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Editorial: Contributions to Human Geography

DIE ERDE 136, Issue 3

The miscellaneous issues of DIE ERDE abide by the principle of opening up opportunities for authors to present very recent results from diverse areas of research, and they also offer the possibility for some new publication experiments to begin. This issue and its contributions to human geography achieve both of these goals. A new element of the activities of DIE ERDE is to publish interviews with leading scientists, who discuss the development path and new tendencies of geographical research; the first contribution to this issue represents this new concept in an interview with *Denis Cosgrove* about cultural geography. A classical element of DIE ERDE is the presentation of new results in empirical research; the following articles cover geographical topics ranging from the rapid development process in China to the changing human landscapes in Europe.

The interview with *Denis Cosgrove* by *Tim Freytag* and *Heike Jöns* connects the biographical elements of *Cosgrove's* academic career with the development of various concepts and ideas in cultural geography. It shows the changing approaches to cultural geography and their influence on individual research. The statement in favour of the landscape approach instead of the concept of space and place is very impressive, as are the deduction of relations to the very recent concept of "new cultural geography". And the explanations paint a colourful picture of the importance of interdisciplinary connections between human geography and the arts and humanities.

The rapid development process in China is currently one of the most important elements of the changing economic landscape of the world. In the system of global production networks and worldwide competition, the Chinese Free Economic Zones are obtaining increasing functionality; and they are an important element of the modernisation of the Chinese economy. *Guangwen Meng* and *Klaus Sachs* analyse the development and problems of the Tianjin Technological Development Area (TEDA) as an example of these zones. They are documenting the development path from labour-intensive production to modern, technology-oriented industries, which in a sense must be regarded as an expression of the economic success of the development area. But the economy is still dominated by multinational enterprises; there is a lack of independent R&D institutions and of indigenous development, all factors that limit the prospects of the area.

Rapid economic growth is very often connected with environmental disturbances, which can be seen in the new urban agglomerations of China. In smaller towns and remote areas, the integration of ecological aspects sometimes seems to take place more easily. *Stefan Zerbe*, *Ümüt Halik* and *Johannes Küchler* discuss the changes in urban greening in the oases of Xinjiang in Northwest China. With the rapid economic development, profound changes in the urban green spaces have occurred even in these remote areas; fruit trees are increasingly being replaced by representative

and aesthetic plants, and large green spaces are opened up. These new forms are not site-adopted and cause problems, such as the permanent need for irrigation. Improvements in planning and education are needed to solve these conflicts between socioeconomic development and sustainable environmental situations.

The idea of sustainable urban structures highlights not only the importance of vegetation and nature in towns, but also that of the reduction of environmental stress through changes in human behaviour by, for example, reduced traffic volumes. The possibilities of sustainable development in European towns, based on empirical studies of the daily mobility in Berlin, are discussed by *Dirk Gebhardt*, *Martina Joos* and *Niklas Martin*. Planners and scientists are currently in favour of the concept of a multifunctional and compact city. The spatial integration of housing, retailing, work and recreation is regarded as an appropriate approach to reducing traffic volumes and the consumption of space. The question is whether this approach can really reduce human mobility, which is primarily determined by individual decisions and scattered areas of activity. The concept is evaluated based on the investigation of daily mobility behaviours for inhabitants of various areas in Berlin. The results show lower traffic intensity in high-density urban areas with a mixture of different urban functions, but they also document the limitations of realising the concept in low-density suburban areas.

In economic geography, the discussion of regional branch clusters has become increasingly important. In a globalising world, spatial branch clusters with intensive material and immaterial links seem to be a better forum for the generation of innovations, and firms included in the cluster are estimated to possess a better position in competition. Up to now clusters have mainly been discussed for manufacturing industries; rural areas and agricultural production have not been included in these considerations. *Peter Dannenberg* and *Elmar Kulke* analyse to what extent cluster-like structures can be found in rural areas, based on case studies in Germany and Poland. The study shows the existence of an agrarian cluster that includes far more sectors than the mere agricultural production in rural areas; the cluster system is based on intensive material and immaterial links between the units, and includes the use of social capital for the exchange and generation of ideas. Comparable to results of studies in the manufacturing industries, not all units are included in the cluster to the same extent, and it is especially those units which have the best position in competition that are intensely integrated into the local cluster, in combination with strong supra-regional production and information linkages.

Europe is witnessing an ongoing integration process of the various sectors of the economy – including agriculture, industries and services – and with this, the permanent and temporary migration of people is increasing. Part of this migration is dominated by elderly people from Central Europe who are choosing retirement residences in the climatically more attractive regions of Southern Europe. *Toni Breuer* observes that existing studies, in their majority, conceive this process as one of permanent retirement migration. His analysis, however, shows the increasing importance of seasonal, semi-permanent migration between homes in Central and Southern Europe, which can be addressed as a kind of "second-home tourism".

As one can see from the brief description of its contents, this issue covers a wide spectrum of topics in human geography, which in turn is an expression of the diversity of current geographical research. Despite their diversity, most of the articles show the importance of human geography's approach of developing models and general conclusions based on profound empirical research. We cordially invite you to dip into these articles, and we wish you stimulating reading.

Elmar Kulke (Berlin)