

**Научковы Артыкул**

**Галандскія падыходы да плюралістычнай і ангажаванай  
гістарыяграфіі ў геаграфіі**

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**Анатацыя.** Гэты артыкул аналізуе развіццё адметнага галандскага ўнёску ў гістарыяграфію геаграфіі, засяроджваючыся на «энцыклапедычным падыходзе», сформуляваным у Вольным універсітэце Амстэрдама ў 1961–1987 гадах Маркусам Хеслінгам і Андрысам Каўэнховенам. Да следаваннен змяшчае гэты падыход у шырэйшы кантэкст дыцыплінарных заклапочанасцяў фрагментацыяй геаграфіі і заклікаў да «ангажаванага плюралізму», здольнага пераадольваць канцэптуальныя, метадалагічныя і інстытуцыйныя разрывы. Каб адпавядаць структурнаму фармату часопіса, аўтар(ы) рэканструюе(юць) метадалагічныя падмуркі галандскай гістарыяграфічнай традыцыі, акрэсліваючы яе аналітычныя прынцыпы, у прыватнасці акцэнт на фармальных і матэрыяльных аб'ектах геаграфіі, канцэптуальным картаграфаванні і ролі сетак навуковай камунікацыі. Вынікі паказваюць, як галандскі выпадак сформаваны даўнімі суперніцтвамі паміж геаграфічнымі школамі, інтэлектуальнымі ўплывамі памежных рэгіёнаў і пасляваенным інстытуцыйным пашырэннем выпрацаваў плюралістычную рамку, якая ўмяшчае разнастайнасць без дэзінтэграцыі. У аблімеркаванні дэмансцруеца, што энцыклапедычны падыход прапануе мадэль для сучаснай гістарыяграфіі, бо стымулюе дыялог, фармуе агульныя інтэлектуальныя генеалогіі і забяспечвае прасторавую кантэкстуалізацыю вытворчасці ведаў. Артыкул завяршаецца высновай, што пераасэнсаванне гэтых галандскіх укладаў узбагачае актуальныя намаганні па фармаванні больш звязанай і рэфлексіўнай геаграфічнай дыцыпліны. Гэта перафармуляванне чытанне падкрэслівае значнасць гістарыяграфічных метадаў для падтрымання цэласнасці дыцыпліны і для інфармавання новых спраб інтэграваць яе разнастайныя падпомі.

**Ключавыя слова:** ангажаваны плюралізм; гістарыяграфія геаграфіі; галандская геаграфія; энцыклапедычны падыход; навуковая камунікацыя; дыцыплінарныя традыцыі; Маркус Хеслінг; Андрыс Каўэнховен

**Research Article**

## **Dutch Approaches to Pluralist and Engaged Historiography in Geography**

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**Abstract.** This article examines the development of a distinctive Dutch contribution to the historiography of geography, focusing on the “encyclopaedic approach” formulated at the Free University of Amsterdam between 1961 and 1987 by Marcus Heslinga and Andries Kouwenhoven. The study situates this approach within broader disciplinary concerns about the fragmentation of geography and the appeal for an “engaged pluralism” capable of bridging conceptual, methodological, and institutional divides. To meet the journal’s structural format, the paper reconstructs the methodological foundations of the Dutch historiographical tradition by outlining its analytical principles, particularly its emphasis on formal and material objects of geography, conceptual mapping, and the role of scientific communication networks. The results highlight how the Dutch case shaped by long-standing rivalries between geographical schools, borderland intellectual influences, and post-war institutional expansion generated a pluralistic framework that accommodates diversity without disintegration. The discussion demonstrates that the encyclopaedic approach provides a model for contemporary historiography by promoting dialogue, shared intellectual genealogies, and the spatial contextualization of knowledge production. The article concludes that reassessing these Dutch contributions enriches ongoing efforts to cultivate a more connected and reflective geographical discipline. This reframed analysis underscores the relevance of historiographical methods for sustaining the discipline’s coherence and for informing renewed attempts to integrate its varied subfields.

**Keywords:** engaged pluralism; historiography of geography; Dutch geography; encyclopaedic approach; scientific communication; disciplinary traditions; Marcus Heslinga; Andries Kouwenhoven

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## **Introduction**

Concerns about the internal cohesion of geography have periodically resurfaced throughout the discipline’s history. Scholars such as Ron Johnston have warned that the overlap between geographical subfields has become so narrow that the discipline risks fragmenting into isolated domains. These anxieties echo broader debates about the increasing specialization of academic geography and the potential loss of a shared intellectual foundation. As a counterpoint to this pessimism, proponents of “engaged pluralism” argue that the diversity of geographical perspectives can serve as a source of vitality rather than division, provided that productive dialogue is maintained across theoretical, methodological, and regional traditions. Within this context, historical reflection becomes essential: understanding

how previous generations navigated internal conflicts and conceptual divergences can illuminate paths toward renewed disciplinary integration.

Recent efforts to diversify the historiography of geography have challenged older, more polemical narratives that framed the discipline's evolution as a sequence of incompatible paradigms or as a predominantly Anglophone story. Greater attention to non-Anglophone traditions offers opportunities to recover alternative ways of conceptualizing geography's intellectual structure. One of the most compelling examples originates from the Netherlands, where intense debates between competing schools of human geography persisted well into the mid-twentieth century. Rather than leading to a permanent schism, these conflicts prompted the emergence of a distinctive historiographical practice aimed at mapping, comparing, and reconciling multiple strands of geographical thought.

This article introduces and analyzes the historiographical framework developed at the Free University of Amsterdam between 1961 and 1987, known as the "encyclopaedic approach." Formulated primarily by Marcus Heslinga and later expanded by Andries Kouwenhoven, this approach conceptualizes geography as a discipline defined simultaneously by its material objects, its formal perspectives, and its evolving social and institutional networks. By foregrounding the multiplicity of conceptual fields that constitute geography, the approach provides a systematic means of examining the discipline's internal diversity without privileging any single viewpoint. The introduction concludes by outlining how this study reorganizes the original essay into a structure consistent with the journal's requirements, enabling a methodological examination of how Dutch historiographical practices can contribute to contemporary discussions on disciplinary pluralism.

## Materials and Methods

First, a document-based historical analysis was employed to examine key sources authored by Dutch geographers, including inaugural lectures, departmental publications, working papers, and institutional statutes. Particular attention was given to the writings of Marcus Heslinga and Andries Kouwenhoven, whose contributions shaped the encyclopaedic framework at the Free University of Amsterdam. Their works were treated as primary materials for reconstructing how Dutch geographers conceptualized geography's formal and material objects over time.

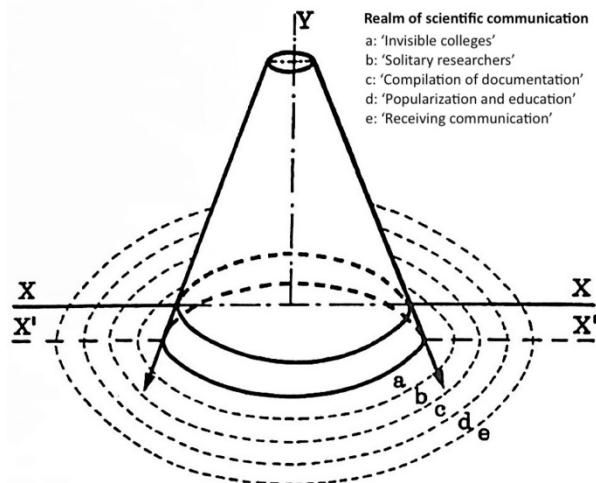
Second, a comparative conceptual mapping method was applied to identify how different schools of geography in the Netherlands especially those in Utrecht and Amsterdam developed divergent yet intersecting intellectual positions. These comparisons highlight how epistemological rivalries, disciplinary borderland influences, and post-war academic expansion shaped the Dutch trajectory. This step aligns with the original approach used by Kouwenhoven, who employed graph-theoretical principles to trace networks of scientific communication and conceptual interdependencies.

Third, a contextual historiographical reconstruction was conducted. This involved situating Dutch geographical debates within broader European and Anglophone disciplinary developments. By integrating external literature on disciplinary fragmentation, engaged pluralism, and transnational intellectual exchange, the study clarifies how the Dutch case contributes to ongoing historiographical debates.

## Results

The analysis reveals that the Dutch contribution to the historiography of geography is deeply rooted in the country's long-standing position as a disciplinary borderland, where multiple European intellectual traditions intersected. The early development of Dutch human geography was strongly shaped by tensions between the Utrecht and Amsterdam schools, each of which articulated distinct conceptual priorities. Utrecht geographers drew heavily on

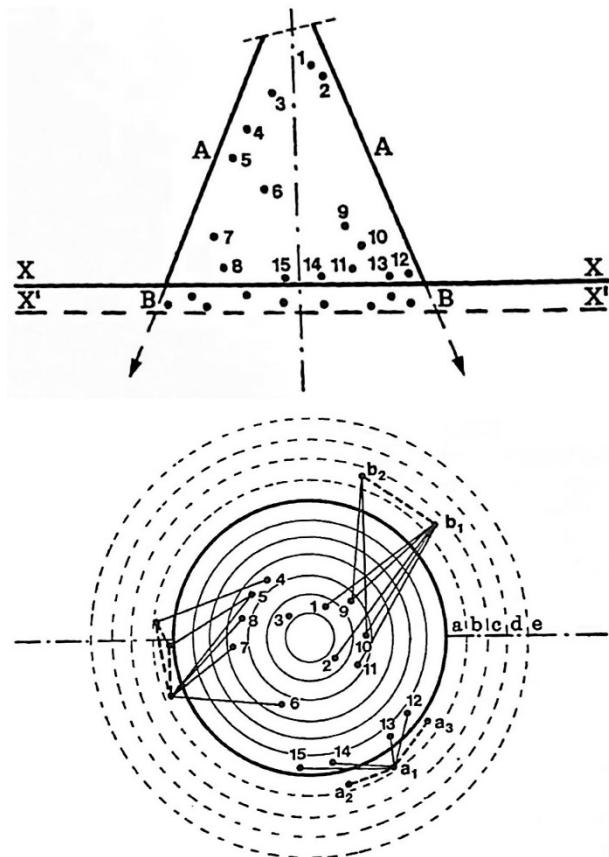
French ecological thinking, particularly the idea of the *genre de vie*, while maintaining a pronounced economic-geographical focus. In contrast, Amsterdam's sociographical orientation emphasized descriptive analyses of social and cultural relations. These competing positions produced decades of institutional rivalry that influenced how geography was taught, practiced, and legitimized in the Netherlands.



**Figure 1.** Kouwenhoven's 1971 model of scientific communication, reproduced with permission.

The expansion of Dutch higher education after the Second World War altered the disciplinary landscape. The establishment of new geography departments at Groningen, Nijmegen, and the Free University of Amsterdam introduced additional perspectives into the academic environment. As the number of professors increased, the intellectual climate became less polarized. Interactions within spatial planning research further contributed to easing ideological boundaries, as practical demands often required collaboration across theoretical divisions. These conditions created a fertile environment in which new integrative approaches could flourish.

The emergence of the encyclopaedic approach at the Free University reflects a deliberate attempt to address the accumulated fragmentation within Dutch geography. Under the leadership of Marcus Heslinga, the approach emphasized understanding geography through both its material object shared with other sciences and its formal object, the distinct geographical perspective. By documenting the multiplicity of ways in which this perspective had been interpreted, the encyclopaedic curriculum encouraged students to recognize the discipline's internal diversity rather than align themselves with a single dominant tradition.



**Figure 2.** Kouwenhoven Analytical Dimension

With the arrival of Andries Kouwenhoven, the approach gained a more explicitly analytical dimension. His model of scientific communication conceptualized geography as a dynamic assemblage of texts, networks, and institutions. The results show that this model provided a methodological tool for mapping how conceptual fields evolve, overlap, and diverge over time. By presenting geography as a networked system of knowledge production rather than a sequence of ideological confrontations, the model enabled a more nuanced examination of the discipline's pluralism.

The synthesis of these developments is reflected in later Dutch scholarship, particularly in the metaphor of the “geographical house.” This conceptualization portrays geography as an organically evolving structure composed of diverse rooms and viewpoints, continually rebuilt by successive generations of scholars. The results indicate that this metaphor encapsulates the core insight of the Dutch historiographical tradition: that disciplinary cohesion can be maintained not through uniformity, but through recognition of shared structures, inherited foundations, and the potential for ongoing renovation.

## Discussion

The findings underscore that the Dutch historiographical tradition provides an important alternative for understanding and negotiating disciplinary diversity in geography. While many global debates portray fragmentation as a destabilizing force, the Dutch experience demonstrates that pluralism can be cultivated into a productive intellectual arrangement. The long-standing tensions between Utrecht, Amsterdam, and later institutional actors did

not result in an irrevocably divided field; rather, these tensions compelled Dutch geographers to confront the multiplicity of perspectives that shaped their discipline. This historical trajectory challenges conventional narratives that cast disciplinary disagreements as inherently destructive and instead shows that sustained engagement across divergent viewpoints can foster conceptual innovation.

The encyclopaedic approach formulated at the Free University illustrates how such engagement can be operationalized. By emphasizing geography's shifting formal and material objects, Heslinga offered a framework that neither invalidates competing traditions nor reduces them to a single unifying theory. Instead, the approach encourages systematic comparison of conceptual fields, acknowledging the historical and spatial contingencies that influence how geographical thought evolves. This analytical stance aligns with broader calls for engaged pluralism, which seek to move beyond paradigm-based conflicts and toward dialogues that enable cross-fertilization between epistemological communities.

Kouwenhoven's contribution further broadened the methodological possibilities of the approach by introducing a model of scientific communication grounded in bibliometric reasoning. His representation of the discipline as an evolving network of publications, actors, and institutional structures provides a sophisticated tool for investigating how ideas circulate and intersect. The flexibility of this model allows researchers to trace disciplinary genealogies without defaulting to linear or teleological interpretations. At the same time, it highlights the social infrastructures academic networks, institutional norms, and pedagogical practices that sustain the discipline across generations.

The metaphor of the “geographical house,” which later emerged in Dutch scholarship, synthesizes these historiographical principles into a more accessible conceptual image. It suggests that geography is best understood as an assemblage of interconnected spaces, continually renovated through scholarly interaction. This metaphor is especially relevant in light of contemporary concerns about disciplinary disintegration. Rather than viewing the proliferation of subfields as a threat, the geographical house metaphor encourages recognition of shared pasts, mutual dependencies, and possibilities for rebuilding conceptual pathways. It reinforces the idea that disciplinary cohesion does not require uniformity, but rather an appreciation of structural continuity amid intellectual diversity.

Taken together, the Dutch historiographical innovations examined in this article provide a compelling foundation for rethinking how the discipline can confront present-day challenges. Renewed attention to historical methods particularly those that foreground plurality, conceptual mapping, and institutional context can support efforts to strengthen intellectual connections across subdisciplines. The discussion thus affirms that historical inquiry remains indispensable for sustaining geography as a coherent yet adaptable academic field.

## Conclusions

The examination of Dutch contributions to the historiography of geography demonstrates that the country's distinctive intellectual trajectory offers valuable insights for addressing contemporary concerns about disciplinary fragmentation. The historical interplay between competing geographical schools, the expansion of academic institutions, and the influence of external traditions created conditions in which pluralism became not merely unavoidable, but foundational to the development of Dutch geography. The encyclopaedic approach established at the Free University, with its emphasis on mapping conceptual diversity and acknowledging geography's shifting formal and material objects, provides a practical framework for understanding how multiple perspectives can coexist within a single discipline.

The additional analytical dimension introduced by Kouwenhoven, particularly through his model of scientific communication, illustrates how the discipline can be examined as an evolving network of knowledge, actors, and institutions. This perspective enables a deeper appreciation of the mechanisms through which ideas circulate and

disciplinary identities shift over time. Likewise, the later metaphor of the “geographical house” encapsulates the central insight of this Dutch tradition: that geography’s coherence depends not on intellectual uniformity, but on the continual recognition of shared structures and the active reconstruction of conceptual connections.

In sum, the Dutch historiographical experience highlights the importance of reflective engagement with the discipline’s diverse traditions. By revisiting conceptual foundations, tracing historical linkages, and acknowledging the multiplicity inherent to geographical scholarship, the field can better address current debates about its future direction. The reinterpretation of these Dutch approaches suggests that sustained attention to disciplinary history remains crucial for cultivating a geography that is both intellectually robust and capable of integrating its many evolving subfields.

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