

Interactive comment on ““Doing” cultural geography/“being” a cultural geographer – reflections by an “accidental geographer” on practising cultural geography in the Netherlands” by B. van Hoven

J. Becker (Referee)

redaktion@raumnachrichten.de

Received and published: 28 September 2010

Against the backdrop of a brief look at the development of Social Geography in the Netherlands, Bettina van Hoven presents her personal scientific path to the reader and develops novel approaches and topics for a new Cultural Geography. In describing this personal journey, she makes use of a more creative essay format rather than strictly scientific style.

Ben de Pater criticizes the author’s approach because she does not apply the three

Full Screen / Esc

Printer-friendly Version

Interactive Discussion

Discussion Paper



standard evaluation criteria of scientific texts, which are scientific importance, scientific quality and scientific rigor. Consequently, he does not address any of the concerns of the author but only views her work as the compilation of interesting reflections on her path to becoming a geographer. Unfortunately, this perspective does not engage substantively in the content of the author's work and is not conducive to overall debate about her thesis.

Furthermore, the criticism and reproach of Lawrence Berg towards the author's work on the history of the development of Social Geography centers on his claim that she had not considered the structural conditions of the neoliberal reconstruction of higher education. However, the author doesn't focus on the "Cultural Turn" which prevailed in Great Britain and the United States, because she views this as a debate for conservative professors about the typical Dutch "national spirit". I think that the author is probably open to Berg's criticism and his arguments, which may be valid. However, it is not the author's objective to trace the history of Geography as a discipline in the Netherlands in detail. She neither discusses the contents of the differences between the various views and approaches nor does she assess the actors or arguments involved in the traditional debate about the "Cultural Turn". The question remains then - what is the article actually about?

It seems to me that the style and content of the author's writing are closely interwoven so you cannot fully comprehend Bettina van Hoven's essay if you ignore any aspect of her writing from the personal to the scientific elements. On the contrary, the full meaning only becomes apparent to the reader when simultaneously looking at personal development and scientific programmatic together.

It is not easy just to filter out of the essay what the author means by using the term "Cultural Turn". In any case and with regards to the content, it is clear that this has something to do with "place making", "otherness", "difference", "gender" and prefers methodologically qualitative to quantitative methods. Through these (re- and new) orientations, the author relocates in her own life: From Biology and Physical Geography

to Cultural Geography, she learns the "Cultural Turn" the hard way: "I began to look more broadly at issues of difference, inclusion and exclusion and, in so doing, explored many interesting literatures and personal connections. It has also led to a continuous (re-)assessment of what kind of a geographer I am, where my 'home' is conceptually and even, in frequent debate with colleagues, what geography is, particularly cultural geography" (P. 2).

This process of (self-)ascertainment is not only the result of scientific activity and new orientations, but also has an influence on the scientific program of the author and fits seamlessly into the trials of post-modernization of Social Geography, which can also be found in the text of Bettina van Hoven: Working on a "major", "rigorous" theory is abandoned in favor of a rather "weak" theorizing one in which the individual with her own preferences, weaknesses, etc. as a whole person – not just the scientist in her – moves to the center of reflections. In place of the predominance of social and economic theories, cultural and social science orientations appear; increased demands on the subjectivity and an ideological charge of the issues and the nature of their processing are further characteristics of this post modernization process, which finally and tentatively end in the "Cultural Turn".

The author concludes her essay with her view about the possible development of a preferred direction of Cultural Geography. Three key points are utilized to characterize such a Geogra-phy.

First, the co-equal and co-existence of empirical research and theoretical work, including a critical view on the relationship between researcher and researched: "In addition to having the potential for some interesting work, it also provides opportunities to re-think the role and the relation of and between researcher, respondents and 'the elements' in doing research."

Second, the combination of scientific orientation and Human Geography: "A second focus is on landscape (...) which combines physical geography and social geography.

[Full Screen / Esc](#)[Printer-friendly Version](#)[Interactive Discussion](#)[Discussion Paper](#)

This interest in building bridges between physical and social geography, rather than confining them to different locations (...), offers exciting opportunities for research on / across perceptions of nature / culture (and the 'divide')."

The third and final point is that the new Cultural Geography shall provide an innovative combination of qualitative and quantitative methods: "There lies an interesting challenge here for cultural geography to bridge the gap between the applied and the abstract, and the quantitative and qualitative."

The older geographers among Bettina van Hoven's readers will be reminded not only of distant times in the evolution of geography as a scientific discipline. In addition, they will be reminded that the examination and symbiosis of regional ways of life or regional cultures with their specific natural environment have been the focus of bridging subjected geography for decades. Human being, the space and its' "material content", the human-natural, human-space or human-environment theme was the core paradigm of classical geography for many years. What should we make of (post) modernization efforts that exchange unconscious and unreflective views from the "Cultural Turn" approach for the old basics of landscape and regional geography? How can it be possible that a research program that is progressive and humane, in principle, is linked to age-old disciplinary traditions? But these are questions that go far beyond a critique of this essay and may not be answered by the author. Nevertheless, I would like to require that the uncalled self-reflexivity would also affect the process of scientific statements. If you take this self-reflexivity seriously and not just as a claim, perhaps you achieve a really new Social Geography that channels in directly – not through the back door – old and very traditional ideas.

Finally, I would like to suggest a more formal notice (specific comment). The author quotes 55 bibliographical references (four manuscript pages) for a 13 page paper. Nearly 30 percent of this literature (16) is marked by Bettina van Hoven either alone or in co-authorship. Even the sheer volume of 55 references used in such a short text can be prone to "name-dropping" unfortunately. This approach is almost unbearable when

the author quotes himself 16 times. It should be cut neatly.

Jörg Becker (Referee) redaktion@raumnachrichten.de

Interactive comment on Soc. Geogr. Discuss., 6, 165, 2010.

SGD

6, C44–C48, 2010

Interactive
Comment

Full Screen / Esc

Printer-friendly Version

Interactive Discussion

Discussion Paper

