From ‘spaces of hope’ to ‘networks of hope’:  
How globalisation gives rise to grassroots economies and new foundations of local wealth creation

IN AUGURAL SPEECH BY PROF DR A. LAGENDIJK

Radboud University Nijmegen
Where do we find the laboratories for future wealth creation? How do we shape new, inclusive forms of working and earning so needed in times of recession? In his inaugural lecture as Professor of Economic Geography, Arnoud Lagendijk explores the options for urban and regional communities to nurture innovative activities. He introduces three examples: Slow Food, homeless street papers and the development of high-tech campuses. Although very different in nature, these cases show that an important source of innovation consists of the embedding of local activities in 'learning' networks spanning the globe. These networks have a double effect. They provide the necessary exchange of ideas and resources. But they also determine, to a large extent, basic ideas, trends and directions. Each networks has ‘nodal points’ – powerful organizations, knowledge resources, gurus protocols – which exert a major impact on the shaping and diffusion of ideas and practices. Consequently, the impact of grassroots activities is dependent on societal debates on the meaning and substance of issues such as ‘innovation’, ‘entrepreneurship’ and ‘global solidarity’. In his speech, Lagendijk will present a research agenda exploring these issues.

From 1 October 2012 onwards, Arnoud Lagendijk has been working as a Professor of Economic Geography at the Radboud University Nijmegen. Lagendijk studied human geography at Utrecht University and received a PhD from the Erasmus University Rotterdam. Since 1998 he has been associated with Radboud University Nijmegen, where he has been working on a wide range of projects dealing with regional development and policy, and the global proliferation of innovative practices such as Slow Food, clusters and micro-credit. Over the last five years, Lagendijk has been Editor of Regional Studies, one of the leading journals in the field.
FROM ‘SPACES OF HOPE’ TO ‘NETWORKS OF HOPE’:
HOW GLOBALISATION GIVES RISE TO GRASSROOTS ECONOMIES
AND NEW FOUNDATIONS OF LOCAL WEALTH CREATION
From ‘spaces of hope’ to ‘networks of hope’:
How globalisation gives rise to grassroots economies
and new foundations of local wealth creation

Inaugural speech delivered (in a shortened version) at the acceptance of the post
of Professor of Economic geography at the Nijmegen School of Management,
Radboud University Nijmegen, on Friday 22 February 2013

by Prof Dr A. Lagendijk
Graphic design: gloedcommunicatie, Nijmegen
Photography cover: Bert Beelen
Print: Van Eck & Oosterink

© Prof Dr A. Lagendijk, Nijmegen, 2013

No part of this publication may be reproduced and/or published in print, photocopy, microfilm, audio tape or in any other manner without prior written permission of the copyright holder.
Prelude One: Three Perspectives in Economic Geography*

Over the last three decades, economic geography has adopted a view in which the region is considered a key engine of wealth creation. This view reflects the ‘endogenous’ perspective (Moulaert & Nussbaumer, 2005; Shearmur, 2011), which assumes that regional wealth is created through resources and capacities that are internal to the region. The capacity to innovate – to develop and produce new goods or services, or to produce and market goods or services more efficiently – is of particular importance. Innovation makes regions competitive in the global marketplace. In other words, it enhances their competitiveness (Bristow, 2005). For example, the ‘Westland’ – the Western part of the Randstad region – uses its excellence in horticulture to feed the world with tomatoes and peppers. Baden-Württemberg uses its competence in engineering to supply all continents with cars and machines, and the City of London benefits greatly from its financial wizardry. Although firms obviously play a leading role in achieving economic performance, this role is largely considered a function of the regional-economic context.

The endogenous view was preceded by a nested perspective based on the ‘global division of labour’. In this perspective, the relationship between regions and firms runs in the opposite direction (Dicken, 2000). Regional wealth is now determined primarily by the functions that are allocated to them by firms – notably large, internationally operating companies – and industries. ‘Core’ regions host central functions related to ‘control’ (headquarters) and ‘development’ (research, marketing). ‘Peripheral’ regions are the sites of ‘cheap’, highly standardised production processes. Other regions jockey for positions in between. For example, they might compete to host regional or national control centres, production sites involving some type of innovation, or supplier hubs serving a global industry. From the perspective of the ‘global division of labour’, innovation is located primarily in large corporations, most notably their Research and Development (R & D) activities. Some innovation also takes place within networks of specialised supplier firms, such as the component manufacturers in the automotive industry (Lagendijk, 1993). Resources and capacities internal to the region play a role as well, but primarily as location factors – explanations for why certain places appeal to certain kinds of business activities.

The shift in perspective from the global division of labour towards the endogenous view sent a double message. Most importantly, it was accompanied by a message of hope. According to this view, regions are able to fashion their own engines of wealth creation by nurturing endogenous resources and capacities. By exploring their current strengths and potentialities in light of ‘global’ opportunities and trends, each region should be able to embark upon a systematic trajectory of specialisation (or re-specialisation) and innovation. Each region represents a potential ‘space of hope’. Not surprisingly, this

* The Preludes were not part of the oral presentation; they have been added here to position the argument more precisely within the academic strand of economic geography.
‘self-help’ model is a prominent aspect of European regional policy. On the other hand, however, this ‘spaces of hope’ portrayal neglects external factors and larger structures. Endogenous thinking supports the idea that each region is responsible for its own success – and hence to blame for its own failure (Harvey, 2000).

The shift towards endogenous thinking can be seen, at least in part, as reflecting a factual change. Three decades ago, it became obvious that the locus of innovation was shifting away from the laboratories of large companies towards the locally embedded networks of small and medium sized firms (Camagni, 1991). The magnitude of this shift and the extent to which it warranted an ‘endogenous’ turn have been the subjects of heavy debate. Critical observers note that the fate of specific regions continues to depend upon the roles assigned to them by firms, industries, markets and states (Amin & Thrift, 1993; Gertler, 1999; Hudson, 1998; MacLeod, 2001). They consider the endogenous view primarily as a product of market-oriented ‘neoliberal’ philosophy. It is thus this thinking, and not the rise of local networks, that ultimately transformed ‘competitiveness’ and ‘entrepreneurialism’ into forces for healing a polarised spatial economy.

Another perspective evolved in response to these criticisms labelled as a ‘relational’ approach (Massey, 2005; Sunley, 2008). The term ‘relational’ means that the role and functions of resources and capacities cannot be seen as given effects, which can be revealed through statistical analysis or other means. Instead, it stresses the specific contexts in which resources and capacities are activated. More specifically, it sees their role and function as the creative outcomes of the interaction of multiple resources and capacities within a particular context. Used in different regions, similar sets of resources and capacities (e.g. technology, labour and entrepreneurial skills) will always produce different outcomes. It is important to note that such differences are not deviations from a statistical mean representing the main effect, as often portrayed by conventional analysis. They are genuine differences resulting from unique creative processes, enabled by latent (not yet actualised) capacities (DeLanda, 2006). In their turn, they constitute the ‘grassroots’ origin of divergent pathways, some of which may lead to important innovations. In this respect, the relational approach does not represent a new spatial approach that is entirely different from endogenous thinking or the perspective based upon the global division of labour. Instead, it provides a perspective that can accommodate endogenous and global streams of thought and other ideas in a fruitful manner.

Prelude two: A relational perspective for linking the ‘local’ and the ‘global’

How can we see the spatial economy in relational terms? For the purpose of studying grassroots phenomena, context can be associated with two settings. The first is the local (i.e. regional) setting, in which resources and capacities coalesce, interact and yield novel combinations. Moreover, and in line with the economist Schumpeter, the creation of novel combinations is generally accompanied by some degree of destruction
from ‘spaces of hope’ to ‘networks of hope’

(Schumpeter, 1976). New forms of wealth creation often crowd out older forms, thereby shifting revenue streams from the owners of previously used resources and capacities to the owners of the new resources. One important context factor therefore involves the extent to which the political and institutional structure of a region allows for such shifts (Boschma, 1995; Gertler, Wolfe, & Garkut, 2000).

The second setting consists of the wider (global) setting, through which resources and capacities emerge, evolve and travel. Regions do not invent resources and capacities themselves, but acquire them from outside. This occurs through the travel of ideas, people, money, scripts, patents and other elements. The channels and nodes that help these items to travel play crucial roles in their diffusion and effects at the regional level. For example, key technological and managerial insights are shaped and circulated by core organisations and networks involved in research and consultancy. Organisations like the eu propagate new policy approaches (Lagendijk & Cornford, 2000). Other networks of policy and practitioners, multi-plant firms, business networks, NGOs and other entities also function as channels of diffusion. These channels do not assign clear roles to regions, as portrayed in perspectives based on the global division of labour (i.e. core, periphery, intermediary). Instead, they create subtle links and interdependencies between regions. These links are not defined in singular terms (e.g. ‘competitiveness’ or ‘core–periphery’). They cover a much wider spectrum of issues, including knowledge circulation, financial interdependencies and labour relations.

The wider context of channels and nodes that connect regions provides a network of development. The appearance and functioning of such networks depends upon the specific nature of the channels, nodes and items transferred. Some networks may be centralised, dominated by a core node (e.g. a principal research centre, consultancy or meeting point). Others may be more dispersed. Some may be dominated by economic transactions (e.g. when dealing with proprietary knowledge), while others (e.g. policy networks) may run primarily on organisational or inter-organisational interactions, geared towards mutual learning. One common feature of these networks is that they all foster activities in particular localities or regions. In other words, regional economic activities are constituted by their inclusion in the networks through which they are fed – and in which they transmit – a wide variety of ideas and resources.

A final point concerns the nature of regional economic activities. Both the endogenous and the ‘global division of labour’ perspective focus on specific parts of the regional economy. Operating from the perspective of an ‘economic base’, they favour export-oriented sectors, with a further preference for high-tech and highly specialised (e.g. craft) activities (Rutland & O’Hagan, 2007). Particularly from the perspective of competitiveness, these activities are considered the sectors that ‘earn the money’. This money subsequently feeds into and circulates through the local economy. If the emphasis is shifted towards wealth creation, however, a different focus emerges (Markusen, 2010). From this approach, any activity that contributes to the division of labour supported by
economic transactions, at whatever scale, constitutes wealth creation. Obviously, not all forms of wealth creation are of similar quality and durability.

From a relational perspective, this quality is not defined by the ability to export (or the relative contribution to competitiveness). The most important factor is the capacity to muster the resources and ideas that are circulating, in order to use them as ingredients for improving local economic activities. An economic activity that primarily serves local markets but that forms a part of a global network of knowledge exchange may thus be just as durable as an export-oriented economic activity is. In terms of regional wealth creation, the Davids can sometimes beat the Goliaths (Shuman, 2007). The current rise of micro-breweries, in a sector dominated by globally exporting companies, presents a case in point. In the next section, I introduce examples from our own research programme. These examples concern local economic activities that form part of global networks of exchange. The cases are followed by a further conceptual elaboration of our relational perspective.

**Introduction: three cases of relational constitution**

Within our research programme, the relational perspective is applied to a number of cases. Three cases are introduced here.

The first case involves homeless street papers. In the late 1980s, a charity in New York organised a benefit rock concert to help homeless people. Although the project ultimately failed, one of its related activities became a success: the newsletter. The organisation opted for an alternative approach. Rather than distributing a newsletter free of charge, the idea emerged to have homeless people sell the newsletter. This would give the homeless people an opportunity to make some money and to take on a role in the economy.
This idea travelled to London, where it evolved into a new approach and format, called the *Big Issue*. In the years to follow, the *Big Issue* grew into a leading example of a ‘social business’. It also grew into a global ‘standard’ of entrepreneurial homeless street papers. The *Big Issue* model spread to more than 30 countries across five continents. Bas Hendrikx is conducting a detailed exploration of this phenomenon in his PhD thesis.

The second case involves the global Slow Food Movement. In 1986, Carlo Petrini, an Italian journalist and publicist, staged a protest against the opening of a branch of McDonalds at the Spanish Steps in Rome (Petrini, 2003). He founded a campaigning group called Slow Food. Since then, Slow Food has spread around the world, turning into a global social movement. The movement has its headquarters near Turin, where it also organises a bi-annual food and wine fair, *Salone del Gusto*, which attracts about 120 000 visitors. At the global scale, the movement has more than 1300 local chapters (‘Convivia’) in more than 110 countries, with about 100 000 paying members. The movement promotes regional food production, without the use of chemicals or additives. It also protects culinary traditions and local biodiversity. Slow Food thus combines political campaigning with efforts to foster entrepreneurship and create exchanges between consumers and producers. Within this broad scope, a wide variety of local Convivia have emerged, ranging from simple cooking clubs to political campaigning groups. We are examining this movement in a joint project coordinated by Stefan Dormans.

The third case involves the proliferation of ‘innovation campuses’. In the 1950s, Stanford University in San Francisco, California (United States), established a university research park, which is now known as Stanford Research Park. The university’s primary motive was to realise a profit on real estate. The park provided space and facilities for graduates to set up new companies, particularly in the field of law and in the high-tech sectors. Since its establishment, the park has hosted many successful firms, including Hewlett-Packard, General Electric, Lockheed and Facebook. In time, the park became the nucleus of one of the most innovative regions in the world, Silicon Valley. Stanford Research Park evolved into a core model for nurturing talent and firms in high-tech sectors. Known in various contexts as ‘science parks’, ‘technology parks’ and ‘innovation campuses’, the model has prompted similar initiatives around the world. Many cities and regions have sought to copy this model of success, and the whole world aspires to become another Silicon Valley. Six decades after the conception of Stanford Research Park, the Netherlands has become enchanted with the ‘innovation campus’ (Kooij, Van Assche, & Lagendijk, 2012). Eindhoven has taken the national lead with this model, with many cities following suit. This is the subject of the PhD project of Henk-Jan Kooij.

Each of these cases presents a very different form of wealth creation, ranging from the most marginalised (i.e. a penny for a squatter) to the most advanced, high-tech investments targeting new global markets. One aspect that they all share, however, is that they reflect grassroots combinations of innovation and entrepreneurship, drawing upon global webs of exchange. In the terms presented above, they are relationally constituted
through local novel combinations of globally circulating resources and ideas. In this respect, local activities have also contributed to the further global circulation and diffusion of social and economic activity.

In our research, we pose the following questions:
• How and where do novel combinations come about?
• How and where do such developments prompt global networking?
• How and where do networks grow and change?
• How and where do they locate in and feed new places?
• Are there ways to improve and extend the entrepreneurial and innovative capacities embedded within these places and networks?

To answer these questions, we provide further elaboration on the relational perspective introduced above. This elaboration consists of three parts, each featuring one core concept: (1) assemblage, (2) coding and (3) overcoding.

**PART ONE: ASSEMBLAGE**

How can we understand the emergence of concrete local phenomena, such as the Slow Food Convivia, street papers and innovation campuses highlighted above? As discussed above, these phenomena can be seen as a process of relational constitution: the joining of circulating resources and ideas as novel combinations. Various concepts can be used to depict and explain this process, including ‘open systems’, ‘non-trivial machines’ (Luhmann, 2012) and ‘actor networks’ (Latour, 2005). In one way or another, these concepts demonstrate how the combination of heterogeneous elements can result in the shaping of a new entity that is capable of performing ‘as a whole’. Following philosophers like Deleuze and Guattari (2002) and DeLanda (2006), I adopt the concept of ‘assemblages’. An assemblage is constructed of various parts – material things (e.g. paper, food or stones), immaterial things (e.g. ideas or protocols) and complex things (e.g. computers or human beings). The parts are combined and made to work together, yielding capacities that make the whole more than the sum of the parts. These capacities are subject to breaking down when individual parts fail, as clearly illustrated by the short life span of the Dutch-Belgian semi-high-speed train Fyra.

Illustration 4. Fyra
(source: kamagurka.com)
How should we understand assemblages? Assemblages do not behave like linear input-output models, but as complex, creative entities. They become manifest in that which is known as 'causal ambiguity'. From a theoretical point of view, assemblages have no essential parts, and the parts have no given effects. Although assemblages can be replicated, they are never exact copies. Consider the Slow Food Convivia, homeless street papers and innovation campuses: each case involves both similarities and differences (Deleuze, 2004). As argued above, differences do not imply deviation from an essential mean. On the contrary, difference refers to the fact that each assemblage is a unique and creative combination of parts, with unique capacities. In all of our cases, we can observe how this uniqueness gives rise to new developments, to innovation. The curious transformation of a newsletter into a homeless street paper, the protest against McDonalds, the real estate venture of a poor university – all of these events prompted new phenomena to spring forth like mushrooms around the world.

Even if it is born out of uniqueness, however, a phenomenon can diffuse and mushroom only if it is repeated in some way. From an assemblage perspective, such repetition cannot be based on simple copying or on the diffusion and application of a generic model, given that each entity is unique. If simple copying is not possible, we must ask what drives repetition and what produces similarity. The notion of relational constitution provides an important clue, which can be illustrated with the metaphor of a mushroom.

Mushrooms grow as an organic network. Under the ground, an extensive network of branches grows and feeds the mushrooms. For the mushroom, what happens underground is every bit as important as what happens on the surface. We can compare this to the development and global diffusion of economic activities. Slow Food Convivia, street papers and campuses have sprung up from global networks or rhizomes. Our research focuses on mapping these networks, their nodes and links, tracing how they give rise to new developments. This corresponds to the circulating networks introduced above.

To study such processes of mushrooming, we make use of various methodological advances. To start, we benefit from progress made in ethnography (Castaneda, 2006), which has developed a more relational focus that is well attuned to the local–global setting described above. This allows us to benefit from the increased visibility that the internet has brought to activities and networks. In the past, the primary sources of data were surveys, interviews and requests for documentation. Today, a wealth of data is just a mouse-click away. In the Slow Food project, we are developing methods to travel throughout the global movement as virtual tourists. Together with Mike Thelwall of Wolverhampton University, we have even developed automatic web crawlers – robots that edge their way through websites, hyperlinks and other cross-references (Minguillo & Thelwall, 2012).
To conclude the first part of this address, our approach has two starting points. First, it considers socio-economic practices as assemblages, which are individually unique, even though they belong to the same movement. Second, assemblages emerge and spread throughout the networks that bind and feed them. This raises questions concerning what happens in these networks and what travels through them. The answer to these questions lies in ‘codings’.

**PART TWO: CODINGS**

What are codings? In common language, codings can be defined as ‘ways of thinking and doing’. In terms of the discussion presented thus far, codings refer to the resources and ideas that directly serve as instructions or scripts for processes of relational constitution (cf. Callon, 1998). Each activity (e.g. creating a Slow Food Convivium, publishing a street
paper, building a campus, or running a university) involves a multitude of such ‘codings’: an inspiring idea; an understanding of how to obtain resources and how to use them; or routines for organisation, planning, communication or financing. Nearly all codings come from elsewhere, through the channels and nodes that connect us. Indeed, there is very little in life that we fully invent ourselves. Our own job consists of combining – of building assemblages – with the help of codings.

Proceeding from institutional theory, we can identify three key roles of such ‘codings’: cognitive, normative and regulative (Scott, 2003).

- First, codings transmit the information on how to set-up, organise and maintain an activity. This is the cognitive role, as exemplified by guidebooks on how to set up a Convivium or a street paper.
- Second, codings convey what we ought to do and what we ought not to do. This normative dimension comprises the values and norms that guide our individual daily actions and social behaviour. Slow Food stands for food that is ‘Good, Clean and Fair’ (in Dutch, Lekker, Puur en Eerlijk). Key slogans for the street-paper movement include ‘a hand up, not a hand out’ and ‘street trade, not street aid’. These mottos have been translated into detailed codings that have helped Slow Food and street papers to spread and flourish.
- The third role of coding is regulative. Codings provide practical ‘rules of the game’. In the economy, the rules of the game are defined in order to regulate the behaviour
and interactions taking place amongst businesses, consumers, workers, and other stakeholders. Both Slow Food and street papers manifest many such rules. One prominent example within the context of campus development involves a proposal in the United States to establish specific zones of regulation. Such zones would include new rulings regarding intellectual property and create new spaces of collaboration between actors from the scientific and business sectors.

How should we study codings? This can be accomplished along two lines. First, we focus on the nodal points and mediators in the networks. We can zoom in on John Bird, the co-founder of Big Issue, and on Carlo Petrini, the ‘godfather’ of Slow Food. We can explore the work of the international associations (e.g. Slow Food International, the International Network for Street Papers or insp, joint meetings, platforms and websites). These nodes are the ‘tour operators’ of codings. They shape, shuffle and channel ‘ways of thinking’ and ‘ways of doing’ throughout the network.

Second, we adopt a spatial-evolutionary perspective. Using various network techniques, we map and trace the use and development of codings throughout the network. We also assess how this translates into new capacities of assemblages. We see the ways in which codings spread and evolve, thereby enhancing capacities and extending the network.

What thus emerges is an evolutionary process of variation, retention and selection in time and space. In this regard, I draw heavily on the evolutionary approach, as developed by the economic geographers in Utrecht and elsewhere (Boschma & Frenken, 2011). This approach bears a particularly close similarity to the research that Ron Boschma and other scholars have conducted on economic routines (Boschma & Frenken, 2009). On a side note, learning about this approach has been one of the benefits of an enormous joint project on which we have been working the past five years. The project consists of editing Regional Studies, one of the largest academic journals in our field. It is now coming to an end, and I hope that our joint interest in evolutionary thinking will prove a good foundation for continued collaboration.

Evolutionary thinking can explain only a part of the development and spread of codings. This is because it is not codings, but assemblages that are directly subjected to evolutionary selection. Codings can endure as long as the assemblages of which they are a part survive, even if their contribution to the survival of an assemblage is minimal. Poor codings may survive by free-riding on successful assemblages. In simple terms, even under evolutionary pressure, bad habits die hard. Miranda Ebbekink bears testimony to this fact in her research on urban cluster policies in the Netherlands (Ebbekink & Lagendijk, 2013). In her PhD project, Miranda is meticulously unravelling the interaction between municipalities, local businesses and research organisations. The results demonstrate the difficulty of building up concepts and practices of governance that can truly help to identify and address local cluster needs, despite the endurance of cluster approaches.
In conclusion, the ways in which codings evolve in time and space depend largely upon the interests, beliefs and strategies adopted by the agents in the network, as well as upon that which is featured and transmitted in the nodes and that which manages to circulate through the channels. To explain this strategic dimension, we now address the third and final concept: overcoding.

**PART THREE: OVERCODING**

Overcoding reflects the importance of storytelling in shaping our society. By storytelling, I am not referring to the bedtime books we read to our kids, but to the stories that attach meaning and significance to social phenomena, or to assemblages and codings, the items that we have discussed thus far. Overcoding plays a crucial role in our complex societies. Codings gain significance and impact through overcoding, because they are seen as working according to our beliefs and interests (DeLanda, 2006).

Overcoding thus complements coding. As explained above, codings provide guidance and instructions. They come in handbooks and rulebooks. Coding consists primarily of *practical knowledge* or, in the terms used before, ‘resources and ideas’ or ‘ways of thinking and doing’. On the other hand, overcoding provides meaning and motivation. It inspires plans and visions, and it frames reality in a narrative or imaginary story, based on our worldviews, mindsets and ambitions. Overcoding serves to frame the past, present, and future state of affairs in such ‘grand’ terms such as ‘democracy’, ‘sustainability’, ‘cohesion’ and ‘development’.

Whereas coding is overwhelmingly practical, overcoding is quintessentially political (Allen & Cochrane, 2007). It is political in the sense that, even if certain stories and images prevail, alternative versions and interpretations will always be possible. The existence of such alternatives is what inspires grassroots movements and new economic approaches. Consider the example of Slow Food and the manner in which Carlo Petrini imagines an alternative world of interconnected food production and consumption, pitted against the global domination of industrial food chains, supermarkets and traders who tamper with meat:

> I do not believe it is utopian to imagine a system like this in the future, made up of many local economies with a network established among them, thus not at all closed off and not necessarily self-sufficient, but completely open to exchange and innovation. If more people learn to become more familiar with food culture they will come to a greater understanding of the profound, irreplaceable value that food has, through the myriad of unseen interconnections between man and the land, and then the change will come almost spontaneously, because this is a common sense solution (Conti, 2012, preface).
A specific form of overcoding that is relevant for geographers involves the use of ‘spatial imaginaries’ (Jessop, 2004). Such imaginaries depict places as moving towards a future that is innovative, competitive, sustainable and cohesive. One of the most influential imaginaries has already been mentioned: many regions want to become like Silicon Valley. In other words, they would like to be, as my colleague Gert-Jan Hospers has called it, a ‘Silicon Somewhere’ (Hospers, 2006). This is a key imaginary of campus development. Another powerful spatial imaginary in the Dutch context is that of polycentric urban areas. For example, the Randstad can be observed in connection with other hotspots in Europe. Transport corridors – including our own well-documented, half-operational high-speed train connection – play an important role.

How should we study the social and political roles of stories and imaginaries? We do this based on our group’s long-standing orientation towards discursive approaches, as manifested in a series of excellent PhD theses authored by Stefan Dormans (2008), Margo van den Brink (2009), Krisztina Varró (2010) and Kathrin Birkel (2010). I will not go into details here, instead limiting myself to one core issue: closure.
What is closure? The orientation and framing provided by overcoding has a flipside. It can easily transform into fixation, which occurs whenever we stop asking further questions and close the door to critique and alternatives.

Our work on campus development in the Netherlands is revealing how closure works for the ‘campus’ concept. Although the concept has considerable potential for local development, we are observing how many policymakers and other parties tend to flock around particular campus hypes. This process can be illustrated by the identification of an official list of ‘genuine’ campuses in the Netherlands. In response to this list, municipalities are currently making major efforts to prove that their campuses are truly ‘genuine’. They are devoting more effort to the issue of classification and labelling (i.e. to overcoding) than they are to finding creative ways of housing and connecting local firms (i.e. to coding and assemblage). The danger of closure is that it closes off the creative power at the grassroots level and stifles the evolutionary capacities of the network as a whole.

In contrast, the success of the Slow Food and homeless street paper movements can be attributed to the space provided for fundamental debate. Local production, organic production, biodiversity and health are important aspects of Slow Food, but they are not fixations. As demonstrated in the quotation from Petrini, change should be emergent. It should evolve through the network, through ‘exchange and innovation’ between many ‘local economies’. Likewise, the street paper movement continues to explore the balance between ‘hand out’ and ‘hand up’. It thus remains a source of new perspectives on how we can create sources of wealth for the most deprived people in our society. We should nevertheless be aware that closure is always looming on the horizon. In many cases, it
is much easier to following the hype of overcoding (which often provides ready-made policy legitimacy and protocols) than it is to perform the painstaking work of finding and probing our own novel combinations.

Closure does occur only through fixations and hypes. It also occurs through the forms of over-coding that Foucault (2009, p. 71) describes as ‘arts of government’. Basic examples of such ‘arts of government’ include the ways in which we score, benchmark and rank activities against what we consider appropriate metrics of innovation, entrepreneurship, sustainability and accountability. In many ways, such narrow metrics result in stronger and more insidious forms of closure than storytelling does. One prominent example is the trend that can be observed in many societal domains that involves ranking individual members against each other. The mushroom metaphor applied above provides a good illustration of the effect of this trend. Imagine what would happen if the street papers were to begin engaging in narrow competitive behaviour. Imagine that they all started to strive for a place in the top five of certain performance rankings. What would happen to exchange and innovation? The danger is that instructive coding will be replaced by narrow over-coding. One good way to kill the creativity of a network is to start scoring and ranking its nodes.

In conclusion, the two faces of overcoding constitute an important issue to be addressed through research. Overcoding helps networks to grow and flourish, while simultaneously narrowing their scope. In our projects, we are examining the combination of network and discourse techniques. In addition to the cases described here, two other topics are currently in development. One involves social and economic improvements in inner-city neighbourhoods. This project, which is funded by the Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research (now), involves collaboration with partners in Zürich, Vienna and Ankara. We will be exploring the fashion quarter in Klarendal, Arnhem. A second topic involves the global proliferation of microcredit. We are exploring this topic in collaboration with Joris Knoben, who recently joined the Department of Economics in our faculty. The initiative forms part of our joint ambition to strive for close collaboration between geography and economics, as well as with other colleagues in the faculty, with a focus on innovation.

CONCLUDING REMARKS
I would now like to present three conclusions. I present them in the opposite direction, moving back from overcoding to assemblage.

My first conclusion concerns the irony of overcoding. I have just highlighted the Janus faces of overcoding – the ‘good’ and ‘evil’ of narratives, imaginaries and ‘governance technologies’ in shaping our economic activities. Building on the discursive work that we have accomplished thus far, we should try to investigate this further. The concept of ‘requisite equity’ could be helpful in this regard. Bob Jessop uses this concept in his work on the growing fixation on the ‘knowledge economy’ (Jessop, 2002). Irony offers an
important resource for addressing the two sides of overcoding and the dire consequences of closure. Each of our cases could provide relevant examples.

I should like to mention another example as well: the fixation of universities on ratings of excellence. Our academic institutions are devoting more and more of their energy and labour into the non-academic practice of ranking. The most problematic, however, is the way in which universities treat early-career researchers, most notably our highly productive and entrepreneurial postdoctoral researchers. As many of you are aware, I have been dedicated to this issue for decades. Very little progress has been made. The ‘boosterism’ at the top stands in stark contrast to the frustration and disbelief prevailing amongst early-career researchers regarding the lack of recognition for their talent and contributions. Let us recognise the irony of this situation; let us understand how it has come about, and let us try to stem the tide.

My second conclusion concerns networks of hope. I have depicted the importance of connecting grassroots activities as a way to foster the development of new ideas and practices – to which I refer as codings. We should build ‘networks of hope’ as networks that can learn and grow from being deeply rooted in a wide diversity of local activities. My predecessor, Frans Boekema, has done magnificent work on ‘Learning Regions’ (Rutten, Boekema, Morgan, & Bakker, 2000). I would like to continue this path by elaborating the notion of ‘Learning Networks’. To return to my first conclusion, networks of hope require overcoding. They need the warmth and energy generated by visions of a
better world, new ways of production, consumption and working. At the same time, however, they should develop the power to resist dangerous obsessions, as with crude rankings and narrow benchmarking. We should allow them the space that they need in order to provide genuine response to the challenge of innovation, enterprise and wealth creation.

My third and final conclusion is that there is no escape from the local. Our perspective based on networks of hope highlights the way in which new codings emerge, travel and help to construct and improve economic activities across space. We are developing advanced techniques of mapping, tracing and visualisation that will enhance our ability to do so. In our efforts to trace codings and to map networks, however, we should not forget the unique nature of assemblages and the depth of causal ambiguity.

We can send out our web crawlers, but this cannot serve as a substitute for our own travels. To quote my former colleague Barrie Needham, we must now get our hands dirty. Good geographers must be good ethnographers.

Please allow me a few final words. To my dear family, friends, colleagues, students and other guests: I thank you very much for your attention. I am very happy to make my contribution to this flourishing academic community. I would like to stress these two words: *community* and *contribution*. I am *not a number* of publications, of grants or other records.

I will do my very best to be a responsible tour operator in what I pledge will become an academic and societal network of hope.

**Words of thanks**

Beste Rob. Ik wil je zeer bedanken voor het in mij gestelde vertrouwen en alle support die je mij de afgelopen jaren hebt gegeven. Je hebt toch iets gezien in deze vaak rommelige, warrige en eigenwijze persoon.

Dezelfde woorden van dank wil ik richten aan mijn collega’s Huib Ernste, Frans Boekema, Pieter Leroy, Barrie Needham, en Ben Dankbaar alsook aan het College van Bestuur van de universiteit.

Collega’s van Nijmegen en elders, dank voor de samenwerking en levendige discussies, die ik nog vele jaren hoop voort te zetten. Beste Bert van der Knaap – dank voor het op de rails zetten van mijn academische carrière ruim twintig jaar geleden.

Studenten en oud-studenten – ik ben erg blij met jullie aanwezigheid hier, maar vooral ook in de klas, in mijn kamer, en in mijn emailbox – met conceptwerkstukken die altijd weer beter kunnen.

Familie en vrienden, geweldig dat jullie hier zijn, en dank voor vele jaren van samen zijn en vriendschap.

Erik en Minca, mijn ouders, dank voor de vele steun die jullie mij hebben gegeven bij mijn vaak tegendraadse levenspad. Al is het niet in de natuurkunde, we vieren toch de eerste professor in de familie!
Anna, Rik, Marinus – ik ben super trot op jullie. Wat zijn jullie groot geworden! Lieve Christien – zonder jou had ik waarschijnlijk daklozenkranten verkocht in plaats van ze te bestuderen – er zijn geen woorden voor mijn waardering en liefde voor jou.

_Ik heb gezegd._
BIBLIOGRAPHY


- Birkl, K. M. (2010). We, Europe and the Rest: EU discourse(s) at work in environmental politics. Ph D., Radboud University, Nijmegen.


