

Christoph Stadel – investigating the mountains

Axel Borsdorf

When Christoph Stadel completed his university career at the end of the 2004 summer semester, I had the honour of holding the eulogy at the academic send-off. I pointed out that this threshold had a series of intended and unintended consequences.

Intended consequences included

- a withdrawal into the private sphere,
- a refocusing on the beautiful things in life, especially:
- finding time to read so-called *belles lettres*,
- to spend hours in Café Tomaselli,
- to spend with his wife, children and friends,
- and to leave daily worries at the university behind.

Unintended consequences:

- None of the intended ones could be realized!

Since his retirement Christoph Stadel has written many research articles, inducted his PhD candidates in Kenia *in situ* and advised them, went to his emeritus room at the Institute of Geography almost every working day, carried on researching and publishing in high-ranking journals and collaborated with me on a major book on the Andes.

He did find the time to move from rented into owner-occupied accommodation, but it is a moot point whether his wife and family have interpreted this as the long awaited focus on the family. He has not been seen in Café Tomaselli once in eight years of retirement! And he has not been able to cast himself off in his mind and his thinking from the fate of the institute and the university. In many conversations with me and with his colleagues at the institute, Jürgen Breuste and Lothar Schrott, the seasoned emeritus still expresses concern about the institution that he was responsible for over more than twelve years. What is very evident in these conversations is the tolerant basic attitude, coupled with an immense experience of life, shaped by encounters with several cultures and paired with the wisdom (of age?) of an emeritus.

It stems from his personality and the many stations of his life. If I were asked to characterize Christoph Stadel's personality, these qualities would come to mind: Baden-Alemannic accent, international outlook and strong identification with Europe, openness towards foreign cultures, lived – and not pretended – Christianity, a certain urge to communicate his insights, experiences and passions (one might call it a didactic impulse, coupled with a natural didactic gift), loyalty, a readiness to cooperate and constant, caring commitment to his students. If you love your students, you endeavour to help them become better than you are yourself. This was what

drove the university teacher Stadel – maybe that made him more popular with his students than with some of his colleagues?

Such qualities do not come about by chance, they emerge in the course of a long life. Christoph Stadel was born on 6 June 1938 in Donaueschingen, the son of a dentist in the Baden part of the German Land of Baden-Württemberg. Both parents were very sporty, went skiing in the Black Forest, walking in the Baar and orienteering in the riparian woodlands of the Danube. The Baden people saw themselves then, and still do, as the antithesis of the Württemberg people. Christoph's mother was a woman with a fervent Baden identity and passed this spirit on to her son, as did the father, who cultivated it further. He had been forced by his Swabian father (Christoph's grandfather) to study in Tübingen, the hub of Württemberg spirit, and thus knew the 'enemy' intimately. His son Christoph should not study there but instead should have the privilege of attending the previously Austrian university of Freiburg im Breisgau, i.e. in his indigenous culture. This regional patriotic narrowness of the parents had two effects on Christoph Stadel: a desire for more openness, the urge to explore Europe and the world – and a certain prejudice against the Swabians. When he conducted an excursion of the Austrian Geographical Society to south-western Germany, he avoided all Swabian regions. So it came that I never met my friend even though I happened to lead an excursion to south-western Germany myself at the same time. My route of course included the Swabian regions that Christoph circumvented.

Even so: a popular pirate radio during the wild late-1960s was called *Radio Dreyecksland*, a reference to the joint background of the Alemanni tribes in Germany, France, Austria and Switzerland. The Alemannic background served as a bridge to his evolving world citizenship for Christoph Stadel. Studying at the previously Austrian University of Freiburg, the proximity to the noble families of the Habsburgs, von Mömpelgards, Straßburgs and Belforts, as well as to the Hartmannswillerkopf peak, the Maginot and the Siegfried Lines – all these conscious and unconscious impressions acted on the young student of geography, medieval history, Romance languages and political science. At that time, Arnold Bergstraesser, a leading political scientist of post-war Germany, taught in Freiburg. Christoph Stadel sat at his feet and at those of Heinrich Schmiedinger in medieval history – whose son incidentally would become rector of Salzburg University during Stadel's career there. In geography, Christoph was first impressed with the great regional geographer Friedrich Metz, so much in fact that Stadel remained a convinced regional geographer. Then Josef Schramm kindled Stadel's interest in the Near East and marshalled all his youthful enthusiasm by applying a small trick: Christoph Stadel travelled with Schramm to Greece, Syria and Jordan, thus bursting the all too narrow banks of his mythical Baden homeland. As early as 1962, still a student, Stadel published his first academic work on the social structure of the Palmyra Oasis. Both worlds should remain Christoph's worlds – that of travelling and that of publishing!

At that time it was customary to spread your studies over at least two universities. Stadel chose Kiel, then the German university furthest away from Freiburg. There he

met Wilhelm Lauer before Lauer was called to the chair of Troll in Bonn, an enthusiastic young teacher who kindled in Stadel a passion for the mountains. Quite an achievement, considering that it happened in Kiel!

Closer to the mountains and rather closer to Central Europe is Fribourg, where Christoph Stadel started on his PhD after successfully completing his studies. There it was Jean Luc Piveteau, who fascinated the doctoral candidate, the second teacher from the Francophone culture, after Pierre Henri-Simon in Freiburg. Under his care Christoph wrote his doctoral thesis, again on the Near East and again with a settlement geography theme ‘Beirut, Damascus and Aleppo – a comparative urban geography’, which he submitted at the age of 26.

The travels required for his work were made possible through his function as regional secretary for the Middle East and Europe of the International Catholic Academic Federation PAX ROMANA, a post he held from 1962–1964. Immediately afterwards and until 1967, he taught at the International College Le Rosey in Rolle/Gstaad. At this time he had long left his Baden homeland myth behind and had become a passionate European, as he once admitted to me, with the potential to become a world citizen.

Paradoxically this development occurred at the very moment when ordinary citizens settle down, i.e. in the year he got married. He first met wife Christel in Geneva, but she also was a native of Donauschingen! I shall return to the fact that this has been a congenial partnership from the word go – here I just want to mention that as soon as they were married, the couple moved to Canada, where Christoph Stadel took up a teaching post at Hillfield College in Hamilton, Ontario. The following year he heeded a call to join the University of Brandon, Manitoba, where he would remain for a quarter of a century. One could assume that Christoph became a Canadian in the course of such a long stay, which he did in terms of citizenship and loyalty to his host country, but even there he remained a world citizen.

The University of Brandon was in its infancy then and open to teachers from all over the world. The cosmopolitan environment attracted Christoph and has strongly influenced him and Christel. The atmosphere in the ‘little big town’ of Brandon, the camaraderie at the university, the idea of a common mission for our lovely discipline – all of these aspects inspired him and helped him to flourish in substantive and regional terms. In 1971 he was invited by the World University Service to spend six weeks with students in the field in Colombia. Similar excursions to Guatemala and other regions followed and kindled a new passion in Christoph for Latin America and especially for its mountainous areas.

His further career was presented in detail by Helmut Heuberger in 1998 in the *Mitteilungen der Österreichischen Geographischen Gesellschaft*. Before I turn to his Salzburg years, I would like to look at the work of Christoph Stadel. We cannot speak of his ‘life’s work’ yet, as Christoph continues to research and publish his findings. And he certainly does not look 75!

Christoph Stadel made tracks in two important areas of geography, in comparative mountain research and in the regional geography of Latin America and Cana-

da. Both belong to regional geography, albeit representing two quite different perspectives, i. e. landscape research and regional research, both of which are based on joined-up and integrative thinking, the desire for synthesis. In Germany Christoph Stadel would have made himself unpopular with this approach. In Canada, however, nobody cared about the death wish of German geography after 1968, and regional geography was always granted the status that in Germany it is only reconquering now, as neighbouring disciplines with their 'regional turn' have established themselves in the epistemological space vacated by geography.

Christoph Stadel, like his mentor Friedrich Metz, is a visual type. Empirical work in the field, observation, mapping and interview – this was his world from the start. As an older man, or I should more correctly say: later, he added theory, but in a form that is to this day typical for both Latin America and mountain research, i.e. condensing the researcher's insights into models and theories. This is very sound and time-consuming but regrettably not very modern. Take as little time as possible and formulate your insights as abstractly and incomprehensibly as possible – this is *zeitgeist!* Christoph Stadel, however, needs time to reflect and writes clearly.

This is why modern geographers might be surprised to hear that Christoph Stadel enjoys an excellent international reputation and is possibly the Austrian geographer best known in North and Latin America – and in his field also in some European countries. He is honorary member of the Geographical Society of Ecuador and was co-editor of the *Revue de Géographie Alpine* in Grenoble, leading member and, for years, head of the Geography Section of the Association for Canadian Studies in German-speaking Countries, member of the Conference of Latin Americanist Geographers, of ADLAF, of the Asociación Andina and other international institutions. His personal friends include key representatives of geographic Latin-America studies and Canada studies, as well as interdisciplinary mountain research. There is hardly any major scientific association or high-ranking international research network in these two fields, in which Christoph Stadel – often in a leading function – was not or still is active. At his 60th birthday, John Everett and John Osborne came from Toronto and Montreal to speak in Salzburg, as did Beate Ratter, then still based in Mainz. Many of us still remember this forward-looking symposium.

I had the pleasure of conducting two international research projects with Christoph and well-known international colleagues from fourteen European and four Andean countries as well as two large excursions with him and students from Salzburg and Innsbruck to Peru and Ecuador. Whether among international eminent scholars or next generation researchers: Christoph enjoys greatest recognition from all!

Such remarkable acceptance is only partly due to the pleasant and engaging personality of the man we celebrate today. It is first and foremost owed to his contributions to knowledge acquisition. There is not enough time to list them all, I shall just mention the most significant of them, in the knowledge that this won't do justice to Christoph or my audience today.

Christoph Stadel is one of the fathers of environmental stress research. In his studies, particularly those in Ecuador, he developed the concept into a theory from

which to derive models that are still found in the relevant textbooks. He is a key geographical thinker on the concept of sustainability, which he tested and refined in urban studies in Latin America, in development studies in the Third World and on the threshold of cold for the arable part of the world's surface. In the comparative study of periodic markets, he produced trail-blazing work on the Andes, which later gave a boost to international research. I hesitate somewhat to mention another field, i.e. Andean cultural geography, in the literal sense of spatial culture of the Andes, the *Lo Andino*, as Christoph Stadel called it in one of his publications and on which he elaborates in the book on the Andes. This wide-ranging volume also demonstrates Stadel's achievements in mountain research. It not only covers the Andes but also the North-American and African mountain areas where he had students.

Let us briefly reflect on the private individual Christoph Stadel. "Why should a man not have a love affair?" asked a popular song from the year in which Christoph was born. He did indeed have an affair and a very intimate one with his wife and family. Christel and Christoph – the names are programme: Christianity is taken seriously in this family, as the basis of each individual life and as an obligation to the social world. And the couple developed a linked commitment, not restricting but strengthening the partners. Christel Stadel got involved in the mission committee of the parish of Thalgau, and her Christian world view is also the motivation for her work in the One-World-Group Thalgau, in the development policy committee of the federal state of Salzburg and on the board of Intersol Salzburg, a well-known development policy NGO.

Not in these organizations but in this field Christoph was and still is passionately active: as initiator of the study area Development Research at the Institute of Geography in Salzburg, as PhD supervisor of many scholars from the southern hemisphere, as organizer of excursions and as scientist. The couple will have plenty to talk about of an evening.

Their youngest daughter Beatrice is social education worker in St. Gilgen, Angela, the older one, works as geographer for the Canadian Ministry of the Environment in Vancouver. The Stadel's' first child, Joachim, is professor of astrophysics at the University of Zurich and the middle daughter Tonia heads the HR department of a leading corporation in Waterloo, Ontario. All of them are concerned with humans, their problems, and indirect and direct issues of their future. And most likely they do this, whether consciously or subconsciously, in the spirit that they imbibed in their parental home.

In this respect I am rather different from Christoph, at least at first glance. Geography of religion is a hobby of mine that I can only rarely indulge in. Religion for me is an epistemological *object*, not an experiential *subject*. Long nocturnal debates on Max Weber's theses on 'begging as a profession' and the 'smell of Protestantism' made our nights in the Andes quite entertaining.

Lived Christianity is one basis of this marriage and Canada is the other. The young couple experienced the heady phase of starting a family in a country that was new for both of them, a country they discovered together and made it their own, a coun-

try that fascinated them from the start and still does. I know that Christoph takes his Canada studies seriously, but I sometimes wonder if he doesn't also pursue them to have a reason to return there. His wooden shack on the lake, his piece of land by the national park – these are immobile, permanent ties that only someone who loves the place will engage in. And why should a geographer not be allowed to fall in love with a country?

Still, Christoph has become a wanderer between two worlds, the old one and the new, and so has Christel. Neither world in the narrow sense – the New World includes the USA and Latin America, the Old World the whole of Europe and the Orient. I have often wondered where the roots of this take on the world lie and I think I have found the answer: in the *plus ultra*, the motto of the House of Austria. Which makes it only fitting that the life cycle of Christoph Stadel, world citizen from Baden, whose academic career started at an Anterior Austrian university, would finish in Austria.

It is no secret that the last years at university were not easy for him – or should I say, were not made any easier for him. For two decades Christoph had lived at a small but open-minded university, in close contact between teachers and students, between town and gown, in a collegial climate of mutual respect. Corporate identity meant belonging to the university family and to attend all university events, from sports to concerts to academic celebrations and talks. It was even expected to sit in on colleagues' lectures from time to time to learn from each other and/or to point out new epistemological paths. Faculty also volunteered evening courses without being paid for them, went out into the prairie and to first nation communities in an effort to disseminate research findings. As Christoph once described these endeavours, "I was a missionary of geography".

What a contrast with the situation in Salzburg! I won't go into detail, but I must point out that the Paris Lodron University at no point recognized, let alone leveraged, the potential of this highly respected scientist. Reading Dietrich Schwanitz' novel *Campus*, I was sometimes reminded of the University of Salzburg and could always picture 'Bernie' in my mind...

That Christoph took this in his stride is evident from his biography, which I could only briefly sketch here. The narrowness that he sometimes encountered in his new working environment was not new to him. It resembled the Baar that he had so successfully crossed, which enabled him to be above such things and helped deal with stress and retain his self-respect. Still, the circumstances were often depressing. All the better then that he was able to escape them on numerous excursions to Ecuador, Peru, the USA and Canada, as well as to Alaska and Switzerland, often with colleagues from Innsbruck or Vienna. Another escape route presented itself in many research visits to Latin America and Canada!

I had the pleasure of accompanying him on two of those excursions, as mentioned earlier. These count as highlights of my career as a university teacher. How we threw ourselves into it! How pleased we were to pass on our joint love for geography and Latin America to young people! And how much fun we had on many an evening!

Christoph, I shall never forget how you helped me in Cuzco get over my heart problems throughout the night! And you may remember how one of the students and I, disregarding Catholic moral teachings as well as the temperatures at an altitude of more than 4,000 m, jumped naked into Lake Paramó in Ecuador (swimming trunks had not been on the list of things to bring). You still claim it was to stop the high spirits from overheating, but I know it was a last show of youthfulness which I so obviously lacked two years later in the Peruvian highlands!

In addition, I had the opportunity to hear and see Christoph Stadel in action as speaker in a lecture series that I organized, as project coordinator and project partner in EU projects, as highly respected Latin-America specialist in 'our' circles, as renowned Canada expert in the Austrian-Canadian Society into which he introduced me, as seminar chair in joint courses and as co-speaker at international conferences. What I appreciate even more, however, is his friendship and the hospitable atmosphere in his house in Thalgau, which my wife and I have enjoyed, individually and together. It is a rare stroke of luck in the life of a scientist if you are able not only to develop a friendship with a colleague but also integrate both spouses. At this point I must explicitly include Christel again in this eulogy. I know from my own experience – we would be nothing without our wives! The saying that "Behind every successful man stands a strong woman" may be rather overused and suspect to feminists, but does this really make it inaccurate?

Dear Christoph! Your career as a researcher is not over even at 75. The volume on the Andes is certainly a late work that benefits from your decades of experience and we hope to benefit from your insights again in the future. Keep the ideas flowing!

On that note: *Ad multos annos!*

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