

I am a Geographer ...

Simon Kuestenmacher

Director of Research at The Demographics Group



My high school teacher in Munich, Dr Bohlender, first opened my eyes to how insightful it is to view the world through the lens of Geography. As a student I was interested in how economies and nation states interacted and Geography was the most helpful intellectual framework I encountered. To this day I immensely enjoy using maps and data to understand how the world works and share these insights with clients and the public on radio, TV and Twitter.

I started my university career with a four-year Geography and Social Sciences degree at Humboldt University in Berlin. My Geography studies allowed me to spend a semester at The University of Tulsa in Oklahoma, study for one year at the University of Melbourne and, in between, go on month-long fieldtrips to China and all across Europe. After a year back in Germany I returned to Australia to complete a Master's degree in Urban Geography at the University of Melbourne. During this time I got engaged and decided to make Australia my permanent home.

As the academic career pathway wasn't for me I started work as a data analyst at a large employment agency using spatial data from the Australian Census to model demand for employment-related services. I eventually took a job at the management consulting firm, KPMG, which had a specialised business unit around demographics – a dream job for every geographer. Here I learned the ins and outs of how to present geographic insights and data to different audiences. There is so much data and information available that businesses pay good money to management consultants who are able to collect, interpret and present relevant data-driven insights to them. This is what I do for a living now and it provides me with a lot of joy as I have found a niche in management consulting that allows me to heavily lean on my training as a geographer.

When I started university in 2005, three years before the first iPhone arrived in Australia, many businesses didn't quite see how geographers might help them. One decade on, Geographic Information Systems (GIS) are essential for businesses and good geographers are in high demand. Geography graduates who can operate QGIS or ArcGIS and are comfortable around data can look forward to great careers in business. Few, if any, nations have better and more accessible spatial data than Australia, which makes this a wonderful place for a career in the sector.