

# Preface

This *festschrift* honours our friend, colleague, and teacher, Norman Long. It is fed by the intellectual and professional journeys of fellow professors at Wageningen University, staff members of the Sociology of Rural Development Group, and by a selection of professor Long's former PhD students now turned practitioners. This assortment of contributors has combined solid academic analysis and commentary, and sympathising critique with expressions of gratitude and affection in this tribute to an extraordinary scholar. In their own, idiosyncratic way, these colleagues add to the legacy of Norman Long's work, and engage explicitly with the cornerstones of his actor-oriented approach: actors, networks, and cultural repertoires.

When Norman Long arrived in Wageningen in 1981, he brought with him British academic culture. With erudition and scholarship, he engaged in debates on the paradigmatic dimensions of development theory and practice which, at that time, were dominated by modernisation perspectives and neo-Marxist approaches. Continuing along the path set out in his well-known *Introduction to the Sociology of Rural Development* (1977), Long enthusiastically developed his biting critique of the inadequate theoretical assumptions and methodological choices of modernists and neo-Marxists. As one of the last *Mohicans* of the famous Manchester School established during the 1940s, Norman Long introduced to The Netherlands a rigorous ethnographic method to the study of development processes, thus providing himself with a context to elaborate his own ideas and perspectives. Academics and practitioners from all over the world were invited to Wageningen as guest lecturers to participate with staff and students in advanced research seminars and to sharpen the intricacies of theoretical perspectives.

As with all good science, the impact of professor Long's Wageningen years took a while to leave its imprint, but after the publication of two seminal books - *Encounters at the Interface* (1989) and *Battlefields of Knowledge* (1992, edited with Ann Long) - the potential of his actor-oriented approach became evident, and a record number of PhD students flocked to his department. Long's fame, supported by the publication of 12 books and nearly 80 academic articles (some of them published in other languages), has paved the way for the construction of what is internationally known as the 'Wageningen School of Development Sociology' - one of the blue chips of Wageningen University.

Hand in hand with the success of Norman Long's intellectual output was the internationalisation of the Sociology of Rural Development Group. The establishment of long lasting co-operative programmes in different countries (Mexico, Zimbabwe, Peru, China) fitted well with Wageningen University's strategy of to spread its wings beyond The Netherlands and Europe.

The enthusiasm, vigour and engagement so distinctive of Long's personality demanded their toll in late 1999 when he fell seriously ill. But Long would not

be Long if he would have lost that battle. He recovered well and managed, just before his formal retirement, to add a new landmark to the field of Development Studies through the publication of *Development Sociology. Actor perspectives* (2001).

The editors wish to extend their thanks to the people who co-operated in making this festschrift possible. We are grateful for their timeliness and see it as an honour that they trusted us to see this lively book to its completion. We also wish to extend our gratitude to Dan Tuffy for correcting the English in what was surely a race against the clock, and to Lothar Smith for revising the chapter by Fajardo.

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