GERMAN GEOGRAPHICAL THOUGHT AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF *LÄNDERKUNDE*

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Introduction

In standard international publications on the history of geography, German geography features as one of the major early contributors to the development of the subject as a regionally oriented discipline in the 19th century. Names such as Carl Ritter, Alexander von Humboldt, Ferdinand von Richthofen, Albrecht Penck, Friedrich Ratzel, Hermann Wagner, Joseph Partsch, Alfred Hettner or Alfred Philippson are synonymous with a geographical approach which has entered the annals of the subject's history as *Länderkunde*, an apparently specifically German variant of Regional Geography. Nowadays there is little mention of this strongly narrative approach, which links physical and human geography through the medium of space: hardly any of the geographers currently practising at German universities spends a significant part of his/her working life writing *Länderkunde*, and there is scarcely a younger geographer among us capable of writing the stylistically accomplished, gripping narrative required for a successful *Länderkunde*, representing the best in current research. Indeed, hardly any of us would wish to do so: since the 1970s the writing of *Länderkunde* has been perceived as an activity which contributes little to one's reputation, as it is associated with a form of geography which is now rejected as unscientific.

The story I will relate here is that of the rise and fall of *Länderkunde* as a geographical approach which significantly influenced the development of regional geography in Germany. Its importance, which is often questioned today, can only adequately be appreciated if one understands the issues to which *Länderkunde* provided answers, and how it was possible for it gradually to lose its functions after the Second World War. *Länderkunde* is not automatically identical with Regional Geography. Although both terms

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have often been treated as synonyms in Germany since the early 20th century, Regional Geography has always been a more formal concept, less burdened with expectations. It could, as distinct from "General Geography", refer to that part of the subject which dealt idiographically with regions without being subject to the requirement of having to give a general overview of all geographical factors. Regional Geography also involved, for example, the study of a particular region from a specific perspective, such as economic geography or demography. *Länderkunde* in contrast, was always something more than this. It was a scientific endevaour which, with the aid of specific geographical concepts and ideas, attempted to delimit particular areas in the continuum of the earth's surface and then to portray these in all their relations (paradoxically) as a typical but unique part of a harmoniously ordered earth. The product of *Länderkunde* took the form of sometimes very extensive monographs. It brought areas to life in the reader's consciousness, by creating images of them with the assistance of geographical descriptive skills, and these images could then be used in social communication and in political expectations. *Länderkunde* also provided a philosophy of the subject. It gave geography an identity, because with the aid of *Länderkunde* boundaries with other neighbouring sciences could be communicated; and the important function of the discipline as a creator of conceptions of the world for a rapidly modernising industrial society could be emphasised.

This lecture is divided into three sections, partially based on significant social and political breaks in Germany history. The first section discusses the rise of *Länderkunde* during the formative phase of German academic geography, which ends with the First World War and in socio-political terms corresponds to the German Empire (1871-1918). The second section includes the historical epochs of the Weimar Republic (1918-1932), National Socialism (1933-1945) and the first two post-war decades. Although these phases are difficult to associate in terms of political history, in the practice of geography they are a unit, for the *Länderkunde* paradigm experienced its heyday in the decades from 1920 to 1970 in the form of landscape geography. The third section deals with the period since 1970, describes the decline of *Länderkunde* and analyses what happens when a scientific discipline repeatedly postpones urgently required reforms, because of misunderstood respect for predecessors' achievements.

Länderkunde in the formative phase of German academic geography (1871-1918)

With the exception of Berlin, there was no chair of geography in Germany until well into the last third of the 19th century. Rather, the subject was pursued in the geographical societies which had been established in

great numbers since the mid-19th century. They were especially involved in encouraging exploration and had a very broad range of interests, so that geography appeared as a comprehensive science. The societies shaped the subject as one that included the analysis of man and nature, and which as a complex of the most varied disciplines addressed geological, geophysical, meteorological, biological, anthropological, ethnological, historical, demographic and economic issues.

When geography began to be institutionalised in universities after German Unification in 1871, this very broad definition proved problematic. As chairs of geography were established, the new university discipline felt the need to define its area of study and methodology in comparison with neighbouring subjects. Although the holders of the new chairs represented totally different approaches, they were in agreement that the largely compilatory study of different states practised in schools and closely oriented towards historical science, could not be continued at university level. The new professors argued instead in favour of developing the subject as a natural science which would seek to identify laws and causal connections and would therefore address itself to the entire globe as a nomothetic science. Geography in universities should no longer be identical with the study of states as practised in schools, but should consist of various sub--disciplines within general geography, and should in particular follow the perspectives of geomorphology which was rapidly becoming the guiding element of the discipline.

As a result of these considerations, the regional aspect of geography was relatively subordinate within the subject until well into the 1880s. Ferdinand von Richthofen, for example, who had emerged as one of the leading methodologists since the late 1870s did accept that regional geography had a valid existence. Nevertheless, unlike general geography, which he defined as the analysis of causal relationships and thus as genuine research, regional geography remained for him merely a form by means of which regionally relevant knowledge could be communicated, but which did not go "beyond the systematic compilation of all phenomena relating to the individual regions of the earth" (Richthofen 1883, p. 31). Thus, in Richthofen's opinion it was "didactic" (ibid, p. 32), "encylopaedic" (ibid, p. 33) and "dull" (ibid, p. 35). Likewise, Alexander Supan, the then editor of the leading scientific journal of the day, "Petermanns Mitteilungen", saw Regional Geography as being "merely the preliminary stage through which one enters the temple of general geography, where alone true science unfolds" (Supan 1889, p. 153).

This differentiation into a general area of geographical research and a didactic-pedagogical area devoted to representation and communication which rapidly became established among geographers at German universities, meant that regional geography remained a less-favoured area

and that geography was on the whole strongly oriented towards the methodological ideals of the natural sciences until well into the 1880s. As a result, the writing of regional geographical accounts was not considered to be an activity favourable to improving one's reputation or career. Thus very few publications of this sort appeared in this period, and most of them consisted of a compendium of factual knowledge about particular regions, such as Friedrich Ratzel's two-volume regional geography of the United States of America (1878/80) or Johann Justus Rein's multi-volume account of Japan (1881-1886).

As the second generation of German geographers began to mature, including Albrecht Penck, Alfred Hettner and Alfred Philippson, the emphasis began to shift. For these young geographers did not share von Richthofen's doubts that it was hardly possibly for regional geography to describe adequately the causal relations at work in one place. These young men, then barely thirty years old, had enjoyed a better scientific education than the generation of geographers born in the first half of the nineteenth century. This was particularly true with regard to the natural sciences, which led them to criticise sharply the compilatory style then pursued in regional geography. In the financially difficult period before their first salaried appointment, many of them also made the discovery that it was comparatively easy to earn money by writing regionally relevant texts, as enthusiasm for the scientific "revelation" of the earth was by then very widespread, so that there was an enormous market for travel accounts and sketches of countries and their people, a market hotly competed by newspapers, journals and publishers.

Thus, from the mid-1880s the observations made by these young geographers in peripheral areas of Europe and overseas were put to use in different ways. During the course of their travels they sent regular reports to the scientific journals, giving information on their routes and specific observations made. If time allowed, they wrote popular essays describing the countries visited and their inhabitants in an accessible style, and these were sent to be printed in national newspapers when possible. This dual marketing was continued when the researchers returned home. The specialised research results, usually in the field of physical geography, were written up as scientific monographs. At the same time, the young geographers produced regional geography essays for more popularly oriented journals such as "Globus" or "Das Ausland" ("Abroad"), who paid for articles printed. Later these could be consolidated and revised to be offered to a publisher as travel monographs.

Because of the new generation's positive experiences with the marketing of regional geography publications and the improved standards due to their university education, a movement for the revaluation of regional geography, now referred to as *Länderkunde*, developed from the mid-1880s.

Its chief aim was to introduce the causal research typical of general geography into regional geography and to bring this to the same scientific standard as general geography in the form of *Länderkunde*. As in general geography, the researchers' own observations were central, and this required a specific scientific training. Thus it was held that not everybody travelling through a country could automatically make observations in the spirit of *Länderkunde*, because observation, as Alfred Hettner said many years later, is "only in a very small part involuntary sight", consisting for the greater part of an "answer to the conscious formulation of a question" which should be deeply reflected upon (Hettner 1927, p. 174f.). Only trained specialists could distinguish the "geographically significant" from the irrelevant, a conviction shared by Alfred Penck (Penck 1906, p. 51). This irreplaceable "autopsy of the areas to be represented" should be augmented by an "extended study of sources" (Wagner 1884, p. 606). Thus geographers working in the area of *Länderkunde* should collect all existing printed material, read this and critically analyse its usefulness by exhaustive application of the historical method of "examination of the witnesses and criticism of sources" (Supan 1889, p. 155). It was also considered important that the observed facts and those derived from printed sources were not simply reproduced in an unconnected manner, but presented to the reader as a well-rounded portrait based on an internal, causal association. *Länderkunde* should therefore no longer be a mere compendium of regional geographical facts, but should be characterised by "a style of presentation combining description and explanation", moulding "the unwieldy material into a readable and stimulating form" (Wagner 1884, p. 607).

Alfred Hettner who was professor in Heidelberg became the leading theoretician of *Länderkunde* (see Wardenga 1995a). His methodological publications from the late 1890s and early 1900s (see Hettner 1895, 1903, 1905a, b) formulated the basic principles for the development of geographical concepts and ideas essential to *Länderkunde* research, and attempted to adapt the subject as a logically formed unit in itself to the production of *Länderkunde* studies.

Hettner initially assumed the hypothesis that the subject of a geography oriented towards *Länderkunde* was the entire earth as a complex of areas of different size. Thus the main methodological problem consisted of the difficulty of regionalising the earth, which was perceived as a continuum, resulting in a system of large-scale regions, countries, landscapes and places. Thus, following on from the teachings of general geography, Hettner argued in favour of discussing the various geographical factors separately in a first step, producing an overview for the whole earth ordered by geographical factors. As general geography research had already shown that every geographical factor has a characteristic pattern of distribution over the earth shaped by specific causes, Hettner developed the idea that this must produce methodologically

verifiable indications as to how the earth could be subdivided at various scales. Based on this regionalisation a second step should include the description of the areas now defined at various scales. This system represented two things to Hettner: firstly, the development of a theoretical construct for an academic geography oriented towards *Länderkunde*, and secondly this served as the basis for the structuring of *Länderkunde* studies which he planned to write in co--operation with his colleagues.

Hettner saw two things as being among the most important aims of these *Länderkunde* studies at whatever scale: firstly, that part of the earth's surface to be depicted should be so characterised that its nomothetic connection to the earth as a whole was made clear, so that it appeared as a manifestation of rules and laws which were valid everywhere in the world. Secondly, however, its idiographic characteristics, on the basis of which it became a unique individual space, were to be emphasised. In order to achieve these aims, Hettner proposed a uniform structure for all *Länderkunde* studies, which would first describe nomothetically the area selected according to its geographical factors, including relief and soils, mainland watercourses, oceans, climate, flora and fauna as well as man and his activities, i.e. settlement, economy and transport, culture and lifestyles. Based on this description the area would be subdivided into further, smaller units, which were then so described that the association of all geographical factors became clear and thus the individuality both of the parts and of the whole became apparent.

All of Hettner's methodological considerations ultimately pursued the aim of establishing geography as a subject entirely devoted to *Länderkunde* and of describing the entire earth in a unified and standardised manner as a complex of regions at different scales. But this ambitious plan remained theoretical, as the descriptive schema proposed by Hettner did not become established within the subject. Nevertheless, his formulation of geography as a chorological spatial science (*Länderkunde*) was rapidly accepted. This was largely because this formula provided an elegant solution to the problem of defining the unity of geography and its subject matter, a problem which had not been solved by the turn of the 19th century. A spatially oriented geography could claim its own subject matter, as distinct from both the natural sciences and the arts, as geography focussed on subject matter which these only dealt with peripherally. As it was now a major aim of the discipline to bring regions to life in readers' minds using specially developed skills of geographical observation and description, the subject could claim its function as the creator of up-to-date images of the world in the context of communication increasingly based on spatial abstractions, as for instance in the nation state debate and the discussion of the significance of colonies. Such images were of great importance in an industrial society increasingly integrated in global affairs.

In this context a wide range of *Länderkunde* publications by university geographers appeared before the First World War, and these began to compete significantly with the specialised studies carried out in the area of general geography. As well as extensive regional geography handbooks such as those edited by Alfred Kirchhoff and Wilhelm Sievers (see Kirchhoff 1887-1907; Sievers, Deckert & Kückenthal 1894; Philippson & Neumann 1894, Sievers 1895, Sievers 1901-1906), numerous *Länderkunde* descriptions were published in inexpensive series aimed at the interests of a broad readership (e.g. Sieger 1900, Hassert 1903, Regel 1905, Grund 1906, Philippson 1908, Banse 1910). Monographs also appeared. These included, for example, Partsch's "Schlesien" ("Silesia", 1896-1911), Richthofen's "Schantung und die Eingangspforte Kiautschou" ("Shantung and the entrance to Ciauchu", 1898), Ratzel's "Deutschland" (1898), Hettner's "Europäisches Russland" ("European Russia", 1905c), Passarge's "Süd--Afrika" (1908) or bestsellers such as Philippson's "Mittelmeergebiet" ("Mediterranean region", 1904, 3rd edition 1914) and Fischer's "Mittelmeerbilder" ("Mediterranean images", 1906, 2nd edition 1913).

Länderkunde under the influence of the *Landschaft* (landscape) concept (1918-1970)

Länderkunde experienced a further boom with the outbreak of the First World War. While its function had hitherto been primarily in the area of education, a strong applied aspect now began to play a role. During the war so-called "*Landeskunde* Commissions" were established, with the task of preparing detailed spatial accounts of Poland, Rumania, Albania, Montenegro and Macedonia, as well as of the Baltic states, so that Germany and its allies would have specific information in case of possible territorial claims should they win the war.

The use of geographical inventarisation for propandanda purposes, most remarkably in the case of Poland (see Wardenga 1995b) encouraged the awareness among many geographers that *Länderkunde* descriptions not only communicate spatial knowledge, but that this knowledge can be actively used to intervene in political debates. Although geographers initially relied on phyiscal-geographical arguments when regional categorisations were required as arguments in favour of the German Empire's right to continental expansion, after 1915 ideas from human geography gained in significance and caused a reorientation in *Länderkunde* studies, which now increasingly placed active man and his influence on the reshaping of nature in the foreground of their descriptions.

The so-called *Landschaft* (landscape) concept played a significant role in this shift of emphasis, which continued after the war. It had already been

in common use in schools before the First World War, as it was not possible to address the logical and methodological problems of regionalisation in the classroom, as was being done at the universities. Rather, it was necessary to follow on from the pupils' everyday world and language when teaching *Länderkunde* (see Schultz 1980). The term landscape now came into use here, a term which had had spatial connotations since the late 18th century and meant a specific section of the earth's surface which could be perceived as a harmonious whole consisting of different natural and anthropogenous factors (see Hard 1970). While the practisers of *Länderkunde* in the German Empire could only isolate the object of their studies by means of the relatively complex process of regionalisation, because of its usage in language "landscape" appeared to already exist in "actual" reality as a spatial entity already given before the existence of any science.

"Landscape" thus made life much easier for geographers. For now they could dispense with the difficult task of an intersubjectively verifiable regionalisation, which many scientists were glad to avoid, and they could also bypass an analysis of Hettner's difficult methodological ideas on the logical ordering of the complex material to be dealt with in a *Länderkunde* monography. From the early 1920s on, and in the face of occasionally vehement protest from older geographers, the landscape concept was presented in numerous methodological publications as the central concept of a new geography, departing from its pre-scientific-aesthetic origins. The "highest goal", "ultimate purpose" and "core" of this new geography was a form of *Länderkunde* newly oriented towards landscape geography (see Banse 1920, 1922/23, 1928, Friederichsen 1921, Obst 1922/23, 1923, Passarge 1922, Krebs 1923a, 1927, Gradmann 1924, Huttenlocher 1925, Volz 1926) "Landscape" as a symbol for the interaction of the most varied geographical factors in a particular place was now defined as German geography's "true" and "very own" subject of research. Landscape was seen as a spatial entity, a harmonious whole, an absolute coherence, as an organism. In what was sometimes extremely polemical criticism of older approaches to *Länderkunde* (see Spethmann 1928, 1931), a new style of *Länderkunde* was called for which allowed considerable space for the researcher's intuition, favoured a warm and lively descriptive style over scientific analysis, placed the immediacy of the landscape experience in the foreground of analysis, described using aesthetic categories such as "harmony" and "rhythm", and broke with the positivist tradition of causal--mechanical description in favour of the phenomenological contemplation of the nature of landscapes.

However, because of the close relationship of landscape geography to everyday language, German geography began to lower its standards of methodological reflection in the inter-war period. Areas were at best viewed as systems of locational relations between material objects in the holistic-

-organicist approach now preferred, as a rule however they were perceived as given containers in "actual" reality, with all their elements: rock base, surface forms and soils, climate, watercourses, flora and fauna as well as man himself, including his settlements, routeways and all areas used or cultivated by man. In the context of geographical theory as shaped by the landscape concept, each area was *per se* a real, individual whole, which was to be comprehended intuitively by geographers and described as vividly as possible.

The resulting shift in comparison to the school of *Länderkunde* in the late 19th and early 20th century is obvious: *Länderkunde*, which included the search for rules and laws because of the subject's orientation towards the ideals of the natural sciences, moved towards a Regional Geography which attempted to record even the smallest areas as unique and unmistakeable entities. A form of *Länderkunde* which had as its sprating point the earth as a whole and portrayed the planet as a complex of areas based on well thought--out regionalisations, was abandoned in favour of a form of *Länderkunde* which saw its subject in unquestioned, supposedly pre-existing landscapes and thus lost sight of the methodological issue of regionalisation which had been so important for the subject. Finally, a form of *Länderkunde* which had devoted itself to the description of basic physical geographical structures moved towards a form of *Länderkunde* which increasingly emphasised the signficance of human geographical factors and thus was transformed to a subject that adhered closely to the methods of the historical and cultural sciences.

In spite of the falling level of theoretical reflection, the new form of *Länderkunde* stimulated by the landscape concept was an incredible success, as it represented a geographical variation on the general intellectual milieu typical of Germany in the inter-war period (see Schultz 1980). To an unprecedented extent, geographers established themselves as leaders of the intellectual debate in a country emotionally reeling from the consequences of the First World War. In spite of inflation and the world economic crisis the subject experienced marked growth, only to be equalled again in the 1960s. New chairs of geography were created, especially in the area of human geography. New geographical journals for schools and universities appeared and took their place on the shelves of public libraries as well as in many private homes, together with established journals such as "Petermanns Mitteilungen", "Geographische Zeitschrift" or the "Zeitschrift der Gesellschaft für Erdkunde zu Berlin".

Because of the high esteem associated with the writing of landscape--oriented *Länderkunde* studies, the number of separately published regional monographs increased considerably in comparison to the period before the First World War (e.g. Scheu 1923, Krebs 1923a, b, 1928, 1935, Schmitthenner 1924, 1925, Behrmann 1924, Philippson 1925, Machatschek

1927, Gradmann 1931, Credner 1935). Far more geographers than hitherto were willing to appear as the authors of popular and cheap series (see Maull 1922, Sapper 1923, Jaeger 1925, Machatschek 1928, Thorbecke 1928, 1929, Sölch 1930, Passarge 1931). In the context of the growing debate on the revision of the conditions of the Treaty of Versailles those *Länderkunde* studies were particularly popular which addressed the issue of Germany and the territories of its neighbours who had profited and gained territory from the issue of the First World War. Thus, for example, Kurt Hassert (1923) examined the economic life of Germany within its geographical constraints and concluded that Germany could not survive in the long term without its "missing" territories. Likewise, Hugo Hassinger (1925), Friedrich Metz (1925), Erich Wunderlich (1923) and Fritz Dörrenhaus (1933) produced critically acclaimed *Länderkunde* studies of Czechoslovakia, Poland, the Upper Rhine region and South Tyrol, which lamented the territorial changes since 1918 using a strongly moralistic tone, and called for their restoration.

The issue of the revision of the boundaries set out by the Treaty of Versailles dominated these studies, together with the associated task of proving the untenability of the new German borders with the aid of geographical studies. These concerns were also typical of a series of *Länderkunde* studies which taken together portrayed Germany as a whole. In comparison to the imperial period, where there had been attempts to include the German Empire in *Länderkunde* studies (see Penck 1887, Ratzel 1898, Kirchhoff 1910, Braun 1916), the home territories now came to the fore of a research interest which was increasingly nationalistically motivated, arguing from the moral standpoint of an unjustly treated loser in the World War. Influenced by research from the "Deutsche Volks- und Kulturbodenforschung" which had been formed in the 1920s and was well financed by the state (see Fahlbusch 1994, Wardenga 1995b), the old *Länderkunde* studies relating to the German state gave way to studies that concentrated on the much larger area occupied by German-speaking peoples (see Krebs 1931, Brandt 1931, Schrepfer 1935), repeatedly challenging international law. The studies published in association with the "Volks- und Kulturbodenforschung", which today seem dominated by propaganda, led seamlessly to a type of geography that willingly let itself be made the servant of extremely revisionist national socialist interests (see Heinrich 1991).

In spite of German geographers' close connections with national socialist ideology, new paths were not sought for *Länderkunde*, even after the collapse of the Third Reich. While in the GDR attempts were made to develop a modern geography in accordance with socialist teaching, and *Länderkunde* was harshly criticised as a leftover from bourgeois values (see Sanke 1958, Grimm 2001, Schelhaas 2004), in West German geography tendencies towards the restoration of historic patterns dominated, at the level of personnel and in the contents of the subject (see Sandner 1995). Although

German geographers did attempt to distance the contents of their research from Nazi ideology (Troll 1947), the theories of the old landscape concept were usually taken up again (see Blume 1950, Troll 1950, Schwind 1950, 1951, Plewe 1952, Schmithüsen 1953). West German geography in the early post-war period thus scarcely differed from that of the 1920s with regards to its structure, contents and theoretical-methodological position.

It was however impossible to repeat the qualitative and quantitative successes of the inter-war period and the associated large numbers of publications. Thus those *Länderkunde* monographs which appeared between 1945 and 1965 were sometimes merely reworked versions of works already published in the 1930s, as for example Lautensach's "Iberische Halbinsel" ("Iberian peninsula", 1964; first published 1931), Schmieder's "Die Neue Welt" ("The New World", 1962, 1963; first published 1932, 1933, 1934), Dörrenhaus' "Südtirol" ("South Tyrol", 1959; first published 1933) or Wilhelmy und Rohmeder's "La Plata-Länder" ("La Plata states", 1963; first published Rohmeder 1936). New publications such as Müller-Wille's "Westfalen" ("Westphalia", 1952), Mensching's "Marokko" (1957), Kolb's "Ostasien" ("East Asia", 1963), Sievers' "Ceylon" (1964) or Schmieder's "Alte Welt" ("The Old World", 1964) were rare events in the first two decades after the Second World War. They were duly noted by critics but gave little new impetus for the further development of the subject.

This stagnation apparent in the production of monographs, is all the more marked if the most widely-read scientific journals are searched for the regional essays which had formed their basis since the time of the German Empire and had developed a stylistic peak when published in great numbers in the inter-war period. In "Erdkunde" only four such essays appeared in the first decade of its publication (see Philippson 1947, Lautensach 1949, Pfeifer 1952, Barz 1957), and after this not one single one appeared. The same is true of the journal "Die Erde". Only three geographers, Blume (1949/50), Krebs (1950/51) and Lehmann (1953), published traditionally structured *Länderkunde* texts in this journal in the 1950s.

A similar but slightly later piece of evidence comes from the analysis of the "Geographische Rundschau", the central publication for German geography teachers, first issued in 1949. In the early years classical *Länderkunde* studies, intended as preparatory aids for teachers, occupied much space in this journal. Up to 1966 they accounted for an average of 25--35% of the articles, followed by studies intended "primarily as basic articles as an introduction to regional thematic issues" (Brogiato 1999, p. 9). This relatively high proportion, with up to five articles in each annual issue in the 1950s, dropped steadily in the 1960s in favour of greater participation by university geographers with contributions from the entire spectrum of human geography, and since the end of the 1960s there have only been occasional articles of this nature.

In spite of the drop in *Länderkunde* publications noted by university geographers, the inter-war opinion that *Länderkunde* was the core of the discipline of geography, to which general geography was subordinate, was retained. Indeed, it was reinforced by the theoretical work of Hans Bobek and Josef Schmithüsen (see Bobek & Schmithüsen 1949, Bobek 1957), as they continued to ascribe central significance to *Länderkunde*, and thus this aspect of geography was seen as the "culmination" of the discipline, both in the perception of geographers and the education of students.

From the early 1960s this discrepancy between the theoretical status of *Länderkunde* in the methodological reflections of the discipline on the one hand and actual practical regional geographical reasearch on the other hand had led to a growing consciousness of crisis and change, expressed in various publications (see Pfeifer 1965, Büdel 1966, Mensching 1967 and Schmieder 1966, 1969). The malaise of *Länderkunde* was accounted for in these publications by external and internal factors, the evaluation of which remained ambivalent. Thus technical innovations which had facilitated many aspects of *Länderkunde* research were welcomed, while at the same time the associated exponential growth in the amount of data and the ensuing new challenges in data processing were bemoaned. The rapid expansion of university research in Germany at the time was welcomed, but in the same breath the resulting changes in the academic landscape were bewailed as this became less clearly structured, and increasingly specialised, interdisciplinary and international. The structural changes that affected most countries in the world after the Second World War were seen as a welcome opportunity for new research, but there were also fears that the required *Länderkunde* synthesis would no longer be possible. The continuing necessity of such a synthesis was unquestioned, especially in view of the problems of developing countries, although it was registered with some dismay that, in spite of repeated claims of its uses in problem-solving, providers of external funding and political institutions reacted to the financial needs of *Länderkunde* research in a reserved or even negative manner.

By the end of the 1960s the need for reform had become even more urgent. The more modern approaches which had become established in other European countries and especially in the USA, brought some young scientists to the realisation that German geography was on the way to losing contact with international research because of its tenacious attachment to the holistic landscape concept (see Bartels 1968, Hard 1970). A major altercation finally took place at the German Geographical Congress in Kiel in 1969. To the horror of the professors, who were quickly argued into a corner and seemed incapable of taking action, student representatives expressed their extreme uneasiness with *Länderkunde*. In a specially convened meeting, they declared that *Länderkunde* did not address any real problems, only constructed trivial relationships, was not capable of

achieving the overview it strived for, only produced empty formulae and should therefore be immediately abandoned in favour of an orientation towards the new general geographical and regional science approaches shaping geography at an international level (see Geografiker 1969).

Länderkunde after 1970

The students' cricism at the Geographical Congress in Kiel was a bombshell for the geography establishment, and in the ensuing years bore fruit in a flood of methodological publications discussing the pros and cons of *Länderkunde* for science and schools intensively and controversially (see Troll 1970, Uhlig 1970, Bartels 1970, Bobek 1970, 1972, Schultze 1970, Hendinger 1970, Birkenhauer 1970, Wirth 1970, 1978, Bahrenberg 1972, 1979, Otremba 1973, Kilchenmann 1973, Hard 1973, Weichhart 1975). As well as these methodological debates, the first visible result was that a newly established, comprehensive *Länderkunde* series, to which many hopes had been pinned for a reform in *Länderkunde*, came to a standstill for several years.

When this series was taken up again in the late 1970s, the emphasis was often quite different in the new volumes than had been the case in previous phases of *Länderkunde*, in spite of the retention of the traditional structure. The trend towards equal treatment of physical and human geographical factors, observable since the 1920s, continued and shifted in favour of a growing emphasis on the spatially relevant processes set in train by man's actions; as *Länderkunde* concentrated more on the present-day and became more problem-oriented this trend became even more marked (one of the most typical examples being Weber's regional geography of Portugal published in 1980). At the same time, in response to severe criticism of holism in methodological publications (see Hard 1973), the number of regional characteristics traditionally described in the overall context of physical and human geographical factors fell dramatically. These were sometimes entirely absent (e.g. Hütteroth 1982, Tichy 1985), referred to briefly in the context of specific themes in human geography (e.g. Lienau 1981), limited to a general overview (e.g. Domrös 1976, Lienau 1989) or presented in the form of issue--oriented, topical regional studies (e.g. Glässer 1978).

Caught between a growing flood of antagonistic research paradigms imported mainly from Anglo-American geography (see Arnreiter und Weichhart 1998) and the imprecise and diffuse concept of *Länderkunde*, West German geography began gradually to modernise and liberate itself from its historical tradition. Although several ideas for the reform of *Länderkunde* had been discussed since the late 1970s (see Schöller 1977, Bartels 1981, Popp 1983, Heinritz 1987, Taubmann 1987), by the 1990s it

was accepted that *Länderkunde* was outdated as a structure-giving element of geographical self-definition in Germany. The foundation of the "Leibniz--Institut für Länderkunde" in Leipzig in 1992 after the reunification of the two German states did not change this (see Blotevogel 1996, Wardenga 1995). As the only non-university geographical research institute in Germany, the Leibniz-Institute für Länderkunde is intended to provide a significant impetus for the development of German geography. Admittedly, for a brief period the differences between the geographical practice of capitalist West Germany and socialist East Germany after almost fifty years of separate development became only too apparent. Many West German geographers were appalled at the use of the term *Länderkunde* in the debate on the naming of the institute and thought that the clock was now going to be turned back again after painfully achieved progress. However, the term *Länderkunde* was less problematic for the East German geographers who had not experienced the conflict-ridden discussions associated with the gradual dropping of *Länderkunde* as a central element of geographical research in West Germany. Also, after decades of party-political interference they associated the concept of *Länderkunde* with a perception of scientific freedom. Ultimately, the non-geographers in the founding commission decided the question by arguing heatedly for its inclusion, as the term *Länderkunde* still determines public perception of the subject in Germany and the general public immediately associates geographical content with an "Institut für *Länderkunde*".

However, from its earliest years the institute was far from becoming a Societas Jesu for the *Länderkunde* counter-reformation. Its first medium--term research programme placed a strong emphasis on general human geography topics. Work on the National Atlas of Germany since 1999 ("Nationalatlas Bundesrepublik Deutschland") as well as the series "Landscapes in Germany. German Regional Heritage" come closest to the *Länderkunde* tradition of inventarisation. The creation of a new research structure led to their amalgamation as an independent field of research at the end of 1997. On the basis of detailed analysis of the history of the discipline and by setting up the term "user-oriented transfer of knowledges", this part of the institute's work provides now continuity with a version of the *Länderkunde* concept used very straightforwardly in the late 19th century before the concept became weighed down with the task of giving the discipline identity (see Wardenga 2001).

An analysis of German geography today shows that the issues discussed in physical and human geography no longer differ very much from those studied in many other countries, which like German geography have lost much of their national individuality as a result of the rapid internationalisation of the subject since the 1990s. Thus the history of the rise and fall of *Länderkunde* can be seen as the history of a uniquely German

tradition, closely intertwined with political developments in a country located in the centre of Europe. This seems to imply that the development of German geography is a special case. One can, however, interpret this history as a specific example, and then try to find out what links German geography to geography as practised in other countries. I would be very glad if, in spite of the specifically German development described here, my lecture could inspire some of you to carry out further joint research on this topic.

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