

Lorenz Hurni

D-BAUG Professor and Vice Rector
for Study Programmes

Mapping a love of music

Text Rebecca Lehmann **Photo** Florian Bachmann

For Lorenz Hurni, the map collection in the basement of the HIL building on the Hönggerberg campus is not just a useful research facility – it also serves as a rehearsal room for him and his soprano saxophone. “Music helps me to clear my head,” says the Professor of Cartography. He particularly enjoys playing the accompaniment to pieces from various musical styles or improvising with colleagues from D-BAUG.

Over the last few months, however, he has mainly been playing his saxophone on the balcony of his chalet in Valais – where he spent lockdown and the lecture-free period – for the benefit of his neighbours. Against the backdrop of the Matterhorn, Hurni, who was born in Biel/Bienne, has been focusing primarily on his role as Vice Rector for Study Programmes alongside his online teaching. As part of this role, he leads the committees for entrance examinations and for the ESOP excellence scholarship and also handles student complaints, mostly in connection with grading and admissions. He says that he took on the role because he wanted to give something back to the university and to show his gratitude for the freedom and trust granted to him as a scientist.

For the 57-year-old, it was his interest in visualising geospatial objects and phenomena that led him to cartography. He mapped the erratics in a forest in Biel/Bienne when he was just 15, winning first prize in the *Schweizer Jugend forscht* (“Swiss Youth in Science”) competition for his work. Today, as editor-in-chief of the *Atlas of Switzerland*, he uses interactive 3D visualisations to implement new cartographic concepts. At the same time, with the *Swiss World Atlas*, he is helping to teach schoolchildren about geography and political territorial conflicts. His research is currently focusing on using machine-learning methods to study and analyse historical maps. That’s one reason why you might find him in the map collection in the basement – or it might just be time for saxophone practice. ■

