



Editorial

Les fabriques des “géographies” – making academic geographies in Europe

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1 Introduction

In October 2012, in our new function as human geography editors of *Geographica Helvetica* (GH), we organized a conference on “Les fabriques des ‘géographies’ – making academic geographies in Europe” in Fribourg to re-launch the journal. We chose Fribourg as the location for this event for a very specific reason closely linked to our intellectual agenda for the symposium and the journal. Fribourg hosts the only bilingual university in Switzerland, where students can earn degrees in either French or German – and where academics need to teach in one language and be at least sufficiently fluent in the second one for following a conversation or debate. More often than not, however, this bilingual university ends up having two language communities side-by-side, academics well connected to either of the two scientific communities in the German- or French-speaking world, but few will be able to cross the borderland and participate at equal capacity in both worlds. Further, academics now have to be well versed in international (i.e. anglophone) scientific debates to show international impact and excellence.

These complexities bring about dilemmas, pressures and opportunities at the same time. And this is the intellectual space wherein we seek to locate the future agenda of *Geographica Helvetica* (GH) – as a Swiss journal of geography that takes the multi-lingual landscape of Swiss human geography not as a reminiscence of the past, but as a stimulating node to cross boundaries, to fuse different ideas and traditions and to nurture linguistic specificities, semantic nuances, theoretical explorations and complex empirical connections. Our core message in this editorial is relatively simple: mirroring the title of the Fribourg event and of this theme issue (“Les fabriques des ‘géographies’ – making academic geographies in Europe”), we want to show that – and how

– we wish the journal to become a fertile meeting ground for the encounter of differing traditions and understandings of “making academic geographies” in Europe and beyond.

This project builds on two basic presumptions: *first*, that diversity in the genealogies of knowledge production and intellectual thought traditions provides a stimulating space of engagement beyond a simple re-production of a monolithic international discourse of how (theory and practice in) writing about geography should be done. And *second*, it requires a critical introspection of the ways knowledge is produced, how ideas can be translated from one tradition into the other, and of the practices that make ideas travel and circulate across previous boundaries of scholarly thought. In this editorial, we will sketch out these two presumptions as a basis for the agenda of *Geographica Helvetica*, before we briefly outline the papers of the themed issue.

2 Entangled diversities

Firstly, we see *Geographica Helvetica* as a place in which different traditions in geography can meet and exchange with each other. Human geography in Europe is still shaped by “national” or “language-based” traditions, such as franco-phonie or *deutschsprachige* geography. In Anglo-American geography too, we can detect important differences between British and US geographies for example. Specific traditions in geography have emerged from specific national genealogies of the discipline, which in turn mirror specific schools of philosophical thought, ways of practising social sciences and styles of academic writing. These differences shape present-day practices of both young and established scholars across the discipline’s sub-fields.

For us, this is not a problem, but rather a source of richness. Whilst there is currently a drive towards internationalization, which largely means Anglo-Americanization, this richness should be saved and explored rather than buried. Thus our stance is not that the existence of language or national traditions in geography is a superfluous reminiscence of the past. Rather, we believe that there is immense creative potential to be found in the actual encounters of these traditions that has yet to be brought to full fruition.

Switzerland, as a country with at least three national academic languages (German, French and Italian), finds in itself a co-existence of differing traditions in human geography. Presently, there are at least two kinds of Swiss human geographies: one inspired by the French tradition in francophone Switzerland and another by the German tradition in the Swiss-German-speaking part of the country¹. In addition, many Swiss geographers have had strong links with Italian geography over the last thirty years. More recently, a strong common reference to anglophone geography has been superimposed upon this intellectual landscape. This has generated interesting hybrid human geographies, presenting a range of specific characteristics, such as the preservation of a markedly quantitative stance in some geography circles and a type of empirical pragmatism.

Building on this overall diversity, we witness an intensification of the actual exchanges and collaborations between geographers and geography departments across Switzerland. There is of course nothing revolutionary about the development of such collaborations. However, in multilingual Switzerland, this has also resulted in increasingly intensified dialogues across different language contexts, national traditions and ways of thinking and doing geography. Thus in its quality as a microcosm that condenses and brings together influences from larger academic spheres, we believe that Switzerland holds a privileged position for the development of a fruitful dialogue between differing geographical traditions in and beyond Europe.

We see the re-launch of *Geographica Helvetica* as an opportunity to emphasize and to develop precisely this potential. *Geographica Helvetica*, for us, should take up the very specificity of Swiss geography as a meeting ground for different ways of thinking and practising geography. We want the journal to become a platform for the development of a creative, truly cosmopolitan geography that provides space for cross-border theoretical debates around major thinkers, past and present, and for the international circulation of geographical ideas and concepts.

¹ This intellectual landscape is, of course, also produced by the presence of French, German and Austrian geographers working in Swiss universities, who bring their national traditions into the Swiss academic space of geography. This process is not without its problems, in particular when it leads to a silencing or weakening of specific Swiss traditions or themes that are sidelined through foreign researchers at these universities.

3 Critical introspection

When we say that Switzerland is an interesting place to develop creative ways of thinking and doing geography, we of course suggest that place matters in knowledge production. The argument that knowledge is situated, coming from somewhere, has been made and substantiated over the past 20 yr by historians of science like Stephen Shapin (2010) and by historians of geography like David Livingstone (2003). Related to this is our suggestion for the journal to become a place and means for "critical introspection". Exchange and cross-fertilization also require critical attention to both the actual encounter that takes place, in its complexities and power dynamics, to the "entities" (traditions) that enter into conversation, and to the acts, events, processes and places of translation and circulation of ideas and practices. This requires a close interrogation of the ways through which, and the reasons for which, different disciplinary positions are framed and brought into dialogue. Different geographical discourses and research practices interact with a range of philosophical, social, institutional and political factors, whose role in defining and shaping geographical problems and positions cannot be overestimated. Thus it is of critical importance to explore and to problematize the very logics and origins of the underlying and hidden a priori assumptions in the field.

This requires us to ask questions such as the following: How and on what levels do specific positions and traditions in geography differ? Why do they differ in these ways? What are their origins, limits and internal logics? Which ideas have circulated between different traditions and what has happened to these ideas in this circulation process? How have they been shaped and re-shaped? How have they been mixed with other ideas in different traditions and places of geography making? More specifically, can we identify different trajectories of theoretical and methodological cosmopolitanization in different countries? Does it still make sense to talk about national traditions? How are current trends towards increased internationalization and cross-fertilization debated in different national contexts?

In this editorial, we want to highlight two major issues underpinning and shaping the present-day practices and experiences of making academic geography. *First*, we position our project within the growing critique on an overarching Anglo-American hegemony in human geography. While we comply with some of this critique, our position is that rather than mumbling about a perceived hegemony versus peripheral locations, we argue for a more creative utilization of different traditions to develop richer international – cosmopolitan – geographies. *Second*, we ask what happens when ideas travel and circulate. How do acts of translation change the semantics of an idea, but also re-shape research practices?

3.1 Centres and peripheries: geographies of geographical knowledge production

The first broad issue at stake relates to the power dynamics in past and present forms of geographical knowledge production. In the late 1990s already, some geographers expressed their worries about the dominance of the English language, of Anglo-American journals and more broadly speaking of Anglo-American norms of knowledge production in academic geography at the time. In a special issue of *Society and Space*, Claudio Minca questioned in his introduction whether major anglophone journals could actually be considered as truly international. Minca called for a geography that “confronts itself with the variety of places which contextualize other geographies; with the variety of alterities making up the discipline” (Minca, 2000:289).

This claim was taken up by Manuel Aalbers and Ugo Rossi some years later, in a study of the multi-layered inscription of European geographers within (1) their respective national traditions, a (2) growing community of European geographers and (3) a range of wider Anglo-American debates (Aalbers and Rossi, 2007). Aalbers and Rossi thus portrayed a generation of researchers navigating in parallel worlds, with different rules and languages. Many of us are part of this generation, and we all know how challenging this navigation can be, especially for early career researchers and doctoral students.

This expectation of European geographers to be part of several worlds is closely related to the development of “academic capitalism” (Slaughter and Leslie, 1997): we are all being asked to account for our productivity in terms of quantity of publications, impact factor, *H* indexes and the like. And we all know that a presence in anglophone journals and conferences is now mandatory for the careers of European continental geographers. The very fact that this introduction is written in English testifies to this development: a strategic choice that would have been unthinkable in Switzerland 10 to 15 yr ago.

This discussion should of course not be limited to Europe, but inscribed in a broader analysis of the global “power geographies of knowledge production”. We should consider that asymmetries, difficulties and domination are even greater between the Global North and the Global South than between anglophone and non-anglophone European countries (Best, 2009). Think for example of Raewyn Connell’s work (Connell, 2007), which has highlighted the predominance of social theory produced in the former colonial metropolises over “Southern theory”, i.e. the theoretical contributions of intellectuals across the Global South. Regarding the domain of geography more specifically, Jenny Robinson’s repeated call for a more cosmopolitan urban theory and urban studies comes to mind (Robinson, 2006).

Our ambition is not to create a new hegemony, a counter-hegemony or an ambitious periphery against a presumed hegemony, but rather to provide an intellectual space of exchange and encounter for cosmopolitan European geographies to emerge. Therefore, what we would like to do with *Geographica Helvetica* is not so much to rehearse arguments about Anglo-American hegemony, but to see how to move beyond it, how to play with it, how to pass around it. Things have changed since Minca’s claim in 2000, not sufficiently but they have: the French-based *Cybergeo*, for example, is trying to develop European discussions in human geography. Also, journals like *Social and Cultural Geography* and *Society and Space* have opened windows to non-Anglo-American geographies. In 2013, the key question is “how can we further push forward such a cosmopolitanization through means such as seminars, research networks and through journals such as *Geographica Helvetica*?”

3.2 Acts of translation and the circulation of ideas

Thus it is generally acknowledged that the ways in which geography is produced have to do with place-specific milieus, resources and historical contexts. However, knowledge production is not only related to place, but also to the translation, mobility and circulation of ideas, thus raising a series of interesting questions. What forms of thought travel? How are ideas and concepts translated from one language into another, from one tradition into another? What happens with “returning ideas”, coming back like a boomerang to their place of origin after having been reworked elsewhere? For example, how does francophone geography receive UK-filtered research on Jacques Rancière? Or how do German-speaking geographers consider the digestion of Peter Sloterdijk’s work in contemporary anglophone geography? How do German political geographers react to the recent reconsideration of the work of Carl Schmitt in anglophone political geography? Why has Foucault been discussed so apologetically in anglophone geography, and why have French geographers been rather reluctant to embrace his writings (Fall, 2007)? What do Italian geographers think of the recent fashion of Agamben’s spaces of exception in anglophone critical geography?

Geographica Helvetica aims to raise and discuss such questions relating to the places and dynamics of geographical knowledge production today and in the past, in Europe and beyond. To be clear, this project is not confined to continental European geographers, but an invitation to Anglo-American geographers as well and it should in the future go well beyond the Northern Hemisphere. As the recent International Benchmarking Review of UK Human Geography remarked: “One of the challenges of English-language research is the default expectation that conceptual as well as linguistic translation is a problem for others.” In our view, it certainly is not. Our interest is in questions such as the following: What

happens through acts of translation? How do semantic shifts occur? How do new ideas re-shape research practices?

And the normative premise behind these questions is of course – how can we foster a cross-fertilization of different interpretations through these acts of translation and circulation of ideas in order to develop richer theory, more nuanced empirics and a general attitude towards mutual enrichment rather than ignorance. In asking for an open and self-critical posture that favours academic encounter and exchange, we imply of course an overall attitude of mutual respect and interest.

4 New formats of engagement: writing European geographies

Besides ideas and concepts, one key difference between various national traditions has been the style of writing academically. The now internationally standardized Anglo-American way of writing a properly argued paper is significantly different to the ways of arguing in francophone or German-speaking geography – and their social science and humanities traditions more broadly. Translation thus not only refers to finding the proper words for a concept in different languages, but also to adapting one’s writing to the expectations of an Anglo-American standard. For this reason, also, we maintain the possibility of writing not only in different styles, but also in different languages within the journal, i.e. the Swiss languages German, French and Italian as well as the global lingua franca: English.

Another recent pattern, in particular in UK geography, has been a dominance of publications in journals at the expense of monographs (and many monographs published by prominent geographers are, at closer site, rather a collection of previously published papers). We think that monographs are still an important way of writing geography, leaving scholars more space to think through and to digest – and a critical examination and debate about such monographs, their argument, their evidence and their location within a broader field of debate will remain important.

In responding to these frame conditions and to underpin a self-critical and open posture, the refurbished *Geographica Helvetica* comprises a series of novel publication formats which are meant to facilitate creative exchange and reflection and allow creative ways of writing. Namely, in addition to the full-paper section, the journal now comprises a novel rubric called “Interfaces”, which provides space for innovation and experimentation. Submitted pieces are encouraged to test ideas and indeed to create productive controversy. Contributions may be sent out to external referees for commentary before publication, but are not subjected to a strict peer-review process, to ensure timely publication. More specifically, the following types of contributions can be submitted to Interfaces:

- Interventions (2500–3000 words): short and concise analyses that engage critically with current social, cultural, economic and political developments from a geographical perspective;
- Positionings (2500–3000 words): critical engagement in current thematic or theoretical debates in geography or neighbouring fields.

Furthermore, the new *Geographica Helvetica* also comprises a refurbished book review section to allow a more fundamental discussion of major books, past and present, and to instill a culture of critical and open-minded reading of such *oeuvres*. We here distinguish between the following:

- Review Essays (1500 words): detailed and critical engagement with one specific and newly published book that promises to be of significant interest to the discipline;
- Review Symposia (2500–3000 words): detailed and critical engagement with several books or key publications, presenting a common thematic focus. This also allows for the critical review and positioning of a number of landmark publications within ongoing conceptual or theoretical debates;
- Thinkers’ Corner (2500–3000 words): critical engagement with past and present thinkers (geographers, philosophers, social theorists) to assess their relevance for present-day geographical theory.

We hope that these formats will become established and well-known parts of the journal. In the current theme issue, we have already included a number of contributions falling into the Interfaces and the book review sections.

5 Content of the theme issue

The present theme issue consists of four full papers, two Interface essays, two commentaries and one contribution to the Thinkers’ corner. In different ways and on different levels, all contributions address the same question: what shapes particular, situated and circulating, ideas and practices in geography, and how do these ideas and practices then meet (or not)?

The first article, by Claudio Minca, entitled “(Im)mobile Geographies”, examines one of the motors and basic pillars of contemporary knowledge production in academia (and in geography more specifically): the trend to quantify and rank academic productivity and impacts. Minca also discusses current trends of internationalization and academic capitalism, which permeate and indeed deeply transform the institutional settings and academic environments in which geography is practised and conceived today. The key point of Minca is, however, that this institutional setting is not only constraining, but has also allowed critical geography to thrive

within UK human geography – and similarly, space could be developed to offer possibilities for pluralization of critical geographies towards a more pronounced cosmopolitan vision as we envisage in the journal as well.

The second article, by Ulf Strohmayer, is entitled “Structure and event, networks and nodes in Human Geography: the 1960s revisited”. Drawing upon the Deleuzian distinction between structure and event, Strohmayer interrogates the “quantitative revolution” in geography of the 1960s, as an example for how intellectual paradigms become shared traditions and as such affect both national and international research practices. Throughout his analysis, Strohmayer also focuses on the very possibility, and implied difficulties, of editing a trans-national journal interested in bridging specific language and national traditions: a discussion that is of course of great relevance to *Geographica Helvetica*.

Ute Wardenga’s article, “Writing the history of Geography: what we have learnt and where to go next” focuses on another subfield of geography in its development – logics and internal framings. Outlining different traditions of narrating the actual history of geography, through national and/or more transnational frameworks, Wardenga discusses the actual possibility and challenges for a truly cosmopolitan cross-fertilization and dialogue across the discipline.

Christian Abrahamsson’s paper adds a further viewpoint to this discussion, in focusing on the specific concept of *Lebensraum* in its genealogy and political exploitation. Showing how Darwinian evolutionary thought was subsequently translated into 19th century German geography, into Kjellén’s formulation of an organics theory of the state, and finally into Karl Haushofer’s geopolitics, the paper explores one particularly telling example of how ideas and concepts travel and “drift off” over time.

The two Interface essays included in the present theme issue, written by Bernard Debarbieux and by Myriam Houssay-Holzschuch and Olivier Milhaud, both focus on the history and internal power structures of French geography. Drawing on different examples and periods, the two essays provide insight into the mutual imbrications between geographical research in France and its wider sociopolitical context. In complementary ways, they thus reiterate that an adequate account of the causes, logics and effects of geographical knowledge production also requires critical interrogation of the institutional settings, the mediating mechanisms and the underpinning sociopolitical rationales, through which specific concepts and problems at hand are framed and approached.

Juliet Fall and Olivier Graefe provide two commentaries on these selected essays, based on their interventions at the symposium. Graefe compares the “positionalities” of German- and French-speaking traditions vis-à-vis the anglophone geographers’ world and concludes, based on a sociological analysis of the academic practices of both “traditions” within their national academic systems, that French-speaking geographers were more akin to define themselves in relation

to French humanities tradition, whereas German (speaking) geographers have recently adapted anglophone (i.e. “international”) trends in the discipline much more vigorously. Fall, in turn, explores the thinking and writing spaces of multilingual geographers and challenges the notion of one “international” disciplinary space as a fiction. But this also raises the question of how we position ourselves to the multiple pasts of the discipline and how we can define whom we write for and how.

Stuart Elden’s contribution to the journal’s Thinkers’ Corner deals with one of those texts and authors – Jean Gottmann’s “The Significance of Territory”, which differed most markedly from the predominant orthodoxies of French geography in the second half of the 20th century, instead creating a very personal, albeit exiled engagement with the discipline’s core questions. Yet in his very position and biography, Gottmann testifies perhaps most powerfully, albeit indirectly, to the power dynamics inherent in geographical knowledge production. Elden’s essay thus not only inaugurates this new format of *Geographica Helvetica*, but also contributes to the overall problematic of the theme issue.

6 Closing

Our project of making *Geographica Helvetica* a site of encounter and a site of emergent cosmopolitan (critical) geographies (among many other sites) depends, of course, on the resonance it will find in the community of academic geographers in Europe and beyond. As editors, we invite interested geographers from all sorts of places and traditions – theorists and empiricists alike – to take part in this project of cosmopolitanizing international geography. We are aware, of course, that this project starts from the margins of current international geography. Fribourg is not Harvard, either. But similarly as we chose Fribourg as the site for our symposium because of it being a node in the borderlands of French- and German-speaking academic worlds, we hope that *Geographica Helvetica* will become a stimulating node that connects complex geographies of geographical knowledge production, theoretical debate and empirical exploration.

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