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Everything I had wished to know about Walter  
Stöhr but I missed out

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Honorable family members of Walter Stöhr,  
close colleagues and friends,  
and all good people working for a good life for all,  
and who are present at this convivial commemoration event today...

Wishing a save journey in the Nirvana to a wise and aged person who left us to our earthly business as usual is rather a moment of enchantment than of pain. Enchantment more in the sense of ‘a *state of being under a spell, a magic moment*; ‘a world of mystery and enchantment’ the saying goes ...

Spell, magic. Why? As a neo-structuralist – and that’s how I would refer to Professor Walter Stöhr if I was allowed to assign him in today’s jargon to a ‘class of social scientists’ - I would be tempted to give a very structured overview of the way he influenced by his writings and his policy advice practice his generation as well as subsequent generations of scientists and public actors. But I will not do this, I am under a different spell, a spell that mesmerized me and led me from past to past, past to present, present to future and back to past.

## **Past 1 Meeting for the first time**

I physically met Professor Walter Stöhr only twice: once at the Symposium on Regional Development Processes and Policies and the Changing International Division of Labour held at the Vienna International Centre in 1984. Together with Swa Willekens I presented a paper on the Regionalization of Regional Policy in Belgium and also took part in the policy panel at the conference. I was 33 years old at the time and highly surprised that the eminent Professor Stöhr had found out about my existence and – eventually – the relevance of my work. These were the times where we young university assistants – we did not become prime Ministers at such modest age in those days – looked up to eminent professors and shyly asked for their opinion on many different themes and issues. And Walter Stöhr certainly was rightfully eminent, esteemed because he was a great scholar.

## Past 2 Learning from the Past

Today's spell is not just about the first meeting, but also about what I, we learned from him. I cited his work regularly in my work on local development, criticism of Regional Innovation Systems and Integrated Area Development, the Social Region. In brief he inspired my work and that of my colleagues on the role of social innovation in spatial development significantly. He was part of a stream or a movement of 1970/1980 scholars – I was born just in time to still become part of that movement – who had intellectually concluded and practically observed that 'development from above', at least by itself and situated in a modernist top-down approach, did not work for the development of peripheral regions in both the North and South of the World. His analysis was interdisciplinary *avant la lettre*. In a way, like many of us today, he would have belonged better in the protodisciplinary era of the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century; an era in which many economists did not know if they were doing economics, political science, sociology, anthropology, cultural science, a.s.o. The reference to the protodisciplinary epoch is important to understand Walter Stöhr's way of doing science. Referring to the German Historical School which he cites in his seminal paper from 1978 on 'Development from below: the Bottom-Up and Development Inward Development Paradigm", there are quite some similarities between the science practice he conveys in that paper and the way scientist from that Historical school did their intellectual work – sorry for simplifying the analysis in the evolution of the German Historical School:

- The role of history of thought and practice in understanding of economic development. The way Walter Stöhr made what we would call today a time-space analysis of the evolution from top-down to development from below approaches in regional and local development, making a distinction between *longue durée* and (recent) modern times
- The way he treated culture and local specificity in his analysis of the drivers of local development.
- The role of ideology and ethics in orientating policy views.
- The role of the state and its different functions; the role and nature of power relations.
- And, implicitly, the way the last generation of the German Historical School became involved in the *Methodenstreit* (with the Austrian School) about the role of theory and history in economic analysis, and the role of the State and the Welfare State in the (national) economy.

I am referring to the German Historical School because it holds all the seeds on the role of local partnerships and the state, culture and local specialization in *endogenous development* – the analysis of which Walter Stöhr is probably best remembered for and has influenced many streams in local and regional development analysis, directly and indirectly. The debates in the German Historical School

also bore the tension between the local and the national state (the time of the unification process ...) and the ambiguity of modernity (science as an essential problem solver, e.g. sanitation of derelict housing blocks vs. modernity overruling local development culture) all essential elements in the debate on the relevance of endogenous development.

## **Past to present**

The ideas and models of endogenous local and regional development have developed spectacularly over the last 40 years. Various factors drove them, not the least the failure of top-down industrialization and development policy – highly discussed among the defenders of growth pole and trickle down and spread effects models and the analysts of the consequences of uneven development (back wash effects). It mesmerized me to recall all these great names involved in these debates, including the protagonists of the Regional Innovation Systems, the Clusters of Innovation, ... I will not cite them here, the papers are available. Yet the authors of the early models of endogenous development, especially those used in the North of the World - with the exception of John Fiedmann and Walter Stöhr - did not recognize the role of popular culture, social relations, agony, local emancipation, community building through and for the sake of solidarity. These concerns were reintroduced later into the debate when analysts, policy makers, activists and social scientists discovered that cultural and social issues of human development had become as relevant for the peripheral regions and places of the North as they had become relevant for the Southern world through the work of the Tiers Mondistes, the Paula Freire movement, etc. much earlier.

Walter Stöhr was very early on in his career aware of places and regions as territorialized culture – or organized threat to the conservation of this culture. In the paper I already referred to critically addressing the top-down model of development Walter Stöhr warns for “the subordination of broader societal values to economic determinants, a characteristic that applies to most highly developed countries today” (p.8) We are writing 1970 – or is it 2018?

“The alternative would be for economically ‘less developed’ social groups and areas to give clear priority to their self-determined societal standards and to subordinate external economic and other interactions to these standards”.

Defending ‘development from below’, in the third basic feature of it, he refers to the intrinsic features of local communities= “Many of these communities have a much higher potential for small scale interaction (interpersonal social relations, group identity, small scale solidarity, rate of active cultural participation) than those of materially highly developed areas. These small scale potentials [the basic

conditions for the survival of society and its communities? FM] (related to Allardts' conditions of loving and being) are important to human being, [...] They have use-value rather than exchange value." [selective closure, develop here FM] And then there is Walter's concern about how these values are affected by economic, social and political transformations that come with a development from above approach.

*How relevant is all of this for communities in the contemporary global economy?*

In more recent work on community-based local development, Integrated Area Development, the Social Region, spatial development through social innovation, the associational economy, grassroots innovation, the foundational economy, these community-driven concerns have been taken back on board. The threat of the global technology and market driven economy to spatial equity and good community life for all, has inspired and driven people and social movements including scientists to revalorize social relations, human relations, community values in rebuilding the local economy and polity. Walter Stöhr has inspired many of us to this purpose.

## **And back to the past for the purpose of the future**

Walter Stöhr is recommended reading for us today and especially for the youngsters (!) among us. His respect for history, ethics, social relations, political dynamics and power relations; the way he connected to public debates – this should all inspire us. As an additional appraisal I would like to praise the way he adapted his language – not his message – to the audience. I cannot avoid a smile when I noticed the change in vocabulary when speaking to a Regional Science Association instead of a development economy audience. For RSA factors of unequal development become variables in innovation processes. We all may have a tendency towards such semantic flexibility. But at the end of the day the purpose is to share a message, not to put off people with a language they do not understand.

In fact and this is part of my personal mesmerizing today as well. Looking back at my own intellectual trajectory and how it connected to that of Walter, I discovered by rereading that I learned to know his work on the Regional Science Association's forum to which I assume he was invited by Walter Isard. It was only by reading these more mainstream articles that I discovered Walter Stöhr's seminal work on bottom-up and endogenous local development and the role of social values and culture. That work inspired me to reconstruct the logic of Territorial Innovation Models and sow the seeds of the Social Region and territorial development through social innovation.

## **Materiality matters – on a lighter note**

Rereading 'Development from below' published in 1978 – one year before I published my first academic article in English in 1979 – I noticed exactly at which moment Hildegard Kaufmann whom Walter Stöhr thanks gratefully for typing and retyping the manuscript changed the ribbon of the typewriter. The introductory footnote also referred to retyping again and again – which makes me curious to know if a typewriter with a memory card was used? Or did she really have to retype the whole text? It is a small question about the extent to which intermediate technology was used at the Institute of Urban and Regional Studies. Finally I noticed that Walter systematically misspelled competitiveness in the same way as I do today. These small observations of industrial archeology are helpful in establishing the material link with the intellectual heritage he left us.

May we all continue to learn from him.







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