Global trade & the Dutch hub: understanding variegated forms of embeddedness of international trade in the Netherlands: clothing, flowers, and high-tech products

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Link to publication

Citation for published version (APA):

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The years I’ve been working on and writing this thesis have been very intense and a great learning experience for me. After all, I’m very glad I’ve finished and can move onto something else without the feeling that there’s still that big, important, and only with an enormous-effort achievable-thing hanging in the air, waiting to get permission to land. Without the help of many people, I believe, this thing in the air would never have landed in the form of the book lying in front of you. Knowing that it is impossible to name all the people who have been important in this work, I do want to pay attention to some of them.

First of all I would like to name Pieter Terhorst, my supervisor, who invited me to return to the University of Amsterdam for this PhD project. At that moment, I’d just finished a Masters in Teaching Geography and was looking around for a new challenge, preferably as a PhD student. So his invitation came just at the right moment. Pieter has been a very generous supervisor. Always carefully reading my work and making many useful comments. His literature suggestions are outstanding and whenever he said to me “This is a really interesting book, but, well, you shouldn’t read it now, you have to stay focused” I went straight to the library or Boekwinkeljes.nl to get a copy of the not-to-read-right-now-book. They’ve never disappointed me. I’ve still not been able to read them all, but I’m sure I will in the near future.

Thanks also to my promoter Willem Salet who has helped me out when I needed it most and whose questions and suggestions have been very important to improve the structure and readability of my book. I’m looking forward to the continuation of our collaboration in my post-doc research.

And then there is Leonie Janssen-Jansen. What can I say? Without her encouragement, advice, help, and talking with cups of tea, this book would certainly never have landed. I still do not understand her energy system – there never seems to be a need for recharging at night time or weekends – but I do admire it and whenever I can be half as dedicated as she is to her work and her colleagues, I would consider it as a great achievement for myself. Leonie: thank you for getting me here and I’m glad to stay a bit more with you at the new AISSR-department.
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Roommates are another issue. Since I’ve been in at least seven different rooms during the work on this thesis, it is impossible for me to name all of them. But I do want to say thank you to the people I met in the days that have gone, eating the terribly salty soup of Chell down in the basement. It is a pity we had to leave that place and it has been a pleasure chatting with you. Then there has been the red-carpet time. I think, that hasn’t been the happiest time I had but that certainly had nothing to do with you, guys! I think that a football in the room is important and keeps you alert. And, thank you for the nice days we spent together in Chicago. Thinking of another trip, I have to thank Els for the great support she gave me in China and after that with climbing the real and a mental Chinese wall. The views on top are great. I’m happy to keep in touch as colleagues. Then there are Niels and Cathelijne who I shared a room with. It has been only for a short time, and you weren’t much around, but it was good to see you some times and to be able to work in your quiet room. After that I shared a room with Joram, which was very nice. Both finishing our dissertation, feeling the pressure and excitement that go with it, has been a stimulating environment to get things almost ready. Almost, because during the last months Joram was replaced by Mendel who also turned out to be good company and a supportive roommate. To finish I became a wanderer and found a place to work at many tables in many rooms. It was nice to often meet new PhDs and finally to be more frequently in a room with Sabine, Edith, Wilma, and Annelies. I also have very much appreciated the working together with visiting researchers. Especially the working together with Anouk Campillo Patel on the flower case has been very inspiring to me. To finish mentioning colleagues, I have to say thank you to the members of the Economy and Space group which now has become the Geographies of Globalization group. I also have to thank the members of the Synergin group of which my research was a part of. Both groups have been a good place for giving presentations and picking up new ideas. I know I now forget many other important people, such as some of my lunch mates and the Roolijn team. Please forgive me for not writing down all of your names.

My research wouldn’t have been possible without the help of many people outside university who were willing to make time for an interview and a visit to their business. I’ve really enjoyed the visits to warehouses, greenhouses, boring office locations, design studios, and the auction. And I now can say by experience that almost every office location in the Netherlands is very well reachable by public transport. Only the Maasvlakte is hell, but fortunately enough of the people working there also have offices in other locations in the Netherlands. Also of great importance has been the help of Geoff Kees Thompson and Daniel Tooth with the English correction of my work. Cor de Haan has very much improved the quality of the photographs in this book, just like Otto Levelt has done with the maps.
Acknowledgements

Finally, I would like to turn to the people dear to me. Finishing a PhD research and maintaining social contacts is a difficult combination. Thank you for supporting me and putting up with my mind being elsewhere sometimes. I expect things will be different now that I have finished my dissertation and Dirk and I have made our new house a home. Know that there is a place for you in our home and in my mind.

Melika Levelt
March 2010