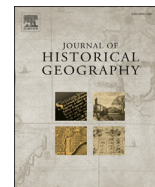




Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

## Journal of Historical Geography

journal homepage: [www.elsevier.com/locate/jhg](http://www.elsevier.com/locate/jhg)

## Edgar Kant, Estonian geography and the reception of Walter Christaller's central place theory, 1933–1960

Erki Tammiksaar<sup>a,\*</sup>, Jussi S. Jauhiainen<sup>b</sup>, Taavi Pae<sup>c</sup>, Rein Ahas<sup>c</sup><sup>a</sup> Department of Geography, University of Tartu & Estonian University of Life Sciences, Centre for Science Studies, Vanemuise 46, EE-51014, Tartu, Estonia<sup>b</sup> Department of Geography, University of Tartu & Department of Geography and Geology, University of Turku, FI-20014, Turku, Finland<sup>c</sup> Department of Geography, University of Tartu, Vanemuise 46, EE-51014, Tartu, Estonia

## ARTICLE INFO

## Article history:

Received 22 March 2017

Received in revised form

16 January 2018

Accepted 1 February 2018

## ABSTRACT

As a result of the First World War several new nation-states emerged on the map of Europe. One of them was the Republic of Estonia, emerging from the ruins of the Russian Empire. As Estonians had never had their own state before, the establishment of the parliamentary republic, its institutions and a national identity was a big challenge for its small elite. First and foremost, the ambition was to do things differently from the previous rulers. The Estonian economic geographer Edgar Kant played an important role in the development of his country between 1920 and 1940. His geography was politically motivated, innovative and pragmatic as the rapid development of the state required new theories and methods. The methodological basis for Kant's 'innovative geography' became Walter Christaller's central place theory, and he was the first in the world to understand the importance of applying it in empirical research, doing so in the 1930s in the reform of Estonian rural municipalities. In September 1944, Edgar Kant fled from Estonia to Lund and Christaller's theory spread more widely through Kant's interactions with Torsten Hägerstrand in Sweden and later Edward Ullman and Brian Berry in the United States. This paper reviews the relatively unknown geography, and the complicated life, of Edgar Kant, who, it is argued, strongly influenced the trajectory of the triumph of the 'new geography' in the 1950s. Through this example it will be shown how peripheral actors and places can play key roles in innovation diffusion and intellectual history.

© 2018 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

On 24 April 1967 at a ceremony held at the Grand Hotel in Stockholm, King Gustav VI Adolf of Sweden presented the Anders Retzius Gold Medal to German geographer Walter Christaller (1893–1969) for his 'fundamental contribution to urban geography', in the name of the Swedish Society for Anthropology and Geography.<sup>1</sup> At this event, Torsten Hägerstrand, the founder of the Lund School of Geography, which was instrumental in promoting the quantitative revolution in human geography, gave a short but important speech in which he named the two people who had been the first to grasp and apply Christaller's central place theory. These

were Edward Ullman and Edgar Kant.<sup>2</sup> Four days later Christaller was at Umeå University in northern Sweden, where he gave a presentation in German entitled 'How I discovered the theory of central places'.<sup>3</sup> The presentation was published a year later. This seems to have been the only time that Christaller directly mentioned that one of his first followers was Kant.<sup>4</sup>

Despite this early and important role, the prominent bibliographies on central place theory lack references to Edgar Kant and his early works, although Kant had become acquainted with Christaller's dissertation as early as 1935, and he immediately used central

\* Corresponding author.

E-mail addresses: [erki.tammiksaar@utu.ee](mailto:erki.tammiksaar@utu.ee) (E. Tammiksaar), [jusaja@utu.fi](mailto:jusaja@utu.fi) (J.S. Jauhiainen), [taavi.pae@utu.ee](mailto:taavi.pae@utu.ee) (T. Pae), [rein.ahas@utu.ee](mailto:rein.ahas@utu.ee) (R. Ahas).<sup>1</sup> Protokoll fört vid Svenska Sällskapet för Antropologi och Geografi högtidssammankomst för vegaminnetets firande måndagen den 24 april 1967 i Grand Hotels spegelsal, Stockholm, the Archive of Svenska Sällskapet för Antropologi och Geografi (Stockholm) [hereafter ASSAG], volume A2:8.<sup>2</sup> T. Hägerstrand, Ansprache an Walter Christaller. Vegadagen, am 24.04.1967, Leibniz-Institut für Länderkunde [hereafter LIL], Nachlass Walter Christaller 578-723-7.<sup>3</sup> O. Hedbom, letter to W. Christaller, Stockholm, 14 April 1967 [in German], ASSAG, volume E1:16.<sup>4</sup> W. Christaller, Wie ich zu der Theorie der zentralen Orte gekommen bin, *Geographische Zeitschrift* 56 (1968) 99.

place theory to study the Estonian settlement system.<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, as an economic geographer he applied Christaller's theory to territorial administrative reform in Estonia, using it to replace the existing administrative system with one appropriate for the rapid development of the nation-state.<sup>6</sup> As Kant wrote in 1938:

The aim of the reform of rural municipalities was not only to change administrative borders but to cut deeply into the existing structure of the society of our country. An updated administrative system would be the modern basis for our statehood and would help to eliminate two out-of-date systems – German manors and 'Russian red-tape' – which still exist in our society. It is necessary for guaranteeing a more promising future for our state.<sup>7</sup>

Despite this, Kant's connection with central place theory has been only briefly mentioned in a couple of articles.<sup>8</sup> Such scholarly omission can be explained, largely, by the language barrier, as Kant wrote either in Estonian, French or German. Moreover, the works and legacies of geographers from small states have not received particular interest from Anglo-American geographers until recently. However, this trend is changing. Daniel Clayton and Trevor Barnes have focused attention on the geographical heritage of small continental European countries during the Second World War and argued for 'the importance of looking beyond American and British experience'.<sup>9</sup> In doing so, they have emphasized the importance of looking beyond Anglo-American geography to the intellectual development of the discipline in smaller states too. Thanks to this initiative, the political and scientific activities of several Danish, Romanian and Hungarian geographers during the Second World War have been introduced to the Anglo-American world.<sup>10</sup> However, as Clayton and Barnes state, the geographical heritage of continental Europe was dominated by 'German and Soviet narratives and agendas' and an adequate picture can only be gained by placing that heritage 'in longer (inter-war and post-war) histories and wider (national and inter-state) geographies'.<sup>11</sup> As is shown below, this applies perfectly to the life and geography of Edgar Kant.

The distinction that Clayton and Barnes make between 'major' and 'minor' historical geographies can, therefore, be used to understand Edgar Kant's geographical project, since his particular geographical initiatives in Estonia were embedded within the major changes of the early twentieth century. According to them,

the 'major' events crucial for understanding inter-war continental Europe were the Russian Revolution in 1917, the entering of the United States into the First World War in the same year, and the Treaty of Versailles in 1919.<sup>12</sup> The first of these events played the most significant role in the history of Estonia, leading to the collapse of the Russian Empire and paving the way for Estonian independence. Another 'major' event that changed the course of Estonian history was the signing of the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact in August 1939 with its secret protocol between the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany. According to the protocol, Estonia was to belong to the Soviet power zone and geographers and officials like Kant had to find a way to act within this insecure and tangled political situation. As we will show, Kant was neither a supporter of the Soviets or of the Nazi regime, but rather a patriot of the independent Republic of Estonia which had ceased to exist in 1940.

Kant was also working together 'major' and 'minor' geographical traditions in his work in Estonia. Although there were 'minor' geographical traditions in the 1930s in countries such as Czechoslovakia, Poland, Denmark, the Netherlands, Greece and Romania, it was the ideas of the 'major' – German, French, Russian, British and American – geographical traditions which dominated in the Western world.<sup>13</sup> Since Kant was mainly interested in the development of Estonian settlement systems and their hinterlands, he immediately understood the potential significance of central place theory and started to use it. Today, Christaller's theory is considered central to the rise of a 'new geography' which resulted in the discipline's quantitative revolution. Yet, in the 1930s Christaller's theory was regarded as too abstract, too mathematical and not geographical at all.<sup>14</sup> We argue, therefore, that Kant, who was born in a peripheral European country lacking glorious scientific and political traditions, was an innovator in his early adoption of central place theory, and that he paved the way for the broader reception of Christaller's theory after the Second World War and, in turn, for the paradigm shift in the discipline of human geography in the 1950s. As we will show, it was thanks to Kant that Lund, a previously 'minor' place as far as the discipline of geography was concerned, became a hotspot of the 'new geography' after the Second World War and was put on the 'flight map' of the quantitative revolution by Peter Taylor.<sup>15</sup> The story starts, however, with Kant's geographical work in Estonia in the 1930s.

### Kant between German and Russian powers

It is impossible to understand the national, political and geographical legacy of Edgar Kant without situating him within Estonian political history. On 20 May 1940, a month before the annexation of Estonia by the Soviet Union and the capitulation of Paris to Nazi Germany, the Estonian auditor general Karl Soonpää wrote in his diary that 'The innate animosity towards the Germans in our people worries me under this [critical] political situation'.<sup>16</sup> Indeed, the oppressed position of Estonians under the rule of the

<sup>5</sup> B.J.L. Berry and A. Pred, *Central Place Studies: A Bibliography of Theory and Applications*, Philadelphia, 1961; H.H. Blotvogel, M. Hommel and P. Schöller, *Bibliographie zur Zentralitätsforschung*, in: P. Schöller (Ed.), *Zentralitätsforschung*, Darmstadt, 1972, 473–494; E. Kant, *Bevölkerung und Lebensraum Estlands. Ein anthropoökologischer Beitrag zur Kunde Baltoskandias*, Tartu, 1935, 169–268.

<sup>6</sup> T. Pae and E. Tammiksaar, 'See on ülesanne, mis mõtleivate inimeste üle jõu on käinud.' *Valdade liitmise reformid Eestis*, *Tuna* 4 (2015) 15–18.

<sup>7</sup> E. K[ant], *Vallaomavalitsuste reform*, *ERK* 6 (1938) 181.

<sup>8</sup> T. Hägerstrand, Edgar Kant 21.2.1902–16.10.78, *Svensk Geografisk Årsbok* 54 (1978) 98–99; A. Buttimer, Edgar Kant and Balto-Skandia: Heimatkunde and regional identity, in: E. Hooson (Ed.), *Geography and National Identity*, Oxford, 1994, 177; A. Buttimer, Edgar Kant (1902–1978): a Baltic pioneer, *Geografiska Annaler: Series B. Human Geography* 87 (2005) 175; O. Granö, J.G. Granö and Edgar Kant: teacher and pupil, colleagues and friends, *Geografiska Annaler: Series B. Human Geography* 87 (2005) 172.

<sup>9</sup> D. Clayton and T.J. Barnes, Continental European geographers and World War II, *Journal of Historical Geography* 47 (2015) 15.

<sup>10</sup> G. Bowd and D. Clayton, Emmanuël de Martonne and the wartime defence of Greater Romania: circle, set square and spine, *Journal of Historical Geography* 47 (2015) 50–63; H.G. Larsen, Geopolitics on trial: politics and science in the wartime geopolitics of Gudmund Hatt, *Journal of Historical Geography* 47 (2015) 29–39; M. Heffernan, The interrogation of Sándor Rádo: geography, communism and espionage between World War Two and the Cold War, *Journal of Historical Geography* 47 (2015) 74–88.

<sup>11</sup> Clayton and Barnes, Continental European geographers, 15.

<sup>12</sup> Clayton and Barnes, Continental European geographers, 15.

<sup>13</sup> Clayton and Barnes, Continental European geographers, 15.

<sup>14</sup> N.-C. Robic, Geography, in: T. Porter and D. Ross (Eds.), *The Cambridge History of Science: The Modern Social Sciences* 7 (2003) 387; T.J. Barnes, Notes from the underground: why the history of economic geography matters: the case of central place theory, *Economic Geography* 88 (2012) 9; B.J.L. Berry, Geography's quantitative revolution: initial conditions, 1954–1960. A personal memoir, in B.J.L. Berry and J.O. Wheeler (Eds.), *Urban Geography in America, 1950–2000: Paradigms and Personalities*, New York, 2005, 68–69; Christaller, *Wie ich zu der Theorie*, 99.

<sup>15</sup> P.J. Taylor, *Quantitative Methods in Geography: An Introduction to Spatial Analysis*, Boston, 1977, 15; T.J. Barnes and C. Abrahamsson, The imprecise wanderings of a precise idea: the travels of spatial analysis, in: H. Jöns, P. Meusbürger and M. Heffernan (Eds.), *Mobilities of Knowledge: Knowledge and Space*, Dordrecht, 2017, 113.

<sup>16</sup> K. Arjakas (Ed.), *Faatum. Eesti tee hävingule 1939–1940*, Tallinn, 2009, 298.

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/7446780>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/7446780>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)