Tracing Deafhood: Exploring the Origins and Spread of Deaf Cultural Identity

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INTRODUCTION

THIS PAPER PRESENTS SELECTED RESULTS FROM AN ON-GOING PROJECT to identify how the formation and worldwide spread of Deaf cultural identity has occurred. ArcGIS, a Geographic Information System computer program, is utilized to map and visually determine the chronological sequences of and patterns in the establishment and spread of schools for the deaf, Deaf clubs, Deaf sport clubs, and national Deaf associations worldwide. Current research efforts focus on Europe and the United States.

Three key concepts, Deafhood, Deaf community 'pillars', and ArcGIS analysis are covered here. Understanding each concept is essential to understanding the purpose of this paper, which is to show that combining all three concepts opens up a new, promising avenue of analyzing Deaf history and Deaf geography.

Ladd (2003:xviii) defines the concept of Deafhood, which he describes "as a process by which Deaf individuals come to actualise their Deaf identity." This process includes discourse amongst Deaf community members (p. 3, also see p. 81). This term seeks to define the essence and existence of Deaf identity (pp. xviii, 3, 4, 81).

Four Deaf community 'pillars' are identified through the work of Lane et al (1996: 131–137; 137–138) and Eickman (2004:190, also see p. 34). These pillars are schools for the deaf, Deaf clubs, Deaf sport clubs, and national Deaf associations[1]. Each pillar has a role in maintaining the Deaf community's existence and serve educational, social, and political purposes. Lane et al

(1996:131–137; 137–138) describe how American schools for the deaf, Deaf clubs and Deaf sport have impacted the acculturation process of deaf people into the American Deaf community and the National Association of the Deaf's socially significant role.

Now, this brings geography into the equation. Why should the geography of Deafhood and Deaf identity be studied? Look at the following premises that are taken:

1) The four pillars influence Deaf identity development.
2) Deafhood is the same as Deaf identity actualisation.

Thus, it can be deduced that the four pillars influence Deafhood. Therefore, if the four pillars affect Deafhood through their impact on Deaf identity development, then the compilation and analysis of their origins and spread is vital to understand Deaf identity's origins and spread.

METHODOLOGY: USING MAPS IN DATA ANALYSIS

Eriksson (1998:21; 22–49; 49-65), who inspired this research, describes the beginnings of deaf education and schools for the deaf, particularly in Europe. He offers analysis of the spread of schools for the deaf there (pp. 53; 58–63; 82–83; 87–90) and to America (pp. 63–64), and of the teaching methods used by individual teachers and schools (pp. 21; 22–49; 65; 82–88; 88–89). He provides two maps of early European schools for the deaf showing their location (pp. 60–61) and the spread of the manual and oral teaching methods (p. 65).

ArcGIS's capabilities enable a deeper level of analysis building on Eriksson's (1998) work. Collected data on the four pillars permits geographic analysis of patterns to determine how Deaf identity has spread globally, as those four pillars serve as venues for Deaf identity development. All four pillars and their characteristics can be plotted on multiple map layers on top of a single map to aid studying their geographic origins, spread, and interplay. This method allows multi-dimensional analysis and aims to give greater insight into the spread of Deaf identity.

Over time, patterns in the pillars' development and locations of stronger and weaker Deaf activity can be learned and analyzed. Places having high and low degrees of Deaf community activity, evidenced by the formation and existence or absence of the four pillars, will be indicators of where Deaf identity has been/is strongest or weakest, representing possible manifestations of an 'ideal' Deaf community or forces of audism, respectively.

Also, the visual geographic impact of positive factors, such as Deaf-centered leadership, sign language usage, and pro-Deaf rights legislation, and negative factors, such as oralism, audism, and Milan, can be illustrated by mapping and analyzing the appropriate pillars affected by these factors.

DATA SOURCES AND DATA COLLECTION ISSUES

Europe was chosen as the initial focus of this project due to the location there of many early schools for the deaf, Deaf clubs, Deaf sport clubs, and Deaf national associations. One of this paper's purposes is to illustrate the power ArcGIS holds for Deaf history research. After considering the available data sources, Germany was chosen as a demonstration case study.

Data was gathered on each German pillar from various sources. As a start, old Deaf-related publications and pillars' websites were consulted. As databases grow and analysis reveals geographic gaps and unusual features in pillars' depictions on maps, Deaf community members can be directly consulted to verify accuracy of the database and for information to fill in these gaps and correct or explain these unusual features.

For each pillar, attempts to collect its name, location and founding year were made. For schools for the deaf, no school names were collected. However, where possible for schools of the deaf, data was collected for founders and heads of schools and the instruction method used at these schools. Latitudes and longitude coordinates of the cities where each pillar was located were also compiled for ArcGIS mapping purposes[2]. All this information was incorporated into a data set.

Eriksson (1998:60–61, 65), Fay (1882), and Optical allusions...(1993:369) provided data on German deaf schools. Eriksson (1998:61) covered selected schools founded between 1760 and 1860. Fay (1882:32; 37–42) appeared to list German schools in existence at his article's time of publication. Optical allusions (1993:369) shows a German language map of cities having Deaf schools up to 1837.

The websites of the Deutscher Gehörlosen-Bund e.V. (DGB or the German Deaf Alliance[3]) and the Deutscher Gehörlosen-Sportverband e.V. (DGS or the German Deaf Sport Association[4]) were very helpful in not only providing information on the history of their own establishment and the state-level organizations affiliated to them, but also on the Deaf clubs and Deaf sport clubs respectively affiliated to them. These websites were pathways to individual state-level associations, local clubs and sport clubs' websites which provided a wealth of information on their own formation and also on other German associations and clubs.

Many of these sources were helpful in providing essential geographic and other information about each pillar. However, several issues arose during this data collection process.

Records were not always complete or in complete agreement with each other. For incomplete records such as those Deaf German clubs for which their founding year was unable to be found, these pillars were omitted from

mapping for the time being. These omitted clubs may have affected the maps presented in this paper (see Results section) and warrant further investigation to complete their entries in the data set.

For those pillars where records differed on some aspect of their data, an educated guess was made to decide which record seemed correct, based on available data sources and other supporting material. Sometimes, the founding year of a school within a particular city did not agree between sources. This may indicate either an error in one of the sources or that two separate schools existed in the same city, the earlier school closing before the later school opened, leading to the discrepancy.

In other cases, pillar names and location (city) names changed over time. When pillar names changed (generally in the cases of Deaf clubs and Deaf sport clubs), the historical information on the club's website sometimes provided information to ensure the location and founding year was correct, regardless of any club name changes. When city names changed, as in the case of formerly Prussian cities now lying within Poland and Russia such as Stettin (now Szczecin, Poland) and Königsberg (now Kaliningrad, Russia), Wikipedia, the on-line encyclopedia (www.wikipedia.org) was useful in identifying the correct city through its listing of the city's name in multiple languages, including German.

In other cases, when compiling latitude and longitude coordinates, there would be two or more cities of the same name for where a pillar was located. As a general rule, the largest or most well-known city was chosen out of the possible cities. It was felt this would lead to the most likely spot for the pillar in question (with the paradigm that larger population would increase the chances of a larger deaf population, and thus the pillar's presence). This left only a few cities where it was not possible to find a plausible location and geographic coordinates for them. Those cities were omitted from mapping for this paper as time did not permit further research on these few cases. It is felt that these cases would not seriously impact the illustration of overall trends of Deaf community pillar establishment and spread within Germany.

For other cases, the written record was unintelligible or misspelled, or the data sources I used did not have a listing for a particular city. In these events, I made an effort to determine the correct location of each city. Wikipedia again was useful in determining the correctness of each city's name.

Even Fay (1883:48), the compiler of one of the data sets on schools for the deaf that I used, acknowledges this issue of gathering accurate information and freely admits his data may not be error-free. So this is not a new problem for researchers. The data compiled for this paper is not claimed to be error-free and is a work in progress. Again, the emphasis here is on showing the analytical power available and methodology involved in using ArcGIS.

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Figure 1: Gern

RESULTS

For the purposes of the German case study, only the first three pillars (school for the deaf, Deaf club, and Deaf sport club) were considered for analysis as they are all 'local' on scale, meaning they can all be located in the same city. As Germany has both national and state-level Deaf associations for Deaf people and Deaf sport, it was decided to omit them from this analysis.

For the purposes of this paper, I included Deaf societies and Deaf associations under the generic classification, "Deaf club," as long as they were local in scale and not regional, state, or national societies or associations. Also, special interest groups or clubs (ie: senior citizen clubs, card-playing clubs, theater groups, ethnic-specific Deaf clubs), including those that are operating as a 'sub-group' or 'sub-club' out of a 'normal' Deaf club, were generally not included in this data set as they do not represent a traditional Deaf club, which serves the general Deaf population. However, these types of special interest groups or clubs warrant future analysis.

Three ways of utilizing ArcGIS to analyze the local pillars are demonstrated here5. They are single-pillar analysis, chronological analysis, and multiple-dimensional, multiple-pillar analysis.

First, the most basic kind of analysis, single-pillar analysis, which is

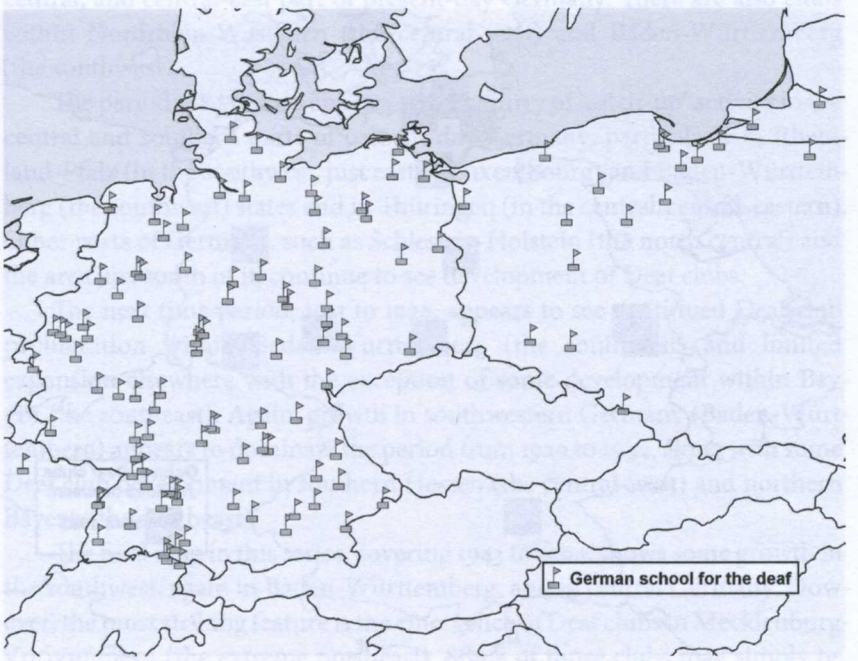

Figure 1: German schools for the deaf established between 1778 and 1882