond. Development is now seen as "*born from within*"-rooted in local resources and local knowledge. Ideally, each territory should develop in its own way, with diversity cherished and encouraged (van der Ploeg & Long 1994). Inclusivity constitutes an essential element of the endogenous approach and is seen as a prerequisite of sustainable development. The general idea is that inclusivity is produced through the right of residents to define their own development goals and their engagement in realising these goals. Here inclusivity includes notions of autonomy and empowerment. Both are generally perceived as positive, as liberation from dependency and domination (Chambers 1994; Long & Long 1992).

Lots of research, however, challenges the success story of endogenous development, regarding its inclusivity as well as its contribution to development. It demonstrates that ideas of participation and community development are often problematic as they ignore the existence of unequal power relations between and within rural communities, and the exclusion of social groups on the basis of among others gender, income, age, and ethnicity (Shortall 2008; Shortall & Bock 2015; Derkzen, Bock & Franklin 2008; Asztalos Morell, Greenfield & Smith 2018). Other research challenges the empowering nature of the turn towards participation and self-governance of rural areas and points at the withdrawing state as abandoning the rural regions (Bock 2019; Ubels, Bock & Haartsen forthcoming; Derkzen & Bock 2009; Cheshire, Higgins & Lawrence 2007). Such research does not dispute the relevance of inclusivity or local engagement, quite the contrary; it does, however, unveil the difficulty of realising inclusive rural development and the necessity to acknowledge and transform power relations within rural areas and in society at large. It also calls for a more in-depth engagement with the concept of inclusivity, to which I will come back later.

[3] *Already in 1960 Hofstee expressed his concern about how growing urbanisation affected the welfare of the rural population. He also stressed that it was important to "look at society as a whole to understand the conditions of agriculture and rural life" (1960: 241) and, hence, to consider rural development as a macro-sociological problem and not only study agriculture's "petty problems in their local setting". He criticised the American rural sociology which in its view engaged in "adjustment sociology" through its focus on the attitude and behaviour of individuals.*

Research demonstrated, moreover, that endogenous forces are often not enough to nurture development (Bock 2016b; Shucksmith 2010; Bosworth *et al*. 2015), especially in rural areas with few resources of their own, or which have lost access to resources as a result of developments outside of their control. The closure of public and private services, such as education, healthcare and transport impairs the vitality of rural areas and weakens their citizens' capacity to act (Carrosio 2016).

Their maintenance, however, importantly depends on the decisions of national governments regarding regulation and financial management, and their loyalty to principles of territorial solidarity. Today many European governments are reconsidering the promise of equivalent living conditions and refer to cost efficiency as the organising principle, also for public services (Wirth *et al*. 2016). At the same time, we see the state renouncing political responsibility and withdrawing support while emphasising the success of civic engagement and the promise of new partnerships between community organisations, businesses, and third sector organisations. Altogether this transforms the system of rural governance from state-led to community-led and from a public (governmental) responsibility to a private (civic) duty (Bock 2019). It also results in a diverse landscape of service provision depending on the capability of citizens to organise civic engagement, to establish and maintain new partnerships and to negotiate service provision with neighbouring communities.

It will not be surprising that this is a challenging development which significantly defines the context of rural development. The apparent role of national policy reflected in it, nuances the importance of geographical location and questions the assumption of development as being territorially and endogenously produced (Massey 2004; Jones 2009; Cresswell 2004). Instead, we see that development is the result of collaboration and competition across territories, and emerging from a shifting network of power relations (Brown & Shucksmith 2017). Which position one holds within this network is not fixed or stable but in a continuous process of becoming.

Towards a relational sociology of rural development

Starting from a relational and dynamic understanding of development is vital in my view if we want to get insights in how urbanisation affects rural areas and understand why some areas flourish while others marginalised (Harrison & Heley 2015). It may allow us to overcome the dilemma that in particular those areas experience from which population is drawn away to the metropoles and which see their resource base deteriorate while being summoned to develop themselves. Instead of dealing with urban and rural development separately it enables us to

conceptualise and understand its co-creation and co-emergence, and the politics of that process.

Peripheralisation theory (Kühn 2015) is an upcoming framework that has been a source of inspiration for me and helpful in thinking about rural development relationally. This theory seeks to explain how rural areas may change status and become defined as peripheral, even when they have previously been seen as highly successful and of central significance. It is based on research into rural development in Eastern Germany, and studies of declining industrial areas in the North West of the country. Theoretically, it is rooted in critical human geography with frequent references made to Wallerstein (2013), Amin and Massey (e.g. with Thrift 2003) and their critique of development and ideas of spatial injustice (Fischer-Tahir & Neumann 2013; Kühn 2015). In their view territorial marginalisation is not caused by geographical remoteness, an inherent weakness or incapacity to develop; instead, it is assigned as a result of unequal power relations and uneven distribution of resources between areas and places (Kühn & Weck 2013). It is a promising approach for my research because it puts the dynamic of relational development at the very heart of its argument. It allows us to study peripheralisation as part of a process of urbanisation in which certain areas are 'left behind' as peripheral and others are being included in the centre of modern, metropolitan life.

There is, however, need to develop this theory further. First of all, it needs elaboration of its relation with processes of social in- and exclusion. As announced above, this requires an updated conceptualisation of inclusivity.

Current theory points at the interrelatedness of social markers of differentiation such as gender, age, race/ethnicity, sexual orientation and religion, and stresses the importance to consider their intersection in the production of inequality (Satsangi & Gkartzios 2019). It underlines fluid and non-dualistic notions of identity and questions the binary way in which the interests of social groups are distinguished (e.g. women versus men) that often includes normative and static ideas of what their interests are considered to be (Doan 2011). It is, for instance, reflected in the tendency to accommodate gender in rural development by offering training in agritourism to women, which trivialises the issue of gender inequality and prevents serious engagement in realising inclusiveness (Bock 2015). Instead, we need a critical analysis of rural governance and planning concerning participation, responsiveness as well as reproduction, celebration and transformation of rural identities (Doan 2011; Bock 2019). Or in other words, inclusivity of rural development requires a critical approach to preconceptions of what the rural is and how it should develop, as well as a critical view on which rural residents and needs are acknowledged and which are not.

Here we may, for instance, think of the fact that migrants are generally not considered in rural development plans although their presence is ever increasing (Bock, Osti & Ventura 2016).

Secondly, peripheralisation theory needs more room for human action. So far, it focuses on the structural features of development with limited consideration of how life in the periphery is experienced by its dwellers, and the meaning they attach to it. As a result, there is little interest in agency and the co-production and contestation of peripheralisation. Recent research by Willett and Lang (2017) offers an exciting entry-point by analysing how objects, ideas and discourses that co-constitute the periphery, affect and resonate with people and instigate action. It points to the importance of feelings of belonging which may nurture or inhibit attachment and engagement at the level of the individual and groups. It concurs with Wacquant's (2008) research among residents of urban ghettos who feel tainted by living in a stigmatised place and compelled to leave to rescue themselves.

Looking into the experience of living in the periphery is crucial as it helps us to understand if, and when people engage in local development, what induces affection and feelings of responsibility and care, what supports their capability and imagination; and how the emergence thereof differs across groups and places (see also Hambleton 2014; Ubels, Bock & Haartsen forthcoming). The ideas of Willett and Lang (2017) link up with Woods' (2015) theory of places as assemblages of material and expressive components. He refers, for instance, to animals, and specific landscapes which feed the idea of the rural idyll. Territories which lack those elements may be perceived as less idyllic, and less worthy of investments. The threat of losing such elements may encourage engagement and collective action.
The opposite may also be true - without love and pride for the place of residence, engagement and action may be discouraged. It points at the importance to acknowledge the value of rural areas, not only within the region and among its residents, but also society at large.

This is something close to my heart, and of which I am increasingly convinced the more I engage with the discussion around the so-called shrinking areas in the Netherlands. Even though it is pertinent to appoint the risk of spatial inequality and segregation we need to be careful not to unintendedly contribute to the stigmatisation of these areas. Peripheralisation theory underlines the disadvantaged position of areas that lack important assets and from which resources are withdrawn, and whose residents feel denigrated and abandoned. That is important. Nevertheless, we should also communicate that these areas constitute value - even if that value is difficult to materialise economically. In my view, its value includes the beauty of

cultural heritage and landscapes next to alternative ways to organise social life.

In many peripheral areas struggling with depopulation and the loss of services, citizens develop alternative ways to ensure the livability of rural life (During *et al*. 2018; Bock 2016b; Bosworth *et al*. 2016). Such initiatives entail trouble and disappointment, but are at the same time rewarding, fulfilling and meaningful through the creation of community bonds, and the experience of self-efficacy in the ability to take care of others; in doing so, they regenerate a proud sense of self and belonging (Hollstein 2018; White 2018). They display what Hartmut Rosa (2018) appoints as crucial elements of de-alienation and "*the good life*", that resonates through creativity, affection, and engagement.[4]

The space for civic engagement and the creation of novel ways to organise social life differently are also among the valuables of the periphery. They give proof that things can be done differently with more satisfactory results, if we step outside the dominant frame of growth and efficiency, and envision a desirable future for rural areas (Wright 2013; Hajer 2017; Shucksmith 2018).

Research agenda

My objective with this chair is to understand better how rural development proceeds over time and in interaction with urbanisation. Further development of a relational theory of development will contribute to this in my view as it allows us to articulate the interaction between areas and interdependence of status positions 'here and there', as well as the interrelation with processes of social in- and exclusion.

[4] *Rosa (2018: 51) criticises modern society which in his view undermines the preconditions for a good life through "its pervasive logic of competition" produced in a context of growth, efficiency and acceleration. The situation is entirely different in the peripheral regions, which are struggling with the absence of growth, the loss of population and employment, and in the ability to sustain cost-efficient services. This context of "shrinkage" stimulates not only collective engagement in initiatives that maintain services in an alternative way but also a critique of the predominant ideology of growth and the development of a novel, transformative approach (a.o. Reverda 2018; Hermans 2016). Or in other words – depopulation does not result in emptiness; it also offers room for social innovation and improvement (Bock 2016a).*

Relational sociology offers the conceptual tools to move beyond a territorially defined perspective and to consider any relevant space of social interaction (Crossley 2015). It is in the network of interactions – the social space – that status positions are defined. These include supposedly individual attributes as gender, ethnicity and class but also seemingly territorial identities such as developed or marginal and the framing of spatial relationships as centre and periphery, metropolis and 'hinterland' (Faludi 2013; Heley & Jones 2012). "*It is a matter of locating people* [and places] *on a social map*" (Crossley 2015: 8; my addition in brackets).

From this, it is only a small step to argue that the identities of people and places interact and inform each other. It enables us to understand how the processes of territorial and social development interlock in the co-production of territorial and social in- and exclusion (Bock, Kovacs & Shucksmith 2015; Spoor 2013). Adopting the terminology of relational sociology we may consider accelerated urbanisation as a novel type of centralisation – of citizens, preferred lifestyles and prioritised public spending which results in the construction of the metropolis as the most important node in the global network and the definition of the others as peripheral (Harrison & Heley 2015). Exclusion from highly respected networks of interaction contributes to the low-status position of the place, and limits their residents' access to resources shared in those networks. Next to material practices, such as the closure of facilities, discursive practices that stigmatise areas and their residents as 'underdeveloped' play an essential role for the life chances of residents in peripheral places next (Bürk 2013).

Many relational sociologists are primarily interested in networks (Prandini 2015) and in my view risk to forget about people. Crossley offers some leeway here through the consideration of human actors as co-creators of relations and interactions. At the same time, he acknowledges the effect of interactions and networks in which the actors are involved and which "*can transform the way in which they act, feel and think*" (Crossley 2011: 30). He considers it therefore essential to understand the stories through which we build relationships and which influence our feelings about them.

In the context of rural development, it is crucial to understand daily life in the periphery and to grasp how this experience translates in affection, attachment and engagement, or the contrary – disinterest, detachment and disengagement. We need to comprehend when, how and why engagement occurs as it may open pathways towards de-peripheralisation. It is particularly important given the changing political landscape and the individualisation of responsibility for regional affairs discussed before. My goal is to improve our understanding of how and why such shifts in rural governance contribute to further decline in some areas and allow for regeneration

elsewhere. Existing research indicates that resisting stigmatisation and rebuilding a sense of autonomy and solidarity as well as pride and affection are essential mechanisms in this regard (Gibson Graham & Roelvink 2013; Skerrat 2017).

Based on the above, I have formulated four research questions as guidelines for research during the coming years.

1. What drives the processes of rural development in times of urbanisation, what are its main features and agents, and how does it interact with processes of social and territorial exclusion?
2. Which new insights do we gain when conceptualising and explaining this process relationally, and in terms of centralisation and peripheralisation?
3. What counteracts peripheralisation and how can we use these insights to promote processes of inclusive rural development?
4. How, to what extent, and under which circumstances do local initiatives support inclusive rural development?

Currently, I am engaged in a number of projects which will allow me to investigate these questions in collaboration with colleagues across Europe and Japan. For reasons of time, I will not discuss them all in detail and only briefly present some of them.

For what concerns the first two questions, my participation in the HORIZON2020 project IMAJINE (http://imajine-project.eu/), led by professor Woods from Aberystwyth University is most relevant. The project is placed at Groningen University and seeks to address the increasing territorial inequalities in Europe. Professor Haartsen, Professor Strijker, Dr Ulceluse and I are focusing on the role of mobility and migration in the construction of social and territorial inequality with particular attention for domestic relocations and international labour migration. The second and fourth question is addressed by the two PhDs that I am so fortunate to co-supervise in the Marie Curie project SUSPLACE (https://www. sustainableplaceshaping.net/), coordinated by my colleagues Dr Roep and Professor Horlings. Angela Morrigi studies the role of care and empathy in place-based development. Marta Nieto Romero looks into the role the common ownership and governance of natural resources can play in institutionalising common engagement and strengthening community resilience.

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[5] https://www.iss.nl/en/research/research-projects/well-being-ecology-gender-and-community

The third question is at the core of the HORIZON2020 project ROBUST (https://rural-urban.eu/), coordinated by Professor Wiskerke which focuses on rural-urban relationships and the opportunities to foster mutually beneficial forms of collaboration and development. Question 4 is dealt with in the work package on community development that the Wageningen team is leading within a Marie Curie network coordinated by Professor Harcourt from ISS[5] and the PhD project of Nanako Nakamura which I co-supervise with Dr Sato. It is also at the core of the project into village initiatives that Roel During from WeCR manages and in which I am participating (During *et al*. 2018).

Thanks

I am now arriving at the part which probably caused me the most headache – how to thank the many people who have contributed to me standing here today.

Arthur Mol once said – science is teamwork; well, so are careers. It is the collaboration with, and support of, bosses, colleagues, friends, and family, which allowed me to develop my capabilities and to spread out my wings. Many of you here present today have assisted me, and I gladly use this opportunity to express my gratitude to you.

I want to start by thanking Wageningen University. Being a student at this university has been important for my professional and personal development and allowed me to make friends for life. I am glad and proud to be a professor here and grateful to the Board of Wageningen University for my appointment.

I want to thank the many people I worked with throughout Wageningen– from the basement to the top of the Leeuwenborch and across the campus - in research projects, classes and committees, the management development group and the Giddens reading circle – to mention just a few. It is impossible to refer to all of you individually. I also want to thank my students and PhDs. As teachers, we sometimes complain about teaching and, to be honest, I have ambivalent feelings about the start of the first year sociology course next week. Overall, however, I enjoy teaching. Moreover, teaching and supervising you have often been inspirational and insightful for me.

There are some persons I do want to thank individually, Jan Douwe van der Ploeg who invited me to return to Wageningen and to do my PhD; Han Wiskerke who always supported and facilitated my professional development, even if it lead me elsewhere. I want to thank all my RSO colleagues. I consider myself lucky to work in

a group such as ours that collaborates in friendship and mutual respect. A special word of thanks also to Jessica Duncan and Peter Oosterveer for the many valuable comments when reading a draft of my speech.

As most of you know, I also work at Groningen University. I want to thank my colleagues from cultural geography and the KKNN and in particular Frank Vanclay, Dirk Strijker, Tialda Haartsen and Elly van der Klauw for our joyful collaboration. I am also grateful for the collaboration with policymakers across the country and in particular the province of Groningen, Frisia, and Drenthe that is a result of my appointment in Groningen. It is so inspiring to share forces across science, policy, and practice.

And finally, friends and family. I am very touched and very happy that so many of you are here today. I thank you for your friendship and look forward to celebrating together. I thank my brother, niece, sister and brother in law present here today, and those who could not make it or who are watching from above as my eldest sister would have said. And last but not least, my wonderful daughters, Sophie and Lucia – who without a doubt are my most precious gift in life. Thank you for sharing my life in so many ways.

Ik heb gezegd.

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Prof.dr Bettina B. Bock

'Accelerated urbanisation affects the future of rural areas. Some are included in the urban lifeworld as desired places of (temporary) residence; others experience continuous population decline in tandem with the loss of employment and social services. Professor Bock argues for the development of a relational perspective that focuses on the dynamics of changing relations between urban and rural areas. She also calls attention to the role of policy and the political dimension of the construction of 'peripheral' areas.'