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## Geography and the core themes of humanity – Editorial

**Rita Schneider-Sliwa, Basel**

This special issue of *GEOGRAPHICA HELVETICA* was prepared in view of the 32nd International Geographical Congress in Cologne 2012 entitled «Down to Earth», which focuses scientific attention on core themes of humanity such as Global Change and Globalization, Society and Environment, Risks and Conflicts, Urbanization and Demographic Change. With this special issue the Geography Departments of Switzerland showcase their contributions to analyzing and solving central problems of humankind in their academic and applied research and teaching. The comprehensive selection of state of the art articles presents leading edge research in basic and applied themes of physical and human geography dedicated to the changing dynamics of the physical and social-economic environment. This compilation is offered to the international community of geographers. Like its predecessor, which was presented to the International Geographical Union (IGU) congress «One Earth – Many Worlds» in Glasgow 2004, the present special issue is both a contribution to geographical knowledge in general and a promotion of communication between geographers and those concerned with the natural and constructed environment. The special issue «Global change, globalization and Swiss geography» is aimed at academic and professional geographers, teachers, students, the next generation in science and practice, the general public interested in the subjects of geography, the sponsors of science as well as experts from other fields. Each geography department or research group presents its spectrum of work or highlights important research projects at the frontier of geographic science. The specializations do not necessarily cover all aspects of current geographic research in Swiss Geography and some important themes may have been omitted given the limits of space in this issue. In total, however, the various authors and research groups create a cohesive image of Swiss Geography where different but complementary research capacities operate and account for a strong «world discipline».

With this special issue we also review fifteen years of *GEOGRAPHICA HELVETICA* in its restructured form: In 1997 *GEOGRAPHICA HELVETICA* decided to embark upon a broader and more international approach and to depart from its previous path of publishing articles on Swiss themes only. When I was entrusted by a group of geographers at the University of Zurich under the lead of Kurt Brassel and the Swiss Association of Geography to become editor-in-chief of

*GEOGRAPHICA HELVETICA* I accepted this responsibility whole-heartedly. It provided the opportunity to open up *GEOGRAPHICA HELVETICA* for new approaches in a globalizing world, in consensus with Swiss Geography Departments, regional and professional associations and the national Association of Swiss Geography. With the restructuring we embarked on a sometimes difficult course to reestablish a journal which had then already been in existence for over 52 years. In 1999 the journal was transformed into an internationally refereed journal. Since then, papers which advance knowledge in all facets of geography were published as were papers on significant research problems and questions from the fields of general and applied geography, on theoretical and conceptual issues and the teaching of geography, as well as papers with particular relevance for Switzerland. For more than thirteen years *GEOGRAPHICA HELVETICA* has conformed closely to professional standards of international journals with four editors sharing responsibilities regarding the journal's content, orientation, organizational and administrative affairs. A new international editorial board with selected geographers from Switzerland, the United States, France, Italy, Austria, the United Kingdom, Germany and Israel has supported *GEOGRAPHICA HELVETICA* in the various subfields of geography. The present concept, orientation and organizational structure of shared responsibilities have proven to be effective and valuable. The long term objective is to achieve even broader acceptance as an international journal and to that extent *GEOGRAPHICA HELVETICA* has undergone repeated self-evaluations and processes of restructuring. Fifteen years after the new orientation of the journal we can proudly acknowledge that *GEOGRAPHICA HELVETICA* has been firmly established both as an important medium of communication for Geography with an international visibility and distribution in science libraries all over the world, and at the same time as a registered Swiss national cultural heritage. Moreover, *GEOGRAPHICA HELVETICA* has developed the potential to become a major international journal of Geography, much like its Dutch and Swedish counterparts. At this point, the time has come for a generational change, leaving room for new minds, new paradigms, innovative ideas, approaches and solutions across the many fields of study of Geography and Environmental Sciences – and for yet another «new» *GEOGRAPHICA HELVETICA*.

I therefore welcome the opportunity to thank those who have assisted in the development of *GEOGRAPHICA HELVETICA* in numerous ways over the past fifteen years and who have helped to strengthen the position

of Swiss Geography internationally: These persons are the co-editors, the editorial board, the reviewers and the large number of authors of high quality articles and book reviews. The editors would also like to express thanks to those who have generously supported *GEOGRAPHICA HELVETICA* and will continue to do so. These are the Swiss Academy of Sciences, the Swiss Association of Geography and the Regional Geography Association of Zurich (Geographisch-Ethnographische Gesellschaft Zürich GEGZ). Our very special thanks go to Veronika Frei for her meticulous work in the editorial office at Basel for over more than twelve years. Special thanks go also to the long-term support team of the GH-editorial office and operative management: Leena Baumann (cartography), Charlotte Ciprian (accounting), Nicolas Pflimlin (EDP system). Thanks are also extended to Françoise Hänggi, Virginie Linder, Gabriel Wackermann and Olivier Walther as native speakers of English and French for their valuable long-term assistance in language corrections, and to the Fotorotar Printing House for the years of very good cooperation. We also would like to thank the authors and collaborative research groups who made this special issue possible by contributing to it in many ways. Last but not least, we would

like to thank Jean-Bernard Racine, former co-editor, for his long-term commitment and cooperation and Hans Elsasser, former editor-in-chief, for his valuable advice over many years, Ulrike Müller-Böker and Max Maisch who preside the Regional Association of Zurich GEGZ, and Hans-Rudolf Egli and Philipp Bachmann from the Swiss Association of Geography for their long-term and continued support of the editorial office and chief editorship at the Basel location.

Under the aegis of Benedikt Korf from the University of Zurich as new editor-in-chief, new and interesting avenues will open up for the promotion of the science of geography and the appropriate discussion of core themes of humanity. The editors of *GEOGRAPHICA HELVETICA*, *Swiss Journal of Geography*, invite active professionals, the geography community at large and all those interested in the environment and core themes of humanity to continue to submit innovative and high quality contributions and thus to serve to promote the progress of geography and the knowledge of societal and environmental relationships.

For the Editors  
Rita Schneider-Sliwa, Basel