



**Belgeo**

Revue belge de géographie

1 | 2004

**Special issue : 30th International Geographical Congress**

---

## Geography in Austria

Heinz Faßmann

---



### Electronic version

URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/belgeo/10056>

DOI: [10.4000/belgeo.10056](https://doi.org/10.4000/belgeo.10056)

ISSN: 2294-9135

### Publisher:

National Committee of Geography of Belgium, Société Royale Belge de Géographie

### Printed version

Date of publication: 31 March 2004

Number of pages: 17-34

ISSN: 1377-2368

### Electronic reference

Heinz Faßmann, « Geography in Austria », *Belgeo* [Online], 1 | 2004, Online since 17 October 2013, connection on 10 December 2020. URL : <http://journals.openedition.org/belgeo/10056> ; DOI : <https://doi.org/10.4000/belgeo.10056>

---

This text was automatically generated on 10 December 2020.



*Belgeo* est mis à disposition selon les termes de la licence Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International.

---

# Geography in Austria<sup>1</sup>

Heinz Faßmann

---

## Introduction

- In Austria, geography is a well-established discipline. The first chair at a university was founded in 1851, and the Austrian Geographical Society came into existence in 1856. During the 19<sup>th</sup> century geography played a major role for the general public. Both the exploration of the world and the scientific explanation of landscape structures were fundamental objectives then. The discipline's outlook was broad and served as a sort of umbrella for developing earth sciences. By now, more than 150 years later, foci have changed in many ways. All parts of the world have been explored, the formation and structures of "landscapes" can be explained, and many formerly included disciplines became independent. Nevertheless, geography as one of the last broad and integrative disciplines is still thriving, well institutionalized and highly relevant for certain issues in the public sphere.

## The process of institutionalization

### The beginnings in the "Founders' Period" in the 19<sup>th</sup> century

- The institutionalization of geography started in Vienna – at that time the capital of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy – in the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In 1851, Friedrich Simony was appointed professor to the third-oldest geography chair in Central Europe at Vienna University (after Berlin and Göttingen), and for a long time he remained the only university teacher in this field in Austria. In 1856, the Austrian Geographical Society was founded, and Simony was the secretary-general of the society under the presidency of Wilhelm von Haidinger. During the following years, this society played an important role as a funding institution for geographical research and in disseminating geographical knowledge. The periodical "Mitteilungen der Österreichischen Geographischen

Gesellschaft” was founded and still is Austria’s most important scientific geographical journal<sup>2</sup>.

- 3 Simony laid the foundation for geography at university level in Austria. For about five decades he carried out research into the Alps in the fields of limnology, climatology, geomorphology and glaciology, especially in the Upper Austrian part of the Salzkammergut and the Dachstein area. After Simony had retired in 1885, two chairs were instituted in Vienna, one for “Physical Geography” and the other for “Historical and Cultural Geography”. Albrecht Penck was appointed professor of physical geography, Wilhelm Tomaschek professor of historical and cultural geography.
- 4 Penck is considered the founder of geomorphology and research into the Ice Age. At the age of 24 (in 1882), he wrote his first voluminous book on “Die Vergletscherung der deutschen Alpen, ihre Ursachen, periodische Wiederkehr und ihr Einfluß auf die Bodengestaltung” (The Glaciation of the German Alps, its Causes, Periodicity and Influence on the Formation of Relief Forms). One year later he defended his habilitation thesis in Munich, and in 1885 he accepted the call to the chair for physical geography in Vienna. Here, Penck wrote his book on “Die Eiszeit in den Alpen” (The Alps in the Ice Age) – together with Eduard Brückner – and a textbook on systematic geomorphology. In this way he succeeded in establishing an all-comprising system of features on the earth’s surface set apart from geological approaches.
- 5 In 1906, Penck left the University of Vienna. E. Brückner succeeded to the chair of physical geography and continued to work in the same research field. His foci were the glaciation of the Alps, climatology and the Ice Age. Brückner held his chair at Vienna University for 21 years. After his death, Fritz Machatschek was appointed professor in 1928, and his successor was Johann Sölch, who had been professor in Innsbruck (1920-28) and Heidelberg (1928-35) before.
- 6 Both of the first two holders of the chair for historical and cultural geography in Vienna, Wilhelm Tomaschek (1885–1901) (who came from Graz) and Eduard Oberhummer (1903–1931), were representatives of historical geography. Tomaschek’s focus was on the Orient, with research into the historical topography of Asia Minor based on Roman and mediaeval sources, and Oberhummer also concentrated on the Orient, with historical geography seen as spatial history and not as a special field within geography with an original and immanent research design.
- 7 Between 1870 and 1880, geography gained importance in two other universities. In 1871, the first geography professorship was established in Graz under the direction of Professor Roesler, a historian and philologist. After a four-year vacancy the “geographical cabinet”, headed by Wilhelm Tomaschek, was founded in 1878, and in 1886 the Department of Geography was set up. Eduard Richter followed Tomaschek (1878-1885) and held the chair from 1886 to 1905. He formed the department’s image by specializing in typical physical geography issues (lakes, glaciers, geomorphology) and regional geography. Robert Sieger succeeded to his position in 1905 (-1926) and shifted the focus to human geography.
- 8 In 1877, the position of an extraordinary professor was established in Innsbruck and upgraded to a chair in 1880. The first professor to hold the chair was Franz von Wieser (1848-1923), who was educated as historian and was engaged in the history of cartography and the history of discovering the world<sup>3</sup>.
- 9 Just before the turn of the century, the “Exportakademie” – that was to become the “Hochschule für Welthandel” in 1919 – was founded in Vienna in 1898. At first there was

one chair only, later on even two chairs for economic geography existed. The founder of the Institute for Economic Geography was Franz Heiderich and he held the chair from 1906-1927. Bruno Dietrich was his successor until 1945. Hans Bobek became professor between 1949 and 1952 before he changed to the University of Vienna.

### The period of stagnation after World War I

- 10 With the end of World War I and the breaking up of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, a long phase of stagnation began. During the 19<sup>th</sup> century, geography had profited from the imperialistic zeitgeist and from the economic power of the empire. Enlarging the state by acquiring colonies had been one of the main strategies in England, France, the Netherlands, Belgium and Germany, and to some extent in the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy (without colonies but with interests in South East Europe) as well, but this goal was completely obsolete after 1919. In the Treaty of St. Germain, Austria was redefined as a small country, only housing most of the German-speaking population of the former monarchy.
- 11 The economic and political crisis of the interwar period brought about a fundamental change in the research paradigms. The perspective changed from a more global one to a focus on issues in the country itself, in Vienna exemplified and personalized in Hugo Hassinger. He became successor of Oberhummer in 1931. On the one hand, he was an eminent scholar with an encyclopaedic and global approach of a “geography of mankind”, on the other hand, he opened up new research fields that had been covered neither by Tomaschek nor by Oberhummer. Thus, he was highly interested in landscape preservation and conservation issues and published an “Atlas of the Art History of Vienna” and established regional research as a planning science. Moreover, he developed a number of regional atlases focussing on society and politics (Burgenland, Lower Austria). Hassinger was involved in politics and influenced planning projects by many expert reports, studies and other contributions. It is also to his merit that he strove to emancipate human geography against the formerly all-powerful physical geography.
- 12 In Graz, Otto Maull followed Robert Sieger after a short vacancy from 1929 to 1945. His focus was on the economic importance of mountain pastures, one aspect of the issue of the carrying capacity of the earth dealt with more fundamentally by Penck. He mainly worked in the fields of political geography, geomorphology and regional geography, forming the image of the department with his expertise and creativity in a decisive way and making it internationally known.
- 13 In Innsbruck, Hans Kinzel (1898-1979) was appointed as full professor in 1935 and remained active until 1968. He came from Heidelberg and he represented geography of an older type, with broad interests, a global perspective and an encyclopaedic approach. He was an expert in population geography, in historical cartography and in glacier research, and he visited Peru several times in order to organise fieldwork there.

### The reinstatement of geography after World War II

- 14 After World War II, geography became reinstated in Vienna, Graz and Innsbruck. During the first years after the end of the war, geography was in desperate straits, as were the universities on the whole. In Vienna, Johann Sölch and Hugo Hassinger managed the reconstruction of the field, in Graz, Hans Spreitzer and in Innsbruck, Hans Kinzl. After

Sölch and Hassinger died a new team took charge and a modernization process started. Spreitzer (mainly focussing on geomorphology and regional geography) left Graz and succeeded to the Vienna physical geography chair in 1952. In 1951, Hans Bobek was called to the chair Hassinger had held. He was one of the most prominent professors in the history of the Institute for Geography and Regional Research, having been one of the founders of social geography and having given considerable impetus to the development of modern urban geography. He was highly interested in the problem of how spatial structures are influenced by social activities. In this way, he practically reversed former approaches that had studied the influence of spatial features on social activities.

- 15 In Graz, Herbert Schlenger (foci ; human and cultural geography, Eastern Europe) followed Spreitzer. In 1958, Herbert Paschinger was appointed to the chair of geography. He was primarily a physical geographer (with a focus on geomorphology) but also one of the last representatives of a universal geography. Paschinger retired in 1982 after having dominated the field of geography in Graz for more than two decades and was followed by Herwig Wakonigg ,whose research and teaching foci were mainly physical geography (climatology, glaciology) and regional geography.
- 16 In comparison with Vienna and Graz the situation in Innsbruck had remained fairly stable. Kinzl had been appointed to the chair of geography in 1935 and headed the Institute until 1968. The successor of Kinzl was Adolf Leidlmair, who held the chair from 1969 to 1989.

### The expansion period

- 17 At the end of the 1960s, the geographical departments in Austria started to expand. They profited from a considerable increase in the number of students, the general extension of Austria's university system and the favourable image geography had as an academic discipline. Based on quantitative indicators, the second half of this decade and especially the early 1970s were the "prime years" for geography in Austria.
- 18 In Vienna, the number of chairs expanded from two to five within a few years. In 1966, a new third chair was filled with Ernest Troger, who had been Kinzl's student in Innsbruck. Erik Arnberger became the first holder of a new fourth chair in 1968. Due to Arnberger's efforts, cartography succeeded in becoming an independent discipline in Austria. Elisabeth Lichtenberger, who had been Bobek's assistant for many years, was called to the newly founded fifth chair of "Regional Research and Regional Planning" in 1972. In this way, the approach to these fields initiated by Hassinger became institutionalized. With these appointments to the new chairs the changeover from the post-war generation was completed ; in 1969, Julius Fink followed Spreitzer, and in 1975, Karl Stiglbauer followed Bobek.
- 19 In Graz, a second position of a full professor was established in 1967 and held by Sieghard Morawetz until 1974, with a predominantly physical geography focus. Wilhelm Leitner followed (1976 to 1996) and redefined the profile of this position to human geography. In 1967, a second chair was established in Innsbruck. Franz Fliri concentrated on climatology and quaternary research.
- 20 During this expansion period of the 1960s, geography was institutionalized at the Salzburg University in 1963. An "Institute of Geography" started its activities with the appointment of the first full professor, Egon Lendl, the editor of the "Salzburg Atlas". In

1969, the department expanded and Helmut Riedl was appointed to the second chair. He concentrated mainly on physical geography and regional investigations in Greece and created the Alpine Research Station Sameralm, providing research and teaching opportunities in landscape ecology. In 1980, Helmut Heuberger succeeded to the chair of Geography I. He was internationally acknowledged for his research into geomorphologic problems and also for studies in cultural geography.

- 21 Last of all, geography was institutionalized in the newly founded Klagenfurt University in Carinthia. Lectures were given as from October 1975, and the department was founded in 1978. Bruno Backé was appointed to the first chair for geography (1975, “Geography I”). He had been teaching at the Berlin Technical University before. Together with Martin Seger, who was appointed to the second chair in 1978 (“Geography II”), he structured this department’s development.

## Institutions and research topics

### Geography at the universities

- 22 At present, approximately 2700 students are enrolled in the five geographical institutes in Austria, studying geography in general or some specialisation like cartography and geoinformatics or spatial planning. Students who are taking geography as an additional subject only are not included in this number (at the Vienna Economic University many students of business administration or economy take this field as a subsidiary subject).
- 23 The Institute for Geography and Regional Research in Vienna is the oldest and largest department of its kind in Austria. At present, the Institute’s academic staff teaches more than 1000 students. The next largest institute is that for Geography and Regional Research of the Karl-Franzens-University in Graz, followed by the Institute for Geography in Innsbruck. The smallest geographical department is the “youngest” one, too ; at the Institute for Geography in Klagenfurt fewer than 200 students are trained.
- 24 At present, there are 19 full professors, 21 associated professors and 29 assistant professors engaged in research and training in the field of geography. They cover a wide range of geographical subdisciplines ranging from cartography to physical geography to human geography to spatial planning. The institutes in Vienna, Graz, Innsbruck, Salzburg and Klagenfurt are so-called “Vollinstitute” with both physical geography and human geography being represented in one institutional unit. Only the Vienna Economic University specializes in just one geographical subdiscipline (economic geography).
- 25 All the “Vollinstitute” provide courses for future secondary school teachers of “Geography and Economics” as well, a programme that must be combined with that of another subject. Beside geographical core knowledge, a wide spectrum of instruction is provided in the field of economics, and didactics is integrated in the courses. In the area of economics the educational fields are finance, economic policy, economic systems, people and economy, as well as living in a global economy. In the field of didactics and pedagogy the designing and planning of teaching units, media didactics as well as new forms of teaching and learning are taught. In this way, students acquire high standards both in the factual and the didactic field, so that they are well qualified for teaching. Most of the didactics courses are taught either by external practitioners or by qualified

members of staff, so that there is close interaction between scientific content and aspects of didactic transfer.

Table 1. Geographical institutes in Austria ; staff and students.

	Number of full professors	Number of associated professors	Number of assistant professors	Entire staff	Number of students winter 2002/03
Vienna University	6	7	7	33	1042
Graz University	2	4	2	18	640
Innsbruck University	2	6	1	14	435
Salzburg University	4	4	4	20	380
Klagenfurt University	2	0	4	9,5	183
Vienna Economic University	3	0	11	19	-
Total	19	21	29	113.5	2680

Sources ; staff ; information obtained from the institutes; numbers of enrolled students ; homepage of the Ministry of Education, Science and Arts ([www.bmbwk.gv.at](http://www.bmbwk.gv.at))

- 26 A specialization in the graduate phase is unique to Vienna, and the “Regional Research and Spatial Planning” and “Cartography and Geoinformatics” programmes are the only ones offered in Austria. Both were instituted in 1975 and have run successfully for almost 30 years. Graduates of Regional Research and Spatial Planning can boast a wide spectrum of knowledge in the social sciences; they are well educated in formal techniques and possess a profound knowledge of the Austrian and European planning systems. Graduates of Cartography and Geoinformatics are able to fulfil all the modern requirements in cartography and geoinformatics jobs. In the masters programme “Theoretical and Applied Geography” the students can specialize in regional demography, regional population studies, regional development, applied geomorphology, landscape ecology and analysis of natural landscapes, research into developing countries, development aid services and research into tourism and leisure activities.
- 27 A bachelors and a masters programme in Environmental Systems Sciences is the special feature in Graz. This kind of interdisciplinary study programme is only offered in this Austrian department. It consists of a six-semester bachelors program and a four-semester masters program. Core structures and contents correspond to the masters programme in geography, and in addition there are lectures in fields like ecology, mathematics, systems research, etc. Besides general geographical competency, the goal of this programme is to

convey a profound understanding of the interactions between systems as well as to develop the ability for analysing them and creating model descriptions, and there is also a focus on environmental problems.

Table 2. Key programmes in the geographical institutes (“Vollinstitute”) in Austria.

	Undergraduate programmes	Graduate programmes (diploma or Master degree)	Teacher training for Geography and Economics
Vienna	Geography (no Bachelor degree)	Theoretical and Applied Geography (diploma), Regional Research and Spatial Planning (diploma), Cartography and Geoinformatics (diploma)	Special curriculum
Graz	Environmental Systems Sciences (Bachelor)	Geography (Master); Environmental Systems Sciences (Master)	Special curriculum
Innsbruck	Geography (no Bachelor degree)	Geography (diploma)	Special curriculum
Salzburg	Geography (Bachelor)	Applied Geoinformatics (Master); Landscape, Urban and Regional Management (Master)	Master programme

Source : information collected from the institutes

- 28 Innsbruck is well known for a profound education in physical geography of the Alpine region, including natural risks, natural hazards and risk management.
- 29 The Salzburg department made an excellent name for itself in the field of Applied Geoinformatics that is offered as an independent masters programme admitting graduates from programmes across the entire range of spatially-oriented disciplines. With an emphasis on combining conceptual knowledge with practical skills, students can choose from advanced spatial analysis, remote sensing and application-oriented classes. Moreover, it offers a postgraduate course on “Geographical Information Systems” (“UNIGIS professional”) and a Master of Science programme in “Geographical Information Science and Systems”. This two-year distance-learning programme is an internet-based course as well. Students from a wide range of backgrounds are accepted into this German-language course offering a mix of advanced knowledge with application skills based on leading commercial software. The department is the biggest German-language institution (in terms of student numbers) in the field of GIS disciplines.

## Research topics

### Vienna – Institute for Geography and Regional Research

- 30 The Institute for Geography and Regional Research in Vienna is the oldest and largest one. 20 full, associated and assistant professors advise more than 1000 students. In comparison to specialized research institutes there is no central research problem dealt



with by all members of the staff. Most of the professors are specialized in different fields. Nevertheless, one can observe a cluster of research issues for which the Vienna Institute is well known.

- 31 Urban geography is a focus with a long tradition and international repute. H. Hassinger, H. Bobek and E. Lichtenberger influenced research in this field on an international level. Since their eras, the actual research problems and the cities studied have, however, become different because of societal changes. Within the framework of a research programme scheduled for a number of years, several megacities – mostly in the Third World – were analyzed. The development of megacities in Asia and Latin America was compared and similarities and differences noted in order to be able to suggest effective regulative political measures. Comparative studies were also made of the structures and political regulations of the housing markets in Europe, the differing approaches to a reevaluation of run-down housing areas in European metropolises and the measures taken for integrating immigrants.
- 32 For more than three decades, demographic problems have been among the research and teaching foci of the department. A number of very successful research programmes in this field were carried out during this period. On the one hand, these research programmes dealt with demographic processes in Southeast Asia, especially in Thailand, with an emphasis on changes in fertility and migration patterns (decrease in the number of births; causes and patterns of, changes in, and consequences of, internal and international migration; effects on the economic development of the country). On the other hand, there were research projects on population development and migration in Austria, clearly a country with an entirely different demographical regime – with no population growth, but stagnating population numbers, the aging of the population and the political consequences of these processes.

Table 3. Foci of research in the geographical institutes (“Vollinstitute”) in Austria.

	Physical Geography	Human Geography	Cartography/Methods
Vienna	Applied Geomorphology Landscape Ecology	Urban Geography Regional Demography Regional Research (Austria, Southeast Asia) Planning Theory and Practice	Digital Atlas (methods and applications) History of Cartography
Graz	Climatology Landscape Didactics	Integrative Tourism Strategic Planning	Media and Cartography
Innsbruck	Natural hazards Climatology	Structural problems of the Alpine regions Ethnicity, Segregation and Urban Geography Agricultural Geography	Digital Atlas

Salzburg	Geomorphology Climatology	Development Research Urban and Regional Management Urban ecology	Didactics and applications of GIS
Klagenfurt	Land Use Patterns Research into cultural landscapes	Demography Regional Planning	GIS and Remote Sensing

Source : information collected from the various departments

- 33 Urban and regional research oriented towards planning is the third focus, concentrating even more on providing suggestions and guidelines for political and planning action. Different research issues ranging from gender perspectives to the management of nature reserves are dealt with and result in concrete political and planning suggestions. Important planning documents were developed in cooperation with various authorities. The comprehensive development plan for Lower Austria and the Austrian Concept for Spatial Development (“Raumentwicklungskonzept”) are among the products of a fruitful partnership with such authorities.
- 34 Within the field of physical geography, historical-genetical geomorphology oriented towards basic research has been replaced by a more pronounced orientation towards applications and landscape ecology. In this way, geomorphology serves as a partner now in connection with planning problems in settlement and spatial development, tourism planning etc. The linking of social science and natural science approaches is of special importance for this discipline. A number of projects were very successfully carried out within an international network.
- 35 The Institute’s focus on research into cartographic problems is one of the richest in tradition<sup>4</sup>. For visualizing geographical contents, cartographic means are indispensable. In connection with this there is an immanent question to be raised for which there is no simple answer ; how do you depict structures and processes in such a way that the observer understands both spatial and factual information adequately ? Cartography is able to provide answers ; it developed a wide spectrum of means of visualization and formalized the rules for their use, and it broadens this spectrum continuously.

#### Graz – Institute for Geography and Spatial Research

- 36 Research at the Institute of Geography and Regional Science is defined by the current international scientific development combined with the interests of the department’s staff, which makes a wide range of activities possible, but nevertheless research in Graz is focussed around the following issues ;
- 37 There is a long tradition in environmental and landscape research. The practice-oriented focus here is put on applied climatology (agrarian, ground and weather climatology, pollutant spreading). Herwig Wakonigg is the representative of this research focus. Projects in the field of environmental management as well as glacier and permafrost monitoring study problems concerning the natural environment, and the environmental research focus is combined with landscape didactics, targeted on the application of existing knowledge in the field of environmental education. Concepts of nature and

adventure trails as well as the development of landscape guidebooks are among the goals here.

- 38 With the appointment of Friedrich Zimmermann – who came from Klagenfurt – integrative research into tourism development became a second research focus. At present, a large-scale project concerning tourism issues in Alpine areas is being carried out. A further focus will be tourism in Central Europe as part of a special interdisciplinary research programme.
- 39 Tourism as a basis for regional development constitutes another research focus; sustainable urban and regional development. In this predominantly application-oriented research field, the following topics are currently being worked on; strategic planning processes in cities and regions, evaluation of EU-framework programmes and analysis of processes regarding the Local Agenda 21, especially participation and communication issues.
- 40 As an important challenge in modern geographical research, geographical technologies must be seen as an integrative part of all fields of research, but as well as an independent research focus, dealing with the further development of various methods and their implementation. These methods are cartography (design and implementation, media and cartography etc.), geographical information systems and processing as well as geographical remote sensing.

#### **Innsbruck – Department of Geography**

- 41 In the Institute for Geography in Innsbruck there are two chairs, one for human geography and one for physical geography. The department for “Landeskunde” is affiliated to it and concentrates on the regional geography of the different parts of the Tyrol. It produces a well-recognized Atlas of North and South-Tyrol and didactic material on the regional geography of the Tyrol. The physical geography focus is aimed at natural hazards in mountainous areas, an orientation that suggests itself, as Innsbruck is a city with about 110,000 inhabitants surrounded by high mountains. “The laboratory is at our doorstep” is the advertising motto. The members of the Institute deal with climate change, avalanches, glaciers and natural risks in general. The research areas are the alpine regions in Austria and in Iceland. With the appointment of Johann Stötter, this research focus was strengthened.
- 42 The research activities in human geography are more heterogeneous. On the one hand, there is research on the economic and social development of the alpine regions, with special emphasis given to the current situation and potential of farmers in high mountainous regions and to central places in areas not meeting the criteria defined by W. Christaller. On the other hand, the interests and activities of members of the Institute include the USA and the Third World.

#### **Salzburg – Department of Geography and Applied Geoinformatics**

- 43 Among the Austrian geography departments, the Institute of Geography and Geoinformatics in Salzburg is the only one with an explicit focus on development research and development cooperation. During the past few years, a number of doctoral theses have been completed on mostly Latin American topics, but also on South Asian and African themes. Among the courses offered there regularly are project-oriented field

excursions in Latin America (Andean region and Nicaragua) in addition to visits to development-oriented governmental institutions and NGOs in Austria and Germany. The Institute has partnership agreements with a number of Latin American, African and Asian institutions; the members of the Institute's staff are also associated with many international professional organizations and participate in bilateral and multilateral projects.

- 44 The second research focus of the department concentrates on development aspects on the local and regional levels. Research into regional development from the viewpoint of social geography has had a long-standing tradition here, but has recently been enriched by addressing various aspects of economic geography as well. Research interests and activities cover a wide range of topics, such as aspects of regional development and governance in the wider Salzburg area and the "Euregio Salzburg-Berchtesgadener Land-Traunstein", factors of innovation-oriented regional development in various socio-cultural settings (regional impact of research organisations etc. in highly and less developed countries, mainly in Asia), collaboration-based regional development and conceptual and political issues, global and local dynamics of development (regarding the role of multinational enterprises, the international mobility of highly skilled labour etc.), and new approaches in the framework of "environmental economic geography". Within these research foci a special programme for practitioners in the fields of urban and regional management was introduced. It is a part-time two-year distance-learning postgraduate programme that leads to a "Master of Advanced Studies in Urban and Regional Management, Development Research and Development Cooperation".
- 45 Research in the field of urban ecology and urban environmental planning spans the local and regional levels. It aims at applying existing methodology and theory in landscape and urban ecology and planning and developing it further, e.g., by considering the increasing importance of ecological problems as to the interaction of biotic and non-biotic processes and their management, the dynamics of urban heterogeneity as well as the development of spatial and temporal interactions and exchanges across urban landscapes in planning processes. The research group investigates the development of environmental elements in urban and suburban areas with the aim to provide practicable strategies for sustainable development and planning. It co-operates closely with decision-makers at both the local and the regional level as well as with other urban stakeholders. It also participates in international research activities to ensure the exchange of findings within networks of excellence.
- 46 Physical geography in Salzburg has special competence in the fields of climatology, geomorphology, geoecological processes and man-biosphere relations with a regional concentration on the Alpine and the Mediterranean region. Foci of research are geomorphologic mapping, erosion systems in the Eastern Alps and the Mediterranean regions, risk analysis as to landslides in Central Asia, recent geomorphodynamics and morphogenesis. In connection with the Alpine Research Station Sameralm in the Tennengebirge, three meteorological stations were established at three altitudes (980 m, 1510 m, 1720 m above sea level) that represent distinctly different ecologic and climatic zones.
- 47 Applied Geoinformatics has been developed as a specialisation since the late 1980s and can boast an excellent reputation in all of the German-speaking countries. There is an annual symposium and exhibition (AGIT - [www.agit.at](http://www.agit.at)) as well as short special courses and a full postgraduate programme in geoinformatics. The Centre for GeoInformatics

Salzburg (Z\_GIS) has become a leading centre of competence that is involved in international research programmes that are sponsored by EU-funding for research and education programmes. Z\_GIS currently employs approximately 20 researchers active in GIScience, remote sensing, online-GIS and learning media development. The geoinformatics group has strong links with regional economy, e.g. through founding the GIS-Cluster of companies ([www.giscluster.at](http://www.giscluster.at)), and cooperates with various authorities within the framework of developing a national geographical information infrastructure.

#### **Klagenfurt – Institute for Geography and Regional Studies**

- 48 In the youngest and smallest geographical institute the focus is on applied geography and environmental research. Many studies on forest decline, air quality and land-use patterns in Austria have been carried out, and a unique detailed dataset on land-use in Austria was produced during the last few years based on remote sensing data of the Russian space programme. In this way, expert knowledge in the handling and use of large remote sensing data sets was acquired.
- 49 Other research interests centre on regional planning and demography. Especially planning problems in the European Union, the future development of Southeast-European countries and the spatial problems of across-borders regions (Alpe-Adria-Region) are being studied.

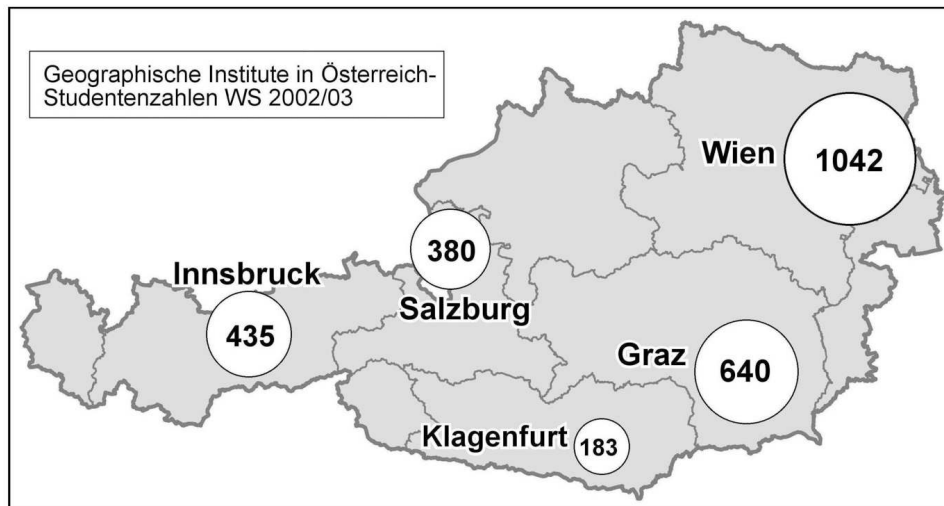
#### **Research Institutes outside the universities**

- 50 One of the most important geographical institutes outside universities is the Institute for Urban and Regional Research of the Austrian Academy of Sciences. Hugo Hassinger had founded a “Commission for Regional Research and Reconstruction” in 1946, and in 1954, Hans Bobek became its head and changed its name to “Commission for Regional Research”. The publication of an “Atlas of the Republic of Austria” in 1955 marked the emerging of a “new Austria” that had overcome the immediate aftermath of the war. As from 1983, Elisabeth Lichtenberger headed the Commission that was transformed into the “Institute for Urban and Regional Research” in 1989. Lichtenberger organized and supported international comparative research, based on a network of research co-operations especially with central and eastern European countries. Her research style was moreover characterized by pioneering in the use of computer-assisted techniques for analytical studies. This led to the implementation of a statistical database on a regional level and a geographical information system of Austria.
- 51 In 1999, Axel Borsdorf was appointed managing director of the Institute but did not change the scientific goals. The main task is still to conduct studies on spatial and social aspects in an urban and regional context. In recent years, emphasis was on urban research, more precisely, research into metropolises and urban outskirts, as well as spatial demography and social research and, last but not least, spatially-oriented research into innovation.
- 52 Another institute with geographical objectives is the Austrian Institute for Regional Planning (ÖIR). Its main focus is on the investigation of spatial development processes, the drafting of proposals relating to the utilisation of space and on making the results of its research work available to the public. It was co-founded by several Austrian Länder and the Austrian federal government in 1957. During the era of reconstruction

immediately after World War II, a small team of pioneers with an innovative approach had formed a working group for spatial research and regional planning under the leadership of Werner Jäger and Fritz Kastner. It was the ÖIR that carried out the first regional planning assignment in Austria, drafted the first large-scale spatial planning experts' reports (on the exploitation of hydropower in the midsection of the River Enns), prepared the first regional economic locational analyses and the first comprehensive spatial planning analysis and evaluation of the federal road network. The ÖIR has an excellent reputation as an independent institution for national planning agendas. During the past decade, the legal basis of the ÖIR and the main research foci changed fundamentally. In 1999, the Institute was privatised, and in the mid-nineties research areas became international. In preparing Austria's accession to the European Union, the introduction of the Structural Funds Programme helped achieve a successful re-launch of regional economic concepts. The ÖIR was strongly involved in the implementation of programming regions and was the national focal point of expertise for the completion of the "European Spatial Development Perspective (ESDP)" that was presented under the presidency of Germany early in 1999.

- 53 A variety of other research institutes outside the universities also go in for geographical research, but with them geography is a sort of sideline only. The Austrian Institute for East and Southeast Europe (OSI), for example, was founded in 1958 under the auspices of the former Austrian Ministry of Education. For a number of years it had a unique position in scientific activities related to the socialist countries of Europe, as Austria was the Western bridgehead to Eastern Europe. The OSI's activities covered the fields of historical, geographical and economic research as well as the organisation of international conferences. After the fall of the Iron Curtain in 1989, the OSI expanded and diversified its activities to other fields of the social sciences (research into national minorities and inter-cultural relations, education and science politics, politology, ecology, etc.) but maintained its focus on historical and geographical research.
- 54 Another example of geographical research in a non-geographical research institute is provided by the IDM (Institute for the Danube Region and Central Europe). It was founded in 1953 as a research institute for problems concerning the Danube region, and later on its activities started to cover all countries of Eastern Central Europe.
- 55 There also is an Austrian Orient Society (Hammer-Purgstall) and an Austrian Latin America Institute (LAI). These institutions are not geographical in outlook but focus their interests on specific sections of the earth's surface and, therefore, contribute to geographical knowledge in a wider sense. Other institutions in the same directions are ; the Federal Institute for Mountain Farming, the Federal Institute for Agro-Economy, the ÖROK (Austrian Commission for Spatial Planning) and the Austrian Chinese Society.

Figure 1. Geographische Institute in Österreich – Studentenzahlen WS 2002/03.



## The social and political importance of geography

56 Besides listing the main geographical institutions and describing their history and their current functions, an assessment of the social and political importance of geography in Austria ought to be presented. It reflects the present author's personal opinion.

- In Austria, people quite readily accept the need for geographical thinking, as it is considered the means for assessing the scale of, and the linkages between, global, regional and local problems on the one hand and for judging the behaviour and actions of individuals and societies on the other hand. Geographical thinking takes an integrative approach focussing on the interlinking and interplay of diverse factors and underlines the responsibility of societies both for nature and the social world. It attempts to counteract the analytical splitting up of complex systems prevalent since the dominance of the natural sciences had set in. Geography is one of the very last broad and integrative fields that still adhere to the idea of indivisible entities and sees itself as a discipline bridging the gap between the social and natural sciences,
- Thus, geography (still) holds a firm position in the canon of disciplines that are considered important and whose stock of knowledge is to be passed on from one generation to the next. It is part and parcel of education and provides useful knowledge; competence in interlinking bits and pieces of information, awareness of environmental problems, critical faculties for evaluating economic and social structures and a sense of responsibility regarding a regionally differentiated world. As long as geography is a widely accepted and established subject in primary and secondary schools ("geography and economy") geography as a discipline will survive and thrive.
- In Austria geography is, moreover, of importance outside education wherever it succeeds in forming an alliance with regional planning that requires detailed preliminary studies, stocktaking and an objectified presentation of the actual situation. In this context, geography can offer a valuable service no other field can provide as planning that lacks a firm basis of integrative knowledge will miss important targets. Geography and regional planning are also of great social relevance for a critical evaluation of the results and effects

of planning. A fair judgement with regard to the planners' and politicians' interventions can only be realized by means of scientific methods that are impartial and objective. Regional planning, regional development and regional politics are a sort of anchorage that provides a secure basis and societal acceptance for geography.

- Moreover, geographical research in Austria is important where fundamental problems of future development in a more general sense are concerned. They may refer to spatial structures as well as to economic chances. Thus, for example, tourism is a field of central importance for Austria, and it does not suffice for managers to rest with marketing, staging and business management, but the natural environment is to be considered as well. Therefore, research into high mountainous areas, glaciology or climatology is of societal importance as well as scientifically.
- The social and political importance of geography depends on its representatives, too. "Geography is what geographers do" is a popular definition based on a concept of activities, and, consequently, the image of the discipline depends on the personal qualities of (male and female) geographers. Geography graduates often hold influential positions as mayors, regional planners, regional managers, heads of schools, journalists or research managers, recycling managers, system planners or estate developers, and they are able to apply what geography taught them; the ability to think integratively and an interdisciplinary and methodically correct approach.

In Austria, geography is a traditional and well-received discipline. In order to keep it thriving and not let it be displaced by new fields like environmental sciences, ecologic spatial development or some sort of limited regional research, scholars are needed who are able to take up relevant themes and succeed in presenting their results to the general public convincingly. Geography must remain a useful and profitable field for society without conforming automatically to the spirit of the age or political ideologies. It must concentrate on core competencies and must not curry favour with all neighbouring disciplines. Practical problems must be tackled analytically, and an integrative approach must always be borne in mind.





Friedrich Simony

## The Austrian Geographical Society

# ÖSTERREICHISCHE GEOGRAPHISCHE GESELLSCHAFT



Geographical Societies are important geographical institutions in all European countries. They serve as an interface between scientific research and the public sphere. The Austrian Geographical Society was founded in 1856 and is the eighth-oldest still existing society of this type in the world. The original name was “k.k. Geographische Gesellschaft in Wien” whereas “k.k.” meant “kaiserliche und königliche”. With the beginning of the republic the “k.k.” became obsolete and the Society was called “Geographische Gesellschaft in Wien”. In 1959, the name was changed once again by deleting the name of the city where the Society is located (“Österreichische Geographische Gesellschaft”).

During the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the society's function was the promotion of research in the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy as well as abroad and to publish its results. It was the meeting point of the well-educated upper classes, namely members of the nobility, of the military and of the academia, interested in foreign countries and striving for encyclopaedic knowledge. ("Die angesehensten Männer des Staates, hohe Militärs, Admiralität, hohe Beamte, wissenschaftlich Interessierte des Hochadels, führende Männer des Wirtschaftslebens waren an der Gründung beteiligt, selbst Mitglieder des Kaiserhauses, darunter Kronprinz Rudolf, befanden sich unter den Förderern" (Sölch, 1951, p. 4)). The Geographical Society was, however, not only a social forum for exchanging ideas and information, but also an important benefactor of geographical research by supporting it financially.

The breaking-up of the monarchy brought the end of the Society's heyday period. In the interwar period, it was extremely difficult to finance any activities. In spite of that, the Society made efforts to support publications, research and excursions into foreign countries. Thus, during the thirties, excursions to Iceland, Norway and Northern Africa were funded. The Society still was the forum for those interested in foreign countries, adventure and environmental phenomena.

The collapse after World War II was more serious than that after World War I. The goals of Austrian geography, namely to play a significant role in the exploration of the world, to be of social and political relevance and one of the leading scientific disciplines became obsolete after 1945. The re-institutionalization of the Society was arduous and slow. No extended excursions could be financed, but series of lectures and occasional exhibitions were regularly organized, and the *Mitteilungen der Österreichischen Geographischen Gesellschaft (MÖGG)* were published. These functions and the yearly granting of awards were and still are the most important spheres of activity besides providing a meeting place for geographers.

In 1952, the Salzburg Branch was founded that became more independent gradually with new statutes in 1969 and in 2001. As a society of its own standing it has its own budget and presidency now, and its name has been changed to *Salzburger Geographische Gesellschaft*. Similarly, in 1971 an independent branch was founded in Innsbruck (*Innsbrucker Geographische Gesellschaft*) that is loosely connected with the Austrian Geographical Society. Further branches are located in Graz and Klagenfurt.

In 2006, the Austrian Geographical Society will celebrate its 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary. It is still an important institution though its functions underwent fundamental changes ; nowadays there are no funds for subsidizing research, and its former educational function that was so very important in a period without mass media, especially television, and mass tourism, has become obsolete to some degree, but it is still a powerful lobby and cooperates with other important organization within an ever-expanding network. Every year (but for 1947), the *Mitteilungen* were published, the only relevant journal in Austrian geography, and the *MÖGG* and the *Geographische Zeitschrift* in Germany are the only German-language geography journals included in the Social Sciences Citation Index.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- BERGMANN U. (1999), *100 Jahre "Wirtschaftsgeographie" an der Wirtschaftsuniversität Wien*, Wien.
- LICHTENBERGER E. (2001), "Geographie", in ACHAM K. (Hrsg.), *Geschichte der österreichischen Humanwissenschaften. Band 2 ; Lebensraum und Organismus des Menschen*, Wien, pp. 71-148.
- SPREITZER H. (1957), "Zum hundertjährigen Bestand der Geographischen Gesellschaft in Wien. Rückschau und Ausblick", *Festschrift zur Hundertjahrfeier der Geographischen Gesellschaft in Wien 1856-1956*, Wien, Geographische Gesellschaft, pp. XV-XXV.

## APPENDIXES

### *To the Geographical Society of Vienna on the Centenary of its Foundation*

*We, the President and Council of the Royal Geographical Society, warmly congratulate the Geographical Society of Vienna on the Centenary of its Foundation & recall with pleasure the cordial relations which have persisted between our two Societies since the days when one of your Founders, Wilhelm Haidinger, first acquainted his friend, our President Sir Roderick Murchison, with the plans for your Foundation.*

*In the century that has passed, your distinguished Society has, by its unceasing encouragement and its guidance, enabled Austrian explorers to make historic contributions to Man's knowledge of the unknown regions of the Earth, and of the deep seas; and Austrian geographers to throw new light on the physical and social aspects of Geography, including the geography of the British Isles.*

*It is the sincere hope of the Royal Geographical Society that, in the coming century, these triumphs of the past will be exceeded and that prosperity will continue to attend your efforts to advance in new ways that Science to which both our Societies are dedicated.*



*James Marshall Cornwall*  
President

*John Murray*  
Honorary Secretary

*J. Pruner*  
Director & Secretary

## NOTES

1. This paper has been translated by Dietlinde Mühlgassner (Institute for Geography and Regional Research of the University of Vienna).
2. The original title was "Mitteilungen der k.k. Geographischen Gesellschaft in Wien". After the breakdown of the Monarchy (1918), the title changed to "Mitteilungen der Geographischen Gesellschaft in Wien". Since 1959, the name of the journal is "Mitteilungen der Österreichischen Geographischen Gesellschaft".

3. It is not important but interesting. The scholar of Franz von Wieser was Josef Fischer (1858-1944) and he founded the oldest map from Martin Waldseemüller where for the first time the name “Amerika” was used.

4. The famous and only dictionary worldwide of the history of cartography (“Lexikon zur Geschichte der Kartographie”) and several study books in Cartography were published by members of the Viennese institute.

---

## AUTHOR

### HEINZ FAßMANN

University of Vienna, Institute for Geography and Regional Research, 1010 Wien,  
Universitätsstraße 7, heinz.fassmann@univie.ac.at