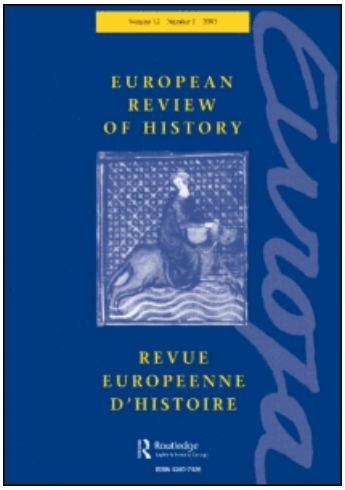


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# Imagining *Mitteleuropa*: Conceptualisations of 'Its' Space In and Outside German Geography

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# Imagining *Mitteleuropa*: Conceptualisations of 'Its' Space In and Outside German Geography

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ABSTRACT *The concept of 'Mitteleuropa' developed in Germany around 1800, albeit without its being deployed in a unitary way. The concept's articulation reveals a variety of patterns. First, a Mitteleuropa defined meridionally, which extended from the North Cape to Sicily; second, a Mitteleuropa given shape by lines of latitude reaching from the Atlantic to the Urals or at least the Black Sea; and finally, a Mitteleuropa located in the centre of the continent. The meridional and, above all, the last named, centre–periphery model were developed into major political platforms of German nationalism. Nature 'itself', geographers but also non-geographers argued, had predisposed the vast territory stretching from the Rhine to the mouth of the Danube and the Weichsel River, perhaps even as far away as to the swamps of Rokitno, to form a geopolitical unity under German hegemony. In point of fact, neither in the case of Mitteleuropa nor in any other similar ones does nature dictate a particular politics. The upshot of this essay therefore is: 'Spaces do not simply exist, spaces are produced!'*

## 1. Introduction

In geography, the beginnings of the concept of 'Mitteleuropa' go back to the end of the eighteenth century.[1] During that period, the new and fashionable discipline of statistics had begun to exert pressure on geography, threatening to overtake the field's standing in the scientific community. One internal reaction to this threat was the postulation of 'natural regions' with borders presumptively determined by nature, an idea that also gained in persuasive power as a result of the rapid transformations of the political map in the wake of the French Revolution and the Napoleonic Wars. Another reaction was the effort to bundle states or regions into new composite wholes. By the mid-nineteenth century, the

1. In this essay, the locational terms 'Mitteleuropa', as well as *Land* (and *Länder*) are retained in their German coinage throughout in order to signal in advance for readers of English the polyvalent, multi-accentuality of the terms' fields of signification. Translating the former term as Central Europe does not stabilize it but emplaces it in a related, but equally overdetermined, shifting context of Anglo-American identity construction of the region. As the present essay also stresses, the term *Land*, which might of course be translated with the same spelling in English, is a primary and problematic example of a spatial signifier whose flexible, scalar imbrications extend effortlessly in semiotic space between (physical) areal surfaces and inhabited territories of jurisdiction ranging from counties to states or countries. The slippage this has enabled historically is one of this essay's objects of critique, hopefully made more palpable in an English language context by a de-familiarising retention of the German signifier.

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new ordering principle had largely succeeded in replacing the prior side-by-side lining up of individual states. It was precisely this success that occasioned a complaint in 1844 by F.-H. Ungewitter, a notable author of geography manuals, about the tendency 'of the new geography to seek systematisation', leading to a division of Europe 'into western and eastern parts, or into three alpine and two oceanic parts …. and God knows what else', even though such partitionings were without any practical value.[2] By 1860, H.A. Daniel could opine that, 'as a matter of course', one had come to presuppose lines of demarcation partitioning Southern Europe, Central Europe, Northwestern Europe and Eastern Europe.[3] In 1873, even the author who revised Ungewitter's manual was forced to concede a certain justification 'for everyday use' in such a partitioning, although the manual otherwise chose to continue the earlier practice of explicating its subject matter in accordance with the principle of state by state depiction.[4] In 1915 finally, Wagner was able to elucidate the principle that 'as determined by their location, the arrangements of regions into higher unities—Eastern, Northern, Western, Southern and Central Europe—will be followed relatively uniformly. Only the position of France—as part of Western or Central Europe—remains uncertain.'[5]

In point of fact, uncertainty regarding the dimensions of Mitteleuropa was much greater than Wagner claimed, and virtually no geographer who gave thought to the question of the borders of this space failed to ruminate about the immense difficulties caused by the attempt to define them. Sinnhuber, in 1954, confessed to 'a feeling of absolute confusion' after reading the relevant literature.[6] On the other hand, it is in fact possible to recognise certain structures that clarify this seeming chaos if one bears in mind that Mitteleuropa was one particular aspect of a conceptualisation of regionalisation explicating the entirety of Europe, and, second, if one assists by abstracting the resulting structures on the basis of the concrete systems of partitioning that emerged. As ideal types (see Figure 1a), one can then differentiate between a North–South, a West–East and a Diagonal pattern. The North–South pattern is the oldest and has its origins in antiquity. The East–West pattern is of newer vintage and can be found, for example, in the historical-geographical writings of J.C. Gatterer.[7] The most recent of the three is the Diagonal Pattern, which is oriented to the major European watersheds or the so-called (central) European mountain diagonals. In the context of these patterns, which in their original form contained two parts, Mitteleuropa might be posited as a *strip* running west to east or north to south, i.e. alternatively from the North Cape to Sicily, or from the Atlantic to the Urals, or, finally, as a *centre* with a *periphery* surrounding it. In addition, the patterns could be combined in other ways, further multiplying Europe's classificatory possibilities. Virtually all of the variables shown in the illustration were tried out before Germany was united in 1871. In the various new editions of his 'Gea', for example, Zeune repeatedly varied the pattern without offering further elabor-

2. F.H. Ungewitter, *Neueste Erdbeschreibung und Staatenkunde*, vol. 1, Dresden, 1844, p. 123.
3. H.A. Daniel, *Handbuch der Geographie*, vol. 2, Frankfurt am Main, 1860, p. 24.
4. F.H. Ungewitter, *Neueste Erdbeschreibung und Staatenkunde*, Vol. 1, 5th revised edn, Dresden, 1873, p. 110.
5. H. Wagner, *Lehrbuch der Geographie*, Vol. 2/1, 6th revised edn, Hannover/Leipzig, 1915.
6. K. Sinnhuber, 'Central Europe, Mitteleuropa, L'Europe Centrale', *Transaction and Papers of the Institute of British Geographers*, 20 (1954), pp. 15–39, ref. on p. 15.
7. J.C. Gatterer, *Abriß der Geographie*, Göttingen, 1875.

ation. In 1808 he distinguished between North, South and Central Europe (see Figure 1b), in 1811 between East and West Europe, and 1833 between Northeast and Southwest Europe.[8] From out of this experimental phase, variable *g* (see Figure 1a) emerged as the dominant one. In this, the North–South pattern and the East–West pattern intersected in certain ways. This variable, however, did not sustain itself because, in the course of the nineteenth century, the concept of Mitteleuropa increasingly became a political weapon deployed in the service of German nationalism.

## 2. Mitteleuropa in the Milieux of the 1848–49 Revolution

The concept Mitteleuropa did not initially implicate a particular political agenda, as the variety of justifications given for its patterns reveal. Often one simply stated without further elaboration: 'Europe is divided into …'. Other authors identified location according to cardinal points or, alternatively, criteria of expediency. When further elaborated on at all, the latter explanation was justified by way of a presumption that it served to assist in providing topographical recognition. This is in fact the rationale that seems to have been foregrounded at first. Increasingly though, the new principle of demarcation was connected to the presumption that it incarnated a better developed level of knowledge in comparison with older approaches. Those thinking along these lines did not merely see pneumotechnical qualities in the new maps but ontological ones. The new map was not merely an expedient construction; it demonstrated the 'nature of things'. Just as *Länder* appeared as given by nature, so too their assemblage into larger units appeared to be a result of nature. This shift was the precondition for their being politicised, just as earlier an understanding of *Länder* as 'given by nature' likewise contained a political dimension from the outset. For *Länder* were themselves conceived of as potential states and connected to them in more than a normative relationship. The trend of history—thus the assumption—was that *Länder*, peoples and states sought to form self-contained units. If one could discern the natural borders of *Länder*, consequently, one would know how far a state might extend itself or, alternatively, would need to delimit itself.

With respect to the delineation of Mitteleuropa, not every variable was equally suited to serve the interests of German nationalism. The Mitteleuropa posited either by the N-M-S pattern (see Figure 1a, variable *e*) or the combination pattern (variable *g*) was unsuitable in this sense for two reasons. First, it included a superpower or superpowers (France, Russia) regarded as a threatening, flanking power and, second, it entailed a territorialisation beyond any contemporaneous goal of German expansion. The Mitteleuropa posited by the centre–periphery model, by contrast, offered the best platform for a politicisation of the concept, for in it a 'naturally' posited Germany could operate hegemonically or imperially as a centre extending in the active direction of all cardinal points. In principle, the W-M-E pattern (see Figure 1a: variable *d*) was also suitable for instrumental deployment against France and Russia. Impulses in that direction, however, did not originate with geographers but rather developed out of political discussions that occurred prior to and during the 1848 bourgeois revolution and only consequently entered into geographic discourse.

8. A. Zeune, *Gea*, Berlin, 1808, 2nd revised edn entitled *Göa*, Berlin 1811; 4th revised edn entitled *Allgemeine naturgemäße Erdkunde mit Bezug auf Natur- und Völkerleben*, 2 vols, Berlin/Leipzig, 1833.

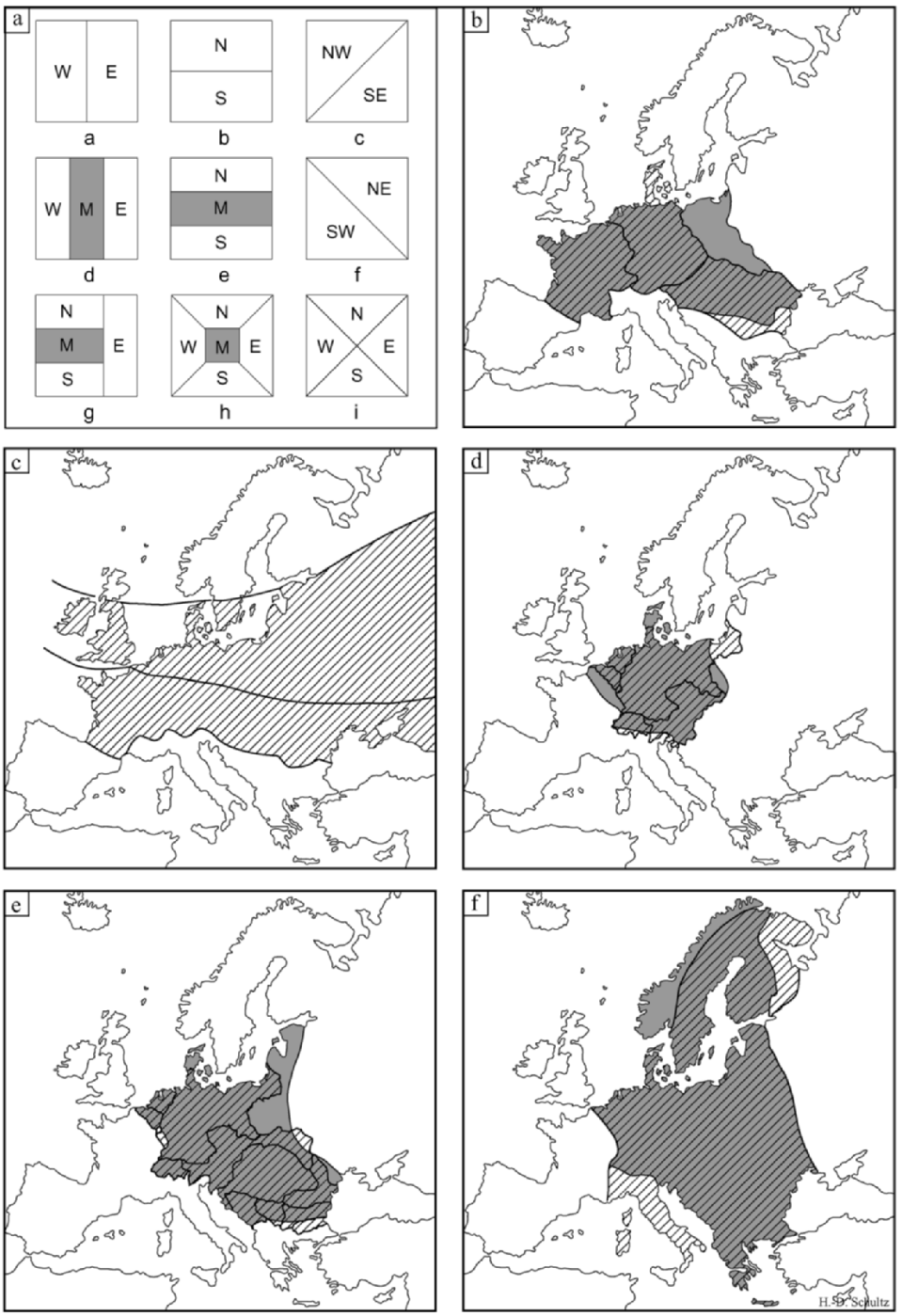


FIG. 1. 'Mitteleuropa' in German Geography. a) European regionalisation in schematic design; b) hatched: A. Zeune (1808); grey: C. E. Meinicke (1839); c) C. v. Bülow (1834) including, Central European Mountainous Regions' and 'Central European Low lands'; d) hatched: A. Kirchhoff (1882); grey: 'natural' Germany according to H. A. Daniel (1850/1863); e) hatched: J. Partsch (1903) 'Mitteleuropa', political composition; grey: J. Partsch (1903/1914) 'Mitteleuropa', physical composition; f) hatched: A. Penck (1915),'Zwischeneuropa'; grey: T. Arldt (1917) 'Mitteleuropa'.

Developed outside geography itself, this political-geographical variable acquired concrete form in the context of unification discussions leading to a Customs Union. For the restless Friedrich List, the German Customs Union would only then be complete when it encompassed the 'entire coastal landscape from the mouth of the Rhine to the border of Poland, with the inclusion of Holland and Denmark'. All of the to-be-encompassed regions were to become part of the German Bund and part of the German nation—if necessary, by force. List's recommendation to the Austrians was that they, in concert with Hungary, ought to pursue expansion toward the lower Danube territories, fostering the development of their underdeveloped areas by German settlers as an antidote to the 'unnatural' flow of emigration to America. List envisioned no less a goal than the foundation 'of a powerful Germanic–Magyar eastern empire rinsed on the one side by the Black Sea, on the other side by the Adriatic, and animated by a German and Hungarian spirit'. Hungary for him was Germany's 'key to Turkey and the entire Levant region, to the Orient, and simultaneously a bulwark against northern (i.e. Russian) superiority'.[9]



List was not alone in offering such a vision for the future. Countless authors influenced by him in the 1840s and early 1850s yearned for a Germany that would develop into a core power in the 'middle' of Europe, by means of either territorial expansion or political alliances. Such spatial longings reached a high point in the debates conducted in 1848–49 in the St. Paul's Church National Assembly, a parliament-like body of the German lands. As Heinrich Lutz has judged the situation, these debates articulated 'positions, desires, demands', which 'retained valancy beyond the end of the Habsburg Empire and Imperial Germany and well into the Second World War.' What remained constant, despite all particular differences, was a 'German will' posited above 'the interests of law and the security of other nations' and justified by a problematic mixture of political calculation, a presumptive cultural mission and a humanistic pathos of freedom. The universalistic tradition of the old Empire, irreconcilable with the modern concept of the nation, acquired a national-German intonation by way of the (economistic) secularisation of a medieval, Christianising task. Almost necessarily, it resulted in imperial chauvinistic visions of the future: the vision of a revived Germany that with the greatest legitimacy was called upon to comprise the most powerful, and power-exercising, people of Europe and the world.[10]

Against this discursive backdrop, and contrary to the apologetic literature about Mitteleuropa, the term 'first assumed a certain importance'[11] as a programmatic slogan during the 1848 revolution, a status it did not imbibe in List's writings. The goal of German politics, demanded Moering, a delegate of the St. Paul's Church National Assembly, ought to be the creation of 'a powerful, united and free Middle Europe', which, 'with a strong hand, would maintain a balance between East and West, between republicanism and autocracy'. For Moering, who held forth on the topic in his *Sybellinic Books from Austria*, 'Germania' ought to rule a space which extended between the 'Baltic Sea and the Mediterranean, from Ticino to the Weichsel River, from the Rhine to the Balkans'. In his presentation before the National Assembly, he expressed above

9. F. List, *Schriften, Reden, Briefe*, eds E. v. Beckerath *et al*., Vol. V, Aalen, 1971, p. 211, p. 405, pp. 499–502.

10. H. Lutz, *Zwischen Habsburg und Preußen. Deutschland 1815–1866*, Berlin, 1985, pp. 302–03.

11. G. Wollstein, *Das 'Großdeutschland' der Paulskirche*, Düsseldorf, 1977, p. 269.

all the wish that Hungary would be included in the German Bund, in order to clear the path that emanated from the mouth of the Danube River, 'that remarkable connecting route between the North and the Black Seas, between America and Asia'.[12] Other Assembly members gave voice to similar constructions of 'Large Orders of Living Space' (*Großraum*), which entered currency alternatively as 'Mitteleuropa' or the 'United States of Greater Germany)'. Smaller collectivities of non-German peoples (*Völkchen*) inhabiting this space were referred to as 'lost children of the Great Migrations', neither spiritually nor physically capable of pursing an independent politics. They could expect to be free only 'as a protectorate people, shielded by the umbrella of politics offered by the larger German Folk', the 'one most powerful Folk inhabiting Mitteleuropa'.[13]

What is perhaps most surprising about this first wave of Mitteleuropa nationalism is the explicit geographic scope of its depiction. This was a discussion that had emerged quite outside the discipline of geography but in a manner providing a conceptual foundation that political geography and geopolitics of the twentieth century would later build upon. Seas, coastlines, river networks, mouth areas, mountains and plains were ascribed a role legitimising territorial divisions and zones of influence, permitting the differentiation between nations with 'normal' and 'crippled' bodies.[14] Natural location factors, present or absent natural borders and the direction of river flows were said to determine whether a self-enclosed, centralised nation-state would develop or instead assume the form of a federal state. Constantin Frantz postulated in 1848 that Germany, positioned in the middle between various peoples, was for geographical reasons unsuited to become a nation-state but rather was destined to mediate a 'union of nations' (*Völkereinheit*) and to organise a 'community of nations' (*Völkergemeinschaft*). Concretely, he had in mind a Federated State of Nations from the Danube regions, with Austria at its head, a 'Baltic Federal State' led by Prussia and including Poland, Lithuania, Kurland and Livland, and a German Federal State (*Deutscher Bundestaat*) widened by the inclusion of Holland, Belgium, Alsace, Lorraine and Switzerland. Prussia and Austria interlinked for the last named group by virtue of their membership within the German Federation (*Deutscher Bund*).[15]

In 1856, the political scientist Lorenz von Stein drew directly on such a paradigm of regional geography. Of all the parts of the earth, Europe was alone in possessing 'true *Länder*', that is, 'regions lying side by side possessing pronounced independence'. Stein subdivided Europe following the W-M-E pattern (see Figure 1a: variable *d*)—'given by nature itself'—whereby his Mitteleuropa was partitioned into three geographically and historically independent groups of countries: A northern, Scandinavian one, a Turkish-southern Italian group, and a middle Austria German group, which each participated in a particular community of interests and existence. It was Central Europe's mis-

12. C. Möring, 'Anträge des Abgeordneten', in K.D. Hassler, ed., *Verhandlungen der deutschen verfassunggebenden Reichsversammlung zu Frankfurt am Main*, Vol. 5, Frankfurt am Main, 1848–49, p. 22; C. Möring, *Sibyllinische Bücher aus Österreich*, Vol. 1, Hamburg, 1848, p. 38.

13. J. v. Perthaler, *Das Erbkaiserthum Kleindeutschland*, Frankfurt am Main, 1849, pp. 12–14, p. 18.

14. F. List, *Schriften, Reden, Briefe*, p. 210; on German geopolitics in the 1920s and 1930s, particularly the deployment of various pan regionalisms, see W. Natter, 'Nazi Geopolitics, Karl Haushofer and the *Zeitschrift für Geopolitik*', in J. Agnew, K. Mitchell & G. O'Tuathail, eds, *Companion to Political Geography*, Oxford, 2002, pp. 187–202.

15. C. Frantz, *Polen, Preußen und Deutschland*, Halberstadt, 1848, pp. 8–9, pp. 44–46.

sion, according to von Stein, to prevent either the East or the West from attaining dominance over the entirety of Europe. Toward this end, 'central Central Europe' would first of all need 'to protect the integrity of its own North and South preserves (but without ruling them) against the West and East'. In accordance with the situation given 'by the basic nature of relations on the ground', Germany was perpetually poised to be either the least or the most important country in Europe.[16]

### 3. Geography's Contribution to the First Wave of Mitteleuropean Concepts

What role did geographers play in this discourse? Were they present in it at all? From the perspective of at least one anonymous author writing in 1845 about future German colonisation goals in Augsburg's *Allgemeine Zeitung*, they had in fact failed completely. While Russia, France and England were taking possession of the globe, the Germans, he complained, had either dreamily stood aside or discussed the most unrealistic plans for future colonisation—even though geography had attained a level in Germany unparalleled anywhere else. German geographers 'had thoroughly depicted the characteristics of every *Land* and the nature of the peoples who flourished in them', yet the results of this scientific inquiry were not being translated into deeds: 'One can find everything recorded in books, but without the result of tangible benefits. Why is it that these heroes of science remain silent when they notice that journalism is not doing its job? Why is it that Ritter, Berghaus, v. Roon, Meinicke and various other authors who know where Germans can flourish, have nothing to say about the Berlin Project on the Mosquito Coast (in Nicaragua). Do they agree with it? Impossible! Or are our scholars too distinguished to address such profane questions? Are these national strivings not important enough for them?'[17]

Had, then, geographers slept through the first wave of speculations about Mitteleuropa; had it developed without geographical consultation and advice? Not entirely. Karl Andree, for example, who had published a geography textbook in 1836 and who had since the beginning of the 1840s combated the recruitment of emigrants destined for Central America, had given a platform to ideas, as editor of the *Kölnische Zeitung* (1843–45), which were completely in accord with those of List.[18] Julius Fröbel, who began his professional career in Switzerland as a teacher of geography and professor of mineralogy before he turned to politics (also as a delegate to the Paulskirche Assembly) had in 1848 published the tract 'Vienna, Germany, and Europe' (Wien, Deutschland und Europa) in order to make clear 'that a more compelling answer must be found to the question of German unity with respect to international relations and its borders in the Southeast' than has otherwise been the case 'where one finds the reductive doctrine of national consolidation'. Against those 'fanatics' who adhere to the principle of race (*Racenprincip*) as a principle of national organisation, Fröbel countered with the consideration that a complicated mixture of 'races' were to be found in Europe, prohibiting the assignment of sovereign states to each individual Folk. For its part, Russia was attempting to destroy the Austrian Reich, which is why the German people 'must strive to unify with its south-

16. L. v. Stein, *Oesterreich und der Frieden*, Wien, 1856, pp. 5–6, pp. 15–17, pp. 21–22.

17. Anonymus, 'Das praktische Interesse der Deutschen am Erdball', *(Augsburger) Allgemeine Zeitung*, 25 August 1845, no. 237–38 (Suppl.), pp. 1889–91, pp. 1897–99, ref. on p. 1889.

18. See K. Buchheim, *Die Geschichte der Kölnischen Zeitung*, vol. 2, Köln, 1930, pp. 255–57.

eastern neighbours into a central European association of states'. This union of states ought to be organised like the free states of North America and, next to 'all of Germany', should also include Poland, Hungary, and the southern Slavic and Wallonian countries, thus extending itself 'from the Rhine to the mouth of the Danube', thereby 'saving' Vienna from finding itself at the border of Russia.[19]

This concern about Russia also worried the much travelled Johann Georg Kohl, who elevated the 'status of the Danube' to a German version of the 'the question about Oregon' (or even perhaps one 'about the Mississippi'). Since time immemorial, Kohl opined, salvation for the Danube had always come from the West; barbarism, by contrast, had arrived from the East. In Kohl's view, Russia, apparently unbeknown to Austria, had entered into a contract with Turkey with the purpose of cutting the throat of life on the Danube right at the source, and depriving Germans of a future paradise that ought to be theirs for the purposes of commerce and settlement: 'One need only consider the fat and fecund delta of the great river, an area where everything should be full of life and activity, blossoming fully and with the fruit of life pulsing through the arteries of the great river region. This Danube Delta, where the fullness of Egyptian conditions would prevail if we Germans occupied it with our farmers and tradesmen, where there would be, as in Holland, hundreds of establishments, harbours, canals, lighthouses, warehouses, and large cities, is now to be made uninhabitable by contractual agreement!'[20] In these passages, the Danube Delta would appear to be nothing less than a future German paradise, were only the natural course of events and German guidance given their due!

The Hegelians Kapp and Funke merit mention here as further significant interlocutors in this debate. At the time they wrote the following, the one was tenured as a teacher at Minden's Gymnasium, the other was a minister in Menslage, near Quakenbrück. Their rather bounded local positionality inhibited the ability of neither to postulate a global reach. Like no other before him, Kapp made of Germany's geographical 'central location', along with the 'all-round' character of its physical environment and its ethnic life, the point of departure for a presumptive world-historical role it was to play. 'Central location' and 'all-roundedness' predestined Germany to comprehensively order the fate of the world, and, in its role as mediator, to initiate the world's political salvation. Britain's control of the seas would need to be replaced by the 'work of peace' ensuing from a universal condition of freedom of commerce. Once ensconced, the spirit of 'humanity's fraternisation' would determine a new 'world-historical dialogue of the nations', a dialogue in which Germany was to be accorded the spokesman's role. The actualisation of this mission, Kapp argued, required Germany's 'maritime rebirth' (including possession of a war fleet), and the creation of a greater economic space between the North, Black and Adriatic Seas. Presumptively Rhineland countries, The Netherlands, Belgium and Switzerland were urged to join either the German Confederation or the Custom Union. Hungary, it was claimed, belonged to the German sphere of influence, because the water of the Danube streamed from

19. J. Fröbel, *Wien, Deutschland und Europa*, Wien, 1848, pp. 8–10.

20. J.G. Kohl, 'Die streitenden Interessen Oesterreichs und Deutschlands auf der einen und Rußlands auf der andern Seite an den Donaumündungen und am schwarzen Meere, *Deutsche Vierteljahrs Schrift*, 1849/1.1, pp. 99–132, ref. on pp. 126–28.

Germany, while France was reminded that the natural border of Germany lay on French grounds, a fact which might be expected to lead someday 'to an eruption of public opinion'.[21]

Kapp's reflections evidence an Atlantic-oceanic orientation and a particular concern that the North Sea coastline of Germany become a focal point of world trade. Funke, who for his part maintained that 'geography was the prophet of history', directed his attention above all to developments on the eastern parts of the continent. Poland, Funke averred, had failed to take up the mission vouchsafed it by its geographic position, namely the expansion of Germanic-occidental culture in the direction of Asia and the Orient and instead had (under-) developed itself into a country locked out from the sea. It now was Prussia's task to drive Russia out of Poland, 'back behind its natural borders … behind the Lithuanian swamps and mires'. For its part, Poland ought to be tied to Germany and undergo Germanisation. Beyond that, Funke insisted on the need for a close alliance between Austria and Germany; this was the prerequisite for the fulfilment of Germany's world-historical mission to crown the Danube as the queen of rivers, ruling 'all of the Southeast'. That in turn was necessary in order for Austria to fulfil its 'call' to expand German control over non-German *Länder*. For the German nation, Funke asserted, 'had not been positioned in the centre of Europe by accident'.[22]

What role did Mitteleuropa play in this political-geographical literature? It did not become a dominant catchword, as was the case in the non-geographic discourse centred on the Custom Union, but the concept had made its presence felt. Kohl differentiated between 'Central Europe' and 'Mitteleuropa'. With the first signifier, he depicted a physical entity, whose borders with Austrian Galicia and Eastern Europe were 'only vague and undetermined'. With the second signifier, he referred to a political entity, encompassing 'the entirety of all German and Austrian states along with their smaller neighbouring states of Switzerland, Belgium, Holland, and Denmark'. Furthermore, he presumed that the political borders in Europe would 'always more or less coincide with the most pronounced physical patterns of our continent'. In Kapp's chapter on Germany, by contrast, the concept of Mitteleuropa is surprisingly missing, even though his own central location rhetoric might have readily called for it. Mitteleuropa only appears on the edges in the sense of a modified N-M-S pattern (1845, Vol. 1, p. 264). This is the case because, in partitioning Europe, he drew lines (as would occur frequently in geography) following ethno-political categories which sought to distinguish between Slavic, Romance and Germanic groups of states and which aligned with 'the continental', 'the Mediterranean' and 'the oceanic' sides of Europe. Kapp counted Russia, Poland, Bohemia, Moravia and Turkey as belonging to the Slavic bloc. Greece was located in the Slavic-Romance zone of transition, the Romance group included Italy, Spain, Portugal and France, and the Germanic states numbered Sweden, the German countries around the Baltic Sea, Denmark, Norway, Holland, Belgium, Switzerland, Great Britain and Germany.

21. E. Kapp, *Philosophische oder vergleichende allgemeine Erdkunde*, 2 vols, Braunschweig, 1845, Vol. 1, pp. 308–10, Vol. 2, pp. 195–97, pp. 298–300; see H.-D. Schultz, 'Deutschlands 'natürliche' Grenzen', in A. Demandt, ed., *Deutschlands Grenzen in der Geschichte*, 3rd edn, München, 1993, pp. 32–93.

22. G. L.W. Funke, *Oestreichs welthistorische Mission in seiner Herrschaft über die mittleren Donauländer*, 2nd edn, Hannover, 1854, p. 1849; G. L.W. Funke, 'Die geographische Weltlage Polens', *Zeitschrift des Vereins für deutsche Statistik*, 1 (1847), pp. 803–25, ref. on pp. 810–12, p. 824; G.L.W. Funke, *Oestreichs welthistorische Mission*, 1st edn, 1851, pp. 116–18, p. V.

With respect to the history of geographical thought, however, the most interesting construct of Mitteleuropa stems from Funke, the reason being that his construct predates Hassinger's similar dualistic concept articulated during the First World War[23]: 'Western and Eastern Central Europe (or Mitteleuropa), Germany and Hungary, belong together geographically. Together they form a giant river area, whose waters flow in northwesterly and southwesterly directions. They ought to form a large totality which need not, however, entail the loss of all their characteristic particularities.' A 'major artery—the Danube—cannot flow through two separate wholes', which is why 'Germany and Hungary are not geographically speaking two wholes, but rather different parts of a greater whole, of which Germany forms the northwestern part and Hungary the southeastern part, and they together constitute Central Europe in the full sense of the term'. In the future determination of the Danube, Funke perceived a 'life and death question' for Germany: Simply stated, the issue was 'whether it would become German or Slavic. If the latter comes to pass, Russia will become the dominant power not only in the East but throughout Mitteleuropa'. Funke foresaw sending waves of German emigrants from the mouth of the Danube toward Asia Minor and India and speculated about 'a second Alexander-like march', which, with German strength and culture, would conquer the Orient.[24]



## 4. Mitteleuropa after German Unification (1871)

With the founding of the Second German Reich in 1871, such speculations about greater living spaces had become detritus. To be sure, its naming as the 'German Reich' recalled a tradition of medieval universalism and pointed in a profound and murmuring way past contemporaneous political borders, but ever more contemporaries grew accustomed to accepting the idea that the Reich was equivalent to the Germany brought forth by Bismarck's politics of saturation. Even so, there remained a constituency for the notion of that Greater Germany that cannot be underestimated. For its adherents, Bismarck's Reich was simply a step on the path to a greater German nation-state.

For geographers, a particular difficulty in contemplating these tendencies was the fact that the new state did not at all equate with the natural definition of Germany (along with its potentially determinate political content) developed in the widely influential model provided by Hermann Adalbert Daniel (see Figure 1d).[25] Toward the east, the watershed at the Weichsel and Oder Rivers drew the border of this 'natural' version of Germany. Toward the west, the border ran from Cap Gris Nez (near Calais) to the Swiss Jura Mountains, making the Artois, Ardennes, Aragons and Vogesen part of this natural Germany. Toward the south, Daniel drew a line along the Alps near Lake Geneva, up to the Gulf of Fiume; toward the southeast, along the small Carpathians and in the north along the North and Baltic Seas up to Skagerrak. The actual borders of the (post-1871) German Reich therefore lay quite a bit behind these lines 'given' by nature; only

23. H. Hassinger,, Das geographische Wesen Mitteleuropas', *Mitteilungen der k.k. Geographischen Gesellschaft in Wien*, 60 (1917), pp. 437–93, ref. on p. 484.

24. G.L.W. Funke, *Oestreichs welthistorische Mission*, 1st edn, 1851, pp. 28–30, p. 115.

25. H.A. Daniel, *Deutschland nach seinen physischen und politischen Verhältnissen* ( = Handbuch der Geographie, Vol. 3), Stuttgart, 1863, pp. 3–22.

in the northeast, where Western and Eastern Prussia held sway, did the Reich push past the lines Daniel had drawn. Thus, the borders of the German Reich fell markedly short of the space accorded by nature to Germany, the Reich was not *Deutsch-Land*, but only one particular German state. There the matter stood for a while, until Alfred Kirchhoff sought to redraw the map over the next decade, recasting the presumptive borders of the German Reich in accord with earlier notions of *Deutsch-Land*. Kirchhoff, who became the first post-unification occupant of a Geography Chair in Prussia (1873, Halle), and began editing Daniel's *Leitfaden* in 1872, and who drew upon Daniel's S-M-N/NW partitioning of Europe, started by vigorously contesting the tendency to equate the (1871) Reich with Germany. 'Natural' Germany, along with the plains of the Danube and France, remained part of Mitteleuropa. Switzerland, Liechtenstein, Belgium, The Netherlands, Luxembourg and Denmark were assigned to Germany as its borderlands, '(a) because they in large part lie within Germany's natural borders, and (b) because with few exceptions, these countries were part of the First German Reich and in part were members of the German Bund until 1866'. In the 125th edition published in 1879, however, Kirchhoff revised this rendering after Daniel's *Leitfaden* was criticised in the Prussian Assembly and the Minister of Culture had promised change. The previously labelled 'Mitteleuropa' sector (including France) running from the Atlantic to the Black Sea now was redrawn as a partition labelled 'the interior countries of Europe'. What had hitherto been encompassed by Daniel as natural Germany hereafter was labelled 'Mitteleuropa' excluding Denmark (see Figure 1d) which was now positioned as part of the Scandinavian kingdoms. The other countries of natural Germany previously identified as 'outer borderlands' remained in Germany's sphere of influence but designated now as 'smaller middle European states'. Arguments which marshalled the notion of 'natural borders' were omitted, replaced in part by the observation that the above-named states were for the most part inhabited by Germans.[26]

What still required justification, however, was whether the Germany given by the borders of 1871 was a geographical unity. After all, geographers, as geo-graphers, concerned themselves with *Länder*, not with state formations (the domain of political science). Kirchhoff therefore offered that even the present German Reich gave evidence 'of a territory selected by nature to serve the fraternisation of its inhabitants', for 'wherever the borders of this Reich do not happen to be borders given by nature, common economic interests, solidified by law, the army and the navy' had sharply drawn them. The particularities of the culture developed within these borders distinguished this nation from other regions outside it. In short, 'our Reich … is more than a "political concept", it is a "*Land*" in a unitary sense!'[27] Kirchhoff's trick consisted in his having substituted culture in the place of nature, wherever the latter failed to provide clear borders. The strategy gave Bismarck's politics of saturation a geographical legitimisation.

This did not mean, however, that Kirchhoff now held the earlier 'natural' model of Germany, which continued to exist in his system as 'Mitteleuropa', to be in error. It retained its status as a higher natural unity, which in a different

26. H.A. Daniel, *Leitfaden für den Unterricht in der Geographie*, ed. A. Kirchhoff, 76th edn, Halle, 1872, p. 173; 125th edn, Halle, 1879.

27. A. Kirchhoff, *Deutschlands natürliche Gliederung und seine geschichtliche Grenzverengung* ( = Sammlung geographischer und kolonialpolitischer Schriften, no. 1), Berlin, 1896, p. 14.

course of events certainly might have constituted itself politically; indeed, albeit in a weak version, it had done so in the past. This larger, natural, territorial unity 'roughly' corresponded to 'the … territory of the earlier German Reich at the time of its greatest expansion in the late medieval period'. Kirchhoff's Mitteleuropa was consequently not a space of speculation to be occupied by future power politics; rather it was a once extant but now lost space grown dim in the intervening ages, a nostalgic space of memory. It is in this vein that Kirchhoff made fun of the pan-German fantasies of Ernst Hasse: 'One imagines organising the waves of German emigration beyond the border, lets these waves take hold here and there, Germanises those places, and already the German nation has grown and soon the German nation state will cover half of Europe.'[28]

Kirchhoff's reservedness was not, however, a generally held position. Quite a few geographers continued to dream that a greater, 'geographical Germany' would sooner or later become a political reality. Particularly as part of an ascendant strategy of 'Weltpolitik' fostered beginning in the 1890s by William II, and then pervasively during the First World War—both in- and outside geography—the expansionist Mitteleuropa concepts of the 1850s blossomed again. Under the sign of the World Power Thesis,[29] they congealed in positing that in the future only a few superpowers, perhaps two to four, would determine the fate of the world. The axioms of Social Darwinism and Large Orders of Space were two elements buttressing this thesis, combined in Ratzel's 'Politischer Geographie'[30] into a variant of geo-determinism that interpreted Darwin's 'Struggle for Existence' as a 'Struggle for Space'. As a consequence of this unending struggle, it was maintained, history evidenced a law-like tendency to form large orders of space. As a result of this 'law about the growth of political spaces', contemporaneous concepts of Mitteleuropa acquired their irrefutable meaning. Within geography, even Joseph Partsch (1903–04; see Figure 1e), Wilhelm Sievers (1916) and Hugo Hassinger (1917) joined Ratzel in propagating the concept of 'Greater Mitteleuropa' in accordance with the centre–periphery model, whereby their variations did not differentiate themselves expansively from one another. In contrast, Penck (1915; see Figure 1f) and Theodor Arlt (1917; see Figure 1f) held to the meridianal variation of a W-M-E pattern, with the caveat that Penck gave this space the name 'InterEurope' (*Zwischeneuropa*), which separated a 'Front' from a 'Back' side of Europe.[31]



28. A. Kirchhoff, 'Die deutschen Landschaften und Stämme', in H. Meyer, ed., *Das deutsche Volkstum*, 2nd edn, Leipzig/Wien, 1903, pp. 39–122, ref. on p. 39; A. Kirchhoff, 'Besprechung von Hasse: Deutsche Grenzpolitik', *Globus* 89, pp. 353–54, sec. p. 354.

29. See S. Neitzel, *Weltmacht oder Untergang. Die Weltreichslehre im Zeitalter des Imperialismus*, Paderborn, 2000.

30. F. Ratzel, *Politische Geographie*, München/Leipzig, 1897, 2nd edn 1903; see H.-D. Schultz, 'Herder und Ratzel: zwei Extreme, ein Paradigma?', *Erdkunde*, 52 (1998), pp. 127–43, ref. on pp. 134–40.

31. J. Partsch, *Central Europe*, London/Edinburgh/Glasgow, 1903 (German enlarged edn: *Mitteleuropa*, Gotha, 1904); W. Sievers, *Die geographischen Grenzen Mitteleuropas*, Gießen, 1916; H. Hassinger, 'Das geographische Wesen' (*loc. cit.*); F. Ratzel, *Deutschland*, Leipzig, 1898, pp. 7–8; F. Ratzel, *Glücksinseln und Träume. Gesammelte Aufsätze aus den Grenzboten*, Leipzig, 1905, pp. 472–73; A. Penck, *Politisch-geographische Lehren des Krieges* ( = Meereskunde, no. 106) Berlin; T. Arlt, *Die Völker Mitteleuropas und ihre Staatenbildungen*, Leipzig, 1917.

It must be noted, however, that Partsch's 'Mitteleuropa' was mostly received unfavourably by pre-First World War geographers.[32] With the appearance and commercial success of Friedrich Naumann's *Mitteleuropa*, geographers gave up their reticence, whereby they particularly lamented the fact that Naumann had not consulted them in addressing the question of Mitteleuropa's borders. In his book, Naumann had spoken of it as a 'geographic expression', which 'had not yet attained a political and constitutional character' but had not delineated its precise geographical borders. According to Naumann's notion, a middle European 'core crystallisation area' would first establish itself, consisting of the German Reich and Austria-Hungary. This would 'extend from the North and East Seas to the Alps, from the Adriatic Sea to the southern edge of the Danube monarchy: Take a look at the map and see what lies between the Weichsel and the Vogesen, between Galicia and the Lake of Constance! You should consider this surface-space as a unity, as a multi-layered fraternal *Land*, as a defence alliance, as an economic union!' Naumann placed Rumania, Bulgaria, Serbia, Greece, Holland and Switzerland into the category of 'smaller, middle European states'. A historical period of decision making awaited each of these countries. Naumann expressly welcomed an alliance with Turkey but noted that it 'did not yet (!) belong to the organisational core' of Mitteleuropa, 'since it does not, geographically speaking, belong to us in a direct sense' and 'its economy and population make it a very different area, more southern, more oriental, more old-fashioned and less populated'. While maintaining that Italy belonged to Mitteleuropa 'in an economic sense', Naumann chose to refrain from further comment in light of its shift in alliances. It would appear that Naumann's conceptualisation of Mitteleuropa follows the meridian pattern—were it not for France, about which he 'continued to' hope that in the 'not too distant future it would chose to count itself as belonging to Mitteleuropa' and were it not for recurring formulations that would seem to identify Mitteleuropa with 'central Mitteleuropa', i.e. which follow the centre–periphery model. An example of the latter tendency occurs when Naumann invokes the old Reich, which 'now was pushing forward from under the earth and was making ready to return following a long slumber'.[33]

Naumann's Mitteleuropa was conceived from the outset as a political concept, but the geographical variations of Partsch, Sievers, Hassinger *et al.* were also politically inspired and intended. Partsch's Mitteleuropa, a multi-state conglomerate which extended from Belgium and The Netherlands to Montenegro, Serbia, Romania and Bulgaria, ought to be ready 'for all eternity' to 'play an independent role' 'between the great powers' and to put a stop to the 'endless swelling of the Russian Empire'. Sievers articulated Mitteleuropa as a multinational complex, bound by common economic and political interests and secured militarily. For Hassinger, Mitteleuropa offered the opportunity to bind the rural 'territories inhabited by the smaller people-nations' in the southeast to German culture, and to bring them into a quasi-colonial relation of dependency, thus both recasting this entire space as an economic autarchy and opening the way to the Orient for the Alliance. Penck construed his 'InterEurope' as a 'uniform

32. H.-D. Schultz, 'Großraumkonstruktionen versus Nationsbildung: das Mitteleuropa Joseph Partschs. Kontext und Wirkung', in H. P. Brogiato & A. May, eds, *Joseph Partsch. Wissenschaftliche Leistungen und Nachwirkungen in der deutschen und polnischen Geographie*, Leipzig, 2002.

33. F. Naumann, *Mitteleuropa*. Berlin 1915, p. 58, p. 42.

wall' poised against Russia and foresaw in an 'Intereuropean Alliance' not only the 'backbone' of Europe but also a step on the way to a future 'United States of Europe'. Within his conception of Mitteleuropa, Arldt offered speculations about the possible founding of a state comprising the Ukraine and White Russia which would push Russia out of Mitteleuropa, speculated about the direct annexations of the Frioulans, Serbs and Romanians by Austria-Hungary, and Poland by the Central Powers, while consigning the Walloons to Germany.[34]

The consideration that political-geographical conceptions were context-specific was an element held in common by all these geographers. That is, what was called Mitteleuropa at any given point in time might under other conditions appear in different shapes in the future. In that vein Hassinger, for example, spoke of an 'emerging Mitteleuropa'. Two generations earlier it would have seemed 'nearly oriental'. What remained constant were only the facts of physical geography but these facts did not suffice to delineate Mitteleuropa. Nonetheless, physical factors—geological, hydrological, orological ones—did play an important role in the conceptual construction of Mitteleuropa and its borders. Sievers drew on the idea of a 'body of Europe shaped' by the coastlines. Partsch defined the Mitteleuropa given by nature as an area modulated by 'three notes, the Alps, the mid-range mountains, and the lowlands'. Wherever any one of these notes died away, Mitteleuropa was at its border. For Hassinger, the border was set by the edge of red beech forests near Königsberg; areas north of them, despite the German influence on their city milieux, no longer counted as Mitteleuropa. For him (as with others), exact border determinations could alternatively follow either physical-geographical characteristics or historical-political, linguistic-cultural and economic ones. The determinations were not thought to be arbitrary, but rather were defended as being a reflection of the intricately bound-up character of human and natural phenomena in the landscape. They were necessary in order 'to cover the largest possible dispersal areas of geographical phenomena', so that 'the borders of naturally shaped areas are criss-crossed by the fewest possible geographical borders'. Unsuitably partitioned natural areas had the tendency to 'grow ill and to become grounds for political conflict'. On the other hand, Sievers found it completely legitimate to use straight lines to cut through naturally given lines and watersheds in order to avoid larger scale protrusions.[35]



## 5. The Immediate Postwar Period

While the Austria-Hungarian Empire and its alliance with the German Reich dissolved as an outcome of the lost war and the German Reich was reduced territorially, the concept of Mitteleuropa spawned by the wartime allies remained much in use as a spatial category within geography. Mitteleuropa was 'not just an embarrassment or some left over concept which remained in the wake of well-individuated peripheral European spaces', Lautensach emphasised, and also 'not just an economically harmonious area born out of the necessity of the war and marked by the trenches of the west, east and south …

34. J. Partsch, *Mitteleuropa* (*loc. cit.*), p. 9; W. Sievers, *Die geographischen Grenzen* (l.cit.), p. 23, H. Hassinger, 'Das geographische Wesen' (*loc. cit.*), pp. 485–88, A. Penck, *Politisch-geographische Lehren* (*loc. cit.*), pp. 33–34, p. 40, T. Arldt, *Die Völker* (*loc. cit.*), pp. 132–36.

35. H. Hassinger, 'Das geographische Wesen' (*loc. cit.*), pp. 477, 483, 491, 475; W. Sievers, *Die geographischen Grenzen* (*loc. cit.*), pp. 7, 23; J. Partsch, *Mitteleuropa* (*loc. cit.*), p. 49.

as Friedrich Naumann justifiably conceived it in 1915'. 'Rather, and this is a discovery which German geographers also owe to the war, it is a geographical entity of well-developed substantiality.'[36]

Penck's term 'InterEurope' also survived the war and entered into currency in the right-wing conservative circle associated with the journal *Die Tat*. Although Giselher Wirsing explicitly referenced Penck, he only applied the concept to the 'Eastern Space' of a 'geographically' defined, centre–periphery model of Mitteleuropa, whose western parts consisted of Austria and the German Reich, while in the east it extended from Estonia to Yugoslavia and Bulgaria. Wirsing maintained explicitly that this space formed a spatial unity, whose 'physical reality had long been in effect well before a political consciousness of its unity had awakened'.[37] Albrecht Haushofer construed a Mitteleuropa of similar dimensions, regarding which he confirmed that 'the concept bespoke a political will', as there were no overriding geographical rationales for its delimitation. At the same time he objected to any attempt to define a Mitteleuropa that excluded Germany. In reaction, he formulated—on the basis of the wide dispersal of German inhabitation within Mitteleuropa—the requirement that 'this territory between the North and Adriatic Seas, between the Baltic Sea and the Ponticum, had to be considered as a unified entity'. Mitteleuropa 'will be built with the German Folk or it won't be build at all'.

The term 'small-Mitteleuropa' was also resuscitated during the Weimar Republic in a politicised version (and paved the way for the establishment of southeastern Europe as a category of larger living space). Kirchhoff's 'subterranean' version of greater Germany qua Mitteleuropa was also not consigned to the dustbin but remained present as a horizon of historically embedded memory. Such an attempt was undertaken by Maull in his 'Politische Geographie' in which, 'on the basis of an objective study of the map', he propagated the utopia of living communities (*Lebensgemeinschaften*), including one set in Mitteleuropa, which would promote the 'idea of mankind'. In his later book on Germany, he declared that the realisation of the idea of a unity defining Mitteleuropa was the necessary prerequisite for attaining the idea of Europe's unity. Unfortunately, German resources had not been adequate to the task of founding such a state commensurate with what, 'in human perspective, coincided with the given facts of nature', namely an eternal, all-encompassing *Land*, which would have then permitted the subsequent formation of Middle European buffer states. Should Mitteleuropa wish 'to do justice with respect to its natural mission', which was to serve as an intermediary between the states in its domain and to forge 'a European union', it 'would be impossible to reject two spatial ideas … that of Germany understood as a geographical, cultural landscape, and that of a nationally delimited German Reich'. As part of this understanding, Maull expected the 'edge states' (including The Netherlands, Belgium, Switzerland, the 'Czech territories' and Poland) to accept the imposition of a union with Austria and, beyond that, their acceptance of a territorial definition of Germany which could include regions not inhabited by Germans if, geographically speaking,

36. H. Lautensach, *Länderkunde. Ein Handbuch zum Stieler*, Gotha, 1926/1944, p. 17.

37. G. Wirsing, *Zwischeneuropa und die deutsche Zukunft*, Jena, 1932, pp. 7, 8–9, p. 14; A. Haushofer, 'Mitteleuropa und der Anschluß', in F. Kleinwächter & H. v. Paller, eds, *Die Anschlußfrage*, Wien, 1930, pp. 151–52.

they gave the appearance of a German physiognomy: 'There is no such thing as a Czech cultural landscape (Penck)'. The actual contents of Maull's 'living community of Mitteleuropa' thus reveal a hegemonic programme of compensation for Germany's failed wartime attempt to align a purported intent of nature with a homogenous national state. Contrary to what the concept might seem to suggest, Maull's Mitteleuropa was anything but a cooperative organisation of partners.[38]

## 6. The Second World War

In the course of the Second World War, geographers found occasion to speculate further about visions of 'Greater Mitteleuropa'. Hassinger at long last found confirmation for the thesis he had developed during the First World War about Mitteleuropa being in 'a state of becoming' in respect of the lower Danube regions. He noted with satisfaction that the 'laws of life' with regard to 'the greater whole' had now, with the end of the Habsburg Monarchy, come into force under the leadership of the Reich. What was meant by this was that 'the resource providers and sustenance preserves of the southeast along with the coal regions and industrial sites of the northwest' had been integrated into a harmonious, economic whole. Viewed critically, what Hassinger was praising was nothing other than the establishment of an extraction relationship familiar in colonial contexts. With reference to the Baltics, an area which, as we saw earlier, Hassinger had not wished to assign to Mitteleuropa because of the border given by the red beech forests (near Königsberg), now were emplaced, along with the Weichsel River region, as part of 'Northeastern Mitteleuropa'.[39]

Hans Graul, director of the National Geography Division at the *Institute for German Work in the East* (Krakow) made a name for himself (as did Walter Geisler) as a new specialist in the Weichsel region. It would appear that Germans had finally come to recognise the natural facts of geography with regard to the east, a recognition which in the 1920s Lautensach had thought lay far distant on the path of becoming of the German nation. Once upon a time, Graul complained, the misplaced Poles, a people characterised by 'uncreative passivity', had inappropriately managed to trespass into the Weichsel regions deserted by Teutons during the great waves of migration. They had covered the landscape with a 'half baked veil of eastern culture', that is, had let it silt up and degenerate into a steppe formation, but they had not succeeded in creating a sustainable state formation positioned between eastern and central Europe. To be sure, the task of unifying people, space and state without nature's predisposition to enable such unity was a sheer impossibility. A solution could only be expected to come from the 'creatively active' 'forest peoples' of Germany, who once had thoughtlessly given these lands away. Already in the Middle Ages, the wave of migrations and settlements (compare this with the Affinity Thesis) had unconsciously been guided by the 'great concepts of nature'. Now the time had come for the Weichsel region to be 'definitively' saved by 'formative powers'. A forest region devastated by eastern steppe peoples, it would be reforested and

38. O. Maull, *Politische Geographie*, Berlin, 1925, pp. 629–43, ref. on p. 630; O. Maull, *Deutschland*, Leipzig, 1933, pp. 7–10.

39. H. Hassinger, 'Mitteleuropa, Donaueuropa, Südosteuropa', *Volkstum im Südosten* (1941), pp. 173–76, ref. on p. 176.

reshaped as a Teutonic-German cultural landscape, that is, 'would be made part of Mitteleuropa as its nature had intended it to be'. Mankind, itself 'eternally' part of nature, could not 'in the long run force' conditions which did not bespeak or 'fit' its nature. Recognising the limits set by nature, therefore, 'was the most noble task of contemporary geography'. The recent extirpation of Poland from the political map could in this vein be rendered as belated retribution, the culprits misrepresented as a 'people of achievement', and the victims transfigured as criminals who had violated space.[40]

Another author, Otto Schäfer, who in his position as a high school teacher also taught geography, broadly accused all previous conceptualisations of Mitteleuropa of having sprung forth out of subjective, liberal-state ideas, rather than (as in the Middle Ages notion of the Reich) a concept that preceded from 'spatial and folkish-organic thinking', which, like the National Socialist claim on a new order in Europe, preceded recognition 'of the entirety of the continent as a whole'. Schäfer's Mitteleuropa found orientation in the 'major Atlantic–Pontic spatial axis of the Rhine–Main–Danube line and the Baltic–Pontic axis'. Alongside these two major axes, which were prefigured by nature, another major demarcation ran from the northern flatlands at the mouth of the Rhine to Warsaw. They and the line drawn from the Rhine, Main and Danube were the most important dynamic axes of Europe. The Rhine River basin could 'never' be thought to be part of Western Europe, it was 'the foundation and bracket of Mitteleuropa and the heartland of the continent'; its western border bespoke 'a large, natural, self-contained whole as well as a border drawn by folkish, climatic and economic conditions'. The Weichsel region's grafting unto Mitteleuropa at last heralded the return of that 'geo-political union of fate of all river areas (i.e. the Rhine, Weser, Elbe, Oder, Weichsel and Danube Rivers) lying in the space of Mitteleuropa'. In this revived union, which according to Schäfer had been destroyed by the liberal, Western European spirit, all European peoples would be united in an 'organic spatial community', bespeaking an 'authentic spatial comradeship under the leadership of the greatest and most responsible of them' in order once again to 'confirm the eternal elements of space'. Peoples 'fighting for their life and perseverance would always need to be mindful of how to accomplish the mission these bequeathed'.[41]



## 7. The Second Postwar Period

As is well known, these 'eternal elements of space' refused to go along with German plans. Instead of reordering and ruling Europe from a central position, Germany itself was split into a bifurcated periphery. Mitteleuropa, as a geographically legitimised political agenda, was put into the archives. During the national meeting of geographers held in Hamburg in 1955, E. Otremba stated

40. W. Geißler, *Deutscher! Der Osten ruft dich!* Berlin, 1941; H. Lautensach, *Länderkunde* (*loc. cit.*), p. 194, H. Graul, 'Das Weichselgebiet, eine mitteleuropäische Landschaft', *Institut für deutsche Ostarbeit Krakau. Jahrbuch*, 1 (1941), pp. 216–35, ref. on p. 223, pp. 233–34; H. Graul, 'Die Landschaft des Generalgouvernements', in M. Freih. du Prel, ed., *Das Generalgouvernement*, Würzburg, 1942, pp. 16–26, ref. on p. 26; H. Graul, 'Die naturlandschaftliche Gliederung des Generalgouvernements und ihre Bedeutung', *Zeitschrift für Erdkunde*, 10 (1942), pp. 337–50, ref. on p. 349, p. 338; H. Graul, 'Vorwort', in *Beiträge zur Siedlungsgeographie des Generalgouvernements*, Krakau, 1943, pp. 7–9.

41. O. Schäfer, 'Die geopolitischen Grundzüge Mitteleuropas', *Geographischer Anzeiger*, 43 (1942), pp. 58–68, ref. on pp. 59–60, p. 61, p. 65, p. 67–8.

that one should never have sought to corroborate a political conceptualisation of Mitteleuropa by morphological means. Hassinger's First World War era concept of Mitteleuropa, as well as other patterns drawn around it, were 'products of their times and are over and done with'. Currently, Mitteleuropa threatened to degenerate into a mere pediment of ideological disputes. A 'unitary Mitteleuropa or one posited in such terms' no longer existed; what remained was a twofold Mitteleuropa, 'each of whose parts now 'were collapsed into each other and laboriously patched together'. Yet Otremba asserted that Mitteleuropa retained a presence as a 'passive space', and insisted on the valence of the idea of Mitteleuropa as a cultural landscape in light of the ongoing fragility of political conditions affecting the core area of Europe. In his considerations, he repeatedly emphasised that Mitteleuropa evidenced a greater affinity toward the West than toward the East, while a Southeast orientation appeared rather suspect. Otremba apparently hoped for a western-oriented rollback of the entire complex of international relations but whose border demarcations ought not to be thought of as 'being substantially changed' despite the events of the postwar era.[42]

Today, in the context of the eastward expansion of the European Union, Fassmann and Wardenga aver that 'the question of whether, politically speaking, a country belongs to the middle, west, north or south of Europe has become ever less important'. Mitteleuropa can nonetheless be expected to remain a 'useful' 'spatial concept though without a power-political backdrop anchoring it'.[43] In this context, 'the requirement' becomes clear 'of differentiating terminologically between different kinds of larger territorial formations—such as the European Union has already and will all the more become'. It ought therefore to remain a task of geography 'to present recommendations of how Mitteleuropa can be demarcated'. Should it become apparent 'that with respect to selected indicators, Mitteleuropa as such no longer exists … and ought to be replaced by notions of Western and Eastern Mitteleuropa', this 'would not be debilitating'. One ought, however, to seek to avoid 'any revival of misleading, geopolitical reflections and judgements'. For Mitteleuropa would now appear 'simply like north, south, west, and eastern Europe, part of a larger, all-encompassing Europe'.[44] What kinds of spaces are these supposed to be, however, if not only purely areal-related descriptors? Is the danger of a substantive or essentialist misunderstanding, which lies at the base of the entire geographical discussion presented in this essay, in any way avoided by this line of argument?

In geography schoolbooks at least, the partitioned spaces of Europe continue to maintain an independent existence. These textbooks continue to convey the impression that their signifiers refer to spatial things, not constructions, to materially extant entities, not utilitarian signifiers of territory. To give just one example, the schoolbook *Mensch und Raum* (Berlin) introduces European regions without any further elaboration using the categories 'North, West, South, Southeast, East and Middle Europe'. They are simply 'there' in all their (multicoloured) cartographic presence. Physical geographical objects (e.g. mountains and oceans) serve to mark positions, while the alignment of these regions'

42. E. Otremba, 'Wesen und Wandlung des Begriffs Mitteleuropa', in *Deutscher Geographentag Hamburg 1955*, Berlin, 1957, pp. 265–73, ref. on pp. 268–69, pp. 270, 273.

43. H. Fassmann & U. Wardenga, 'Der Begriff Mitteleuropa in politisch-geographischer Sicht', *Geographische Rundschau*, 51 (1999), pp. 26–31, ref. on p. 27.

44. *Ibid.*, p. 30.

borders coincides with the national borders of countries. Echoing a nearly classical formulation, Mitteleuropa is said to be 'the space of transition between Western and Eastern Europe, as well as between Northern and Southern Europe. The other regions of the continent arrange themselves around Mitteleuropa.' Among the follow-up exercises the textbook assigns students is to compile tables for each region and place the relevant countries (or, as a synonym, *Länder*) in the appropriate region. A next step involves calculating the relevant percentages that each region of Europe evidences with respect to total surface and population statistics, and to compare the surface to population ratios that result. How could the impression not emerge from such exercises that these regions are in fact actually existing phenomena and not just simply utilitarian constructions?[45]

## 8. Conclusion

'Spaces are not simply given, they are produced!'[46] That is to say, certain sections of the earth's surface are talked about in certain ways producing certain identities in their wake. The presumptive identities that result are bound to judgements made about people and places, in a manner that often enough serves to reinforce hierarchies and create scapegoats. Mitteleuropa, for example, could stand for order, 'Southeastern Europe' (or the Balkans) for chaos, whose overcoming required the 'guardianship' of the former. Were one no longer to hold forth about the spaces thus labelled, they would disappear along with talk about them. Their existence is entirely bound up in the ways that we communicate about them. Mitteleuropa can exist only in so far as one speaks of its existence. The reflections inscribed in the tradition of regional geography, however, evidence a different history: The natural environment of a *Land* was said to already predetermine its classification and emplacement. Nature exercised a mysterious power, which directed the actions of mankind in a particular way, while on the other side of the formula it guaranteed that pursuit of the dictates of nature would ensure lasting results for mankind's actions. The physical-material substrate of the earth's surface contained within itself the norms that would decide what would persevere over time or what in the short or even (sometimes quite) longer run would be corrected again by nature itself. The mountains, rivers, hills and flatlands which presented themselves to geographers in the abstracted representation of the map in reality served the function of an empty screen upon which the most varied and often enough contradictory depictions could be projected, reflecting the interests of group inclusion and exclusion. A meaning innate to nature itself only existed to the extent that it was posited there by human thought. Of its own accord, nature did not and does not speak a political language. This is no less true of 'Mitteleuropa' than it is for all like-minded constructions of space.

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG Die Konzeption 'Mitteleuropa' entstand—in uneinheitlicher Form—in Deutschland um das Jahr 1800, und entsprechend vielschichtig war auch ihre Propagierung: Erstens, ein meridional definiertes Mitteleuropa, das vom Nordkap bis

45. C. Ernst & U. Ernst, eds, *Mensch und Raum. Geographie. Erdkunde Berlin 7*, Berlin, 1997, p. 8.

46. See H.-D. Schultz, 'Räume sind nicht, Räume werden gemacht. Zur Genese 'Mitteleuropas' in der deutschen Geographie', *Europa Regional*, 5 (1997), pp. 2–14; see also W. Natter & J. P. Jones III,, Identity, Space, and other Uncertainties', in G. Benko & U. Strohmayer, eds, *Space and Social Theory. Interpreting Modernity and Postmodernity*, Oxford, 1997, pp. 141–61.

Sizilien reichte; zweitens, ein an Breitengraden orientiertes Mitteleuropa vom Atlantik zum Ural oder zumindest bis zum Schwarzen Meer; und schließlich ein im Zentrum des Kontinents loziertes Mitteleuropa. Das meridionale und vor allem das letztgenannte Zentrum-Peripherie-Modell wurden zu bedeutsamen politischen Plattformen des deutschen Nationalismus. 'Die Natur selbst', so Geographen, aber auch Nicht-Geographen, habe das weite Territorium vom Rhein zur Donaumündung und zur Weichsel, vielleicht gar bis zu den Rokitno-Sümpfen, dafür vorgesehen, zu einer geopolitischen Einheit unter deutscher Hegemonie formiert zu werden. In Wirklichkeit diktiert die Natur natürlich keine Politik—weder im Falle Mitteleuropas noch in irgendeinem ähnlichen Fall. Entsprechend lautet die Quintessenz dieses Essays 'Räume sind nicht, Räume werden gemacht!'

RÉSUMÉ Le concept de 'Mitteleuropa' a été développé en Allemagne vers 1800, bien que dans un sens non univoque. L'articulation du concept relève d'une variété de modèles. Le premier, une Mitteleuropa définie méridionalement, qui s'étend du Cap Nord à la Sicile; le second, une Mitteleuropa formée des latitudes de l'Atlantique à l'Oural ou au moins la Mer Noire; et enfin, une Mitteleuropa située au centre du continent. La version méridionale, et par-dessus tout la dernière nommée, le modèle centre–périphérie, sont devenues des plates-formes politiques majeures du nationalisme allemand. La 'nature' elle-même, argumentent à la fois les géographes et non-géographes, avait prédestiné le vaste territoire s'étendant du Rhin à la bouche du Danube et le fleuve Weichsel, peut-être même jusqu'aux marécages de Rokitno, pour former une unité géopolitique sous l'hégémonie allemande. Mais dans les faits, ni dans le cas du concept 'Mitteleuropa' ni dans aucun autre similaire, la nature ne dicte une politique particulière. La thèse de ce papier se résume à considérer que les espaces n'existent pas simplement, les espaces sont produits!