

Rural Sociological Research and Its Importance for the Betterment of Rural Life^[1]

by

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It is possible, and it would be quite understandable for me, that perhaps some of you when they read the announcement of my lecture, felt a little sceptical and even suspicious. What is this sociology and what has it to do with agriculture and rural life? How can this new science tell us something new about rural life which was not already known? How can a man coming from some institute of university, who as a Nosy Parker looks at the people in a certain rural district for some months, know more about this people than those who are living in this district and how can he be able to give sound advice which can lead to an improvement of the living conditions of the farmers? Is not this whole science of sociology just a modern fashion, which like many other fashions has been imported from America and which has been accepted by the Europeans, just because it was something new?

Perhaps I'm making a mistake. It is possible that you are wiser than the Dutch people and that sociology was more quickly accepted and more highly esteemed here than in my country. There, at least, when we began to develop rural sociology and when we tried to convince those who are responsible for the furtherance of rural welfare, that sociology could be of some help to them, we often had to face disbelief and even distrust. Gradually the situation has improved and I can say that we are quite content in this respect. Nevertheless, there are still many who regard sociologists as innovators who cannot be taken quite seriously. And I think it would be too optimistic to assume that in your country conditions would be quite different.

As I said, it is quite understandable. Notwithstanding the fact that sociology as a science is not so young as many suppose—the term sociology was already coined more than a hundred years ago—it is only recently that the man in the street has become conscious of its existence. Before the war, in western Europe at least, interest in sociology was restricted to a rather small group of scientists who carried out their research, which was predominantly of a theoretical character, without much direct contact with real social life.

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DEVELOPMENTS IN SOCIOLOGY

But since the war things have changed in several respects. First the activities in the field of sociology have increased enormously. Before the war, in my country for example, there was only one full professor of sociology at the university of Amsterdam. Now at all our eleven institutes of higher learning there are one or more chairs for sociology and almost everywhere you can get a doctor's degree in sociology. Hundreds of students are educated in sociology now and the sociologist has become a normal phenomenon in the academic world. Perhaps the development in the Netherlands has been somewhat quicker than in some other countries of western Europe, but everywhere the importance of sociology increased enormously. This growing interest in sociology after the war was only partly due to purely scientific reasons; probably the most important background was that more and more government officials and others who have to do with policy-making in the broadest sense, became convinced that sociology could be of help to establish a sound basis for all kinds of activities which aim at the furtherance of the welfare of the population. At the same time the character of sociological research has changed. The sociologist left his ivory tower in which he wrote his speculative theories about social life. Modern sociology is a sociology based on fieldwork, on interviewing in different ways, on participant observation, even on experiment.

This change as to volume, tasks and methods of sociological research resulted in a much closer contact of laymen with sociology. The application of the findings of sociology to the problems of daily life means that the conditions of life of each of us become to a certain extent dependent on the activities of sociologists. The fact that an ever-increasing amount of field work is carried out by an ever-increasing number of sociologists means that a growing number of people become the direct subjects of sociological research. It becomes increasingly difficult to avoid the sociologist and if you try to do so he will just try to find you, because he thinks you are interesting. This almost unavoidable presence of the sociologist compels us to develop a certain attitude towards him just as we have developed a certain attitude towards other people with whom we come into contact and who have a certain influence on our life.

This necessity to develop an attitude towards sociology arose rather suddenly for many of us. Thousands who never heard of sociology during their whole life are now subjected to sociological research or have to consider the results of such a research. This sudden confrontation in itself often leads to an unfavourable attitude towards sociology. Even at the present time we do not like to be hurried when we have to take in new concepts and new ideas. We like to feel at home with things in which we get involved. But there is another reason. Sociology is not always a pleasant science and is often an unpleasant science. In the nineteenth

century Carlyle called economics the "dismal science" but today many are inclined perhaps to use this term for sociology. Sociology tries to know and to understand human life as it really is and often human life is not so very good. We are better than we are pictured by the wagging tongues of our enemies, but we are not so noble, so altruistic and so industrious as we like to be pictured by the president of our club or society in his anniversary speech. When I published my doctor's dissertation about the population of a rural district in the north-eastern part of our country, a number of people in this district considered the possibility of a protest meeting against what in their opinion was something like a collective defamation of character. On the other hand, people in the adjoining districts thought that I had still given them too much credit. This occurred, I repeat, in 1937 and in the meantime people have become more accustomed to sociological research, but nevertheless this personal experience demonstrates how people who are subjected to this research often feel uneasy about its results. Often they will try to defend themselves against what the sociologist considers as being the truth, but which they feel as a kind of accusation. Their almost self-evident reaction is to deny the reliability of the findings of the sociologist. And then often the reasoning is followed which I mentioned in the opening lines of my lecture: "How can a sociologist know more about a certain group of people than those who have lived for long years with this group in question? Why should we trust his judgment more than that of many others who have another opinion?"

THE MEANING OF SOCIOLOGY

This leads us again to the first question which I shall try to answer: "What is sociology and why can sociologists claim to know things which laymen do not know?"

Sociology, to begin with, is a behavioural science like, for example, psychology. That means that it tries to know and to understand human behaviour. But as distinct from psychology, at least from individual psychology, sociology does not consider man just as an individual. It studies man as a social being in his interaction with other people and tries to understand his behaviour as it comes about in this interaction with other people. In other words, sociology studies social groups, groups of people distinguishing themselves from others by certain mutual relations which are characteristic of them, and it tries to understand how the behaviour of the members of the group is influenced by the fact that they belong to it and take part in its life.

Therefore sociology is much interested in culture. When I use the word culture here, I use it in the broad sense, that is in its meaning of the total mental and spiritual inheritance of a certain group as it is living in this group at present. This culture includes beliefs, ideals, traditions,

science, habits, folkways, mores, techniques, all that bears the stamp of the human mind. It is hardly necessary to explain that culture in this sense is to an important extent responsible for human behaviour. What we are doing, we do for the most part because in our parental home and in our social environment in general we learned that we should do it and how we should do it. Culture is different from nation to nation, but within a certain country every region and even every village has its own culture, at least its own sub-culture, and if we want to understand the behaviour of the people in question, we have to know their culture.

The sociologist is also interested in structures, that means in the way in which social groups are built. He wants to know by what kind of ties, by what kind of relations people are knit together as a social group. He is interested in the way in which a group is organised, by what type of leadership it is characterised, how leadership comes into being, etc.

Another aspect of social life, studied by sociology, is function. What is a group doing and what are the effects of its activities for the group as a whole, for its members and for the society as a whole, in which a group is placed? How many functions does a group have and how is it carrying out these functions? Has it only one function, as for example a football club, or has it many less exactly defined functions, as for example a closed village community?

This brief survey of the basic aspects of social group life, culture, structure and function may be of some help to get a clearer picture of the field of study of the sociologist, but it does not yet explain why the sociologist can claim to have a better knowledge and a better understanding of social life and human behaviour than a layman. Without knowing the terms the sociologist is using, people in general and those who showed a special interest in these affairs in particular always have known quite a lot about their fellow-men, their nature and their activities. They have known that mankind is not an undifferentiated mass, but that there are groups of people who are united by certain special ties, that those groups are characterised by a certain mental outfit and that the members of those groups are characterised by a certain behaviour. The knowledge of these differences between social groups has even found its expression in nicknames, folk tales, folk-songs and other elements of folk art and folk lore.

The reason why the sociologist can claim to have a better knowledge and a better understanding of social life is not the fact that his knowledge of a certain social group as such is more extensive than that of other people. That may be so in some cases, but even then it will be very difficult for him to prove it. The only real basis of his claim is that he made the study of social life into a science. The most fundamental difference between "ordinary" knowledge and science is that science is systematic knowledge. I may perhaps illustrate the difference between normal, unsystematic knowledge and systematic knowledge by a simple

example. One of my students investigated some sociological aspects of agricultural advisory work in the district of a local adviser of the State Agricultural Advisory Service. There are many of these local advisers and as a consequence their districts are rather small, so that the adviser can easily know all the farmers in his district. The adviser in question was already working for a long time in his district and besides, he was a very good one. This adviser was convinced that he gave the same attention to all the farmers in his district and that for example he visited the small farmers as frequently as the bigger ones. When this student interviewed all the farmers in the district and among other things counted the number of visits they had received from the adviser during the last year, it was demonstrated very clearly, however, that the adviser was wrong. The figures left no doubt that the adviser on the average paid considerably more visits to the big farmers than to the small ones. The adviser was astonished when he saw the results of the investigation but admitted that they had to be right. Here we see clearly the difference between systematic knowledge and normal, non-systematic knowledge. There is no doubt, of course, that the adviser knew much more of his own district and of his own activities than the student. But his knowledge, at least in this respect, was unsystematic knowledge, based on uncontrolled experience; the knowledge of the student was of a higher quality, it was systematic and it could be controlled.

To this one example hundreds could be added, to show that almost always unsystematic and uncontrolled knowledge, especially as to social phenomena, is more or less unreliable and that sound conclusions can only be based on systematic investigations.

This does not only hold for pure facts but also for generalisations which are made on the basis of our knowledge and for the possible explanations of the phenomena we observe. One of the most common and most characteristic aspects of the popular reasoning of laymen about social phenomena is the tendency to rapid unjustified generalisations often based on accidental experience. The true scientist and so the true sociologist will always try to avoid accidental influences which can spoil the value of his observations. He will only generalise when he has enough facts at his disposal to make his generalisations reliable. The modern sociologist often will use mathematical methods to control his results in this respect.

Systematic, controlled knowledge gives the possibility to draw reliable conclusions as to the relations between different phenomena and here again mathematics are at the disposal to control the findings of the sociologists. In this way sound explanations of the facts which are observed are possible. Reliable generalisations and sound conclusions as to the interdependence of different phenomena form the foundations of an extensive body of sociological theory which gradually developed

and which helps sociologists to understand new facts which come to their knowledge.

I hope that the foregoing may have convinced you that the sociologist can claim on good ground that with the help of the scientific methods he has at his disposal, he can come to a better knowledge and a better understanding of social life than a layman can. That does not mean, of course, that the sociologist thinks that he is omniscient. On the contrary. Because of his general knowledge of social phenomena and his training in observation of social facts, it may be somewhat easier for him to get a more or less reliable picture of the social life of a certain group on the basis of uncontrolled experience than for a layman, the superiority of the knowledge and the understanding of the sociologists exists in fact only after he has made a scientific investigation. If he has not done so—I mentioned it already—he does not know much more than a clever and interested layman. A mistake which is often made by laymen who have heard about sociology and its field of study is that they think that a sociologist has to look only at a certain social group in order to know what are its problems and how they can be solved. When the sociologist tells them that he is not able to do so and that he has to investigate the group in question before he can give his opinion, they feel disappointed and often will come to the conclusion that sociology has little value. They forget, of course, that in all other sciences the situation is exactly the same. But perhaps the sociologist, at least if he is a wise sociologist, will be even more cautious than his colleagues of the other sciences. For he knows that the field of sociology is a very slippery one and that mistakes are made very easily.

So, if we agree that the sociologist has the opportunity of coming to a better knowledge and a better understanding than are possible for the layman, we come to the next question: "Can sociology do something for the betterment of social life—in our case for rural life—and how can it do that?"

SOCIOLOGY AND RURAL WELFARE

In principle the opportunity for sociology to do something for the betterment of social life is given by the fact that sociology can inform us about the interdependence of social phenomena and about the influence of non-social phenomena on social life. Sociologists in general are not so very fond of the words "cause" and "effect," certainly not when they are used in the sense they received in the natural sciences in the nineteenth century. But to make clearer what I mean, I may perhaps say that because sociology is able to find the causes of certain social conditions, governments and other policy-makers who want to change these conditions can know what causes have to be eliminated to bring about the change. This is certainly an oversimplification; the real situation

is more complicated. But that does not alter the fact that sociology is able to give government and administration an insight on which they can base their activity. It may be emphasised here that it is not the task of the sociologists to establish the measures and the line of action which have to be taken. Policy-making is a political activity and as such it is and must be subjective, while science is, or should try to be, objective. Science can establish the facts and try to explain them. If necessary it can determine also the possible effects of possible measures which can be taken. But to establish the aims which should be attained by any one policy and to make the choice from the different measures which could be taken, do not belong to the responsibility of the sociologist. Policy-making means expressing preferences and making choices on the basis of general political principles and ideals and practical possibilities. The scientist as such has no preferences and makes no choices.

As I tried to demonstrate, the most important contribution of sociology to a policy aiming at the betterment of social welfare is that it can indicate the factors which are responsible for certain conditions considered as being undesirable. But it is of much importance also that sociology can show the true facts about the existing situation. Often the popular opinion about the actual situation is quite wrong. Sometimes social problems are assumed to exist, while exact research can show that the facts do not support this supposition. The reverse can be true also. So to know the true facts, even if sociology is not able to give an adequate interpretation of those facts, is already of great value.

The fact that sociology can be of use in establishing a sound policy does not yet explain why its help is asked to an ever-increasing degree. There must be also a need for this help. The real background of this need is that our society has become a dynamic society. When I call our society a dynamic one I'm not thinking primarily of the quick change which is actually going on, but of the phenomenon that in modern western society change is accepted as normal and right. In a traditionalistic society such as ours has been for centuries, change is considered as being essentially wrong. In such a traditionalistic society the norms for human behaviour are found in the past. As things were in the past they were right, and in the present and in the future they have to be in the same way. If change occurs in a traditionalistic society it does not occur according to the will of the population in question, but in spite of this will.

Our modern society, whether we personally like it or not, has chosen for change. We want to change all things, material and non-material. We want them to be better, we want to improve them. "Old-fashioned" has become an abusive word, "modern" an approving one. We are not content with the fact that things are already changing very rapidly in our society without our help. We want to induce change consciously and we want to influence change which started of itself. That we want to further change holds also for social and economic life in general and

rural life in particular. We want to increase production, we want to improve education, we want to stimulate social participation, we want better relations between town and countryside, we want to stimulate the development of family life, we want more and better co-operatives, we want to stop migration (in Ireland) or to stimulate migration (in the Netherlands), we want better labour-relations between farmer and farm labourer, we want these and countless other things. And all those things mean changes: changes in the function of our society as whole and of the social groups of which it is composed, changes of the structure of this society and these groups, changes also in culture. It will be clear that the many and quick changes in our society and especially our will to bring about these changes, unavoidably led to a call on sociology. Policy-makers and administrators learned that you have to know how the situation really is before you can begin to try to bring about a certain change. They learned also that a certain change they expected as a result of certain measures did not come about, because people reacted in another way than was expected. It was very important that they learned that, even if the expected change occurred, often other and sometimes damaging consequences, which they had not expected at all, came into being also. And so they came to sociology to ask for help. As I said a moment ago, sociology as such has no preference; it is not for or against social change. But it cannot be denied that the rise of sociology has much to do with the fact that social change has become one of the most important features of our modern society. Because of the use which in practice has been made of its findings, sociology has become an instrument of social change and the problems of social change have become one of the most important subjects of sociology.

Up to now my lecture has been rather theoretical and I think it had to be so; to explain why sociology can be of use for the betterment of rural life is impossible without some insight in the character of sociology as a science, the possibilities it offers on the one hand and its limitations on the other hand. But I should like to devote the last part of my speech to some practical examples of results of rural sociological research which clearly show its importance as a basis for practical activities for the betterment of rural life.

EXAMPLES FROM HOLLAND

I will take these examples from the research of our own department of Rural Sociology of the Agricultural University of Wageningen and from other research with which I was closely associated, not, of course, because I think that these results are better or more important than those of other sociologists, but because, as is self-evident, I know these investigations better than any other research, their real aims, the problems they offered, the methods which were used and the real importance of the results.

I. Rural Mentality: One of the most important fields of research for rural sociology is the economic-sociological field. Though in our society sometimes the importance of the economic aspect of human welfare may be over-emphasised, it cannot be denied that, when we speak of the betterment of rural life, almost always this improvement of rural welfare needs an economic basis. As a consequence, up to now the greater part of the organised activities connected especially with the countryside, like agricultural vocational education, agricultural advisory work, etc., aimed for the greater part at an increase of the income of those engaged in agriculture. To a certain degree these activities have been successful; since to the end of the nineteenth century all countries in the western world have shown an almost permanent increase in productivity of agriculture. But not always and everywhere has the success been the same. Even in a country like the Netherlands where advisory work in agriculture is perhaps more intensive than anywhere in the world, many farmers do not yet make use of the advisory service. An investigation of our department of sociology showed that only one-third of the farmers consult representatives of this service frequently, one-third does it infrequently and one-third never. The reason of infrequent use is not unavailability of the help of the agent; the number of counsellors and assistants is great enough to serve every farmer regularly. Nevertheless, many farmers abstain from contact with the service, though it is an established fact that contact with the advisory service leads to better economic results. Investigations in the United States and also in the Netherlands have shown that the farmers who have frequent contact with the advisory service produce better results than those who have not. In general, we can observe that, notwithstanding the availability of vocational training, of advisory services, of an extensive literature on agriculture, of written advice on special topics in agricultural journals, in newspapers, etc., still many farmers continue to operate their farms in a way which must be called old-fashioned and inefficient and which leads to a far lower income than would be possible. This shows that the thesis derived from the philosophy of the nineteenth century, that you only have to show a man the way how to improve his economic situation to be sure that within a rather short time this improvement would come into existence, is wrong. According to these philosophers the personal self-interest of the individual would lead to that result. Sociologists already long ago came to the conclusion—at least to the hypothesis—that the economic behaviour of the individual is not motivated solely by self-interest. Economic behaviour, as well as behaviour in general, is an expression of the personality of the individual as a whole as it is formed in its social environment. The economic activity of the individual bears the stamp of the society in which he is living. Already for many years rural sociologists in the United States have investigated the relations between the economic behaviour of the farmer, in particular the acceptance

of new farm practices, and a number of other social data. They found, for example, that economic activity is related to social participation, to education, to socio-economic status, to the degree of rationality, etc. In the research we did in our department we started from the hypothesis that these correlations between economic activity and all those more or less separable variables, which the American sociologists found in their investigations, must have a common background. We supposed that this background must be the general character of the culture or sub-culture of the social group in question. Our next hypothesis was that, at least in an important part of the Netherlands, the farming population still is in the period of transition from the traditional pattern of culture to the modern pattern of culture, and that the degree to which the modern pattern of culture has been accepted is of essential importance for the economic activity of the farmer and its results. As I mentioned a moment ago, the most essential difference between the traditionalistic and the modern pattern of culture is that in a traditionalistic society change is considered as wrong and abnormal, while in the modern society change is considered as right and normal.

The greater part of my staff-members took part in the research in question and in the end one of them tried a method by which he could discriminate in a rather simple way between those who showed a relatively modern and those who still showed a predominantly traditionalistic pattern of culture. He asked the farmers in a certain region in the eastern parts of the Netherlands ten questions. An answer to each of these questions could be considered as an indication that the farmer accepted change as normal and right, no answer as an indication that his thinking was still predominantly traditionalistic. In this way the research-worker was able to form two groups, viz., one group of farmers who gave an answer to the majority of the questions and one group who answered only a few of them. Then he tried to find out if those groups showed differences as to their mentality and their social and economic behaviour. The results were surprising. He could show clearly that the two groups were characterised by quite different mentalities and that they demonstrated very great differences in their social and economic behaviour. It is impossible to give you full particulars about the results of this piece of research. But let me mention that he could show that on farms of the same size the group of the "modern" farmers had on the average an income which was about 40% higher than the income of the "traditionalistic" farmers. Perhaps you will make the remark that these differences do not show that success in farming is dependent on the degree to which the farmer has accepted the modern pattern of culture. It is also possible that the successful farmers are those who have the best inborn qualities and the unsuccessful ones are those with the lower inborn capacities. We thought of that possible objection also, of course. So we tried to find out whether the supposed traditionalistic mentality

originated from inborn qualities or from external causes as for example social contacts by which the modern pattern of culture could be brought to the farmers. We were able to demonstrate, that in the region which we investigated and where still many farms are lying on sandy roads, the number of "traditionalistic" farmers increases, when the distance of their farms from the metalled roads increases. There is no reason why the inborn qualities of the farmers would be lower when the distance of their farms from the metalled roads increases. On the other hand, it is quite obvious that the possibilities of social contacts and, because of that, the opportunities to adopt the modern pattern of culture, decrease when the distance to the metalled road increases. So these findings gave us a clear indication that the existence of a modern pattern of culture is to a high degree, at least, dependent on the possibilities for acculturation, on the possibilities for assimilation of elements of culture from outside. Perhaps I may add that the conclusion that the degree of modernisation of the farmer's mentality is dependent on his possibilities of social contact was corroborated by the results of research we did in other parts of the country.

I think there can be hardly any doubt as to the practical importance of these findings for the betterment of rural life. If it is true that economic behaviour is primarily or at least to a high degree dependent on the pattern of culture as whole of the group to which the farmer belongs, we should not over-emphasise the importance of pure technical and economic instruction and advisory work. It indicates that even for economic purposes a type of education which aims at the development of the personality and the culture of the worker in agriculture as a whole, as for example is done by the Danish folk high schools, is of primary importance.

II. Rural Family: Another piece of research of practical importance. Though the Netherlands is a rather small country it shows still important differences as to family life and family organisation of the rural population. In the eastern part of the country in particular we still find a type of extended family. Here it is normal that the farm is taken over after the death of the parents by one of the sons. If the son marries, he and his young wife will not try to get a farm of their own but they find their home on the farm of the parents of the young husband. His father will remain the head of the family and the head of the farm and the son, notwithstanding the fact that he may have grown-up children of his own, remains dependent on him until the old man dies. The same holds for his wife in relation to her mother-in-law; the old lady runs the affairs and the daughter-in-law has to obey. If there are more sons and daughters, and if they cannot find a job outside agriculture, they will stay unmarried with their parents and, after those have died, with their brother and sister-in-law. Nowadays the number of these unmarried brothers and sisters, because of the better opportunities outside agriculture and the

decline of the birthrate, has decreased, but essentially the system did not change; in the part of the country in question it is still normal to find on a farm a family of three generations united in one, undivided household. The system has existed for ages and ages and the population in question considered it as normal and right. No one protested against it. But during the last few years the situation began to change. Gradually those who live in these three-generations-households began to compare their own situation with that of other people and they begin to feel their situation as abnormal. This holds especially for the younger generation. The social isolation of the rural districts where this system of family life still exists has come to an end and the young people now see that almost everywhere in the country, not only in the cities, but also in the greater part of the countryside the small, the nuclear family, consisting of father, mother and their children, forms the normal unit in which people live together. Besides, in the districts in question the non-farm population has increased and with them also the nuclear two-generations family and not the three-generations family is normal. Especially the daughters-in-law begin to feel their position as unpleasant. That they have the strongest objections against the existing situation is quite understandable. They have to cope with serious problems of adjustment. When the young couple marry, the situation for the young man does not change so very much. He lives with his own parents and his own family as he did before. But the young wife has to live with a strange family in which she holds, although she is already grown-up, the position of a dependent child. But perhaps even more important is the fact that the young women begin to feel that the extended family lacks the intimacy between husband and wife and between parents and children, which is characteristic of the nuclear family. As is understandable, the existing style of living in the extended family does not allow of the expression of feelings of affection as is normal in the nuclear family. Moreover, the education of the children is often still considered to be the task of the grandmother while the daughter-in-law is doing farmwork.

During the last few years, the problem of the extended family has been the subject of many and sometimes heated discussions in the churches, in farmers' unions, in welfare-organisations, etc. Many have advocated that after the marriage of the young couple the parents should move to a separate house in the village, so that the young people could start a life of their own on the farm as is the rule in a large part of the country. On the other hand, there are many who are convinced of the advantages of the existing system and are against change. But no one could say with certainty what, under the existing conditions, would be the most satisfactory solution for all parties concerned, because no systematic knowledge about these conditions and the existing opinions was available. With the help of local authorities one of our staff-members made an extensive investigation of the whole problem. He came to the conclusion

that a continuation of the existing situation would lead to serious tensions and conflicts within the families, but that on the other hand a complete separation of the parents and the young couple would be unacceptable also. Even with the young people there is still a strong feeling that it is their duty "to see the parents to their end" as they call it. The existing norms in the region still demand a permanent care by the younger people of the older ones, which can be given only when parents and children are living in the same house. So the result of the research was that the only acceptable solution is the division of the farmhouse into two separate living quarters, so that the parents and the young couple are near together, but are able, at the same time, to have separate households and to live their own life.

III. Rural Settlement: As a third and last example I should like to mention a piece of research in relation to the colonisation of the Zuiderzee-polders. As you will know perhaps, one of the most important projects in my country is the reclamation of the former Zuiderzee, by which the surface of cultivated land in the Netherlands will increase by about 500,000 acres or by about 10% of the total cultivated area. A very important problem for the two polders which have been settled and the three which still have to be settled, is the settling of the small farmers. Because we want to give a change to farmers and farmers' sons coming from farms of different size on "the old land," we make farms of a different size in the new polders also. The smallest farms in the polders have a size of about 25-40 acres, the biggest of 125-150 acres. The building of farms of different sizes brought about the question how these farms of different size had to be spread over the polders. Some people who were interested in the colonisation of the polders thought that it would be wise to mix the farms of the different sizes. They thought that it would be an advantage for the small to live near the bigger ones, because the bigger ones in general have a better education, have better opportunities to attend exhibitions, lectures, etc., and have more money available to try out new methods, so that the smaller one could learn from the bigger one. As a result of this reasoning, in the first polder bigger and smaller farms were more or less mixed indeed. When we had to colonise the second polder, research had already taught us that, in regions where big and small farms are mixed, the small farms are often in a difficult position because they try to follow the same style of farming as the big ones, while, just because these farms are small, they have to be managed in a different way. So in the polder we began already to settle the small farmers in groups. But the dispute between the advocates of group settlement and those of scattered settlement of the smaller farms had not yet come to an end. So we decided to investigate the real character of the relations between the big farmers and the small ones in the already existing polders. This investigation led to the conclusion that there are almost no personal relations between the farmers on farms of different

size. Farmers have their friends and their visiting-relations almost exclusively amongst farmers of the same size-class. This means that if farms of different size were mixed in the polders, perhaps small farmers would imitate, like elsewhere in the country, the general style of farming of the bigger ones, but that probably there would not be a permanent passing of experience and knowledge about details of farming from the bigger one to the smaller one. The transmission of knowledge in this way needs frequent social contacts and these contacts are lacking.

At the same time this investigation taught us that scattering the small farmers over the polders brings about the social isolation of the small farmer. The small farmer is much more tied to his farm than the bigger one and mostly he is not able to keep a car. So if he cannot find social contacts in the neighbourhood, this will often mean that he will hardly find them at all. Especially for colonists who had to break already the ties they had with friends and family in their districts of origin, this isolation is not only unpleasant, but it can threaten their mental health also. Some years ago we had a few cases of suicide in the second polder which probably had their background in a feeling of loneliness originating from the loss of familiar surroundings. I'm sure that now after this investigation, the problem of the way of settlement of the small farmers is solved; in the next polder we will settle them in groups.

I have already taken too much of your time and your patience and I shall end here. I hope that—if this was necessary—I have convinced you that sociology in general and rural sociology in particular is not only an interesting playground for the scientific mind, but that it can be and is of great importance for the furtherance of rural welfare.

E. W. HOFSTEE