In 1940, August Lösch had published the pathbreaking work “Die räumliche Ordnung der Wirtschaft. Eine Untersuchung über Standort, Wirtschaftsgebiete und internationalen Handel”. In this publication, though hardly noticed by his contemporaries, Lösch developed an overall view of the dynamics of spatio-economic processes, based on numerous detailed works and approaches of different disciplines. The work which has been published in several new editions after World War II and the early death of August Lösch introduced pioneering ideas to regional science.

50 Years Institute of Regional Science

50 years ago today, on 26 July 1966, the Institute of Regional Science at Karlsruhe University was founded. In honour of this occasion, the background and founding history of the Institute and the reasons of foundation of this discipline should be analyzed, contrasting today’s Institute and study course with its beginnings.

The Beginnings and Foundation of the Institute

After World War II and recovery efforts often born out of necessity of the situation, the idea of a steering spatial planning intervention had been discredited especially on a supra-regional level. The establishment of planned economies in the Soviet sphere of influence further contributed to the negative connotation of the notion of planning in Western Europe and particularly in Germany. Therefore, the scientific foundation of the discipline which had essentially been developed on the basis of August Lösch’s theoretical works was not pursued any further, neither systematically, nor in an university context. Quite unlike the United States, where, led by Walter Isard, the new discipline of “regional science” was founded and soon enjoyed an excellent reputation. At the beginning of the 1960s, against the background of the emerging regional and land use planning, a number of German experts adopted these ideas, partly inspired by guest stays in the US, partly driven by the necessity to develop a scientific basis and to qualify experts. Rolf Funk, professor of macroeconomics at the Technical University of Karlsruhe, Germany can be considered as a representative of the first function, while Adolf Bayer, professor of urban planning and design, can be seen as a representative of the second function. On behalf of the “Planungsgemeinschaft Zentrales Oberrheingebiet”

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(planning association of the central Upper Rhine region), Bayer had created a regional development plan for the region’s planning area.

In these years, Karlsruhe became a hub of spatial planning-related sciences. At least since 1964, a group of ten Karlsruhe professors had met to discuss the creation of an appropriate subject and an education schedule. They soon agreed this was a transdisciplinary task which had to be met with a structural solution crossing wherever necessary the borders of faculties. The first curricula drafts as well as the creation of an institute – called “central institute” – had been discussed since February 1964. The senate approved this discussion and also the federal state government called for a corresponding education, primarily organized by its technical universities. The former Technical University of Karlsruhe felt particularly obliged: On the one hand because it was the birthplace of the related science of urban planning which had been created about 100 years earlier in 1862 by the constitution of the first chair in urban planning and the nomination of Reinhard Baumeister; on the other hand because all disciplines required for such a central institute already existed at the university and had achieved excellent performances by then. After all, at the beginning of the 1960s, experts of different disciplines whose experts

e strongly focused on this subject area had been appointed to come to Karlsruhe. Nowadays an obvious insight, back then, the idea only gradually found acceptance that also a liberalier organized community needs a steering planning, which however had to follow different basic principles and objectives than the planned economies of the East.

Therefore, as it was common practice then, the Technical University of Karlsruhe notified the German Science Council of the new field of research and teaching “urban and regional planning” as common project of the three departments involved: the faculty of humanities and social sciences, of architecture and of civil engineering and surveying. The state parliament of Baden-Wuerttemberg asked the federal state government to provide personnel and to create structural and financial conditions to allow for research and teaching activities in the field of spatial planning.2 The federal state government promised posts for the new field of activity. Thereupon, on 26 July 1966, nine professors of the Technical University of Karlsruhe founded the Institute of Regional Science:

Prof. Dipl.-Ing. Adolf Bayer, professor of urban development and designing
Prof. Dr.-Ing. Heinz Draheim, professor of geodesy
Prof. Dr. Rolf Funck, professor of macroeconomics
Prof. Dr.-Ing. Gados Lammers, professor of urban development and rural planning
Prof. Dr. Adolf Leidlmair, professor of geography
Prof. Dr.-Ing. Wilhelm Leutzbach, professor of traffic engineering
Prof. Dr. Hans Linde, professor of sociology
Prof. Gunnar Martinsson, graduated landscape gardener, associate professor of garden and landscape designing
Prof. Dr.-Ing. Karl Selk, professor of residential construction, settlements and designing

Shortly afterwards, Prof. Dr.-Ing. Hans Günter Krebs, professor of road construction, joined the institute. Together, these ten professors were in charge of the research and teaching activities. Prof. Gados Lammers, expert in urban development, was appointed the first managing director, supported by his assistant Dr. Dieter Bö kemann. Later on, as a professor in Vienna, Bö kemann introduced decisive ideas to the field of regional science. In 1982, he wrote a theory of spatial planning which has remained the most important theory in spatial planning until today.

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2 Cf. 40th session of the Baden-Wuerttemberg state parliament on 30 September 1965, enclosure 10
The enthusiasm of the founding fathers for the new field – only much later, women would occupy leading positions in universities – as well as the transdisciplinary and supra-regional interest their work met with had different consequences: On the one hand, it encouraged highly innovative organizational regulations, for instance the introduction of interdisciplinary cooperation instead of short-sighted research focusing on a single field of expertise. On the other hand, it gave birth to a series of cooperative seminars based on concepts which were well-received also abroad and finally led the French colleagues, notably Prof. Reitel from Strasbourg, to participate in the activities of the Institute of Regional Science. Accordingly, the list of professors who lectured the regional science seminar during these years reads like a who’s-who of the central-European regional science research of that time. Those years can be referred to as second renaissance of spatial planning, following the first renaissance in the 1920s. The Karlsruhe-based institute formed the hub of a continuously extending network of planning-related spatial research. The enthusiasm affected more and more researchers and fields of expertise. Soon, the coordination activities of the institute exceeded the capacity of the founders who actually had to lead their own institutes, especially after Dieter Böke-mann had accepted a chair in Vienna (1971). The creation of an own chair in Karlsruhe provided with personnel and infrastructure was the next step to further establish the field of regional science.

The Degree Course in Regional Science

The establishment of an autonomous degree course in 1970 was another decisive event. On 2 June 1972, the first graduate was awarded the academic title of Licenciate in Regional Science (lic. rer. reg.). Ever since, 406 students holding positions all over the world today have graduated in regional science. Since 2006, graduates have been awarded the academic title of Master of Science.

The fundamentals of the discipline of regional science have been developed in an international context, and the institute’s focus has always remained international. Accordingly, the share of non-German students and eventually staff has been continuously rising. It comes as no surprise that there were much more foreign than German students of regional science, and the course’s focus increasingly shifted towards the problems of the global South – called “developing countries” back then. This re-orientation was emblematic of the lecturer’s conviction who did not feel obliged to adhere to a rigid teaching schedule but followed and still follows today a problem-oriented concept. Topical social issues are picked up if they have a reference to space. For instance, since the collapse of the Eastern Bloc in 1989, questions related to the transformation of the social and economic
conditions in the countries of the former command economies were a major object of research. These questions have remained important, yet research now concentrates on the effects of the great post-socialist transformation, its social consequences and new spatial disparities.

Over the past 50 years, regional science has constantly dealt with the challenges of the global South, i.e. with regions that seem to be cut off the economic and social development, and with the periphery of globalization. Actually, in a regional analysis, the idea that the world is moving closer together to become a global economy with the vision of a global society turns out to be an illusion in many places. Although megalopolises may show similar processes, they are increasingly cut off the country’s peripheries. Regional disparities increase, leading to different development stages, heterogeneous structures and growing conflicts. Therefore, regions increasingly eclipse countries as objects of analysis. In this context, the approach of regional science even more proves to be helpful. Not only is it the basis for the analysis of regional structures and processes, but also of the conception of planning interventions. These interventions do not only have to be adapted to the challenges, but first and foremost to the social and economic conditions and options for intervention in the respective region. In many cases, though, it has turned out to be the wrong strategy to simply transfer instruments of the global North to the global South. Today, regional science asks for adequate strategies for a regional society to solve its own problems. This does in no case mean to abandon a society to its own fate, but to cooperate with local and regional actors in an internationally-oriented knowledge transfer, with the objective of jointly implementing analyses and to work out and suggest adaptive solutions.

This has also led to the conception an implementation of an international bilingual master’s degree course with the University of Concepción, Chile. In this course, students spend half of the time Germany and Chile respectively. Also the topic area has changed: Climate change and the increasing exposure of critical infrastructure systems to extreme events such as earthquakes, hurricanes or floods play a more and more important role in the world. Regional science has responded to this changed scenario by adding the field of risk-oriented regional development to its research and teaching spectrum. This shows that the tasks of regional science have not gone back but have indeed been stepping up.

Over the past 50 years, the Institute of Regional Science and its master’s degree course have undergone many changes, caused by new organizational structures and technical innovations. Casting a retrospective glance, the Institute’s history has proved to be a success story. It is this tradition which the Institute’s staff and its students from all over the world keep on following.

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