

## Only Connect ... Pleading for a Neo-Holistic Geography

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### 1 Presentation of main points

The text unfolds and puts up for discussion an ambivalent theme. On the one hand, a call is made for the reconstruction of geography in German-speaking countries as an integrative discipline focusing on space and place as arenas of interrelated man-land-systems (points 1-6 below). The methodological specialty of this «re-united» geography would be a multi-scalar analysis which interrelates processes on local, regional, national, continental and global levels. The growing demand by societies and organizations for a better understanding of complex man-land-relations at various geographical scales explains the necessity for a reconstruction of the field of geography.

On the other hand scepticism is reflected at the probability of geography in German-speaking countries taking on this intellectual challenge (points 7-11) and translating it into fitting organizational structures and operational research projects, thus turning geography into one of the leading sciences of the post-modern world. One reason for this scepticism is that research activities and consequently career routines in geography are marked by increased topic specialization. Another is the growing competition between geography and related disciplines in the fields of areal and spatial analysis.

The following eleven points expand on the main argumentation. It is important to note their immersion within the research contexts of Germany as the current situation of geography in other European and American countries appears to be notably different.

1. It is only if geography is seen in its overall academic and social contexts that the potentials and bottlenecks of the proposed re-form course can be identified (see Fig. 1).
2. In daily life the number of life-styles and their degree of openness have greatly increased. As a result, patchwork identities have become common for an increasing number of individuals. The same holds true for members of the scientific community. In many disciplines self-contained groupings of scientists continue to form and to shield themselves while the number of go-betweeners («Grenzgänger») continues to be relatively small.
3. In the present context geography focuses on three broad epistemological traditions or paradigms (see Fig. 2 b below):
  - (a) geography as spatial science, as study of spatial structures and place relations;
  - (b) geography as study of man-land-relations;
  - (c) geography as study of the cultural and social meaning of places and spatial structures.
 Presently, the adherents of each of these three broad sub-cultures (paradigmatic orientations, belief systems, ontologies) continue to fence themselves off, to develop and nurse their specific jargons and languages.
4. It is through integration of these geographical sub-cultures – a process that has elsewhere been termed «intra-disciplinary inter-disciplinarity» that the academic institution «geography» can best utilize its comparative advantage to meet the demand for applicable research results of a more integrated kind.
5. The concept of sustainability constitutes a fitting guiding principle for the creation of such a «neo-holistic» geography. The much publicized triangle of sustainability corresponds largely with the three traditions of geography (see Fig. 2).
6. The triangle of sustainability can serve as a model to identify more concrete bilateral research issues (combining sides A-B, A-C and B-C, Fig. 2) and «triangulated» issues (combining A-B-C-aspects). The following concepts, besides sustainability, lend themselves as conceptual foci for such a neo-holistic geography: political or human ecology, syndrome, vulnerability, risk, crisis, and conflict.
7. To halt and reverse the prevailing trends of disintegration in geography, substantial efforts will have to be expended. The main reason is that (re-)integration does not primarily constitute a technical problem. The psychological, or «human» barriers put up between the «camps» are more relevant, and more difficult to overcome. Consequently, the required remedial actions would have to be organized as processes of institutional learning and inter-cultural communication. The concept of «patchwork identities» and related theories of «foreignness» are recommended as guiding principles – fields where geographers have accumulated a multitude of experience.
8. Three particular routines of geographical research function as effective barriers for the requisite process of inter-cultural communication within geography. Firstly, the current trend towards increasing specialization in research so characteristic in each and every discipline, including geography. The force and sus-

tainability of this tendency should not be underestimated; it is deeply rooted in the career systems of German academia.

9. Secondly, the status of geography among the related disciplines of social and natural sciences is generally low. More often than not, geographers are treated by members of the «accepted» and powerful tribes among academia's population as foreigners, outlanders, or vagabonds on the territories of scientific work. In their attempts to avoid marginalization, geographers tend to assimilate. They imitate the routines and standards of the «main» or «mother» disciplines, often at the expense of retaining their own cultural roots and traditions.
10. Thirdly, the «accepted» disciplines keep intruding into the territories of traditional geographies. This is true for each of the three traditional cultures of geographic thought. Spatialization, territorialization and localization are frequent consequences of the continuous specialization in related disciplines, such as psychology, economics, and sociology. Likewise, these disciplines continue to focus on natural resources as study objects.
11. Only if geographers make intensive discourses on the meta-theoretical and ontological levels part of their routine work, can this process of mutual learning be initiated and upheld. In other terms: only if geographers adopt an attitude of self-reflexivity in their daily research work can they hope to overcome the cultural barriers between different schools. To achieve this, procedures of mediation and consultation which have recently gained ground in other sectors of social development and planning appear appropriate.

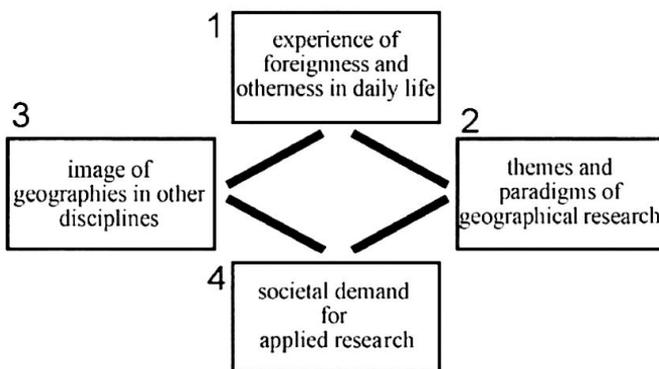


Fig. 1: Arenas of interaction relevant for the status and position of geography  
*Handlungsarenen, in denen über Status und Lage des Faches Geographie entschieden wird*  
*Aires d'interaction dans lesquelles sont déterminés le statut et la position de la géographie*

## 2 Illustration of the propositions

In this section the eleven points discussed above will be illustrated. Wherever possible, results of empirical research are drawn on to keep the discussion as «grounded» as possible.

### 2.1 An analytical framework

Fig. 1 illustrates the conceptual framework employed to identify and assess the potentials and bottlenecks of the proposed integration course in geography. Four relevant arenas are distinguished.

### 2.2 Arena 1: Patchwork identities in daily life and research work

Patchwork identities have become a common attribute of post-modern lifeworlds, with the latter's territorial configuration getting more and more complex and extended (cf. ALBROW 1997, BRENNER 1999). Daily routines are increasingly variable and include an increasing number of encounters with «the other» and «the foreign», both in the sense of the unknown and the different. The following extract from a 1998 interview with a then leading political figure in Germany provides an example.

Q: What does the term «*nation*» mean to you?

A: Nation is the overarching whole, encompassing my native place («*Heimat*»). My native home («*Heimat*») is the *Palatinate*, I speak its vernacular *language*. At the same time I feel to be specifically close to my country as a German – there are good reasons to call it *national feeling* («*Nationalgefühl*»). I stand for this feeling, knowing that to overstretch it would be misplaced. Never would I revile the native place and nation of others. I am a *European German*, a *German European*. (...)  
*Oggersheim* has always been considered to be my *residence* («*Wohnort*»). But that's not true. I was born in *Ludwigshafen at the Rhine* and I live in *Ludwigshafen at the Rhine*, in the ward of *Oggersheim*. If this is considered provincial, I don't object. Then the *provincialists* are a majority in Germany.

Text 1: Multiple territorial identity and place relations  
*Räumliche Mehrfachidentität und vielörtige Orientierung*  
*Identité territoriale multiple et orientation multispatale*

(Source: Ihr werdet Euch wundern!

Chancellor HELMUT KOHL talking to ROGER DE WECK.  
 In: DIE ZEIT No. 36, August 27, 1998: 2-4;  
 emphasis added, translation: H.D.)

In every society, everywhere in the world a growing number of de-territorialized communication networks are developing. The distance between communicators continues to increase in terms of mileage, or physical distance, though not necessarily in terms of social distance. Otherness and foreignness are becoming elements of daily life for more and more individuals. And, as can be seen in incidents such as those in Ruanda and Kosovo, politicians are not the only actors constructing ever more complex structures of foreignness in the shape of «ethnic politics», to strengthen seemingly «natural» ethnic networks. The theme has, sad to say, a secure future. Well-informed, descriptions are badly needed.

**2.3 Arena 2: Three separate strains or sub-cultures in geography**

What is true for lifeworlds and informal sectors of social life holds true for the allegedly more rational organization of science. Confrontation with an increasing variety of specific academic traditions, of standards and epistemological routines, of foreign language groups in every sense of the term has become a regular challenge for more and more scientists.

The drastic reduction of the rich plurality of geographic traditions to only three «families of thought» (Fig. 2) is certainly debatable; the arbitrariness of any classification is a well-known fact. But even this highly simplistic view highlights the notion that the organizational unit «geography» is a body containing individuals and groups within the process of becoming alien to each other. In what follows the three corner positions of Fig. 2 (a) will be briefly characterized with some of their main scientific issues and key terms. Each of the positions is so well established that at least one textbook summarizes the position.

*Geography as study of man-land relations*

The concept of «sustainable development» is often understood to stand for a more restricted view of ecologically sustainable paths of development. It is in line with this dominant political trend that the issue of ecological conditions and potentials has become a new research focus in many scientific fields.

Results of geographical research on the multifarious expressions of man-land combinations are almost countless. In colonial times, sound knowledge of agricultural and mining potentials was required, and geographers were ready to answer to this demand. Some of the most convincing results of classical geography achieved between the two World Wars are rooted in the tradition of micro-geographic descriptions of the cultural impregnation of land-use patterns in all parts of the world. In recent times the continuous interest in man-land-relations has seen a major shift both in scale and subject-matter. The efficient use of energy resources and the reaction to natural risks have developed as core

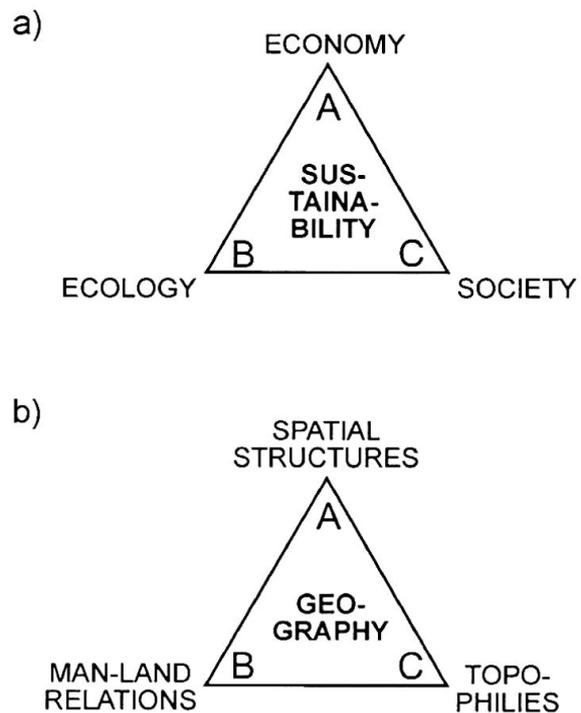


Fig. 2 Three geographies related to fields of current applied research  
*Drei geographische Sichtweisen als Beitrag zur aktuellen angewandten Forschung*  
*Trois points de vue géographiques contribuant à la recherche appliquée actuelle*

issues, often researched from a multi-scalar angle. How do the emerging global, continental, international and national and local organizations and institutions shape the use of agricultural and mining resources? To answer these and related questions geography will have to compete with other disciplines, simply because the public is prepared to spend notable sums of research funds for this purpose.

*Geography as natural and/or social science of spatial structures*

In the late 60's and early 70's of the 20th century, areal patterns or regularities of areal differentiation came to constitute the most widely accepted study object of the «new» geography. The development was the result of a unprecedented international effort, with the young DAVID HARVEY and PETER HAGGETT in Great Britain, and the late DIETRICH BARTELS and GERHARD HARD in the German speaking world standing out as initiators. In this new paradigm, shaped after the analytic positivism of the time, spatial interconnections were predominantly seen as determining forces of areal distribution of objects, be they tangible (normally) or intangible (less frequent). Space in these studies was mostly conceptualized as a container of the studied objects, the number and kind of which are practically countless. In this per-

spective, geography was, and still is, the science of the «where» of elements, conditions, structures or processes. Within geography, the unifying effect of this paradigm was strong; geographers of the human as well as of the natural strain were ready to line up behind the newly raised banner of distributionism. Externally, however, the esteem which it bestowed on geography's rank in the overall academic arena (Fig. 1, Arena 3), was less noticeable. Today, the carrying capacity of areal differentiation as an ontological and epistemological basis is further called into question. The legitimization of geography as a «cartographic» discipline, of geographers as experts on areal distributions of every kind, will probably continue to be a matter of debate.

#### *Geography as topophilia*

Starting around 1975, and with YI-FU TUAN'S «Topophilia» as its hallmark, a group of new research questions came to the fore of international geographies: Which human demands and needs are used to structure the areal dimensions of living-spaces? Who and what constitutes the uniqueness of places and of the «räumliche Umwelt» (literally, «areal/spatial environment»)? How are places entrenched in social meaning, and which cultural traditions and complexes serve as sources of ever changing connotations? How are places charged with meaning and relevance for individuals? Which daily and more formalized contexts are prone to functionalize these meanings for what purposes? In more general terms: What do we know about the relation between landscape qualities on the one hand and territorial (local, regional, national) identity on the other? As P. SHURMER-SMITH and K. HANNAM have demonstrated in their stimulating summary of these issues, this strain of cultural geography is deeply rooted in the hermeneutic «verstehende» methodology of the related «mother» disciplines. Here, ontological and methodological developments have been drastic and fast in recent years (for a thorough overview of this extensive field see NÜNNING (ed.) 1998). The resulting task of new methodological orientations for geographers is both an urgent and a heavy one.

In this context, the effects of constructivism on geographical thought deserve special attention. The following quotation from CHECKEL (1998: 2) may serve to indicate both the direction and the far-reaching implications of this forceful trend:

«These [constructivist] scholars, who combine an ontological stance critical of methodological individualism with a loosely causal epistemology, are thus well placed [...] «to seize the middle ground» – staking out a position between positivist and agent-centered rational choice, on the one hand, and interpretative and structure-centered postmodernism on the other.»

Daily experience shows that most groupings of physical geographers as well as some from the field of human geography find this kind of ontological development

difficult to understand, let alone accept. The reasons for this are manifold. More often than not, adherents of the constructivist paradigm tend to present and defend their position with a good pinch of cultural arrogance well known from all sorts of intercultural contexts. The «other» (geography) is not only considered foreign, but also inferior. This – often latent – attitude opens few perspectives for the badly needed constructive cooperation between the «hard», positivist and the «soft», qualitative camps on geography's ground. The constructivist turn in social and cultural geographies puts the epistemological unity of geography on a severe test.

#### 2.4 A necessity:

##### **Intradisciplinary interdisciplinarity**

Increasingly, a perplexed public finds itself confronted with more and more complex catastrophes and conflicts. To benefit from the opportunities which this contains for problem-oriented research, geographers would have to initiate a systematic process of what has bombastically been called «intra-disciplinary inter-disciplinarity». This includes a twofold dynamics of integration and/or re-integration: (1) cross-sectoral and (2) multisectoral. With regard to the first issue, it is well known that the request to combine the epistemological and methodological approaches of the natural, social, economic and cultural sciences (in terms of theories and of research designs) is as sensible as it is difficult to realize. The second aspect, the investigation of reality at various scalar levels has recently found a strong advocate in NEIL BRENNER (1999). His work constitutes a great challenge for geography which has the privilege of a long tradition of (re-/de-) territorialized approaches to theoretical (less) and empirical (more) researches.

At both levels of geographical integration, the above mentioned danger of alienation between the members of various sub-cultures in geography is imminent.

#### 2.5 Sustainability - a lighthouse for the course of integration

The three geographical traditions distinguished in Section 2.3 can be related to the three core aspects of sustainability, one of the most widely used concepts in ongoing development debates (Fig. 2).

(A) The issue of *economic* sustainability hinges on the quality of a firm's location in communication and transportation networks – a traditional object of economic and transportation geography. (B): Whether a certain policy is sustainable in view of the social actors promoting, or the local actors being affected by, certain policies is a matter of their acceptance. In other terms: the degree to which the actors feel the new regulations and rules lead to a better quality of life – an intensely studied subject of social geography. (C) Lastly, *ecological* sustainability can best be assessed (by scientists) and guaranteed (by politicians) if ecosystems are subjected to the well developed procedures of integrated geo-

graphical analysis of (man-made) ecotopes – a combination of intensive field work and laboratory research covering each of the ecological components within an ecotope and their interaction.

## 2.6 From corners to lines to bundles

The process of goal-orientated integration of geographical traditions is not totally novel; geographers have always defined some of their research topics figuratively speaking, along the sides and not at the corners of the triangle depicted in Fig. 2a. In this section some of these bi-topical research issues will be sketched out in more or less abstract terms. This does not mean that the various «schools» are only ephemeral developments. All of them have developed into textbook laden, vigorous research fields.

### Side A-B:

The impacts of economic and financial globalization on concrete land-use patterns have been intensely studied. Concepts such as «property rights» and «property rights systems» are useful to mediate between economic or regulatory change at higher levels of the scalar hierarchy (international, national, regional) and their local effects. Such changes are almost countless in kind and number. They are confined to innovations with direct effects on spatial patterns, such as new regulations for agricultural or forestry land use. The far-reaching ecological effects of rapid metropolization are a case in point.

### Side A-C :

As mentioned earlier, the era of globalization emphasizes the emergence of increasingly dense and multi-layered networks between more and more distant locations. This offers considerable potentials for human geography with its long research experience in a «relational theory of space-time»:

«what goes on in a place cannot be understood out-side of the space relations which support that place any more than the space relations can be understood independently of what goes on in particular places» (HARVEY 1996: 316).

Furthermore, if globalization is conceived as a multi-sectoral process going beyond financial and economic interrelations to include processes of universalization of values and aesthetic norms, as LASH & URRY (1994) and LASH (1996) have convincingly demonstrated, then globalization creates a multitude of new place-space relations to be analyzed from this typically geographical angle. International tourism provides many relevant examples; and the assessment of urban place qualities is deeply influenced by the extension of universally agreed or accepted norms of architectural design.

Further impulses for A-C-themes are part of the above-mentioned constructivist turn in social science. NEIL BRENNER characterizes this shift of perspective:

«Space is not merely a physical container within which cap-

italist development unfolds, but one of its constitutive social dimensions, continually constructed, deconstructed and re-constructed through an historically specific, multi-scalar dialectic of de- and reterritorialization» (BRENNER 1999: 3). And, still taking globalization to be the major driving force behind the actual spatial restructuring in most parts of the world, he specifies the need to respond to this trend by means of a multi-scalar methodology:

«[...] globalization unfolds simultaneously upon multiple, intertwined geographical scales – not only within global space, but through the production, differentiation, reconfiguration and transformation of sub-global spaces such as territorial states, regions, cities and localities» (BRENNER 1999: 3).

### Side B-C:

This side signifies the far-reaching program of what has, with varying and peculiarly vague terms, been characterized as urban or social or political ecology. A good example is provided by the meticulous research work of GERHARD HARD (1997) who has, on the basis of his empirically voluminous geo-botanical studies in urban areas, summarized the principles for this kind of integrative program in geographical research as follows:

«The (urban) ecologist must observe in his research practice

1. the «real» ecological situation as it is perceived in natural science
2. how people perceive and interpret ethno-ecologically the ecological situation (including the actors and the social, political and economic basis of these ethno-ecologies)
3. the relationship between the real ecology and the symbolic ecologies
4. how people behave and act on the basis of their symbolic ecology
5. the result of their behaviour and actions with regard to the real ecology
6. how this result of often unreal ecologies is being perceived, interpreted and legitimated» (HARD 1997: 100).

### A-B-C-bundles

Studies reflecting the highest degree of integration could be shaped after the holistic definition of landscape by O. FRÄNZLE of the Kiel Institute of Geography. For FRÄNZLE, integrated geographical research is nothing less but

«regionalizing analyses of the structure and dynamics of interrelated («vernetzter») biotopes and biocenoses with different degrees of human influence, of the material and energy flows and of the multifarious mechanisms governing the regulation and the resulting limits of stability and carrying capacity» (FRÄNZLE 1998, internal communication).

This is a far-reaching demand indeed. But practical research shows that the high standards can be met in em-

pirical studies, even by individual researchers. THOMAS HOPPE (1992) has provided a convincing example with his thorough study on the salinization and alkalization of soils in the Tarim Basin which is analyzed as an effect of the internal colonialism imposed on Xinjiang after it became a province of China.

It is along these lines of theoretical, conceptual and empirical research work that a neo-holistic geography would have to develop. The traditional basis for these initiatives is solid, their excavation a rewarding task.

### 2.7 Integration as a process of inter-cultural learning

In the course of time, geographers have accumulated a vast amount of experience with various expressions of foreignness or otherness (see e.g. SHURMER-SMITH/HANNAM 1996: Chapter 1). Some of the basic categories developed in this research may be utilized to take a hermeneutic view at the current research landscape of «geotopia».

In many Departments of Geography various paradigms are pursued simultaneously during daily research routines. Consequently, more and more geographers find themselves as foreigners in an academic territory which at the beginning of their careers, they might have taken to be their home ground. The feeling that emerges in many individual researchers and teachers can be likened to a feeling of «intra-national» alienation – a feeling of otherness within the boundaries of the organizational unit called «geography». In this unit, multi-cultural environments steadily gain complexity. To cope with their increasingly specialized tasks, researchers rely on their own, ever more specialized analytical tools, terminologies and jargons. They cocoon themselves into secluded sub-cultures with specialized models of the reality, with highly ingenious world-views and classificatory schemes. These schemes and models may be practical for tackling set jobs. Inter-cultural communication, however, becomes increasingly difficult and time-consuming. The sub-cultures drift apart, their initial common purpose slowly moving out of sight.

If the scenario described above is widespread, then the reconstruction of geography as a neo-holistic discipline involves primarily tackling inter-cultural communication problems and focusing on inter-cultural approximation.

This places geographers in a comparatively good position: they can draw on a vast amount of pertinent research findings. Among geographers there is no need to explain that the development of processes involving various cultural groups normally take a long time.

### 2.8 Specialization in research and interdisciplinarity

The disintegrative consequences of prevailing trends in research routines are well documented (for more detailed analyses see DÜRR 1995 and 1998). Suffice it to

repeat the observation that a promising career in German academic geography is based on the publication of specialized research findings, preferably collected in original field-work, and not on analyses and interpretations of secondary sources (with the main intention of contributing to the stabilization and consolidation of conceptual foundations of the discipline), however extensive.

### 2.9 Arena 3: Geography: a pariah?

But it is not only in the field of geography itself that obstacles have been laid hindering the re-unification of the geographies. The following quotation is part of the final report of an international research project aimed at understanding the organizational development and topical differentiation in today's academic institutions in the Western world.

«For us, all these differentiations into disciplines appear to be so plausible that we often fail to see how awkward they are. Although there was no denying the fact that, for example, spatial relations, existed, they were difficult to be explained by the dominant model. One solved this problem by creating a special discipline, geography which afterwards was degraded in the intellectual hierarchy to something like the status of a pariah» (WALLERSTEIN 1995: 118).

Not too long after WALLERSTEIN had, in the original English version of his «Unthinking Social Science» (1991), made this provocative assessment, the Gulbenkian Commission, headed by the same IMMANUEL WALLERSTEIN, in its influential report «Open the Social Sciences» (1996) offered a less harsh evaluation of geography (perhaps because one of the members of the renowned Gulbenkian Commission was Peter Taylor, the political geographer). There, geography – along with law and psychology – was again not reckoned as a «basic element of the social sciences» but addressed as a potentially very rich discipline:

«When, in the late nineteenth century, the study of social reality was increasingly divided up between separate disciplines based on a clear division of labour, geography with its generalizing, synthesizing, non-analytical character appeared as anachronistic. [...] As a result the coverage of space and place was more or less ignored» (GULBENKIAN KOMMISSION 1996: 32-33; translation: H.D.).

A further important notion which this statement signifies is that the realm of academic disciplines is not void of clear power structures. WOLF LEPENIES, in a stimulating essay on «the Social Sciences after the End of History» (1995), has taken a closer look at these conditions. He does not restrict himself to analysis but moves on to clear-cut recommendations for the members of the «lower castes» of academia:

«... in many disciplines a growing need of an economic analysis of non-economic phenomena is to be felt – reaching from aesthetics via psychology, history and political science as far as geography and theoretical biology. Apart from biology which, with its pronounced self-esteem, feels no need to

hide behind economics, the concerning disciplines will only be entering into a fruitful exchange with economics, if they do not approach it as critics, but as modest outsiders. (...) It is only this kind of outsiders' modesty that can lead to the economists' benevolent, and thus productive, condescension» (LEPENIES 1997: 91).

The question how this unequal distribution of power among the disciplines came into being, by whom it was produced and still is being upheld, must be left open. Three conclusions relevant in this context can be made: (1) that it would be naive and tactically unwise not to take these power realities into account; (2) that any decision of a young geographer to shape her or his career according to the epistemological and technical standards of, say, economics is quite rational and understandable; and (3) that this externally orientated attitude further weakens the integrative forces of geography.

### 2.10 Arena 3: Recent invasions into geographical territories

Another external trend influencing, and indeed limiting, the number and routes of possible integration strategies for geographers is the striking inflation of «areal» models and spatial world-views that have recently come to the fore in many related disciplines (cf. for a brief overview: SCHOLZ 1998). This holds true for each of the paradigmatic strains of geography. A few examples of these «geographies without geographers» will serve to illustrate this point:

With regard to the tradition of *man-land relations*, the growth of hyphenated disciplines like «resource-economy» or «sociology of resource management» clearly illustrates this development.

With regard to geography as *areal and/or spatial analysis*, the following quotation from RICHARD EVANS' famous study on the cholera epidemics of the 19th century «Death in Hamburg» is exemplary:

«No other aspect of social inequality of cholera cases has been studied as thoroughly as the spatial aspect - chiefly because in many cases the documentation of illnesses and deaths in terms of urban quarters has made the compilation of figures easy» (EVANS 1991: 521).

In the subsequent section, Evans, the highly acclaimed social historian, moves on to analyze the coincidence of the «blue death» and the social geography of Hamburg where, significantly, he employs choropleth maps as instruments of illustration and analysis.

Finally, the human geographic tradition of *studying space and place* as elements of human orientation and identification is to be found in other disciplines as well. In his study on «The Language of the Bells», the French historian ALAIN CORBIN deals with «acoustic landscapes» in 19th century France. Chapter 2 is devoted to the «Acoustic Orientations of the Rural Population». Here, Corbin differentiates rural living spaces of early industrial France into center and periphery. The medium of this areal structuring are bell sounds:

«For village people as well as for burghers and professional people living in the centres of small towns it was easier to sense that sort of spatial embeddedness which the emerging proletariat of the cities had still to do without. [...] The bell tower signified an acoustic space corresponding to a particular concept of territoriality: the obsession to know each other. The bell thus emphasized the division into an inner and outer sphere» (CORBIN 1995: 139).

Another recent, and very striking, example of «geographicalization», this time in the field of literary and cultural studies, is FRANCO MORETTI's ingenious application of geographical models in his «Atlas of the European Novel» (1999). Similar «adaptations» of geographical modes of description and analysis by neighboring disciplines can be found in large numbers.

How should the apparent «invasion» be interpreted and what does it signify for a geography seeking to sharpen its academic profile and reputation in the world of science?

The following comments are put forward for more systematic discussion. *Firstly*, the smooth export of geographical techniques and methodologies indicates once again the proximity between world-views and some geographic disciplines. *Secondly*, in each of the cases mentioned above, the authors are convinced that the breakdown of a given study area into smaller units of analysis helps to gain a deeper understanding of the phenomenon at hand. And *thirdly*, only in rare cases is geography explicitly mentioned as the source of the areal perspective.

In the appropriate words of «otherness» studies: The ease with which many intruders onto geographical ground ignore the traditions of the vernacular population is as amazing as it is annoying. In full accordance with the general model of colonialism, the invaders take great pains to demonstrate their self-confidence, a behavior typical of long-standing members of the allegedly high cultures ...

Under these conditions, what can the suppressed classes and tribes do?

### 2.11 Upscaling the intradisciplinary discourse

The topics studied in the physical geographies as well as in the positivist «hard» and hermeneutic «soft» camps of human geography have been allowed to develop in independent directions. Keeping this in mind it is difficult to see how discourses on positive subject-matters and research findings alone could promote an approximation, let alone a genuine (re-)integration of the various paradigms in geography. It appears absolutely necessary to complement this topical discourse with discourses on the meta-theoretical level. It is only if the adherents of the three (or more, for that matter) cultures of geography agree to abide by the spirit of what

ULRICH BECK (1990) has described as the self-reflexive mode of science that sustainable approximations can be expected.

In other words, the following «4D»-perspective must be adopted as one component, or rather prerequisite, of the required process of mutual institutional learning:

«The perspective of the «4D»-strategy focuses on the specific collective patterns to observe, interpret, think and decide which, for the members of the collectives, constitute the basis of their everyday actions. This strategy aims to make these patterns transparent and to motivate the actors to adopt a permanent attitude of (self-) criticism and (self-) reflexivity» (DIERKES & MARZ 1998: 23).

And, more precisely (and, presumably, finding less acclaim in the scientific community):

«One component of the methodological core of this «4D» concept is to radically denounce the ontological boundary between lifeworld and academia with regard to the process of theory formation. In other terms: neither science in general nor the academic operation of science in particular possess a monopoly for the interpretation of reality and for theory formation» (HOFMANN 1993: 243, quoted from DIERKES & MARZ 1998: 24).

Up until now not every scientist has made systematic self-observation of his research a habit. But perhaps any progress towards a neo-holistic geography is deeply dependent on this kind of serious and constant self-reflection. Only then will the patience, the understanding, the tolerance, the pragmatism and last but not least, the mutual trust be developed which is a precondition of a reconsolidation of geography. Only connect, break down boundaries, join forces: easier said than done ...

### 3 Conclusion:

#### Geography as a multi-cultural territory

All in all, at the end of the 1990's, the realm of geography in German-speaking countries presents itself as a multi-cultural territory, densely populated and lacking unifying centers. Smaller «tribes» tend to populate the border areas of this territory, nurturing contacts with foreigners on the other side of the national boundary whose cultural orientations are often deemed intellectually more attractive than the old country of origin. The extra-territorial foreigners in turn get to know the geographical culture and find certain components useful and attractive. And while the inhabitants of *Geotopolis* take special pains to improve their command of the neighbors' more difficult language, the latter start to pick up the seemingly easy vernacular of the former. Inter-national communities develop. As a result, *Geotopolis* itself develops into a territory with lively multi-cultural environments. This, to extend the rather loaded simile still a bit further, is deemed all the more attractive because processes of de-territorialization or dis-embedding are central elements of a post-modern existence;

cf. BRENNER 1999. Idioms and paradigmatic world-views continue to drift apart. More and more of the locally rooted geographers feel surrounded, if not dominated, by «othernesses», by foreign habits and norms.

As was clearly seen at the Würzburg symposium in January 1999, this situation – as a matter of fact, this «constructed reality» – gives rise to many concerns and questions at the epistemological and methodological levels as well as with regard to the organization and sociology of the discipline.

Under the given conditions at our universities, where the need to legitimate ones existence vis-à-vis the neighboring disciplines and the bureaucracies is becoming an indispensable duty, it is inappropriate for geographers to adopt a strategy of «business as usual» or of «wait and see». What is needed, instead, is a strategy of goal-oriented change for the discipline as a whole. The present paper suggests the chief goal should be the creation of an amalgam of the traditions and existing sub-cultures of geography. Geographers would have to define a - to borrow an elsewhere much disputed term – «new center» («*neue Mitte*») of the discipline. The two-fold argument behind this suggestion is, *firstly* that it is only by joining forces that a widely accepted, clear profile of geography can be created, and *secondly* that only a discernible geography will be accepted by the more powerful disciplines as a respected partner enjoying equal rights and reputation in the field of science. An enormous amount of solidarity between geographers is required to shape such a clear cut profile of neo-holistic geography.

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*Note:*

If not otherwise stated quotations from German texts based on English originals were re-translated by the author.

**Summary: Only connect ...  
Pleading for a neo-holistic geography**

In eleven propositions the article surrounds an ambivalent theme. It is related to the conditions found in Departments of Geography in German-speaking countries. – On the one hand it pleads for a disciplinary strategy to integrate various human and physical geographies to constitute a neo-holistic geography. This could contribute to shape geography as a centre of competence for current issues of regional and urban development. The complex concept of sustainability – taken in its three-fold meaning as ecological, economic and social sustainability – lends itself as a sound basis for this integrative strategy. – On the other hand well-established career routines of young scientists are a strong hindering factor. These career paths require a degree of topical specialization which runs counter to serious steps of integration.

**Zusammenfassung: ... was zusammengehört,  
Plädoyer für eine neo-holistische Geographie**

Mittels 11 Thesen kreist der Artikel ein ambivalentes Thema ein; er bezieht sich dabei auf die Verhältnisse in Geographischen Instituten des deutschen Sprachraums. – Einerseits wird für eine Integrationsstrategie des Faches plädiert. Danach sollten verschiedene sozial- und naturwissenschaftliche Geographien im Sinne eines Neo-Holismus inhaltlich wieder zusammengefügt werden. Dies könnte dazu beitragen, die Geographie zu einem wissenschaftlichen Kompetenzzentrum für aktuelle Probleme der Raum- und Stadtentwicklung zu machen. Das Konzept der Nachhaltigkeit in seiner dreifachen Bedeutung – als ökologische, wirtschaftliche und soziale Nachhaltigkeit – ist dafür ein bestens geeignetes Bezugfeld. – Andererseits: Diese Re-Integration erfordert große Anstrengungen. Sie lässt sich bei den gängi-

gen Karrieremustern junger Nachwuchswissenschaftlerinnen und -wissenschaftler nicht leicht verwirklichen, denn diese Karrieren setzen einen hohen Grad an fachlicher Spezialisierung voraus; sie sind nicht integrationsfreundlich.

**Résumé : Plaidoyer en faveur d'une géographie néoholistique**

Cet article cerne un sujet ambivalent à l'aide de 11 thèses. Il se réfère à la situation rencontrée dans les instituts de géographie des pays germanophones. – D'un côté, on revendique une stratégie d'intégration : en réunissant le contenu de diverses géographies humaines et physiques, on souhaite faire de la branche une discipline néoholistique. La géographie deviendrait ainsi un centre de compétence scientifique permettant de traiter les problèmes actuels de développement spatial et urbain. Le concept de durabilité (dans sa triple acception de durabilité écologique, économique et sociale) est un champ particulièrement approprié à cette stratégie d'intégration. – D'un autre côté, cette réintégration demande de gros efforts : les modèles de carrière actuels

des jeunes scientifiques de la relève ne permettent pas de la réaliser facilement, car ces carrières exigent un degré élevé de spécialisation, ce qui joue contre l'intégration.

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