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Cover

Carlotta Lübbecke

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Universität Zürich

Winterthurerstrasse 190

8057 Zürich

geoscope@geo.uzh.ch

www.geoscope.uzh.ch/microsite/geoscope

Editor-in-Chief

Francesca Bonin

Editorial Team

Carlotta Lübbecke

Geo Molteni

Lea Stoffl

Viviane Fluck

Gian-Berno Fark

Vijeeapan Vairamuthu

Julia Stahel

Layout

Francesca Bonin

Logo

Gian-Berno Fark

Proofreading

Carlotta Lübbecke

Translation

Leon Schultz & Geo Molteni

Print

AHORNPRINT

6208 Oberkirch

www.ahornprint.ch

Welcome back!

It's hard to believe how time flies – and here's the second issue of the Geoscope already finding its way into your hands.

At the end of the semester, after the exams, there's a great sense of anticipation for the holidays. For almost three months, students do their best to steer clear of the Irchel campus and any other university matters. The Irchel falls into a summer sleep.

It's a different story for the editorial team. Our fine-tuning only begins after the end of the term: the articles, the pictures, the layout – all the details are only now being finalised. Whether on the beach or in the living room, whether sweating or enjoying the air conditioning: we're typing away, taking photos, getting in touch with people and formatting everything so that the issue is ready in time for the start of the term.

And now that the semester is starting again, we're moving on to the next phase too. Fresh off the press, the Geoscope can now be distributed to students in the corridors of the campus as it fills up once more. Old and new faces appear, the corridors fill up, there's laughter, chatter, coffee-drinking and people savouring the warm September sunshine.

The Irchel is starting to buzz again. And with that, we wish you all a great start to the new semester.

Carlotta & Francesca

Editorial Team



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Editorial Team FS26

The editorial team's current hot topics...

Petrichor

That's the name given to the smell that arises when rain falls on dry ground. It's been a rather rare phenomenon this summer. When I went on a motorbike ride through Aargau at the end of July, I was surrounded in places by steppe-like fields, so for a moment I felt as though I were in southern Italy... a rather special feeling. I – and nature, I imagine – would actually welcome a rainy autumn for a change.

Francesca

A full emptiness

Shocked, a little lost, but also content... and yet not quite ready for the next step. No more words, the final sentence ending with a full stop, a complete emptiness... that's how it feels when I've just finished a good book. Perhaps not quite so dramatic, but after every good book I need a moment to pause, take it all in and say goodbye before I can open the next one.

Julia

Postcards

It's a joy for both sides. As the recipient, you're happy to get a surprise in your mailbox that shows someone was thinking of you. And as the sender, you get to send lovely souvenirs and warm greetings to all your friends :)

Carlotta

People watching while dining

After cooking, the kitchen feels like a tropical climate this summer. A gas stove doesn't exactly help matters, but it's brilliant for cooking and makes the food taste just that bit better ;). Anyone who lives in the city and has a balcony simply moves dinner outside. With a plate in hand, entertainment is certainly guaranteed.

Vijee

Read on the train

I went on an Interrail trip this summer and read «How the Railways Will Fix the Future» by Gareth Dennis. Do give it a go. It's the perfect blend of British humour and scientific analysis of how the most futuristic mode of transport – the (partial) solution to all our problems – was invented as long as 200 years ago. Except in Germany, apparently. But everywhere else, it's a solid 10/10. I've tested it.

Gian-Berno

Boredom takes practice

I started by doing nothing, and now I'm training. What began as five minutes without my cell phone and without any «meaningful» activity has now grown to twenty minutes. It's a small personal protest against the obsession with optimization and a reminder that not every minute has to serve a purpose. Now I just hope my new routine survives the winter.

Lea

Autumnal anticipation

With every syllabus that lands in my Outlook inbox at the start of the autumn term, my anticipation of autumn grows alongside the pile of deadlines. The warming October sun, crisp leaves crunching underfoot, flamboyant Halloween costumes, hot chestnuts on every street corner, and everything tasting of pumpkin and cinnamon.

Viviane

«The only way to begin, is by beginning» - Sam Reich

This is a call out to do stuff, if you have things you really want to do, just do them. Stop thinking about how to do them, stop thinking if you are ready, just commit and do try them out.

Geo

Would you like to join our editorial team, do you have an idea for an article or would you like to give us some feedback?

Drop us an email at

geoscope@uzh.geo.ch

We'd love to hear from you :)



Surviving Between Fog, Tea and Vitamin D

A Survival Guide for the Winter Months in Zurich

When I moved to Zurich two years ago, I thought my biggest challenge would be my master's degree. I hadn't expected that it would actually be the gray sky over Lake Zurich. It's not necessarily the cold, but rather those weeks when the sky looks as if someone has turned down the contrast. The lake and the mountains disappear into the fog, it's already dark again on the way home, and at some point you find yourself wondering when you actually last saw the sun.

The good news is that almost everyone feels this way, and over time, I picked up a few strategies that make winter much more bearable.

1 Vitamin D becomes a must

I never would have thought that vitamin D tablets would one day become a regular part of my morning. By now, they're just as much a given in the winter as breakfast and my first cup of coffee.

2 Exercise, even if it's just half an hour

On gray days, it sometimes takes a lot of willpower to even go outside. That's exactly why I try to schedule at least a little exercise every day in the winter. It doesn't always have to be at the gym, a nice walk on the Uetliberg, a short run, or yoga in my room is often enough. It's amazing how much easier the day can feel afterward.

3 Get outside as early as possible

One of the best tips I've ever received is actually quite simple: soak up as much daylight as possible in the morning. Even when the sky is gray, natural light helps the body more than any desk lamp. Since then, I've often started my mornings on our balcony, walked part of the way to university more often, or drank my first cup of coffee on the way instead of waiting until I get to the library.

4 Don't Fight Winter

At some point, I stopped waiting for winter to finally be over. Instead, I started celebrating it a little differently: lighting candles, taking a thermos of hot tea with me, photographing the fog by the lake, or enjoying an apartment where string lights replace the ceiling lamps.



5 Just Drive Beyond the Fog

That's probably my personal highlight. Sometimes all it takes is a train journey towards Graubünden or Central Switzerland, and suddenly the sky turns blue. That moment when the train leaves the fog behind and the sun suddenly comes out always feels a bit surreal. By the time you're having a coffee with a view of the snow-capped mountains, you find yourself wondering why you didn't set off sooner.

6 A Dip in the Thermal Waters

For me, the hot springs in Baden and Ennetbaden have become an integral part of winter. Sitting outside in the warm thermal waters while the air is cold and steam rises from the water is probably the most pleasant way to wind down on a gray day. The public basins are located right on the Limmat River and are open from 7:00 a.m. to 10:00 p.m., with a water temperature of at least 38° (when the outside temperature is above 0°).

7 Ice Bathing

I never would have thought I'd voluntarily jump into the Limmat in winter. Whether ice bathing is really right for anyone is something each person has to decide for themselves. But once you've worked up the courage to try it, you'll at least understand why so many people look surprisingly cheerful afterward.

Winter in Zurich will probably never be my favorite season, but I've come to realize that it's not all gray days. Sometimes you just need a little help to discover the beautiful moments.

Maybe that's the real lesson of my first winters in Zurich: not to wait for spring to arrive, but to make winter your own, just a little bit.

Fancy a leisurely late-autumn hike?



A Walk through the colourful larch trees to the Morteratsch Glacier

If you're looking for a pleasant and scenic autumn walk, a trip to Val Morteratsch in the Engadin is well worth it. The Rhaetian Railway takes you to Morteratsch in less than four hours from Zurich. This is where the walk to the Morteratsch Glacier begins. When the Bernina Railway began operating between Pontresina and Italy in 1908, the glacier's tongue was just a few hundred metres from the tracks. Today, however, you'll search in vain for the glacier at the entrance to the valley.

It is very easy to trace back the glacier's retreat, particularly as the footpath to the Morteratsch

Glacier is lined with numerous information boards. These also provide details of the glacier's extent in specific years. The changes to the landscape at the glacier's foot are equally impressive. At the entrance to the valley, there are many larch trees, which take on a colourful hue in autumn. The further you walk towards the glacier tongue, the less lush the vegetation becomes. Eventually, you come to the



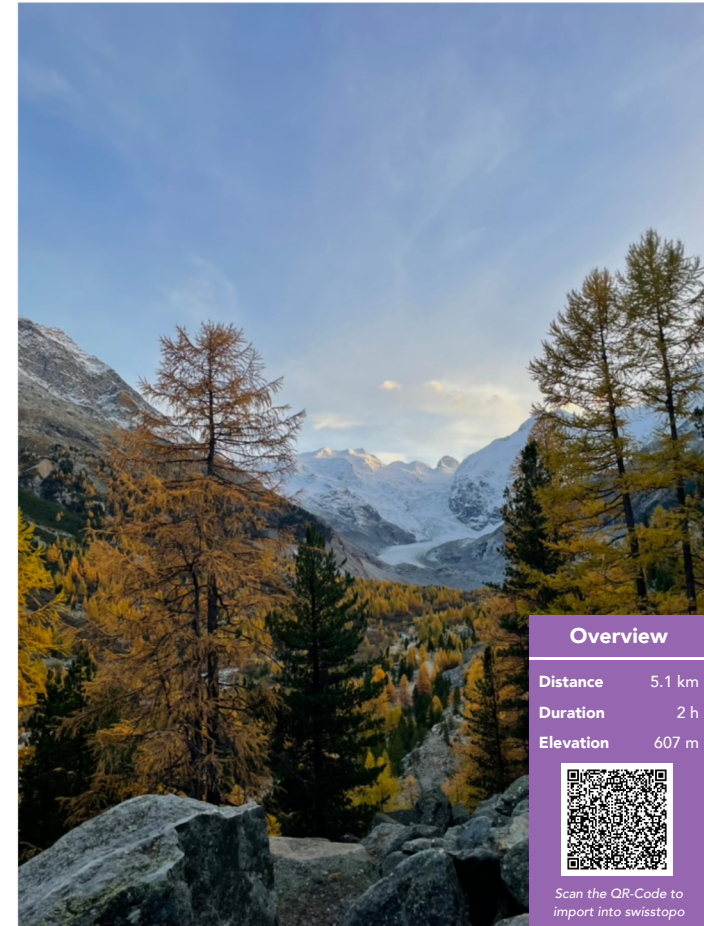
transition from sparse vegetation to a landscape of rock and ice. The final section of the walk follows a white-red-white marked trail (T3) and leads over scree and a rocky ledge up to the glacier tongue. At the top of the plateau, you can admire the moraines and the surrounding mountain landscape, including the imposing Piz Bernina (4,048 m). The marked path ends just before the glacier tongue.

Due to current climate change, the glacier tongue has changed significantly. *It is advised to only walk on the glacier with a mountain guide.*

Over the Morteratschgletscher: Hike to the Boval Hut

Anyone wishing to tackle a greater elevation gain and admire the glacier from a bird's-eye view can set out on the mountain hike to the Boval Hut (Chamanna da Boval). The hut is staffed until around mid-October. However, the hike can also be easily undertaken as a day trip without an overnight stay.

The approach also starts at the Morteratsch station. An old mule track first winds its way through the Swiss stone pine forest and later leads up along the glacier's lateral moraine to the hut. Whilst in the past the route took you over the glacier quite early on, today you only reach it in the final third of the route.



From the Boval Hut, there is an impressive view of the Pers Glacier, which 'split off' from the Morteratsch Glacier in 2015. In the background, the Bellavista Group stretches out, with Piz Palü, all the way to the Diavolezza mountain station.

Text & Photography:
Vijeepan Vairamuthu



Animals at Irchel

What are meerkats doing at Irchel?

After a long day of classes, I leave Irchel in the evening and suddenly come face-to-face with a badger. It quickly slips into a gap between the field and the building. If you want to see adorable animals without leaving it to chance, just look out the window from the rooms on the H-floor above the atrium staircase. You can watch the meerkats from there. But what are the meerkats doing at the Irchel?

The meerkats are at the Irchel campus for research by the Institute of Evolutionary Biology and Environmental Sciences. The group, led by Prof. Dr. Marta Manser, studies the social behavior, perception, and communication of meerkats. They aim to understand how animal societies function and evolve. Meerkats move around as a group all day and communicate constantly. Although it's easier to observe them in an enclosure, studying animal societies in their natural habitats is essential for gaining

insights. That's why researchers at the Kalahari Research Center in South Africa—run by the NGO Kalahari Research Trust and led by Marta Manser and Tim Clutton-Brock—study meerkats in the wild. The Kalahari Research Centre is an international field research center in the southern Kalahari where various groups examine the local flora and fauna, including meerkats. Over time, the meerkats have grown used to the researchers' presence, allowing for close observation.

We don't have to fly all the way to the Kalahari to see meerkats. We can do that right here at



Irchel—in rooms Y25-H-79, Y25-H-86, and Y25-H-92, which host various geography modules. The enclosure beneath the windows has previously housed zebra mongooses, European wildcats, and bats.

When Marta Manser joined the University of Zurich, the enclosure was empty. Thanks to her initiative, a group of meerkats arrived there in 2011. Currently, the two groups total 18 animals. During my visit, a two-week-old only child is cuddled by four animals, while one stands on a rock, keeping watch. The meerkats have scientific names as well as names in Setswana, Botswana's national language. «This way, our visitors know where the animals come from», says Marta Manser. However, the meerkats at Irchel are not typical Kalahari meerkats. They include a mix that has a coastal population, which is slightly shorter and sturdier. Although students can't work with the animals until they reach the master's level, undergraduates interested in meerkats can begin helping with feeding in their second year. For geographers, the meerkat research at Irchel is intriguing. A research project led by Sofia Forss studies how meerkats perceive their surroundings and navigate their environment.

The meerkats at Irchel not only draw the interest of students from all fields but also inspire sponsors to support research at the University of Zurich.

As cute as they are, you can't take the meerkats home. However, many former lab animals are waiting for loving homes. Since 2018, the University of Zurich, in partnership



with Swiss Animal Protection, has been rehoming lab animals to private individuals through the Rehoming Project. The Animal Welfare and 3R Department oversees the project for the university and refers the animals to the animal welfare organization, which finds them new homes.

The three Rs stand for replace, reduce, and refine: Researchers aim to replace animal testing

with alternative experiments whenever possible, conduct as few animal experiments as needed, and minimize animal stress. Paulin Jirkof, coordinator of the Animal Welfare and 3R Department, explains that the costs of rehoming are shared among the animal owners and researchers surrendering the animals, the responsible animal welfare organization, and the adopters.

The university supports the project financially, covering costs if a research group lacks the budget for it. The adopter only pays a placement fee. Since the project began, around 410 mice, 400 rats, 30 dogs, 30 rabbits, and even a horse have found new homes. The horse was kept at Strickhof to teach veterinary students specific handling techniques.



In a conversation with Paulin Jirkof, I learn that the pigs and sheep behind the Irchel are also used for educational purposes. «Sadly, we don't rehome as many animals as we'd like», Paulin Jirkof admits. The numbers are low compared to how many animals the university keeps for education and research.



Nevertheless, the Animal Welfare and 3R Department regularly receives inquiries from university staff, students, and the public.

If you're interested in giving a former lab animal a new home, please reach out to Swiss Animal Protection (STS) or Zurich Animal Protection.

Text & Photography: Viviane Fluck



Get to know David Small

Be honest, how many hours of your life have you spent looking at SAR imagery?

(laughs) Too many to count, I think. It really varies a lot. Some weeks almost nothing, in other weeks it's quite intensive.

Your background combines engineering and geography. How did these two fields come together in your work?

I studied systems design engineering, which in many ways has some other parallels with geography because it's trying to be a high level, general visible way to talk about the world and get all these different ways of looking at the world. It was interesting to first learn radar from the side of engineering and how everything works and then move into geography and deal with the world of map projections and all this kind of stuff, which is complete gibberish to the engineers usually.

So trying to bridge those two camps was the beginning of my life here. Since then, I always look for new ways to bridge the two camps and to find ways that one can use to help the other and vice versa.

What would you say has been your main contribution to the SAR community?

I originally did my PhD here, working with ERS-1 data to generate digital elevation models. The data was new at the time, although it seems old nowadays. From that the Germans were able to build the Tandem X system and that's how they generated the Copernicus DEM, which many students are probably quite familiar with. So that's a concrete output of this technology many decades later (laughs).

That's how I started here. But then I moved on

from interferometry to look at how I can get rid of these effects of topography on the SAR images themselves. The topography is causing huge distortions in the radar images. We're not really interested in learning that there's topography because generally we know there's topography. We're just interested in removing those effects or at least mitigate them as deeply as possible. What is left is what's on the topography, the thematic land cover on top.

That was my motivation for this radiometric terrain correction, which was my big paper. Building on that, I developed another technique to enable wide area analysis ready data. So now you can look at all of the Alps or theoretically all of Europe or even the whole world with satellites that are coming in the future and one can do analysis at those huge scales. That was just never possible before because there are even further steps beyond this initial radiometric terrain correction. Now there exist these higher level products which are more user friendly.

In Remote Sensing we often celebrate spectacular images or launches of new satellites and new applications. Do you think the work behind the scenes is sometimes overlooked?

Yeah, sometimes, at least in some quarters I would agree. Some people in the government just want to launch some piece of metal into space and then their job is done. But people that are in the business really know what one has to do to get something out of the data.

In what ways did Switzerland shape your scientific career and is there a difference between the scientific world in Canada

and in Switzerland?

There are big differences in the way the structures and funding for research are set up. So Switzerland has some big advantages there, but there's no Utopia anywhere. There's always a plus side and a minus side, that's just life. But on balance, I must say I'm really quite grateful for all the opportunities I've had here.

You have spent your entire scientific career at the same university. Was that always the plan?

No, no, no. I thought I'd be here for three, maybe four years and then go back. But it just never worked out that way. Me and my wife, we thought about going back a couple of times, but in the end we never did. So here we are.

After all these decades in SAR research, do you still enjoy looking at radar imagery or do you mostly notice problems right now?

No, I still enjoy it. People keep on talking about this being the golden age of SAR because there are so many satellites going up. The data density is just getting bigger and bigger. We've never had it so good, basically. The images just keep on getting better and better.

Have you, in your whole life, ever become emotionally attached to a data set?

(laughs) Yeah, well, maybe during my PhD. There was so little data. We only had like one or two images, maybe four or five if we were lucky and then you really got quite attached to it. Nowadays I get more attached to a time series that I've extended over time.

I have this time series from the beginning of Sentinel 1 until now, basically. That's kind of a sad thing that I look back on. This is the end,

basically. I've been running this for a long time, more than 10 years and this is the end of processing now. There are other groups that have duplicated my algorithm and put it into operations. It's actually going to be covering the whole world and it is already within the Copernicus data ecosystem. So now, just since last month, people are able to download these Level 3 products that I developed for anywhere in the world, basically.

What kept you so curious all these years?

It's not that often that one has a position with this kind of freedom where you can develop these products and just put that out into the world. It could have gone a different way. I could have started a company and tried to make money off of it. But then I really wonder if I would have gotten all the cooperations from all these space agencies. So there's always pluses and minuses. There's no perfection in the real world.

Would you recommend students to go into the scientific world?

Under certain circumstances. It's probably not going to happen all that often though. Just from what I've seen and the way things are developing now. I'm just glad that it was possible for me. I didn't really count on it at the beginning.

Do you have anything else you want to add?

Oh yeah, I just want to express my gratitude to all the people that supported me over all these years. This is not something you can take for granted.

Interview conducted by: Lea Stoffl

Rapid Radar Round

Coffee or code?

Both

A perfect DEM. A myth or reality?

Yeah, perfect is a mathematical concept, but in reality there's always noise.

AI excitement or AI fatigue?

AI Curiosity.

Radar shadows or layover?

They both have their pluses and minuses. It's hard to decide between one or the other. At least with shadow, you know, you have no signal. And with layover people sometimes believe that maybe there is something there. And in some circumstances there probably really is, but it's really not very much.

Python or MATLAB?

Oh, I'm too old fashioned. MATLAB. I used MATLAB in Canada before I came here and when I came I said "Why don't we use MATLAB?" And they said "No, no, no! We don't use MATLAB. We use this thing called IDL." So, I had to throw out all my old MATLAB code, reprogram everything in IDL and then eventually they did go for MATLAB but then it was too late for me.

I did catch up and I did start doing MATLAB again and now Python is coming, but I'm too old for that. I guess I learned a little bit, but not enough to be really correct.

Resolution or coverage?

I am a big proponent of coverage. We always hear about the spatial resolution, that we're getting 10 centimeter resolution. But you always have to ask: «What is the swath width and how often can you cover the whole world?». Nobody can do that if they don't make a compromise on the spatial resolution.

Geocoding or geoguessing?

(laughs) I guess they both have their place, but I'm not an expert on geoguessing. I guess I'm not bad, but I'm not one of the best either.

Retirement or just one more project?

Mainly retirement, but maybe a little project here and there is fine. I don't have anything against that.

Norman Backhaus

Human Geography

Correspondence: Carlotta Lübbecke

From Geography to Human Geography

I studied in Zurich and have also pursued my academic career here. Geography was my favourite subject at highschool (Gymnasium) and I also had a good teacher. As I grew up close to Irchel, just behind the Zürichberg, the UZH was the most obvious place to study.

A Flashback to the 1980s of the Geoscope

In the mid-1980s, I was a member of the Geoscope editorial team. Editorial work back then was different from today. You couldn't send an email or set up a chat group to find topics or contributors. It all had to be done through personal contacts, which sometimes meant I had to put together an issue on my own. With no access to computers yet, we wrote the articles on typewriters. Even back then, we would frequently discuss whether we could find enough contributors and editors to ensure the magazine could be published regularly. That's why I'm delighted that Geoscope is back.

The Motivation behind it...

What are your current research topics?

Broadly speaking, I work in the field of political ecology and nature and landscape conservation, as well as sustainable development, are close to my heart I'm interested in how people perceive and value 'nature'. This leads to questions such as: 'What is it worth to whom, to be protected or not protected, and what are the reasons for this?' or 'What connects people to a particular



landscape, a natural object or a situation?' Regarding the latter, namely different night-time lighting scenarios, we'll be conducting an experiment in the Irchelpark in late autumn to find out which lighting situations pedestrians perceive as pleasant or unpleasant, and what the reasons for this are.

Which place on earth is the most exciting «field of research» for you?

Actually, anywhere where fascinating questions about human-environment relationships are being explored. More specifically: places I have a research connection with. In Switzerland, the national park region; globally, Georgia, Indonesia and Malaysia.

What fascinates you about your field of research?

Human-environment relationships are constantly changing, unfortunately not always for the better. That is why I find it both

fascinating and a privilege to be involved in research towards possible transformations leading to a more sustainable and fairer world, and thus, to make a small contribution.

What was your most shaping experience during your studies?

There isn't one in particular that stands out. The friendships that were formed during my studies and which still endure have been and continue to be formative. On another level, the realisation that poverty and famine are not natural phenomena but have social and political causes. And as far as my academic career is concerned, the fact that the supervisor of my diploma thesis (more or less equivalent to today's Master's thesis) asked me if I would be interested in writing a PhD thesis, he had a project that might interest me.

If you could study again, which course would you take?

Although human geography has always been closest to my heart, I began my geography degree as a 'Humboldtian' interested in all sub-fields of geography. That's why I can't name a single course. Rather, I find today's degree programme very diverse and interesting, so I'd be happy to take it again.

To read, see & think about

What advice would you like to give to students?

Approach your studies with an open mind and curiosity, reflect on what you're learning, and then throw yourself wholeheartedly into the areas that really spark your interest, rather than focusing primarily on the job market, which is

constantly changing anyway.

Do you have a recommendation for a (geography) book?

Wulf, Andrea (2016): Alexander von Humboldt and the Invention of Nature, C. Bertelsmann: Gütersloh.

A fascinating biography of the explorer who was a political ecologist avant la lettre, rejected colonialism and the slave trade, and proved that even in the early 19th century, it was not necessary to take a geodeterministic approach.

Do you have a cultural recommendation?

A hike in the Swiss National Park, wondering what this has to do with culture.

What else is currently on your mind?

Not only as a problem-solving geographer, but also as a (global) citizen, I am deeply concerned by the current polycrisis (the climate crisis, loss of biodiversity and social injustice), the associated polarisation, and the question of how we can find a way out of this situation.

Either this or that

Sea	↔	Mountains
Google Maps	↔	Instincts
Digital	↔	On paper
Longitude	↔	Latitude
Tram	↔	Bicycle
Fieldwork	↔	Deskwork
Past	↔	Future
Lecture	↔	Seminar

Hendrik Wulf

Spatial Data Science

Correspondence: Carlotta Lübbecke

From Geography to Spatial Data Science

I grew up in Berlin and studied Earth Sciences in Potsdam, a degree programme that was new at the time, combining geophysics, geology and mineralogy. How does one come up with the idea of studying something to do with ‘geo’ in the geological desert of Berlin/Brandenburg? I suppose I watched too many nature films as a child. Studying Earth Sciences was therefore a brilliant opportunity to get out and about whilst learning something interesting at the same time. Remote Sensing was also an essential part of the course, and it’s fascinated me ever since. I also spent an Erasmus year in Ghent and London whilst I was studying.



My path to the University of Zurich was then a wild series of happy coincidences. From Berlin’s perspective, Zurich was quite easy to combine with holidays in Italy. Settling in here was a bit of a bumpy ride, language-wise. On the other hand, the atmosphere was far friendlier than I was used to in Berlin. At the start, I was able to work as part of Philip Jörg’s team at the NPOC. That was priceless in helping me familiarise myself with the Swiss university system and the local environment. Over time, I’ve taken on some of the teaching in remote sensing and now coordinate the Minor in Spatial Data Science (SDS).

The Motivation behind it ...

What are your current research topics?

The two major topics that interest me are the climate crisis and environmental change. In this context, I am taking a closer look at the cryosphere, with a particular focus on snow and

glaciers. Glaciers are excellent indicators of the rapid changes in the global climate. At the same time, they serve as water reservoirs, natural hazards and cultural heritage all in one. Snow and glaciers belong together, like brother and sister. The ‘white gold of the mountains’ probably fascinates us all. Here, too, we are seeing a clear decline in snow cover due to global warming.

Which place on earth is the most exciting «field of research» for you?

Definitely the internet! My research is based on geospatial data. This vast collection includes everything from satellite data to ground-based measurements. It is often the combination of complementary datasets that brings us closest to answering a research question. As there seem to be more pixels than grains of sand on the seashore, direct access to these mountains of data via cloud computing on the internet is playing an increasingly important role. However, the data alone does not generate

knowledge. To satisfy this thirst, we also need computing power and algorithms. If we skilfully combine this trio of geospatial data, computing power and algorithms, we can create the knowledge that enables us to earn a living.

What fascinates you about your field of research?

What fascinates me most about working with geodata is the opportunity to travel through space and time. It is incredibly exciting to trace the changes that have taken place over time in all sorts of different parts of the world. There is something magical about simply being able to zoom out of our usual field of vision and take a bird’s-eye view. This different perspective on our world also gives me new insights into it.

What was your most shaping experience during your studies?

A defining experience during my studies was that feeling of utterfear. During an excursion in a Kenyan national park, I suddenly found myself face to face with a large, hissing snake. I’ve never run so fast in my life. On another occasion, during a rare heavy rainstorm, the mountains beneath our feet began to slide. That was also very frightening, as it was unclear whether we would make it out of that situation safely. Fortunately, things turned out well for the most part.

If you could study again, which course would you take?

Good question. Probably something to do with computer science. That’s what would be most useful to me right now. But I could also well imagine doing something practical, like pottery or glassblowing.

To read, see & think about

What advice would you like to give to students?

Together. Whatever you do during your studies, do it together. Shared experiences not only make your studies more interesting, easier and more fun, but also help you to stay on the ‘wrong track’ beyond your studies.

Do you have a recommendation for a (geography) book?

If anyone still reads books, Hans Fallada’s «Jeder stirbt für sich allein» comes to mind as a fitting follow-up to the previous mention. The geographical element is the locations where the postcards were found. Unfortunately, the topic is once again highly relevant.

Do you have a cultural recommendation?

Football is, after all, the new mainstream culture. You can still experience it at its most charming and authentic in the lower leagues or amongst children. If you ever drive past a pitch with just a few supporters, just stop and enjoy the play.

And what else is currently on your mind?

Chess! An old love.

Either this or that

Sea	↔	Mountains
Google Maps	↔	Instincts
Digital	↔	On paper
Longitude	↔	Latitude
Tram	↔	Bicycle
Fieldwork	↔	Deskwork
Past	↔	Future
Lecture	↔	Seminar



Amsterdam, Netherlands

Aurora Barrio, Exchange Semester FS26



Dag,

My name is Aurora. I'm in my 7th semester studying Geography and spent the spring semester of 2026 in Amsterdam.

Amsterdam is a very international and beautiful city, with very changeable weather: in winter it's cold, very windy and rainy, whilst in summer it can get very hot.

University took up quite a lot of my time. That made me enjoy the weekends even more - whether spending time with friends in the park, at flea markets or on a rainy day, popping into one of the many cafés or visiting a museum.

I also took trips to other towns or enjoyed a day at the beach and going for a dip in summer in the grachten (canals in Dutch) is a must. You might miss the fresh, clear waters of the Limmat for a moment, but on hot days you're simply glad to be able to cool off in the water at all.

My personal highlight was cycling: you can get through the city incredibly quickly and almost without stopping, because bikes actually (almost) always have right of way!, even if tourists occasionally get in the way.

Doei doei



Stellenbosch, South Africa

Elena Moczko, Exchange Semester FS26



Howzit?

I'm Elena, I'm studying geography and history and I spent my 7th semester at the University of Stellenbosch in South Africa! Sometimes I've wondered whether Stellenbosch is more of a campus with a town or a town with a campus — that's how much the students, the dorms and the numerous clubs and bars shape the atmosphere. The university has a practical and chill approach, so the lectures almost felt like seminars. During semester breaks, the otherwise very young city is flooded with tourists, as the Stellenbosch region is particularly known for its many wineries. In addition to great weather, dreamy beaches, and mountains, South Africa impressed me most of all with its cultural diversity. The people are incredibly friendly, open and fun, yet at the same time, the vast social inequalities are palpable everywhere.

Besides the country's vibrancy, I also miss my Birkenstocks — they were eaten by a baboon one night while I was camping. :')

xx Elena

Swiss Security Policies in an international context

Text: Andrea Luca Pagano

What is it about?

The module consist of a series of guest lectures from the field of Swiss security policy. Guests in FS26 included, amongst others, Juliette Notto, Deputy Director of the Federal Information Service; Benedikt Roos, Chief of the Armed Forces; Simon Plüss, State Secretary for Economic Affairs; and Federal Councillor Micheline Calmy-Rey, who joined via video call.

Workload

- 1 lecture per week: optional, as the assessment is not directly linked to the lectures.
- The assessment consists of a text of approximately 2'000 words.
- The topic can be chosen fairly freely

06SM615o013 - ECTS: 3 - FS - UZH

Advantages

- Fascinating guests
- After each lecture, plenty of time was set aside for the audience to ask the guests questions
- No prior knowledge required



Good to know

The lecture is NOT recorded

The Sun and Planets

Text: Levi Holenstein

What is it about?

This module provides an introduction to solar and planetary research. In her lecture, Ravit Helled, a former NASA employee, speaks enthusiastically about the planets in our solar system, geophysical processes on planets, the formation of the solar system, exoplanets and minor bodies.

Workload

- Standard, comparable to other 5 ETCS courses
- Weekly worksheets (to be completed independently)
- No need to take notes during the lecture



Image Source: NASA/JPL (2001)

AST248 - ECTS: 5 - FS - UZH

Advantages

- No prior knowledge required
- Fascinating subject matter and a lecture that feels like a Spotify podcast
- After the lecture, «Lecture Summaries» are available on OLAT, summarising the content.
- Some of the content has already been covered in Dynam (ESS111)
- Fair exam (answers to multiple-choice questions may be justified and you can skip sections of questions – similar to Dynam)

Good to know

There is a midterm (30% of the final grade)

Dinosaur Palaeobiology

Text: Michelle Graf

What is it about?

Every week, a new group of dinosaurs is introduced, along with their distinctive characteristics. The focus is primarily on anatomy, palaeontology and taxonomy.

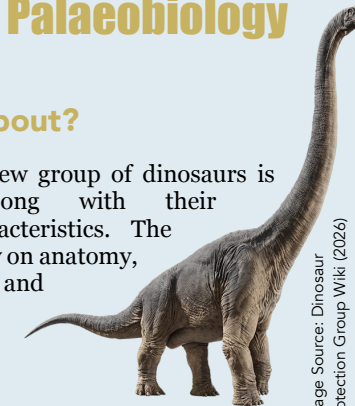


Image Source: Dinosaur Protection Group Wiki (2026)

Workload

- Compare two dinosaurs of your choice in a two-page report
- A poster summarising the results of comparison
- Poster presentation (approx. 2 minutes)

BIO 270 - ECTS: 1 - FS - UZH

Advantages

- Random Sidequest
- Very friendly lecturer
- Relaxed atmosphere, no attendance checks
- Interesting facts about dinosaurs (e.g. Brachiosaurus have a very small head due to their long neck and consequently, a very small brain)

Good to know

45min lecture once a week

Prior knowledge of systematics is a nice-to-have, but not a must

Self-guided water excursions in Baden and at Lake Biel

Text: Carlotta Lübbecke

What is it about?

The module consists of two excursions: a half-day excursion through the town of Baden and a full-day excursion (by bike) along Lake Biel, during which you will learn about the Jura Watercourse Correction Project. It is particularly fascinating to learn more about the watercourse correction project on site whilst at the same time being able to see first-hand the impact it has on the landscape.

Workload

- Introductory session at the start of the term
- Preparation simply involves downloading the app (this can also be done on the train)
- A two-page field trip report with photos and a short, researched in-depth section

Advantages

- Like a day out with friends, but where you also learn some interesting facts along the way
- A nice change from the usual routine of student life and a chance to spend time in the fresh air
- Freedom to choose when you go on the excursions



Image Source: Wikipedia (2026)

Good to know

Pass/Fail



Pesto is one of the most beloved pasta sauces worldwide and it is a regular meal for many students. Yet, few people know how **EASY** it is to make it at home, or how **CUSTOMIZABLE** it is.

Pea-Pesto

Step-by-Step

Start by washing your spinach and remove excess moisture. In a blender combine the spinach, basil, the peas, the garlic cloves and 80g of oil, blend until combined.

Depending on your blender, you might have to stop and push the mixture down before it runs smoothly. Once all the ingredients are mixed, add salt to taste, and drizzle in the rest of the oil until it reaches a creamy consistency. If the pesto is too chunky, blend it a bit more or slowly add a bit more oil

This amount of pesto will yield 6 - 8 portions, depending how much pasta you eat and how saucy you like it. The pesto will stay good for 1 - 2 weeks in an airtight container in the fridge, but in my case, it usually doesn't last that long.

TOOLS:

Blender (immersion or tabletop) or food processor

INGREDIENTS:

- 20g Basil
- 100g Frozen Peas
- 100g Spinach
- 100g Olive oil
- 5 cloves of Garlic
- Salt

COST:

~ CHF 6.- for 350g

Pesto is a wide term that covers many sauces, the most common of which is pesto alla Genovese. My recipe is not traditional, but it achieves a similar result with a few different ingredients: It uses peas instead of pine nuts, it uses less basil but adds spinach to maintain its greenness and moreover, it doesn't use any cheese. This way, dairy free and vegan readers can follow the recipe without having to look for substitutions, but... I don't want people to follow the recipe exactly. As I tested different variations, I realized that if you have good ingredients, it is hard to make a bad pesto, so feel free to experiment.

A few ideas to try out:

You could use rucola instead of spinach, you could add nuts like walnuts to add protein or you could add cheese back in. For a vegan alternative, use a couple tablespoons of nutritional yeast.

Not enough? Experiment with the herbs. Try adding oregano, add some mint and lemon for a fresher pesto, use rosemary or sage for a more savoury pesto for the colder seasons. Additionally, pesto does not only go with pasta. It works well in a risotto, as part of a salad dressing - I've even used it as a dip for grissini.





Wichtigster Tipp von Mathe-Markus

Hallo zusammen und willkommen im Semester 😊

Ich bin Markus und biete die Mathe-Unterstützungskurse für Studierende an. Ihr werdet im Verlauf des Semesters sicher noch von mir hören – für die Mund-zu-Mund Werbung bin ich allen ehemaligen Teilnehmer:innen enorm dankbar! 🙏

Dabei geht aber leider oft ein entscheidender Punkt für den Prüfungserfolg unter, was die allermeisten Studierenden bestätigen; beim Lernen für die Prüfung merkt man oft (zu spät):
Die Zeit reicht nicht, wie gedacht 😞

Der wichtigste Tipp daher:

Nutzt die Zeit im Semester – startet frühzeitig!

Ich möchte euch gerne noch besser während des Semesters unterstützen. Um mehr aus den 13 Semesterwochen herauszuholen (#MatheMotivationsloch), starte ich dieses Jahr neu eine **YouTube-Playlist mit Hinweisen, Tipps und allem, was euch sonst noch weiterhilft** ❤️ 🎧



Ich hoffe, die Infos und Tipps helfen euch – oder vielleicht jemandem, den ihr kennt.
Bei Fragen oder Wünschen bin ich jederzeit für euch da!

So oder so wünsche ich euch einen wunderschönen Start ins Studium
und ganz viel Freude & Erfolg!!!

Liebe Grüsse
Markus

YouTube <https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLQ58aUOpzruw>
 Website www.mathcourses.ch/mat182_basics.html
 Kontakt info@mathcourses.ch

UZH alumni geographie

GEGRÜNDET 1899 ALS
GEOGRAPHISCH-ETHNOGRAPHISCHE
GESELLSCHAFT ZÜRICH



Fühlst Du Dich der Geographie verbunden?

Möchtest Du im Kontakt mit Geographinnen und Geographen bleiben?

Willst Du geographische Themen auch nach Studienende verfolgen?

Werde Mitglied bei Geographie Alumni UZH



Das Ziel von Geographie Alumni UZH ist die Förderung und Verbreitung von geographischem Wissen. Geographie Alumni UZH sieht sich als Bindeglied zwischen Hochschule, Öffentlichkeit und Schule mit dem Hauptanliegen, durch Fachvorträge und Exkursionen wissenschaftliche Forschungsergebnisse weiterzugeben und den Nachwuchs zu fördern.



Unser Jahresprogramm: • 2-3 Exkursionen • Next in Geography • Vortragsreihe im Herbsthalbjahr

Montag, 19. Oktober 2026 um 18:30 Uhr

Die neuen Klimaszenarien der Schweiz - Aufruf zum Klimaschutz und Handlungshilfe zur Anpassung an den Klimawandel

Referent: Prof. Dr. David N. Bresch

Professor für Wetter- und Klimarisiken am Institut für Umweltentscheidungen im Departement
Umweltsystemwissenschaften, ETH Zürich und MeteoSchweiz

Montag, 9. November 2026 um 18:30 Uhr

Grosse Veränderungen im Innern der Berge: Erkenntnisse aus 25 Jahren Permafrostbeobachtung in der Schweiz

Referentin: Dr. Jeannette Nötzli

WSL-Institut für Schnee- und Lawinenforschung SLF, Leiterin des Schweizer Permafrost Messnetz (PERMOS)

Donnerstag, 3. Dezember 2026 um 18:30 Uhr

Raumplanung und gravitative Naturgefahren

Referent: Christian Holzgang

Stellvertretender Sektionsleiter und Fachexperte Wasserbau beim BAFU

Vortragsreihe Herbst 2026
Thema: Naturrisiken

Alle Infos auf unserer Website: www.geographie-alumni.uzh.ch



Horoscopes

Aquarius
20.01 - 18.02



Layers of sediment are forming around you. Every lecture, every field trip and every coffee with new friends adds something valuable. Even if you don't always see your progress straight away, it's there, because you're building on a solid foundation.

Pisces
19.02 - 20.03



Right from the start of the term, your calendar already looks like a dense road network with various roadworks.

Try not to put too much pressure on yourself, and make a conscious effort to take breaks now and then.

Aries
21.03 - 20.04



Just as with mountain formation, even small tectonic movements are often enough to bring about big changes.

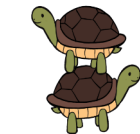
With a little courage, your love life could take a positive turn this term.

Taurus
21.04 - 20.05



You've slipped into the new term full of motivation, like a landslide after heavy rain. Don't lose sight of your direction and focus on finishing your current projects before taking on any further commitments.

Gemini
21.05 - 21.06



You're currently under the influence of high pressure. Whilst others are plagued by procrastination caused by low-pressure systems, the sun is shining for you and you can make the most of this favourable weather for your projects whilst it lasts.

Cancer
22.06 - 22.07



You're as steady as a granite. Whilst quite a few people around you are losing their footing, you remain steadfast and always keep a clear head. This will be particularly beneficial to you during the exam period.

Leo
23.07 - 22.08



After a turbulent few months, the general weather conditions have improved significantly. The clouds are clearing and visibility is improving. You realise how far you've come and can use that as motivation.

Virgo
23.08 - 22.09



Pay attention during presentations this term; you're bubbling over like a volcano and can hardly hide your enthusiasm for your projects. Sometimes, however, the actual message gets lost. So try to channel your energy effectively at the right moments.

Libra
23.09 - 22.10



You see the exam period as being much like a slowly moving glacier tongue: you know you've still got plenty of time and skilfully ignore it. But be careful: don't wait too long, because even something that moves slowly can have a massive impact in the end.

Scorpio
23.10 - 22.11



Bei dir fließt momentan alles wie ein gut eingependelter Fluss. Die Motivation für Projekte und Unternehmungen findet dich fast wie von allein. Schwimme nicht gegen den Strom, sondern lass dich von ihm mittragen.

Sagittarius
23.11 - 20.12

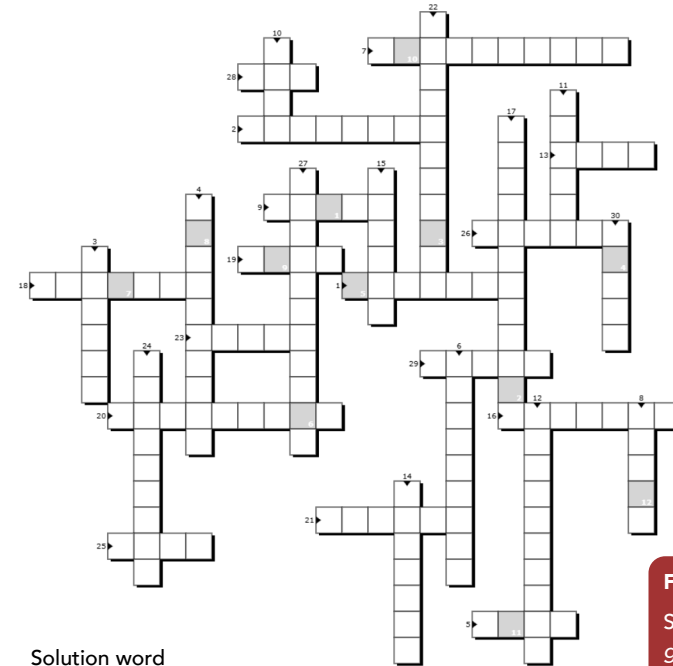


At the moment, everything in your life is flowing like a river that has settled into a steady rhythm. You find yourself naturally motivated to take on projects and new ventures. Don't swim against the current; let it carry you along instead.

Capricorn
21.12 - 19.01



This term is like a hike in the mountains. You're always looking ahead to the next peak and hardly enjoying the section of the trail you're on right now. Make a point of staying in the here and now a bit more, so that you don't have to take any unnecessary detours later on.



1. African animal at Irchel
2. Best known pesto version
3. David Small originally comes from
4. Scientific area with solid water
5. Mound of sand formed by the wind
6. Exciting field research destination for Prof. Dr. Backhaus
7. Winter activity in Zurich
8. Hendrik Wulf's old love
9. Python
10. Study drink
11. Construction project at Irchel
12. Swiss Mountain peak at 4048m
13. Rare weather phenomenon in the summer of 2026
14. UZH rector and former geoteam member (first name)
15. Spice in the name of a Sommer am Irchel band (FS26)
16. Popeye's favorite food
17. Type of cloud
18. Dino with a small brain
19. Bye-bye (NL)
20. Cartography Prof at UZH
21. Rock often described as nice
22. Projection in Google Maps
23. Was there to eat at the Mapathon
24. Animal Selection GEO243
25. Lowest cafeteria at Irchel
26. Giuz Mission: One Earth - Many ...
27. Opposite of Deriving
28. Federal Office of Culture - BAK
29. Springs from the Todi Massif
30. Capital of Bolivia

Solution word



Created with XWords - the free online crossword puzzle generator
<https://www.xwords-generator.de/en>

Did you know?

Text: Viviane Fluck



On your way from the 'Universität Irchel' tram stop to the Irchel Building, you may well have noticed a grey sculpture on the outer wall of the State Archives. The artwork depicts a bookshelf bent out of shape by a storm, with its books being blown away. This installation by the Swiss artist Wolfgang Häckel is intended to serve as a reminder of the transience of all human endeavour and the vulnerability of archived documents.

«Sturm» (1982) – Wolfgang Häckel

A Glimpse at FS 2026



Announcements

Coming Events

- Wednesday, 16. September First-Semester-Event**
Aimed at our newest Geography and ESS students. Come along and get to know your year group :).
- Thursday, 17. September Dozbar**
Come and meet our lecturers behind the bar and catch up with your friends about the summer holidays!
- Sat, 19. - Sun, 20. September Hiking Weekend**
This year, the 'Wild Wanderfidlis' are heading to the Blüemlisalp.

The full event calendar for HS26 will be published in the coming weeks.
Check out @geoteam.uzh on Instagram and our website so you don't miss a thing.
The next issue of Geoscope will be published in spring 2027 at the start of the semester. Stay tuned!

In the next issue

In the Footsteps of the Geoscope

*The History of the Student Magazine of
the Departement of Geography*

