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## Boundary spanning in social and cultural geography

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## **Special issue: Intersections of German- and English-language social and cultural geographies**

### **Boundary spanning in social and cultural geography**

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This article situates interactions between German- and English-language social and cultural geographies since the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century within their wider intellectual, political and socioeconomic contexts. Based on case study examples, we outline main challenges of international knowledge transfer due to nationally and linguistically structured publication cultures, differing academic paradigms and varying promotion criteria. We argue that such transfer requires formal and informal platforms for academic debate, the commitment of boundary spanners and supportive peer groups. In German-language social and cultural geography, these three aspects induced a shift from a prevalent applied research tradition in the context of the modern welfare state towards a deeper engagement with Anglophone debates about poststructuralist approaches that have helped to critique the increase of neoliberal governance since the 1990s. Anglophone and especially British social and cultural geography, firmly grounded in poststructuralist and critical approaches since the 1980s, are increasingly pressurized through the neoliberal corporatization of the university to develop more applied features such as research impact and students' employability.

Keywords: knowledge transfer, boundary spanning, history of geography, German-language geography, English-language geography

## **Themenheft: Überschneidungen von deutsch- und englischsprachiger Sozial- und Kulturgeographie**

### **Brückenbauen in Sozial- und Kulturgeographie**

Dieser Artikel situiert Interaktionen zwischen deutsch- und englischsprachiger Sozial- und Kulturgeographie seit Mitte des 20. Jahrhunderts in ihren weiteren intellektuellen, politischen und sozioökonomischen Kontexten. Die Analyse von Fallbeispielen unterstreicht wichtige Herausforderungen im Hinblick auf den internationalen Wissenstransfer aufgrund von national und sprachlich strukturierten Publikationskulturen sowie unterschiedlichen wissenschaftlichen Paradigmen und Beförderungskriterien. Wir argumentieren, dass ein solcher Transfer formelle und informelle Diskussionsforen, den Einsatz von kulturellen Brückenbauern und unterstützende Fachkolleginnen und –kollegen erfordert. In der deutschsprachigen Sozial- und Kulturgeographie haben diese drei Aspekte seit den 1990er Jahren zu einer Verlagerung von einer weitverbreiteten angewandten Forschungstradition im Kontext des sozialen Wohlfahrtsstaates zu einer stärkeren Auseinandersetzung mit englischsprachigen Debatten über poststrukturalistische Ansätze geführt, die eine kritischere Analyse der zunehmenden neoliberalen Steuerung soziokultureller Praktiken ermöglichen. Die konzeptionell versierte und kritisch ausgerichtete englischsprachige und insbesondere britische Sozial- und Kulturgeographie gerät durch eine fortschreitende neoliberale Ökonomisierung der Universitäten immer mehr unter Druck, angewandte Aspekte wie Forschungswirkungen und die Beschäftigungsfähigkeit der Studierenden zu betonen.

Schlagwörter: Wissenstransfer, Geschichte der Geographie, Deutschland, Vereinigtes Königreich, USA

## Introduction

Collaborating across worlds – despite its discomforts, messiness and power politics – allows us to make full use of situated knowledges and at the same time creates often unplanned opportunities to destabilise vantage points, and to improvise different, variegated perspectives in producing and performing knowledges (Pratt & Yeoh, 2003, p. 164).

Since the early 2000s, English-speaking social and cultural geography has developed enhanced sensitivity for geographical voices from other language areas. This includes specific sessions for international conversations at the *RGS-IBG Annual International Conference* (e.g., Hudson & Williams, 2004) and a series of country reports on state-of-the-art research in the journal *Social and Cultural Geography* (SCG). These country reports were initiated by SCG's founding editor Rob Kitchin with the twofold aim 'to bring into dialogue social and cultural geographers from around the world acting as conduit through which they can share empirical research, theory and knowledge' and 'to disrupt and destabilize the prevalent trend towards English-language and Anglo-American hegemony in the international production of geographic knowledge' (Kitchin, 2003, p. 253). One striking absence in this series of country reports has been Germany, where the subject of geography is represented at 56 universities (Dittmann, 2013). Germany constitutes the second largest university-based national geographical community worldwide, ranking behind the United States, with about three times more Geography Departments, and just before the UK, followed by Canada, Spain and Japan

(Förster, 2014). Through the common German language, geography in Germany is also closely linked to disciplinary units at six universities in Austria and five in German-speaking Switzerland (Dittmann, 2013; see Söderström, 2007 for a review of multilingual Swiss social and cultural geography).

This special issue thus responds to a significant gap in the representation of non-Anglophone European social and cultural geographies in SCG by examining selected fields of research in German-language social and cultural geography in relation to their English-language counterparts. Three articles, written by Ulrich Best (York University, Canada) on critical geography, by Annika Mattissek (University of Dresden, Germany) and Georg Glasze (University of Erlangen-Nürnberg, Germany) on discourse analysis, and by Markus Hesse (University of Luxembourg, Luxembourg) on urban geography, are framed by this introduction (a collaboration between Loughborough University, UK, and the University of Freiburg, Germany) and an analytical commentary by Matthew Hannah (University of Bayreuth, Germany). This selection of topics results from an open call for presentations that led to two conference sessions at the RGS-IBG Annual International Conference 2009 and thus conveys a necessarily partial representation of German-language social and cultural geographies. Given that the country report for Germany was commissioned in 2003 (Kitchen, 2003) but has not yet appeared, a theme issue seemed to be most appropriate for providing more detailed insights into highly diverse intellectual developments in German-language social and cultural geography.

The articles in this special issue introduce the state-of-the-art of research in their respective sub-fields to a wider international audience. They

examine intersections, convergences and divergences of underlying theoretical frameworks, methodological approaches and topical foci in relation to Anglophone geographical debates in order to develop a broader understanding how social and cultural geography is practiced in different language contexts. The individual contributions also help to elucidate why certain concepts and topics travel more easily on an international scale than others, thus displaying a larger connectivity across political, cultural and linguistic boundaries. This special issue therefore adds to a series of commentaries about an English-language hegemony in geography and related asymmetries and challenges of international academic exchange (e.g., Minca, 2000; Samers & Sidaway, 2000; Garcia-Ramon, 2003; Kitchin, 2005; Rodríguez-Pose, 2006; Aalbers & Rossi, 2007; Bajerski, 2011; Bański & Ferenc, 2013). This includes reflections about the situation of non-native speakers in English-language social and cultural geography and their perceptions of Anglophone conferences (e.g., Belina, 2005; Helms, Lossau, & Oslender 2005). The special issue's multiple perspectives of analysis provided by seven authors, who wrote their contributions at seven universities in four different countries and have all experienced research and teaching within and outside of Germany, specifically aims to capture some of the diversity and at times contrasting perspectives on geographical knowledge production in both German- and English-language geographical debates.

The focus of this special issue is on contributions to social and cultural geography that have been published in the German language by academics based in the Federal Republic of Germany.<sup>1</sup> Due to the transnational nature of German-language geography and various forms of outgoing and incoming

academic mobility and migration, relevant research produced by academics based in Austria, Switzerland, Luxembourg and, if appropriate, other countries is also considered. Such a flexible notion of German-language social and cultural geography takes into consideration that relevant contributions can take multiple formats. Most of these are published in the German language, but in our view, they could be written in any language by academics who were socialised and/or worked in German-language academia at some point of their career, even if they are temporarily or permanently employed abroad. From this perspective, German-speaking social and cultural geography can neither be defined by language nor by national boundaries but needs to be conceptualised, in similar ways as Söderström (2007) discussed for Swiss geography, as interlinked networks of researchers, institutions, practices and discourses shaped by both German-language academic debates and national systems of higher education.

This article aims to situate the themes of the special issue within wider intellectual developments by analysing geographical knowledge production and transfer through the lens of interactions between English- and German-language social and cultural geographies. The following discussion is guided by the key question of what this special issue and the insights into German-language practices mean for social and cultural geography more generally? We argue that an international exchange of knowledge and ideas beyond individual conversations can be mutually enriching but cannot be taken for granted because it requires, in addition to formal and informal platforms for international academic debate, at least two comparably rare circumstances: first, the commitment of so-called 'boundary spanners' (e.g., Williams, 2002),

who facilitate knowledge transfer across linguistic and epistemological boundaries based on their cosmopolitan cultural capital and openness towards diversity; and second, the willingness of academic peers to engage with ideas and arguments that might not fit existing schools of thought and long-established power-geometries of often language-specific and internationally embedded but nationally-focused academic networks in both English- and German-language geography.

### **Boundary spanning**

In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, German-language social and cultural geography produced two lines of argument centred on the writings of Alfred Hettner (1859-1941) and Walter Christaller (1893-1969) that have considerably shaped Anglophone geographical debates about a chorological approach to cultural geography (e.g., Harvey & Wardenga, 1998) and the development of spatial science in social geography (e.g., Barnes, 2000).<sup>ii</sup> Both approaches collided in the famous intellectual debate between geographers Fred K. Schaefer (1904-1953), an assistant professor at the University of Iowa and advocate of a new scientific approach to human geography that subsequently developed into spatial science, and Richard Hartshorne (1899-1992), a full professor at the University of Wisconsin-Madison and defender of the then predominant chorological approach to human geography. This debate appeared in the *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* (Schaeffer, 1953; Hartshorne, 1955) but the socialist geographer Schaeffer, an émigré from the Nazi period, could not respond to Hartshorne's critique because he died prematurely from a heart attack in 1953, even before his repudiation of

Hartshorne's (1939) *The Nature of Geography* was published (Barnes, 2000; Barnes, 2014).

Hettner's chorological approach was adopted by English-language cultural geography at a time when German universities – and the German language – were in the declining phase of their academic hegemony (e.g., Hartshorne, 1939). This hegemony had flourished until WWI and encouraged American geographers such as Ellen Churchill Semple (1863-1932) to study in German-language universities (Keighren, 2010) and Richard Hartshorne to visit for extended periods as an early career academic (Entrikin & Brunn, 1989). This means that German-language geography continued to serve as a source of inspiration for methodological frameworks in the interwar years (e.g., Schaefer, 1953; Martin, 1988). In contrast, the post-WWII adoption of Walter Christaller's ideas on central place theory, developed in his PhD thesis from 1933, and its inspiration for spatial science required the active involvement of transnationally mobile academics from German-language academia such as the Nazi refugee Schaefer and the Nazi sympathizer Edgar Kant (1902-1978), an influential Professor of Geography and Vice Chancellor at the University of Tartu from 1941 to 1944, who fled to Sweden towards the end of WWII. Kant found a new home at Lund University, where he strongly influenced the thinking of his long-term student assistant Torsten Hägerstrand (1916-2004), who subsequently developed the sub-field of time geography (Barnes & Abrahamsson, in press).

This selective sketch of knowledge transfer between German- and English-language geography in the 20<sup>th</sup> century provides an idea of the personal contacts required for international and interlinguistic knowledge

exchange at a time when academic hegemony shifted from German to English. The two specific instances of knowledge transfer from German- to English-language geography that are represented in the Schaeffer-Hartshorne debate also mark a major change of direction in academic mobility because this hegemonic shift meant that in most disciplines frequent visits to Germany were superseded by increasing academic travel and migration to the United States (Jöns, 2015). We argue that such personal mobilities and interactions have remained crucial for the transfer of academic knowledge and conceptual frameworks between different language contexts. Before tracing recent examples in the interaction of German- and English-language social and cultural geographies, we characterise those individuals who facilitate knowledge exchange across national and linguistic boundaries as ‘boundary spanners’ (Williams, 2012). This notion has been widely used in innovation and organisation studies (e.g., Aldrich & Herker, 1977; Williams, 2002) to designate individuals who ‘engage in “boundary spanning” activities that cross, weave and permeate many traditional boundary types, including organisational, sectoral, professional’ (Williams, 2012, p. 1) and, as we would like to add, linguistic, cultural and political.

Integrating the notion of boundary spanners into geographical discourse helps to stress that knowledge exchange across national and linguistic boundaries requires the work of individuals, who are willing ‘to engage with the Other’ (Hannerz, 1990, p. 239) by investing their valuable time into overcoming the challenges of intercultural and especially interlinguistic communication. Among those academics working in the hegemonic language of academic debate, this requires a specific ‘openness

toward divergent cultural experiences' (Hannerz, 1990, p. 239) and cosmopolitan cultural capital that provides them with the ability to see the value of discussing ideas with students, post docs and academics displaying less developed English language skills. Boundary spanners thus 'make a real effort to empathize with, and respect anothers' values and perspectives' (Trevillion, 1991, p. 50 cited in Williams, 2002, p. 110). They would not roll their eyes when approached by early career researchers from other language contexts at international conferences but invest their time to listen and to provide their perspective, thereby transferring knowledge, styles of thought and argument to their interlocutors and most likely gaining a new perspective on the subject matter as well. In the words of Bilecen and Faist (2015, p. 218), boundary spanners act as knowledge brokers, who 'hold various kinds of knowledge and enable its transfer to a wider audience'.

A broader circulation of knowledge, ideas and concepts in time and space not only requires the work of boundary spanners but also the acceptance and actions by other people working outside of the place(s) of knowledge construction, who 'believe [a knowledge claim], buy it and disseminate it ... If people are not interested, or if they do something entirely different with the claim, the spread of a fact or of a machine in time and space does not take place' (Latour, 1987, p. 121). Knowledge production is therefore a collective process, in which other people 'have the power to transform the claim or the object into a durable whole' (Latour, 1987, p. 131). Both circumstances, the involvement of boundary spanners and a supportive peer group helped Hettner's and Christaller's ideas to gain wider momentum in Anglophone human geography during the early and middle decades of the

20<sup>th</sup> century, but from the 1960s onwards, the main direction of knowledge flows between English- and German-language social and cultural geographies has been reversed due to a shift of critical mass and hegemonic discourses to Anglophone research universities, which also changed the habit of translating German-language writings into English (Ehlers, 1998; 2004; 2007).<sup>iii</sup>

One striking example of the challenges that complicate the wider acceptance of geographical ideas generated in different language contexts is the dissimilar reception of Benno Werlen's writings in English- and German-language geography. When Werlen's (1987) outline of an action-centred approach to social geography, originally formulated in his PhD thesis, was published in English (Werlen, 1993), it was widely but very critically reviewed in Anglophone human geography. Werlen's call for social geographical research centred on actions mainly drew on continental philosophy and sociology to overcome what he felt was an obsession with absolute notions of space and the habit of treating spatial entities as research objects in German-language human geography (Werlen, 1993, p. x). While seeing value 'in the sociological theory of a broadly neo-Kantian tradition' (Smith, 1995, p. 76), Anglophone critics argued that Werlen's approach neither reflected on the most recent writings of Anglophone humanist and cultural geographers (Ley, 1994) nor considered the more sophisticated theorizations of space by David Harvey, Doreen Massey and others that had just attracted the attention of Anglophone social scientists (Pile, 1993). Due to the nature of the German-language debates that Werlen drew upon and that provided a context largely unfamiliar to Anglophone geographers at the time, reviewers felt uncomfortable with the formalism of the proposed action-centred approach

(Smith, 1995) and found it 'difficult to know who exactly he is tilting at' (Johnston, 1995, p. 93), even if Werlen (1993, p. ix-xi) explained this tradition of thinking in his foreword.

In German-language social geography, Werlen's elaboration of an action-centred approach (e.g., Werlen, 1995) has had a large and sustained impact, as expressed by critical appraisals of his oeuvre (e.g., Meusbürger, 1999; Belina, 2013) and the emergence of a wider school of thought that has analysed the politics of everyday regionalizations in policy and practice (e.g., Miggelbrink, 2002; Felgenhauer, Mihm, & Schlottmann 2005). This divergent reception of conceptual ideas in two distinct geographical language communities therefore illustrates the path dependency of geographical debates that are framed, as Hannah (2015) powerfully argues in his commentary on this special issue, by different national politics and language-orientated academic cultures. While this path dependency clearly complicates boundary spanning knowledge transfer, it also explains why the proliferation of conceptual ideas across national and linguistic boundaries often requires specific circumstances beyond intellectual coherence and conviction, such as an author's co-presence in a particular linguistic academic community; his or her positionality as an established professor, whose ideas are reproduced and developed by PhD students and post docs; and supportive academic peers, who provide platforms for discussion at conferences and in publications and/or attend relevant workshops. Since social and cultural geography more generally is constituted by at times diverging intellectual trajectories in different linguistic and national contexts despite a growing internationalisation

of higher education, it appears to be ever more important to provide fora for cross-border exchanges such as this special issue.

### **Formal and informal knowledge exchange**

Almost two decades ago, Ehlers (1998, p. 62) developed the provocative hypothesis that linguistic isolation and a superior and thus self-sufficient national system of research funding had led to 'the decoupling of German geography from international developments', even if a few German-speaking human geographers published in Anglophone international journals at the time (e.g., Klagge, 1994). In this section, we develop three lines of argument to show that by 2015 this situation has changed significantly in many, though not in all ways, through formal and informal ways of international knowledge exchange involving academic mobility of boundary spanners from both language contexts.

Firstly, we argue that the engagement of German-language geography with Anglo-American geographical debates has always only constituted one dimension of a range of international interactions with geographers working in French, Spanish, Japanese, Hungarian and many other languages. Based on a well-developed international fieldwork culture and diverse language skills, the internationalisation of German-language social and cultural geography has traditionally involved exchanges with colleagues in a range of countries across the globe (Wirth, 1988). Such a broad geographical orientation is especially evident in key contributions of German language human geographers to conferences, commissions and the governance of the International Geographical Union (IGU), including most recently the hosting of

the 32<sup>nd</sup> International Geographical Congress in Cologne in August 2012 and Benno Werlen's post as Executive Director of the IGU-Initiative for an International UN Year on 'Global Understanding' in 2016.

Secondly, we argue that international knowledge exchange through articles published in leading journals of the other language community remains rare because of nationally and linguistically structured publication cultures that are linked to varying academic paradigms and promotion criteria. In addition, any discussion of international collaborations, publications and co-authorship needs to take into consideration that individual authorship prevails in theoretical and interpretative-argumentative research in the social sciences and humanities. It is also much more frequent in empirical social scientific work than in any research practice of the more standardised natural and technical sciences, which means that international collaboration and co-authorship is less developed in fields such as social and cultural geography (Jöns, 2007). An analysis of the institutional affiliation of authors in four main German- and English-language geography journals from 1995 to 2014, namely *Die Erde*, *Erdkunde*, *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* and *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, confirms that the number of human geographical articles by scholars working in the other geographical language community has only slightly increased over the past two decades. These international articles are also highly asymmetrically distributed with fewer authors from Germanophone countries having published in *Transactions* and the *Annals* than those from Anglophone countries featuring in *Die Erde* and *Erdkunde* (Table 1; for a comparison, see Ehlers, 1998, p. 63).

[Table 1 about here]

This asymmetry can be explained by both the larger need of academics working in the more neoliberalised Anglophone systems of higher education to publish in internationally peer-reviewed journals ranked highly in powerful citation databases as well as by varying cultures of academic debate (Jöns & Hoyler, 2013). According to findings from Bajerski (2011) and Bański and Ferenc (2013), this not only leads to high shares of national authorship, with *Transactions* and the *Annals* being far more nationally orientated than other geography journals with a high impact factor (e.g., *Transactions*: 76%; *Annals*: 68%; *Progress in Human Geography*: 48%; *Geoforum*: 40% [all 2000-2010]; *Die Erde*: 73% [2001-2008]), but this also means that these academic cultures are often only accessible through direct personal experience. For example, the five *Transactions* articles of authors with an affiliation in a German-language country (including multilingual Switzerland) were all (co-)written by geographers who had spent at least an extended period of research leave at a UK or US university (Christian Berndt, Markus Hesse, Patrick Rérat, Maarten van Ham, Kathrin Hörschelmann). In turn, quite a few authors based in Anglophone countries had received their MSc or PhD in Germany and published in *Die Erde* while visiting or working overseas (Heike Jöns, Christine Tamásy, Darja Reuschke, Fabian Frenzel).

The importance of cultural proximity for bridging transnational academic cultures extends beyond personal experience through academic mobility. For example, the main Anglophone boundary spanner in this analysis was Anne Buttimer (University College, Dublin), who published three

articles in the journal *Erdkunde* (1995, 2001, 2003) as someone who has been interested in the flow of ideas across political and intellectual boundaries in her research as a leading humanist geographer as well as in her function as former IGU President. The fact that knowledge exchange across national and linguistic boundaries requires the investment of extra time and resources as well as specific attitudes and skills might therefore also contribute to the situation that in subjects such as human geography publications in journals of another language community remain an exception rather than the rule.

The striking shift of contributions by Anglophone authors between the journals *Erdkunde* and *Die Erde* over the past two decades might be linked to the fact that *Die Erde* has been published exclusively in the English language since 2010. On the one hand, this move has taken up Ehlers' (1998, p. 66) call for 'a quick and comprehensive adoption of English as the lingua franca of science'. On the other hand, the resulting shift ties in with Paasi's (2005) apt observation that the neoliberalisation of higher education through corporate audit cultures leads to a homogenisation of publication practices in the social sciences and the humanities because of the increased demand for publishing in Anglophone international journals. For German-language social and cultural geography, this poses the challenge to find a sustainable way of combining, if desired, more contributions to Anglophone academic debates with the continuation of German-language publications, especially for teaching, outreach and impact activities. As publishing in Anglophone journals as a non-native speaker takes extra time and effort, more of such outputs will necessarily mean further changes to prevailing publication cultures and styles of academic debate, thus enhancing internationalisation but endangering, in

similar ways as Helbrecht (2007, p. 2800) has discussed in relation to the creation of a unified European Higher Education Area, 'national identities, cultures, and traditions in higher education'.

Thirdly, we argue that in this context of rare knowledge exchanges through publications in geographical flagship journals of the other language community, international conferences and workshops play the most important role for regular exchanges between German- and English-language social and cultural geographies. Beyond the IGU Congresses, this includes especially the participation of German-language geographers in the Annual International Conference of the Royal Geographical Society (with the Institute of British Geographers) and the Annual Meeting of the Association of American Geographers. Two prominent examples in German-language geography that have been instrumental for a closer engagement with vibrant debates in Anglophone social and cultural geography, and thus have contributed to a stronger international integration, are the Heidelberger Hettner Lectures (1997-2006) and the *Tagung zur Neuen Kulturgeographie* (NKG; New Cultural Geography Conferences; since 2004).

The Hettner Lectures were an annual lecture series organised by the Department of Geography at the University of Heidelberg. Every year, a renowned Anglophone geographer was invited for a week to deliver two public lectures and three day-long seminars with postgraduate students and early career researchers from different parts of Europe (Meusbürger, 2007). In this special issue, Best (2015) highlights the importance of this lecture series for a wider engagement with critical approaches in German-language human geography but interestingly, he links the lecture series' origin and main

objective to an international excellence agenda driven by the neoliberalisation of higher education that was pursued single-handedly by a powerful professor of social and economic geography. This interpretation looks slightly different from our own perspective as two core members of the Hettner Lectures' organizational team over the whole ten-year period, first as lecturing PhD students (1997-2002/03) and then as postdoctoral lecturers (2002/03-2006). Based on our experience, the Hettner Lecture emerged less strategically and more organically out of Peter Meusbürger's long-standing interest in conceptual debates. This was stimulated by his interest in the geography of knowledge and education since the early 1970s; by Alois Leidlmair's (Geography Department of Innsbruck University) seminars on *Zeit- und Streitfragen der Humangeographie* [contested issues in human geography]; as well as by Meusbürger's sabbatical leaves with Jean Gottmann at Oxford University (1977) and with Susan Hanson and Richard Peet at Clark University (1993-1994). Instrumental were also Meusbürger's contact to philanthropist Klaus Tschira (1940-2015), whom he met in the mid-1990s, and his widespread international networks, as expressed in the hosting of several Humboldt Research Fellows and Award Winners from different countries. These international networks contributed, for example, to a research visit of Michael Hoyler at Loughborough University in 1991, who subsequently helped shape the intellectual development of the Hettner Lectures over the ten-year period.

Our perspective aligns with Best's (2015) and Ehlers' (2004) view in regard to the important role of the Hettner Lectures for a broader examination of critical geographical approaches and poststructuralist social theories, for

networking among early career researchers from Germany and other European countries and for the emergence of more informal international exchange fora. The impacts of both the Hettner Lectures and the subsequent Knowledge and Space Symposia, which have also been hosted by the Klaus Tschira Foundation in the Villa Bosch in Heidelberg (Table 2), on human geography have been quite substantial. They range from ten published books and videos that document the boundary spanning activities of the ten Hettner Lecturers via regular reading weekends of German-language feminist geographers with Doreen Massey (Bassda, 2006) and transnational academic mobility in both directions to joint publications between Hettner Lecturers, organisers and participants. For example, the Klaus Tschira Knowledge and Space Book Series, an outcome of the international symposia, consists of more than ten edited volumes (e.g., Meusburger, Livingstone, & Jöns 2010). Other important impacts on human geography are the promotion of several seminar attendees to professors at German universities and the Jena Lecture Series in Human Geography, which Heiko Schmid (1971-2013), a Professor at the University of Jena, established in 2012 based on the model of the Hettner Lectures at his former academic institution. While it seems to be a fascinating task for future historians of geography to trace the development of ideas and knowledge transfer through the Hettner Lectures in relevant publications, our own experience confirms that the ten Hettner Lecturers, and especially those who returned afterwards for reading weekends and other international conferences, have served as important boundary spanners. They have brought English- and German-language social and cultural geographies more closely into dialogue with each other by integrating geographers from

Germany into Anglophone academic networks and by encouraging especially early career researchers to publish in Anglophone journals and edited collections.

[Table 2 about here]

The annual New Cultural Geography Conferences (NKG) established in 2004 have become something like an 'obligatory passage point' (Latour, 1987, p. 132) for early career researchers in German-language cultural geography. They have been less focused on Anglophone discourses than the Hettner Lectures because over the past twelve years, Anglophone key note speakers were only invited to three events. The 2010 conference, organised by Anton Escher and colleagues at the University of Mainz, was conceptualised as a French-German bilingual event with presentations in three languages and Jean-François Staszak as a key note speaker from the University of Geneva (Table 3). The conferences' guiding themes represent an interesting *mélange* of topics relating to Anglophone new cultural geography and interdisciplinary academic discourses in the German-language as well as to novel research perspectives such as 'Small geographies' (2015) that are linked to an equal standing of some German colleagues within Anglophone academic networks (e.g., Miggelbrink, Habeck, Mazzullo, & Koch 2014). In 2016, the first NKG will cross international boundaries and be hosted by Ulrich Ermann and colleagues at the University of Graz in Austria.

[Table 3 about here]

### **Intellectual challenges of neoliberalisation**

Over the past two decades, social and cultural geography in the German-language has been characterised by a diversification of conceptual perspectives (e.g., Werlen, 2000; Gebhardt, Reuber, & Wolkersdorfer, 2003; Ehlers, 2007; Lossau, Freytag, & Lippuner, 2014). This has led to a productive co-existence of research perspectives building, for example, on Foucault's discourse analysis, Bourdieu's practice theory, Said's postcolonial studies, Giddens' dialectic of agency and structure, Luhmann's system theory, Latour's actor-network theory, Werlen's action-centred approach, Urry's mobilities paradigm as well as a variation of Marxist, feminist and other poststructuralist approaches. The three lines of inquiry discussed in depth in this special issue, namely critical geography, discourse analysis and urban geography, represent diverse social and cultural geographical research practices constituted by epistemic communities that often straddle intradisciplinary, interdisciplinary and international boundaries beyond the Anglophone research context. The respective articles show that specific styles of doing social and cultural geography in the German language are shaped by context-specific histories of geography, by interdisciplinary academic traditions at German universities and by interactions with academics working in geography and associated disciplines across different language contexts.

Ulrich Best's (2015) article traces critical and radical geographical practices in the Federal Republic of Germany and its predecessor states since the 1920s. He outlines four phases of internationalisation: (1) sporadic exchanges of human geographers operating outside of the formal structures of the discipline before 1933; (2) a new boom inspired by the student

movement of the late 1960s that argued against a national framing of human geography; (3) attempts to overcome conservative mainstream geographical practices in the context of a fairly closed academic labour market in the late 1970s and 1980s; and (4) a wide reception of critical human geographies that he regards as being driven by neoliberal agendas of international excellence since the late 1990s. Best's article sketches the important struggle of geographers working in the radical and critical geography traditions for formal recognition in German academia and at the same time sketches a promising research agenda that needs to flesh out the nuances between critical and radical geographical approaches and to examine more carefully interactions, exchanges and mobilities of people and ideas based on biographical and textual analyses.

Annika Matissek and Georg Glasze discuss the context and interests of German-language poststructuralist discourse analyses in human geography and associated fields (Matissek & Glasze, 2015). They outline how this field of research has been shaped by Foucauldian discourse studies, as they emerged in German-language feminist, political and new cultural geography since the late 1990s, and subsequently brought into debate with interdisciplinary discourse analysis, especially in German-language linguistics and other social scientific disciplines. The authors argue that German-language discourse analyses differ from related Anglophone writings in human geography through their emphasis on the methodological operationalization of different theoretical ideas and methodological rigour in empirical research. Matissek and Glasze explain the different styles of Anglophone narratives (e.g., Hubbard, 2005) versus Germanophone analytical

treatises (e.g., Mattissek, 2010) in geographical discourse analyses through the differing role of Marxist and actor-centred approaches respectively and use this insight to underline the great value of academic knowledge production in different languages. Their call for mutually beneficial exchanges on discourse analyses between the two geographical language communities creates an intriguing intellectual challenge for future research.

Markus Hesse (2015) compares the main trends in English- and German-language urban geography, arguing that both language contexts could benefit from mutual exchanges because of their complementary emphasis on social theoretical framing and empirical case studies respectively. From this comparative perspective, it emerges that German-language urban geography lacks a comparable infrastructure for regular academic debate, such as Anglophone progress reports, author-meets-critics sessions and urban geography research groups, which most likely have encouraged the development and critique of overarching conceptual ideas in Anglophone urban geography over the past three decades. Hesse's call for retheorizing German-language urban geography suggests relational approaches at different spatial scales, from the urban as an assemblage via city regions and creative cities to multi-locational households, while stressing the need to strengthen further the sub-field's policy relevance and empirical grounding. In turn, he argues that Anglophone urban geography could benefit from comparative case studies in different cultural and political spaces despite the methodological challenges arising from such comparisons. Hesse concludes that diverse urban places require pluralistic understandings that can only be achieved through conversations across different language

contexts, which nicely ties in with his apt observation that German-language urban geography has recently been theoretically most innovative at the intersection with social and cultural geographies.

In his concluding commentary, Matthew Hannah (2015), himself a boundary spanner *par excellence* because of the permanent professorships he held in the US, the UK and now in Germany, explains fundamental differences in epistemological traditions and thematic foci of social and cultural geographies in the two different language contexts with reference to wider social and political developments during the Cold War. In particular, he argues that not only the three sub-fields discussed in this special issue but other main strands of German-language human geography 'have *all* to some extent been able to develop in such a sustained and differentiated way *in the relative absence of a prominent Marxist stream of work*' (Hannah, 2015, p. 11). While German-language human geography research was closely linked to an ameliorative government planning tradition at different spatial scales in the 1980s and 1990s, Hannah argues that the accelerating erosion of the social welfare state over the first two decades of the 21st century requires that the more critical human geography approaches, which have proliferated in German-language human geography since the 1990s, should now be used to challenge the rise of an increasingly neoliberal governance.

From a comparative perspective, German-language social and cultural geographies discussed in this special issue thus appear in some ways to be slightly less critical and/or radical (Best, 2015), more rigid in their methodological frameworks (Mattissek & Glasze, 2015), more empirically-driven and applied (Hesse, 2015) and less opposed to a focus on individual

human agency (Hannah, 2015) than related writings in the English language. We suggest that social and cultural geographers working in other language contexts may benefit from these articles, for example, by reading about the benefits of multi-method approaches combining solid skills in quantitative and qualitative research methods for practicing theoretically-informed and empirically-grounded social and cultural geographies (Mattissek & Glasze, 2015; Hesse, 2015). They may also gain new insights about the disciplinary and policy contexts that gave rise to a very close relationship between geographers and practitioners in the production and use of geographical knowledge in the German-language context (Hesse, 2015; Hannah, 2015) and about the inherent dangers of neoliberal agendas of internationalisation in higher education for publication and citation practices, especially in critical and radical geography (Best, 2015).

Two features of contemporary German-language social and cultural geographical practice could be of particular relevance to Anglophone debates. Firstly, this relates to the frequent and at times creative use of quantitative research methods, as evident in the long-term national atlas of Germany project of the Leibniz Institute for Regional Geography (2015) and many edited collections in the German language, such as Weichhart's and Rumpoldt's (2015) latest studies on multilocal households. This could provide an interesting area of cooperation and inspiration because the recent international benchmarking review of UK human geography has stressed the need to develop more substantial quantitative skills among UK students, post docs and academics (ESRC, 2013). Similarly, Wyly (2009) has sketched a 'strategic positivism' agenda that advocates critical and creative quantitative

research in Anglophone human geography, whereas Kitchin (2014) promotes innovative situated and reflexive epistemologies in regard to the new empiricism of Big Data research.

Secondly, the close engagement in German-language geographical research and teaching with visions and strategies of public planning (e.g., Blotevogel & Schmitt, 2006; Aring et al., 2014; Harrison & Growe, 2014a; 2014b) as well as with practitioners working more often in government-funded institutions of spatial analysis and planning than in private planning consultancies might be of particular interest to Anglophone audiences. The post-WWII relationship between geography and public planning was quite close in West Germany (Schelhaas & Hönsch, 2001) but less so in Britain (e.g., Ward, 2005; Woods & Gardner, 2011), partly because of a lack of collective action for the promotion of British geography in policy circles on the side of the learned societies and the subject's leading scholars in the 1950s and 1960s (Johnston, 2004). In West Germany, Walter Christaller, Paul Gauss and Emil Meynen founded the Association of German Professional Geographers as early as in 1950 to promote the goals of applied geography (Wardenga, Henniges, Brogiato, & Scheelhaas, 2011). This organisation was transformed into the German Association for Applied Geography (DVAG) in 1980 (Schelhaas & Hönsch, 2001) and currently has about 1,700 members, thus representing the largest organisation for professional geographers in Europe (DVAG, 2015). From personal experience, the related professional orientation and applied nature of geography degrees at German universities up until the 1990s has meant that many aspects of the new employability and impact agenda that is currently pursued at UK universities have been firmly

embedded in geographical research and teaching in (West) Germany over the past three decades but in a very different political and socioeconomic context. At the level of Geography Departments, examples are provided by research methods courses in collaboration with external organisations; guest lectures by relevant practitioners, often recruited in the context of academic advisory work and among alumni; employer data bases and organisational advice on student internships; and opportunities for students to write Bachelor, Masters and PhD dissertations in consultation with practitioners and potential employers in profit, non-profit and public institutions (e.g., Freytag, 1999; Schreiber & Gans, 2014).<sup>iv</sup>

This data-oriented, applied nature of much of German-language social and cultural geography, which is substantive at its best and empiricist at its worst, has created public impacts of geographical research that developed in collaboration with post-WWII public institutions designed to preserve, as Hannah (2015) points out, the social justice of the welfare state against the global forces of unfettered corporate capitalism. Despite operating in what Harvey (1974, p. 23) characterised as ‘a corporate state which instructs downwards in the interests of finance capitalism’, the close interaction of human geographical research with public policy in West Germany seems to have worked more in the direction of Harvey's polar opposite ideal of ‘an “incorporated state” that reflects the creative needs of people struggling to control the social conditions of their own existence in an essentially human way’ than in Britain and the United States, especially in the context of Anglo-American privatisation during the 1980s (e.g., Woods & Gardner, 2011). More recently, however, this relatively progressive state-oriented context of

applied geographical research in Germany has changed in the light of transformative neoliberal forces and thus needs to be reflected critically (for critical perspectives on neoliberal urban policies, see, e.g., Belina, 2006).

From this perspective, it appears that German- and English-language social and cultural geographies have been affected by complementary 'blind spots', or underdeveloped aspects in geographical discourses and practices that were shaped by different political and socioeconomic contexts but have recently been expanded upon under the influence of neoliberal transformations of political, economic and university life. In German-language social and cultural geography, formal platforms for in-depth encounters with critical and conceptual poststructuralist debates have proliferated since the 1990s in order to fill a demand for more sophisticated theoretical discourses (Meusburger, 2007) and for criticising the erosion of the modern welfare state through neoliberal agendas in a reunified Germany (Hannah, 2015). Anglophone and especially British social and cultural geography has widely used and debated Marxist, critical and poststructuralist approaches for at least three decades but has recently lacked engagement 'with pressing social issues' (Hubbard, 2011, p. 529). Paradoxically, the recent neoliberal corporatization of the British university has pressurized geographers to develop more applied features of their work. Two examples are an increased emphasis on research impact in the regular evaluation of British universities as part of the Research Excellence Framework (REF) and a focus on enhanced student employability by embedding internships and work placements into university curricula, which both creates the danger of supporting neoliberal governance within and beyond the university more than

ever before (Harvey, 2006). Even if Woods and Gardner (2011, p. 211) argue that “support for the system is not a precondition of policy research, and incremental improvements can be secured through research even within structures that might be subjected to broader critique”, there is much scope in both English- and German-language social and cultural geography for exploring the complex relationships of geographical research and public policies as well as the various ways in which geographers can critically engage with different publics and resist neoliberal governance (e.g., Pain, 2006; Ward, 2007).<sup>v</sup>

A joint lesson gained from the insights of this special issue could therefore be that based on a research and teaching agenda that appreciates the value of conceptual debate, methodological rigorousness, empirical research and policy relevance respectively, students, post docs and academics should be encouraged to produce theoretically-informed, empirically-grounded and policy-relevant human geographical research that not only aims to understand but also critiques recent neoliberal transformations in European, North American and other societies with the aim of creating more social justice. Furthermore, it seems to be important to let individuals decide whether they wish to emphasize some of these dimensions more than others or focus on different historical periods because choosing (and varying) one’s approach to social and cultural geography in the light of epistemological pluralism (King, 2012) might help to stress the collective and collaborative nature of academic knowledge production by scholars working both as individuals and in teams. The alternative would be a more competitive stance that protagonists of a neoliberal corporatization of the university seem

to promote and that Harvey (2006) criticised because it endangers a critical, politically progressive, open-minded and mutually supportive exchange of ideas within and across national and linguistic boundaries. In the words of Anne Buttner, the future of interactions between English- and German-language social and cultural geographies seems to be most promising if it embraces

invention as well as inventory, debate and dialogue as well as denunciation, and invites richer harvests from reflections on historical experience in the form of fresh insight and energy to elucidate the emerging social realities of this new millennium (2003, p. 270).

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<sup>i</sup> For geography in the German Democratic Republic (1949-1990), see, for example, Schelhaas & Hönsch (2001) and Schelhaas (2004).

<sup>ii</sup> These were not the only bodies of work in the German language that shaped Anglophone geographical debates. For example, Ellen Churchill Semple (1863-1932) studied with Friedrich Ratzel (1844-1904) in Leipzig (1891-92, 1895) and subsequently published articles as well as the book *Influences of geographic environment* (1911) based on Ratzel's ideas. The book is a critical appraisal of Ratzel's work and impacted considerably on anthropogeographical thought at US and UK universities in the first three decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Keighren, 2010).

<sup>iii</sup> A recent exception to this trend is work on geographies of education and learning (Holloway, Hubbard, Jöns, & Pimlott-Wilson, 2010) and especially the geographies of higher education (Jöns & Hoyler, 2013), which has received inspiration partly from the long-standing research tradition on geographies of education in the German-language context (Meusbürger, 1998).

<sup>iv</sup> For the internship initiative founded in Heidelberg in 1993, see [http://www.geog.uni-heidelberg.de/studium/imstudium/pig\\_en.html](http://www.geog.uni-heidelberg.de/studium/imstudium/pig_en.html); for the GeoBörse set up in Frankfurt in 2007, see <http://www.geostud.de/beruf-qualifikation/geoboerse/>.

<sup>v</sup> The recent collaboration between John Harrison (Loughborough University, UK) and Anna Growe (University of Freiburg, Germany) represents the different foci of English- and German-language human geography particularly well because their work analyses the interplay of theory and practice by bringing together Anglophone conceptual debates about territorial and relational regional spaces with the ways in which different networked-territorial conceptions of the city-region have been implemented in the spatial development frameworks (*Leitbilder*) of the Federal State of Germany from 2006 to 2013 (Harrison & Growe, 2014b). Furthermore, these *Leitbilder* embody the tension between social welfare state ideologies and neoliberal governance in the reunified Germany because they juxtapose the “long-standing principled commitment to promote equalized living conditions (a goal to be achieved through financial equalization between *Länder*) while at the same time promoting the superior strategic importance of 11 Metropolitan European Regions” (Harrison & Growe, 2014a, p. 38).