

CONTENT, SIGNIFICANCE AND GLOBAL ROLE OF WORLD REGIONAL GEOGRAPHY IN THE FRAMEWORK OF PEDAGOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract . This study discussed the significance and function of regional geography courses taught in Faculty of Arts and Sciences Geography Departments in Turkey along with the pedagogical and scientific role of the course. The study sought answers to the following questions: What should be taken into consideration and what subtitles should be included to carry out a country's geographical analysis and to prepare its geographical ID? What should regional geography teachers take into consideration in terms of collecting resources, performing country analyses and planning training and education? What main titles and sub titles should the complex working method of regional geography include? Which learning domains should be prioritized in 21st century regional geography courses? What is the national and global significance of regional geography course for the students? What are the main tasks of regional geography teachers in the globalized world?

Keywords: Regional Geography; University Students; Geography Teachers; Turkey; Globalization

INTRODUCTION

Investigating the complex relationships among nature, population and economy in a space whose borders are defined is the main subject of regional geography. Regional geography experts should widely benefit from various branches of geography such as geomorphology, climatology, hydro-geography, biogeography, economic geography, population and settlement geography and political and cultural geography and be able to interpret interrelations among these sub branches in a sound manner. Regional geography experts or teachers who teach these courses should be in close relations with different science branches such as botany, zoology, economics, demography, history, ecology, statistics, anthropology, geology and geo-politics and be able to present more

reliable country analyses and deeper scientific and pedagogical syntheses by benefiting from these sciences.

One of the priority functions of regional geography is to address and explore the similarities and common features as well as contrasts and differences. In other words, regional geography should not confine itself to examine physical, human and economic characteristics of different countries but should present their achievements, positive aspects and differences while examining their failures, negative aspects and problems with the same rigor; i.e. regional geography should include economic, ethnic, ecological, social, cultural, demographic and geopolitical problems as well. In short, regional geography should give wider coverage to “Critical Geography” and “Geographical Issues” (Atasoy, 2003).

Regional geography should present a broader vision to the itinerant, researching, curious and informed individuals of 21st century and a more sound and scientific outlook to world’s political, social, economic and cultural realities and regional and global problems. Regional geography should provide individuals with opportunities to get to know the cities, regions and nations that we have not yet visited, seen or learned about; it should make different spaces and countries more familiar. Intensified relations between countries in the areas of technology, tourism, trade, science, education and politics in the globalized world make information sharing among countries inevitable as well. Hence, research, books and scientific studies on regional geography have significantly increased in all civilized counties and regional geography courses are taught in high schools and universities as compulsory subjects (Atasoy, 2003).

According to Baranski, regional geography is the complementary and integrative branch of physical, human and economic geography. Regional geography was born from the intersection of physical, human and economic geography branches on an area whose borders have been defined and from the interrelations among these geography branches. According to Baranski, regional geography should not regard itself as a separate science but strive to generate a sounder county profile by collecting and assessing the diverse information from different branches of geography and by often asking and answering “why, where, when, how and what” questions about all geographical features of these countries (Masbits, 1995).

Atalay’s view on the significance and function of regional geography reflects a similar outlook: “To know the position and significance of a country in the world, to cooperate with it for the future, to prepare plans in the social, political and strategic fields and to develop various strategies is only possible via knowledge on other countries. Therefore, educators, bureaucrats and intellectual must have deep and detailed knowledge on regional geography. Especially politicians and educators should test the pulse of their countries on one hand and test the pulse of other countries on the other in order to achieve their tasks thoroughly and adequately (Atalay, 1999).”

Human beings and the society are placed at the center of regional geography which is the synthesis of geographical sciences. Hence, man-nature, man-economy,

man-culture, man-politics and man-space relationships are also included at the center of regional geography. Also, the need for regional geography in solving the social, cultural, political, demographic and economic problems of the planet is increasing day by day. When regional geography presents the geographical characteristics of a country via different symbols, visual materials and numerical data such as graphics, figures, maps and diagrams and analyses industrial, agricultural and tourism potentials of countries and natural resources, commercial and demographic structures, it should address issues that are in the realm of geography such as social geography, cultural geography, politic geography, ethnic and religious structures, military and economic organizations and demographic, economic and political problems. Only then it is possible to picture the geographical portrait of countries soundly (Atasoy, 2003).

Y. G. Masbits, a pioneering Russian expert in regional geography emphasizes the different roles and functions of regional geography and combines these under six headings (Masbits, 1995):

1. Function of informing or informatics,
2. Function of description or representation
3. Function of education
4. Function of culture or enlightenment
5. Scientific function or research
6. Function of implementation

While it is imperative not to discuss these functions based on a discourse as to which one is more important, it is reported by Masbits that these headings should not compete against one another and that regional geography should undertake all these roles and functions together. According to the author, regional geography has three different research and exploration aspects: a) Physical aspect, b) human-financial aspect and c) complex aspect (multi-dimensional). But it is stated that they are beneficial as a whole and not separately (Masbits, 1995).

The scheme prepared in 1930's by N. N. Baransky in regional geography studies is still relevant and widely used. According to this scheme, while undertaking geographical analysis for a continent, region or a country, research should be conducted under six headings (Masbits, 1995):

1. Geographical location (mathematics, special or geo-political location). The position and significance of the country in the world. The historical evolution of the country and its significant historical steps
2. Physical geography characteristics (climate, geographical formations, hidrography, soil types, flora and fauna etc.). Potential and production of the natural resources (surface and underground resources).
3. Historical geography characteristics and the past and present of human-financial system.
4. Human geography (distribution and structure of population, demographic characteristics, settlement geography).

5. Economic geography (agriculture, industry, trade, tourism, transportation etc.)

6. Regional geography and characteristics of important cities.

In this working draft with six categories, Baransky specifically emphasized regional differentiation of continents or countries and physical, economic and human characteristics of different regions. In short, he underlined the parts rather than the whole, and focused on the differences rather than the general and similar aspects. He specifically mentioned that regional geography should have at least 70% share in a country working text (Masbits, 1995).

In the following years, geographers such as V. P. Maksakovski, I. M. Maergoyz, N. M. Panter, Y. G. Masbits and M. D. Şarigin presented different studies and suggestions in this area. Among these, Y. G. Masbits's 1995 work "Complex Working Method in Regional Geography" is remarkable. Masbits suggests an outline composed of 11 main headings for studying a country. These 11 main headings are summarized below along with sub titles (Masbits, 1995):

1. Factors or characteristics that enable a country to be "distinctive" or "privileged"

- Formation of country identification card.
- Position and significance of the country among others in terms of human, economic and politic characteristics.
- Geographical location, neighbors, and distinctness in terms of political and administrative structure.
- Distinctness in terms of human, physical and economic characteristics.
- Distinctness in terms of social, cultural, religious and settlement characteristics.
- In short, "privileges" and characteristics that are unique to this country.

2. Geographical Position.

- Area of the country and its population potential.
- Geographical location of the country (advantages and disadvantages).
- Neighbours, land borders and coastal characteristics of the country.
- Relationship of the country with economic, military and political organizations.
- Geo-political position of the country and relevant results.

3. Historical and political past of the country.

- (Masbits defines the historical and political past of the countries as the "Genetic Code of the Countries".)
- Stages in the formation of nation and governments based on time and space.
- The main historical-political achievements and failures of the country, the position and significance of the country in the world history.
- Man-nature interactions undertaken in the country soil in the historical process and their results.

4. Natural environment, natural resources and use of natural environment

- Physical structure of the country (vertical and horizontal distribution) and its characteristics.

- Natural characteristics such as climate, land formations, flora, fauna and water resources.

- Natural regions (highland, bottom land or wasteland, river basins, low or high areas, arid or moist areas etc.).

- Potential and production of natural resources.

- Forestry, fishery, apiculture, animal husbandry and vegetal production.

- Energy-mining reserves and their production.

- Impact of humans on the natural environment and its ecological results.

- Use of land and soil.

5. Population geography.

Qualitative and quantitative characteristics of population.

- Population density types and their characteristics.

- Population increase, its causes and results.

- Demographic, health and education characteristics of population.

- Ethnic, religious and socio-cultural characteristics of population.

- Population projections.

- Population problems.

6. Settlement geography

- The evolution of settlement in the land of the country .

- Rural and urban distribution of country population .

- Main characteristics of urban and rural settlements.

- Urbanization process in the country and its characteristics.

- Main characteristics of metropolises.

- Internal and external immigration, cause and results.

- Settlement problems .

7. Economic geography

- General economic structure of the country and its economic potential.

- Technological and scientific potential of the country.

- Regional and local characteristics of country economy.

- Production, employment and sectoral characteristics of country economy.

- Analysis of main economic branches such as agriculture, transportation, tourism and commerce

- Economic and commercial relations with other countries.

8. Social geography.

- Social, educational and cultural structure of the country.

- Societal and political characteristics of the country.

- Folk culture and popular culture.

- Ethnic, linguistic and religious problems of the country

9. Regional geography.

- Main geographical characteristics of the country along with its physical and economic regions.

- Ethnic, linguistic and cultural structure of the regions.
- Economic potential of the regions and their standards of life.
- Regional differences, similarities and contrasts.

10. Environmental protection and ecological problems

- Environmental problems related to industry, transportation and tourism.
- Environmental problems related to population, nutrition and urbanization.
- Environmental problems related to activities in the areas of agriculture and energy.
- Regional ecological problems, their causes and results.

11. Country perspective and projections for the future

- Economic projections for the country.
- Political projections for the country.
- Population and settlement projections for the country.
- Regional and local projections for the country.

Masbits attributes the methodical approach that can be used in regional geography to the five main principles of geography (space/region, complexity, clearness/demonstrativeness, multi dimensionality, interactivity and dependence) (Masbits, 1995):

According to Masbits, the five principles cited above are valid for all world geography studies in all realms such as scientific, informatics, educational, cultural, descriptive etc. there are not very different methods in today's regional geography studies as well. The methods that are valid for all geographical sciences such as presentation and description method, historical development method, comparative analysis method, cartography method, statistical and economic methods are also equally valid for regional geography. However, using all these methods in conjunction with each other while trying to develop a sound portrait of a country may be the most sound method of them all (Atasoy, 2003).

Which Learning Domains Should be Incorporated in 21st Century Regional Geography Courses Geared towards University Students?

Educators, scientists and especially geography teachers face a daunting task in presenting, endearing and popularizing different cultures, societies and civilizations, different continents, cities and countries, different nations and minorities to young generations. Knowing, comprehending, protecting and embracing the world first of all requires internalizing and embracing different cultures, different nations, different continents and countries. We cannot love and adopt a world that we do not know and we cannot sufficiently protect and embrace a world that we do not love. One of the indispensable tasks of regional geography is to present similar and common aspects among countries and nations; to smooth out biases and intolerance and to bring nations and states closer. The part below discusses what university students should be taught in regional geography courses today's complex world and some suggestions are presented.

Teaching an awareness of world-homeland

Today, while the existence of 7 continents, more than 230 countries, about 5000 ethnic communities, about 6000 languages and a great number of religious beliefs in

the world reflects a wide dividedness, a large diversity and richness, the concept of a common melting pot, common homeland and common destiny in which all civilizations and humanity comes together and becomes integrated is either ignored or cannot be soundly perceived. Today's educational system brings differences and superiorities to the forefront rather than underlining the similarities and common characteristics of the humanity and prefers to emphasize the strong and privileged aspects of each nation and country.

While separatist movements and schisms increase in this century in which religious exploitation, ethnic conflicts and competition among civilizations have increased, societies also integrate, cultures get increasingly closer, the world becomes smaller and dependencies among countries increase. In other words, while the concept of globalization familiarizes and integrates societies and countries, it also increases conflicts, divides and separatist movements. While our planet becomes smaller and unites on one hand, it is divided and fragmentized on the other (Morin, 2003) as a result of all this, 21st century is about to transform into a century in which anthropological and homogeneous awareness is eroded and ecological awareness and world citizenship consciousness are underrated or ignored. However the melting pot that unites the black and white, the Japanese and the English, the westerner and the southerner, the villager and the urban, the Christian and the Muslim, the poor and the rich and the Pygmy and the Aborigine is the melting pot of the world where we exist all together.

The melting pot of the world is the pot where concepts such as common planet, common destiny and common humanity reach significance and make sense. This pot is the pot of "world-homeland" pot where ethnic and religious discrimination are destroyed and racial and cultural differences are eroded. This pot is the pot of common joys and sorrows; achievements and failures, hopes and expectation and the past and the future; it is the pot in which the passengers of the same ship await for the next stop. Regional geography courses should be areas where awareness for a common planet is transfused, they should present the reasons why we should lay claim to our world with sound rationales. Moreover, these courses should transfer students a sense of ethnic awareness, religious awareness, nationalistic awareness and consciousness of citizenship while they also transfuse world-homeland consciousness.

How can we be purified, become clean, renew ourselves and change our consumption, production and lifestyles before it is too late? We need to equip today's children of the world-homeland with new morals, awareness and with new attitudes and behaviours; we need to develop their world-homeland consciousness, their awareness of belonging to the Blue Planet, their consciousness of world citizenship. With the help of regional geography, we should teach these children to listen to the world-homeland instead of dominating it; to feel it instead of conquering it; to love it instead of exploiting it. Because there is no homeland other than the blue planet in this endless universe; because all races, all nations, all religions have the same identity under the same roof: The identify of an earthling; because we are all passengers of the same ship, we share a

common destiny, we share a common fate, and we share same hopes and expectations. The happiness of our homeland is our joy; its future is our future; the fate of the planet is looped in the fate of humanity. Therefore, regional geography courses should teach our children how to be earthlings, they should teach them how to adopt and embrace our planet; they should teach them how to live as brothers and sisters, how to embrace each other, how to share and how to be tolerant (Atasoy, 2005).

Today, all nations, all religions, civilizations and countries share the same ecological destiny, the same global threat and the same fear of death. Therefore, consciousness of humanity should be combined with the earthly consciousness of sharing a common fate. Because all human beings are the citizens of the same planet, they are dependent on the same world. Therefore, we should stake a claim to the biosphere that we depend on, the planet that we are contingent upon and we should ameliorate and protect them or we will be destroyed in our shared destiny with our selfishness and insensitivity. Comprehending the world citizenship requires internalization of our shared destiny and consciousness of belonging to the same planet (Morin – Kern, 2001)

Main responsibilities regional geography teachers in the globalized world

While regional geography teachers analyse the causes and results of global and regional problems, they should have students grasp that events and problems can be approached by using various outlooks, different thoughts and viewpoints. They should also train students to become individuals who can learn and make deductions from these problems; compare different regions and countries; objectively examine the advantages and disadvantages of these countries; make sound connections between the problems of the country and global problems and freely create individual worlds in their own heads. Before anything else, teachers should not transfer concepts to students such as superiority of countries or nations, show of strength, competition, ethnic spite and religious hatred; to the contrary, they should give students positive, universal and peaceful messages to students by emphasizing similarities, beauties, common shared items and tolerance. In these courses, students should be able to observe together and balance the beautiful and the ugly, the positive and the negative, the advantages and the disadvantages.

Regional geography courses should not be unpleasant and monotone courses that only teach about the mountains, rivers, the largest lakes and cities and the mines of countries; that have students memorize country capitals and confuse students' already confused minds by filing them with encyclopaedic, empty and boring information. Modern regional geography teaching should be a learning domain that builds a peace and Brotherhood Bridge among different nations, different religions, different countries and cultures and it should emphasize democracy, human rights and positive universal values. Also, regional geography teachers should teach their students how and where to use numerous digital data, maps, figures and diagrams on continents and countries by utilizing the most recent scientific and technological innovations. What's more;

they should have their students to love, comprehend and make sense of the field of geography by synthesizing and deeply filtering the geographical events and by looking for answers to “when, where, how much and how” in the framework of cause and result and have their students stay away from stereotyped information and rote learning in the field of geography.

Embracing the Unity of the Planet and of Humanity

“Geography is a science that presents the characteristics of the spaces on earth and examines and explains these characteristics, the reasons for similarities and contrasts among different spaces and the rules that govern them” (Erinç, 1977). Geography explores the complex relationships between social and natural environment and it is a science of synthesis whose most prioritized research field is the interaction between society and the geographical environment by placing man and space in the focus of its exploration, hence, geography is the science of space before anything else. Space is constant, limited and variable. Anatolian peninsula, Japanese state, Cyprus Island and African continent are constant, but limited and variable spaces. While the limits of the spaces are determined by different physical factors such as seas, oceans, valleys, mountains and rivers and by political factors such as state borders; internal changes on spaces are determined by internal forces, external forces and human activities (Atasoy, 2004).

RESULT

While teaching students the natural, human and economic characteristics of different spaces during regional geography courses and having students learn about authentic aspects and superior sides of different countries, it should be remembered to teach them the factors that bring these countries together and unite these people and the factors that integrate the nations included in different political and economic organizations. Regional geography courses should not ignore the fact that the common space for us all. Teachers, first of all, should train students to be individuals who can approach regional and global problems from peaceful windows, who can approach different races, religions and culture with tolerance and who can volunteer to remove biases and enmities among countries. Hence, regional geography should move away from being field of occupation that marginalizes and excludes people and states and must be turned into a teaching field in which messages of love, peace, amity, empathy, cooperation and tolerance are given.

Having students comprehend human ethics and develop homogenous awareness lays at the center of future regional geography education. The homogenous awareness that should be developed in students should be built on the belief foundation that all races, all religions, all cultures and all peoples belong to the same human race and all people are actually relatives. Until now, our lineages, skin colors, beliefs, the languages we speak, country borders, political beliefs and our kindredship have separated us from one

another, they have even estranged us. The quadruple unity of “individual-race-nation-state” has caused nations and countries to view one another with suspicion and distrust and resulted in conflicts and wars, genocides and immigrations, tears and tragedies. Therefore, the future geography teaching should work to humanize the humanity and it should strive to develop world citizenship ethics, ethics for understanding, tolerance and empathy. This is only possible through comprehending our earthling identity and embracing and adopting the unity of the planet and the unity of humanity. The regional geography teaching of the future should surpass national, ethnic and religious awareness; sow the seeds of homogenous awareness and develop ecological awareness and world-homeland awareness and advance world citizenship consciousness which shows that we belong to same humanity.

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