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The international transfer of human geographical knowledge in the context of shifting academic hegemonies

SUMMARY: This commentary reflects critically on two key challenges of human geographical research – the relationship between academic mobility and international knowledge transfer, and the limitations and opportunities of bi- and multilingualism. Based on a historiographic and (auto)biographic approach, I develop a multidimensional concept of mobility and knowledge transfer between hegemonic and non-hegemonic contexts, and argue that national academic communities remain important in human geography because of different path-dependencies, languages, and time restrictions.

Keywords: academic mobility, knowledge transfer, multilingualism, human geography

KURZFASSUNG: Dieser Kommentar reflektiert kritisch zwei Herausforderungen humangeographischer Forschung – das Verhältnis von akademischer Mobilität und internationalem Wissenstransfer sowie die Einschränkungen und Möglichkeiten von Zwei- und Mehrsprachigkeit. Aufbauend auf einem historiographischen und (auto)biographischen Ansatz wird ein multidimensionales Konzept entwickelt, das Mobilität und Wissenstransfer zwischen hegemonischen und nicht-hegemonischen Kontexten betrachtet, und argumentiert, dass nationale Wissenschaftsgemeinschaften in der Humangeographie aufgrund verschiedener Pfadabhängigkeiten, Sprachen und Zeitbeschränkungen weiterhin bedeutend sind.

Schlagworte: akademische Mobilität, Wissenstransfer, Mehrsprachigkeit, Humangeographie

The international transfer of geographical knowledge frequently takes places through academic conferences and journals. For example, more than a third of delegates at the Annual Meeting of the Association of American Geographers (AAG) in 2013 attended from outside the United States (36%); the largest shares of international delegates came from the United Kingdom and Canada (7% each; Derudder and Liu 2016, 320). In the 2013 volume of the *Annals of the Association of American Geographers (AAAG)*, only three out of 17 articles (18%) were authored entirely by colleagues with an affiliation outside of an English-language country – in China, Hong Kong, Brazil, South Korea, and Sweden. In other language contexts, international exchange has been less developed, as evidenced by the small number of articles written by authors based in Anglophone countries for the German geography journals *Erdkunde* and *Die Erde* in the periods 1995–2004 (21) and 2005–2014 (25), and by the even lower number of articles published by scholars employed in Germanophone countries in *Transactions of the In-*

stitute of British Geographers and AAAG (1995–2004: 1; 2005–2014: 13; Jöns and Freytag 2016, 8).

These observations illustrate that participation in English-language academic discourses remains easier for native than for non-native speakers, and that incentives and opportunities for publishing in Anglophone and non-Anglophone journals vary considerably by geographical context. The rise of an Anglo-American academic hegemony in the 20th century (e. g. Jöns 2015) has created new inequalities concerning the reach of geographical knowledge because human geographers from non-Anglophone countries need to be at least bilingual to reach a wider English-language audience through their presentations and publications (Garcia-Ramon 2003). Depending on the cultural and linguistic positionality of academics, key professional challenges arise from uneven global power relations that are inextricably linked to hegemonic and non-hegemonic economies, languages, epistemic communities, academic schools and styles of thought, and the rise of neoliberal audit cultures (e. g. Becher and Trowler 2001; Castree 2006; Minca 2013).

This intervention aims to contribute to ongoing debates about the nature and challenges of international knowledge transfer in human geography. It results from the panel on "Geographies and geographers on the move" that followed on Claudio Minca's opening lecture at the 13th *Tagung zur Neuen Kulturgeographie* [NKG XIII; Conference on New Cultural Geography] hosted by Ulrich Ermann and colleagues at the University of Graz in January 2016. The following discussion elaborates on Minca's provocative question: "Do national geographical traditions and communities still make sense today?" (2018, 5). In so doing, it critically interrogates two challenges of human geographical research, namely the relationship between academic mobility and international knowledge transfer, and the limitations and opportunities of bi- and multilingualism.

The subsequent narrative draws on literatures concerning transnational academic mobility and the global shift of knowledge centers (e.g. Jöns 2015); the history of geography (e.g. Martin 2015); and (inter)national productions of geographical knowledge (e.g. Paasi 2015). It is based on a historiographic and (auto)biographic approach that adopts my perspective as a German native speaker with 23 years of experience in both publishing geographical research and teaching university students in German and English. After studying geography, geology, and history of art at the University of Heidelberg (1992–97), I was employed there as a PhD researcher and lecturer until the award – in 2002 – of a PhD for a German-language dissertation on transnational academic mobility. Postdoctoral research under the aegis of my PhD supervisor Peter Meusburger in Heidelberg (2002–04; 2006–07), and with the support of a two-year long Feodor Lynen Research Fellowship hosted by Michael Heffernan at the University of Nottingham (2004–06), has led to academic employment at Loughborough University since 2007.

Based on the combination of existing research and personal experience, I argue that national geographical traditions and communities remain important because different academic languages are used in diverse national contexts, and because academic networks, career structures, and promotion criteria are structured differently across national systems of higher education. National geographical traditions and communities

can thus be regarded as both mediators and outcomes of historical path-dependencies linked to different languages, organizational structures, funding regimes, field sites, literatures, and audiences, as well as the need for complexity reduction related to time restrictions in academic everyday life that only few scholars can overcome based on their efficiency, cosmopolitan attitudes, and multilingualism.

Transnational academic mobility and knowledge transfer

The degree of internationalization of geographical discourse has varied over time and space. At the 6th International Geographical Congress (IGC) in London in 1895, 29 % of congress members came from countries outside the United Kingdom (Keltie and Mill 1896, xxxvi), yet the share of international delegates at the 7th IGC 1899 in Berlin reached only 19 % (Stadelbauer 2012, 20). With hindsight, the greater international nature of the 1895 IGC can be interpreted as the beginning of a shift in the hegemonic academic language from German to English that was only completed by the 1960s. By then, the main direction of transatlantic knowledge flows had been reversed, and the habit of translating human geographical work from German into English had stopped (Ehlers 2007).

By situating five biographical snapshots of human geographers, who transferred knowledge between German- and English-language human geography from the late 19th to the early 21st centuries, in their wider geoeconomic, geopolitical, and intellectual contexts, I first argue that the impact of academic mobility on the international transfer of human geographical concepts and ideas has varied profoundly with the direction of mobility, the hegemonic status of home and host countries, and the type of boundary spanning academic involved (Figure 1):

- (1) In the 1890s, when German universities and the German language were at the height of their academic hegemony, the American student Ellen Churchill Semple (1863–1932), who later served as a Professor of Anthropogeography at Clark University (1922–32), travelled to Germany to attend Friedrich Ratzel's German lectures on *Anthropogeographie* at the University of Leipzig in 1891–92 and 1895 (Keighren 2010). Based on a critical appraisal of Ratzel's ideas, Semple subsequently published articles and her book "Influences of Geographic Environment" (1911), which has had an almost 30-year long history of reception in US and UK human geography (Keighren 2010). Churchill's example shows how ambitious students from the emerging research universities in the United States mobilized ideas discussed in the hegemonic German universities and were able, upon their return, to bolster their academic careers and shape disciplinary discourses by developing the ideas of their academic teachers.
- (2) In the 1930s, Richard Hartshorne (1899–1992), a Professor of Geography at the University of Minnesota (1924–40) and later the University of Wisconsin-Madison (1945–70), spent two sabbatical leaves in Central Europe, where he visited several distinguished geographers, including Alfred Hettner (1859–1941) at the University of Heidelberg in the academic year 1931–32 (Martin 2015, 889–891). During his

1938—39 sabbatical, he mainly stayed in Vienna, where he finished his book "The Nature of Geography" (1939). By drawing on Hettner's approach of conceptualizing geography as chorology, Hartshorne's book considerably shaped the new paradigm of regional geography in Anglophone geography from the 1940s to the 1960s (Entrikin and Brunn 1989). Hartshorne's travels to Germany as an early career academic confirm that despite an ongoing hegemonic shift, the declining hegemonic German universities still provided such a wealth of valued ideas that Hartshorne studied German with a personal tutor for two years before spending two research leaves in German-language academia (Martin 2015). As late as the 1930s, these language skills empowered him to create, through translation and emulation, a new human geographical paradigm in the emerging hegemonic US universities.

- (3) After 1945, the final 20th century transfer of a new paradigm from the former hegemonic German universities to Anglophone human geography was the adaptation of Walter Christaller's ideas on central place theory - developed in his 1933 PhD thesis – for the new paradigm of American spatial science. This transfer was facilitated by the Nazi refugee Fred K. Schaefer (1904–53), who had migrated from Germany to the United Kingdom for five years and then - in 1938 - to the United States (Barnes 2014). Schaefer started lecturing in business at the University of Iowa in 1939 and was appointed Assistant Professor in the newly founded Iowa Department of Geography in 1946. In 1953, he published a profound critique of Richard Hartshorne's chorological approach to human geography in the AAAG that generated a furious response from Hartshorne in 1955. Yet, Schaefer's article paved the way for the new paradigm of spatial science, although he had died from a heart attack in 1953, shortly before his intervention was published (Barnes 2000; 2014). As Jöns and Freytag (2016, 5) have argued, the Schaefer-Hartshorne debate marked "a major change of direction in academic mobility because the ongoing hegemonic shift", accelerated through the exodus of Jewish intellectuals from Nazi Germany to the United States, had in most fields generated more academic travel and migration from Europe to the United States than from the United States to Europe (Jöns 2015).
- (4) In 1989–90, Benno Werlen, a Professor of Social Geography at the University of Jena since 1998, worked as a Swiss postdoc at the invitation of Richard Chorley and Anthony Giddens at the University of Cambridge. Having arrived from a non-hegemonic language context in one of the most vibrant intellectual hubs of the Anglophone social sciences, Werlen contributed to a wider reception of Giddens' structuration theory within German-language geography and also engaged critically with this body of thought (Lippuner 2011). His own outline of an action-centered approach to social geography, the so-called *handlungszentrierte Sozialgeographie*, originally formulated in his Swiss PhD thesis with reference to continental philosophy and sociology (Werlen 1987), was poorly understood in Anglophone human geography when published in English a few years later (Werlen 1993; Jöns and Freytag 2016, 6–7), but it has had a large and sustained impact on German-language social geography (Lippuner 2011). Werlen's boundary spanning activities therefore

- underline that by the 1990s, global academic power relations had changed to such an extent that international knowledge transfer from English- to German-language human geography was much easier than *vice versa*.
- (5) In 2016, Claudio Minca, then a Professor of Cultural Geography at Wageningen University (2010–17), co-edited a book on "Hitler's Geographies" (Giaccaria and Minca 2016). The book's 17 chapters were written by authors working in ten countries (six of which were non-Anglophone) and provide a first critical and "detailed investigation of the spatial imaginations of the Nazi regime and of the actual geographies it designed and implemented" (Giaccaria and Minca 2016, 1). That two international scholars took up a pertinent German topic in the intellectual context of Anglophone debates might reflect a lack of engagement with historical geography and the historiography of geography at German universities - the only contributor based in Germany was Jürgen Zimmerer, a Professor of Modern History at the University of Hamburg. It can thus be argued that Minca and his co-editor have acted as cosmopolitan academics, or boundary spanners, who "hold various kinds of knowledge and enable its transfer to a wider audience" (Bilecen and Faist 2015, 218). Such bridging of national, linguistic, and disciplinary boundaries arguably requires a cosmopolitan background and attitude of the sort that is clearly embodied by Minca, who grew up and was academically socialized in Italy; who has held permanent academic positions in Italy, the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, and Australia (since July 2017); who has published in Italian, English, Spanish, Catalan, and French; and who has helped to promote ideas of the Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben about biopolitics in English (Minca 2006). Minca thus epitomizes cosmopolitan academics who speak more than two languages and are pivotal for a multidirectional transfer of knowledge between various nonhegemonic and hegemonic academic communities because of their ability and willingness to travel between different cultural contexts.

These five snapshots illustrate that due to the high symbolic capital ascribed by academics to knowledge, concepts, and ideas developed in academic hegemonies, knowledge transfer within the same discipline has been much easier to accomplish from hegemonic or declining hegemonic to non-hegemonic or rising hegemonic academic contexts, rather than in the opposite direction. This results in intricate but still comprehensible relationships between various directions of academic mobility and knowledge transfer that are linked to different types of boundary spanning individuals (Figure 1): from the ambitious early career academic emulating hegemonic academic debates; via the knowledgeable creative mind transferring ideas from the old to the new home country; to the cosmopolitan academic shuttling with ease between multiple language contexts and thereby integrating scholars, empirical contexts, and ideas from non-hegemonic academic communities within core debates. A decoupling of the discriminating impact of hegemonic power relations on the predominant direction of knowledge flows away from the cores of academic debate is complicated by the relative scarcity of

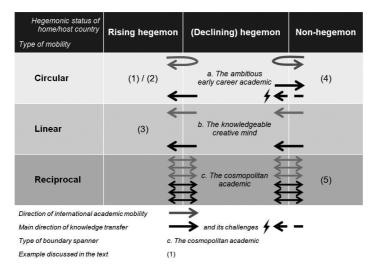


Figure 1: Transnational mobility and knowledge transfer between hegemonic and non-hegemonic academic communities by different types of boundary spanning scholars

cosmopolitan academics who are able and willing to invest time in connecting scholarly discourses in different national and linguistic academic communities.

The limitations and opportunities of bi- and multilingualism

National geographical traditions and communities remain not only highly visible in academic publications (e. g. Bajerski 2011) but also at international conferences. As Derudder and Liu (2016) have demonstrated for the 2005 and 2013 AAG Meetings, academics are at least twice more likely to present in sessions with their national peers than in sessions with international colleagues. My second claim therefore is that despite the age of the Internet, human geographical debates remain powerfully structured by different academic languages, and by nationally-orientated research traditions, publication cultures, promotion criteria, and networking opportunities at conferences of learned societies and professional associations, because of historical path-dependencies of intellectual organization and debate; various degrees of language skills; and the need to reduce complexity because of time restrictions. These three factors also seem to be the main barriers for developing more bi- and multilingualism in human geography.

For non-Anglophone academics, publishing in internationally peer-reviewed English-language journals presents multiple challenges that are absent for those working within the dominant language hegemony. As a non-native speaker, contributing to geographical debates in English requires the investment of extra time and resources, as well as specific attitudes and skills (Garcia-Ramon 2003). For instance, as a German-language geographer trained at a German university until the award of the PhD, I needed

to (1) learn to write in a different language; (2) adopt a different style of thought and argumentation; and (3) focus on ideas and debates familiar to Anglophone reviewers and readers (Aalbers and Rossi 2007). I also needed to invest additional resources, especially at the beginning, by (4) employing native speakers to check and correct my written English, as well as drawing on the help of linguistically more versatile friends; and by (5) investing more time in reviewing processes because of misunderstandings and, as discussed by Becher and Trowler (2001, 97–100), what felt like blunt hostility towards novel ideas and young (female) geographers. Despite globalization and increasing virtual communication, publication outlets in other language contexts, whether Anglophone or non-Anglophone, also seem to be more relevant and accessible through direct personal experience and thus academic mobility (Jöns and Freytag 2016; see also Storme et al. 2016).

My publication profile over the past 23 years underlines the existence of different publication cultures in Germany and the United Kingdom. It shows that I had to change my publication strategy radically to be promoted in the UK academic system from Lecturer (appointed in 2007) to Reader in Human Geography (2016). This change required (a) publishing more frequently in journals (2007: 13 items; 2017: 30) than in edited books (2007: 24; 2017: 35); and (b) writing primarily in English (2007: 18; 2017: 52) rather than German (2007: 28; 2017: 32). Over the past ten years at Loughborough, only four of my 38 new outputs appeared in German (11%), which demonstrates that I widened the potential audience for my research by publishing almost exclusively in English as the present *lingua franca*. Yet, because of the requirements of the septennial research assessment at British universities, the Research Excellence Framework (REF), and because of time restrictions, it has not been possible for me to maintain an academic output in two languages. Due to the creation of such limitations, the REF and some of its underlying assessment tools have been criticized for fostering the neoliberalization of higher education and a standardization of academic discourse (e.g. Castree 2006; Paasi 2015).

Nationally-structured research evaluations and promotion criteria thus generate different publication cultures, while increasing demands on an academic's time mean that for scholars working at UK universities, it is almost impossible to maintain a multilingual publication profile and meet the REF assessment criteria. Through a proliferation of audit cultures and university rankings, the neoliberalization of higher education has restricted multidirectional international knowledge transfer via publications and thus reinforced the symbolic power of Anglophone ideas over those produced in the same discipline but in other language contexts (Jöns and Hoyler 2013). This also affects con-

The REF requires – over a period of seven years – the publication of four journal articles (two for early career academics) of the highest possible quality in well-respected internationally-peer reviewed journals ranked highly in the subject-specific Social Sciences Citation Index (one research monograph can replace two journal articles). The REF publications are evaluated by a subject-specific committee of academic peers, who assign one of four review scores, linked to different amounts of research grant allocations, to each of their allocated articles. The categories range from recognised nationally (1*) to world-leading (4*) in terms of originality, significance, and rigor.

ference attendance because to maintain a regular output of publications, the number of conference presentations per year must be restricted. As such, it makes sense to attend at least the annual or biannual meeting of the learned society in one's country of employment, and perhaps one additional conference in the same discipline and language context, to position one's research firmly within the epistemic community that evaluates one's research in peer reviews, promotions, and research assessments.

If an academic's cosmopolitan capital, as previously established, can help to encourage multidirectional international knowledge transfer, it is possible to undermine the influence of hegemonic power relations on the dominant flow of knowledge and ideas from hegemonic to non-hegemonic academic contexts. This then raises the question why human geographers do not learn more languages. A possible answer could be that apart from different inclinations to learn languages, the publication requirements that early- and mid-career researchers must meet to obtain an academic position impose considerable restrictions on their time, which hinders their ability to develop additional linguistic skills (Aalbers and Rossi 2007). Learning to speak and write academically in one or even two foreign languages reduces the academic output in comparison to monolingual peers and thus can delay career promotion. This also applies to international migration for an academic job, not only because of the challenges associated with working in a different language context but also because of varying publication cultures and research evaluation criteria. Such challenges can be seen as limitations of both biand multilingualism, and as a career impediment to those who are intellectually and/or physically mobile across linguistic boundaries when compared to academics publishing solely in their native language.

Yet, knowledge of languages is often valued as cosmopolitan cultural capital with large creative and collaborative potential through exposure to intellectually diverse situated knowledges (Pratt and Yeoh 2003) and the opportunity to express ideas better in one language than the other. Latour (1999), for example, stressed the importance of the hyphen in the term "actor-network theory" because it would represent the co-dependence of heterogeneous actants within an actor-network. This term has often been translated into German as Akteurs-Netzwerk Theorie, but it can actually be written in one word as Akteursnetzwerktheorie, thereby signifying more clearly the unity of complexity that this body of thought has promoted (Jöns 2003). Opportunities and challenges of translation are also evident in regard to the series of annual conferences on Neue Kulturgeographie [new cultural geography] that inspired this special issue. The NKG XIII in Graz saw an intense debate about different connotations of "new cultural geography". This field emerged in Britain as part of a plea for more qualitative, critical, and nuanced humanistic and social scientific approaches with a focus on cultural representations and practices (Cosgrove and Jackson 1987). In German, the term Kulturgeographie is often used as a synonym for Humangeographie [human geography], as expressed in the wide range of geographical topics presented at the NKG since 2004. Moreover, new cultural geography and Neue Kulturgeographie evoke entirely different geographical research traditions that had largely parted ways between the adaptation - in the 1950s - of Christaller's central place theory for the development of spatial science in English-language human geography and the growing popularity of critical, poststructuralist, and new cultural geography approaches in German-language human geography since the late 1990s (Hannah 2016; Jöns and Freytag 2016).

In conclusion, it seems paradoxical that in an age of globalization and virtual communication, inter-linguistic knowledge transfer remains an exception rather than the rule, thus reinforcing the existence of different national human geographical traditions and communities. Yet, the co-existence of different academic languages, nationally-structured publication and networking cultures, as well as promotion and assessment criteria, can be explained by historical path-dependencies of academic organization and debate; the use of different languages; and the need for complexity reduction, community cohesion, and time management as key processes for making academics function in an ever more demanding professional life. In response to Minca's question about the relevance of different national human geographical traditions and communities, I therefore argue that their existence seems to be unavoidable but their value remains ambiguous because of their potential to contribute to both diversity (if brought together on an international scale) and parochialism (in the case of restricted international exchange). More multidirectional knowledge transfer could help to overcome some of the asymmetric power relations of academic mobility and international knowledge transfer. Yet, this would require more academics, as argued in similar ways by Garcia-Ramon (2003), to embrace bi- and multilingualism, cosmopolitan attitudes, and generous time giving to link debates across cultural contexts, and to evaluate research outputs based on argumentative persuasiveness rather than their language or publication outlet.

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