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# Introduction

'Tales of Development: People, Power and Space' has been written to mark forty years of commitment to the field of development geography by Ton van Naerssen. To understand the importance of his contribution to human geography and development studies we borrow his own words. In 1997 Ton van Naerssen wrote:

*I, for one, hold as basic belief [...] that human geographers who occupy themselves with the developing countries are most interested and engaged in matters of poverty, exploitation and dependency, and their counterparts emancipation and 'empowerment'.* (Van Naerssen, 1997: xix).

Through 19 essays, all concomitant with Ton van Naerssen's words by taking an engaged and academically critical perspective, this book reflects on a number of important themes. These themes concern: the role of critical theory and the need for academics to position their contributions in public debate; the importance of civil society for development; the implications of changing identities as related to an articulation of space; the role of globalization on people's lives and livelihoods; and the significance of migration. In this manner this edited volume contains an insightful set of critical tales of development.

Ernst Spaan opens this book by elaborating on the themes recurrent in the work of van Naerssen over the years. These themes more or less constitute the backbone of development issues and this book.

The first theme covered by the book deals with 'Critical Geography and Social Space'. Huib Ernste extensively reviews what critical studies and geography in particular means. Like many others in this book, he sketches the need to know the ontology of one's theoretical starting point. This starting point is formed by the beginning of an academic career. Paul Hebinck takes this one step further by elaborating a critical perspective on land reform with the central argument that a sound understanding of social development and action requires going beyond structural models of development. De Haan takes a similar perspective by showing that in popular livelihood analyses there is little attention for spatial dimensions of development.

Ton Dietz, Annemieke van Haastrecht and Rudolf Scheffer take us back to the seventies when development in the South was understood in terms of peripheral capitalism. Poor empirical evidence at that time made the authors leave Marxist inspired theories. But a confrontation with the situation in Zambia today makes them consider trying it again. Sef Slootweg narrates in his contribution about the soul searching within SNV Netherlands Development Organisation, which sought to recapture the relevance of its development aid interventions. In a perhaps somewhat unusual style, he depicts the usefulness of internal debates about measuring one's impact.

The second set of chapters 'Migration Trajectories', deals with migration, and return migration. The latter is discussed by Tine Davids and Ruerd Ruben. They debate on the unhappy marriage between migration and development within the context of stricter controls of European states to control the influx of migrants. Martin van de Velde takes this discussion further by attempting to model migration, particular with regard to East-West migration patterns. One of the big

questions we face is what to do when we take constitutions serious as this may mean that borders become meaningless. Joris Schapendonk and Lothar Smith build on the prior contributions by focusing on the contradictions between the opportunities given to migrants to travel the world and the flows these migrants create –notably remittances- to do the same. With regard to transnational flows established by migrants Marisha Maas discusses the particular case of Philippine migrants in The Netherlands, zooming in on the dynamics of cultural dimensions through transnational exchanges.

The theme ‘Acting on Globalisation’ discusses actions by groups and individuals to change the world. In their contribution Ankie van der Camp and Ben Janssen explain what art means in a global context. This chapter is significant in being more than a tribute to artists in Southern Africa by also attempting to carve out a relevant political space for social action. Frans Schuurman, in his typical style, critically positions development studies within the dynamic and changing context for development and academia. Therein development studies for whom, and for what, remain the key questions academics need to ask themselves. Bas Arts follows this argument of global acting through by taking us into the forest. His argument is that we need to move beyond global governance as a political practice to embrace the notion of politics of scale. Paul Hoebink debates the dynamics of foreign aid by addressing the critical issue of coherence. He argues that the debate lack on foreign aid continues to lack voices from the South. In his chapter he therefore discusses some of the Southern perspectives on the coherence of European policies vis-à-vis developing countries. The finally contribution to this theme is by Cor van Beuningen, who discusses the meaning of increasing scarcity of raw materials, energy and food for global economic relationships, leading to a possible redrawing of the geopolitical world map. He wonders whether we are we moving from a unipolar to a multipolar world.

The final theme of ‘Redefining Regions and Identities’ specifically deals with regional issues. Luuk Knippenberg en Saskia van Bruchem debate the relationship between development dynamics and democracy in Thailand. Bas Hendrikx and Arnout Lagendijk discuss the meaning of regional development in the context of growing global integration and increasing global economic competition. In their view regional governance will become a key issue to consider in contemporary regional development. Paul van Lindert focuses on current trends of decentralisation and urban governance in Latin America. Although it is often maintained that traditionally local governments are the weakest link in the public sector, he argues how Latin America is showing a growing variety of promising and innovative initiatives at local levels that may lead to improved urban governance. The last contribution of Françoise Barten and Geert Tom Heikens describe the unprecedented challenge posed by rapid urbanization and the deepening inequalities in health conditions presently rising within and between urban settings in the South. Their plea is to arrest this development through interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary research.

*Paul Hebinck,  
Sef Slootweg  
Lothar Smith*