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REGIONAL GEOGRAPHY AND GEOGRAPHICAL EDUCATION: CHANGES IN GLOBAL TRENDS IN MODERN SCHOOL GEOGRAPHY*AUTHORS***Boris Avdić, Ranko Mirić, Nusret Drešković***Department of Geography, Faculty of Science, University of Sarajevo, Zmaja od Bosne 35, 71000 Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina**e-mail: borisavdicpmf@hotmail.com; rmiric@gmail.com;**nusret2109@gmail.com*

UDC: 913:371.3

*ABSTRACT****Regional geography and geographical education: Changes in global trends in modern school geography***

The position of regional geography in the system of geographical sciences is a topic that has been the subject of intense epistemologically and methodologically focused discussion within scientific realm at the global level since the middle of the 20th century. The initial outcome of these processes at the academic level was the marginalization of regional geography in the study of spatial phenomena, but since then there was a partial revitalization of the regional approach. In view of these changes, the place of regional geography within geographical education also began to be problematized. In this paper, it is conducted a critical review of selected academic articles from the last few decades that at least in a certain segment touch on this topic, as well as analysis of recent trends in school geography. This analysis suggests that it is difficult to find an adequate replacement for regional content, especially in the geographical education at lower levels of education, and that in many countries it still represents the basis or at least an important part of the geographical curriculum. However, at the same time, the need for change of teaching approach based on the excessive so-called regional inventory of space, by introducing general geographical concepts in the study of regional units of various levels, and putting them in the service of the development of critical thinking in students.

*KEY WORDS**Regional geography, geographical education, school geography.*

1. Introduction

Changes in the position of regional geography in the system of geographical sciences have been largely reflected and transferred to school geography, or influenced the scope of regional geographical teaching contents, as well as the dominant didactic approach. Given that each country has a separate education system, and in some countries there are more of them, it is not possible to talk about completely universal changes that have transformed the status of regional geography in education, but we can identify some general trends globally, or at least in the Western world. It is a process that is continuous, which means that it is still active. In the context of Bosnia and Herzegovina, it is much more current issue than before, since it is only in recent times that more serious discussions on essential education reform have begun to be discussed. In such circumstances, domestic geographers should be involved as intensively as possible in the promotion of geographical education, which for the general social benefit must be included in the dynamic concepts of the moderntimes. It is therefore necessary to consider the path that geography, as well as regional geography within it, has so far taken as part of educational concepts in other countries.

However, first of all it is necessary to determine what regional geography can offer to the teaching process. The simplest answer to this question is to come through an objective analysis of the learning outcomes of regional geographical contents and the expectations that this concept in school geography should fulfill. According to Mastilo (1981), education based on regional geographical contents has the following tasks:

- introduction to the continents as complete natural creations;
- introduction to countries as unique (in space and time) parts of geospace;
- introduction to other spatial units relevant from the geographical point of view;
- revelation of mutual connection and conditionality of natural phenomena with each other, and especially between natural and social phenomena in totality;
- assessment of the natural and social impact in specific territories, as well as establishment of the links between the natural basis and various civilization types;
- revelation of patterns of origin and distribution of territorial units of a certain taxonomic and hierarchical rank, and their variability in space and time;
- explanation of way in which general geographical patterns are expressed in case studies;
- explanation of territorial population structure;
- explanation of factors of economic production development and distribution;

- revelation of human work values and collective efforts through positive examples of space organization, as well as the opposite pointing to examples of degraded geospaces, which affects the constructive attitude towards the environment;
- provision of up-to-date information about the contemporary world, geographical aspects of world events and issues, and development of ability to cope in international situations;
- development of positive attitudes and commitments;
- development of the ability to manipulate logical operations of analysis, synthesis, comparison, generalization, etc;
- development of skills of working with maps, graphic and statistical materials, literature, etc.

It is evident that among these tasks there is a wide range of various knowledge, principles, values and skills that a student attending geography classes should acquire. On this basis, we can emphasize informative knowledge about the world, then the awareness of the connection between natural and social elements in spatial dimension (which in a certain context and form can be interpreted as determinism), numerous examples of general geographical patterns recognition (as an argument in rejecting the thesis of excessive descriptiveness of regional geography), elements of updating the teaching content, as well as some general geographical and educational concepts. These dimensions were present in practically all historical phases of the development of regional geography in geographical education, with some of them being more and some less emphasized in certain periods. For example, in the past, a deterministic and encyclopedic approach to regional geography was dominant, and in recent times there has been an insistence on development of critical attitudes.

2. Early stage of development of regional and school geography

The introduction of geography into the school system in Western countries is mainly tied to the second half of the 19th century, when formal education began to take on its modern contours. Marsden (1997) believes that the educational institutionalization of geography occurred after geographers became aware of the fact that it must first be placed on the original scientific foundations, and that it must reject the hitherto image of a mere storehouse of knowledge about Earth. To this end, a new regional paradigm has been set in a more complex way, and a political context has been added to geography as a whole. Thus, for example in the United Kingdom at that time there was a need for a school subject that would cultivate nationalism and imperialism in a positive light. According to Capel (1981), the emergence of geography in British schools in the late 19th century, when the need arose for a larger number of geographically educated civil servants, merchants and soldiers, was not a coincidence.

Such circumstances have clearly encouraged the need for larger number of geography teachers. The main problem with the original regional contents in the school system was ethnocentrism, which often grew into racism. The thesis that the climate has a decisive influence not only on the economic activity of society, but also on human behavior, attitudes and intelligence, had a racist overtone. Although already then have existed the opponents of this interpretation, which from today's perspective can be characterized as blatant determinism, it was offered as an essential regional geographical explanation within school geography at the end of the 19th and in the first decades of the 20th century, especially in the educational systems of the great colonial powers. The golden period of regional geography in the school system came at the end of the First World War, when the importance and popularity of geographical science increased further. Its main goals have become the identification, delimitation and analysis of regions. Central in this context were the terrain features of a particular area or region, climate and water played a secondary role, while the least attention was paid to biogeographical features and ecosystems (Naish, 1997). Human geography has thus become subordinated to environmental determinism within the aforementioned regional paradigm. Although many regional geographers have strongly rejected determinism (e.g., Vidal de la Blache in France), an excessive focus on studying the natural factors of social development of world regions in schools has generally characterized regional geography as deterministic.

3. Changes in school and regional geography in the mid-20th century

The end of the Second World War marked a completely new phase in almost all segments of society, including education. In school geography, this meant a definite break with environmental determinism. This did not immediately mean an automatic shift of focus from regional geography, but new issues, such as social development and the environment, were introduced into the geographical teaching process within the existing regional framework. The result of this modified regional geographic approach has often been an increase in the number of lessons about more distant parts of the world (Lambert and Morgan, 2010). It has been observed even earlier that memorizing geographical information can easily be turned into knowledge of these facts, but it does not automatically imply knowledge of geography. Therefore, the basic educational goal in many countries was no longer the accumulation of information, but the development of attitudes and opinions about geographical reality (Marsden, 1997). Education policy in the United Kingdom became focused on the conception of the world with all its differences in natural and social terms, enabling students to gain insight into spatial problems from a more realistic perspective, as well as to develop compassion and understanding for other people on Earth. In secondary education, a more complex comprehensive scheme of studying the world was

adopted, in order to point out the spatial dimension of the vital problems of humanity in that period.

Although many of the then harmonized principles in geographical education are still relevant today, after the concept of quantitative geography at the academic level prevailed, regional geography began to lose its primacy at lower levels of education, but with a certain inertial period. Naish (1997) sees this inertia as the result of a detailed specification of curricula, whose changes and adjustments are difficult to make in a timely manner, or in step with the dynamic needs of modern society. This is one of the reasons why curricula have become less precise in recent times, which leaves a greater degree of autonomy in creating the teaching process to schools and teachers, but also creates predispositions for faster introduction of certain changes. In the second half of the 20th century, the dominance of the regional approach within geography as a school subject began to be clearly criticized, with arguments that it was too focused on description, that preference was given to memorization instead of critical thinking, that fundamental spatial concepts were not emphasized, and that there was still a strong dichotomy, that the lack of a problem-solving approach is evident, etc. Although all the above remarks could be taken into account through redefining the regional concept in education, the changes that followed were largely at the expense of regional geography.

The reduction of regional geographic content in education began in the United States in the mid-1950s, while such a trend in Europe came to the fore during the 1960s and 1970s. For German-speaking countries, an important turning point occurred in 1969 at the German Congress of Geographers in Kiel, while in the United Kingdom this issue was covered by educational reforms until 1974. Meanwhile, the focus of school geography has been placed on the modernization process in the light of global development trend, so the division of countries into modernized and traditional societies has come to the center of geographical interest (Lambert and Morgan, 2010). Parameters indicating the level of development or modernization have become a new means of developing geographical thought in students, and topics such as urbanization or transport systems are gaining significantly more space within the curriculum. Thus, subject of Geography was to a much greater extent now tied to the social studies. This educational concept was soon get criticized. Taylor (1985) stated this implies that the world consists of between 150 and 200 countries that follow their own path of development, which is a mistake, because countries should be observed as interdependent bodies, which together participate in the world economy.

In general, it can be said that the emphasis on the global dimension has contributed to the development of critical geography in the teaching of most developed European countries and introduction of the so-called systemic

approach as an alternative to the regional one. This is not achieved by increasing the amount of content or information about different places, regions or countries, but quite the opposite – by reducing the quantity of this type of content. Geographical knowledge has thus gained secondary importance, in relation to the spatial skills and moral values that have been highlighted. This significant change was prompted by modern processes that took place in capitalist society during the second half of the 20th century.

They include a huge quantity and quality of new scientific knowledge and ways of its systematization, changes in methodological and didactic practice, which are based on new discoveries of cognitive science and the pluralization of society, which acted as a catalyst for many other changes. In addition, one should keep in mind the trend of introducing interdisciplinarity and cross-curricular topics into the education system, which attached geography even more to social orientation. However, it is almost a paradoxical fact that these interdisciplinary tendencies paid almost no attention to the physical component of geographical science, which could be used to relate topics from the natural and social subjects. This can also be interpreted in the light of the forced marginalization of the regional geographical approach.

Another effect of the new approach is emphasis on similarities rather than differences, which was the focus of regional geography as a study of specificity (Walford, 1997). The concept of place clearly gave way to the spatial concept in school geography as well. In this context, the crystallization of new leading ideas should be observed, such as the concept of spatial organization and the knowledge of spatial distribution patterns of certain phenomena. The regional approach was not completely eliminated, but it has got a new methodological formulation. It has referred to the study of spatial differentiation, which became more grounded on a scientific basis than was the case before.

Given that the student population has significantly more contact with their immediate environment than with remote parts of the world, it is easy to assume that the principles and methods of spatial differentiation will be more easily adopted through case study of the local area than some remote parts of the world. Therefore, a greater opportunity in geographical education is open to the study of local environment, at the expense of reducing the number of lessons about various world regions. Wridt (2002) makes the pedagogical argument that the curriculum should link the student's personal geographical experience with the study of geography. She emphasizes that this does not mean that students (especially in adolescence) are not capable of acquiring abstract knowledge.

4. Modernization of regional geography in the last decades

Already in the first half of the 1980s, the excessive focus on social spatial phenomena and the neglect of the natural basis received well-founded criticism in scientific community. These remarks were accepted in some countries, so certain steps were subsequently taken in terms of reaffirming physical geography. For example, in the United Kingdom physical and so-called environmental geography were established as two of the five basic areas of geographical education. The remaining three are human geography, geographical skills and knowledge and understanding of place (Walford, 1997). Seven areas were originally proposed, but in their final form (1990) three areas were summarized within one – knowledge and understanding of place (Graves, 1997). In the second half of the 20th century, place as a term in the educational context began to be used more often for what was understood in traditional regional geography as its object of study. However, it is not possible to talk about the complete identification of regional and so-called place geography, speaks to the fact that the U.S. education system clearly defines the five geographic topics being studied: location, place, man-environment relationship, movement, and region.

The study of a place includes the consideration of natural and social factors in a particular location. This geographical topic is related to toponymy (the name of the place), the description of local geographical features and the study of the relationship between the local population and the natural environment. Every place on Earth has its own special characteristics, a fact that has long been the focus of regional geographers. Terrain, climate, water, soil and vegetation vary from place to place, and thus to some extent affect the socio-geographical features, but in this context, modern geographers, whether in the classroom or outside, should not fall into the trap of environmental determinism. On the other hand, social characteristics are defined by population (distribution, dynamics, their culture, way of life, etc.), political circumstances, settlements and economy. The concept of place, which in terminological terms has become an alternative to regional geography, allows geographers to notice similarities and differences between comparative locations or parts of the Earth's surface.

The American Association of Geographers (AAG) has clearly differentiated the educational conception of place in relation to the notion of region, despite the fact that the study of place makes significant use of regional geographic methodology. The region, as one of the five geographical themes in education, is defined as an area with uniform natural or social characteristics, whose boundaries can be defined in a formal or informal way. Given that many regions mentioned and studied in the educational process are not clearly and sharply delimited on the map, and in a particular context can be reduced to the concept of mental map, this field of geographical interest is recognized and confirmed as

a resource to encourage abstraction in students (worldatlas.com, 2016). Abstract concepts like this have a role to play in developing higher cognitive abilities, so it has become clear that regional geography can offer much more in educational terms than a simple inventory of spatial content. On the other hand, in today's globalized world, it is almost impossible to ignore regional disparities, both globally and at lower levels, so getting to know different segments of the Earth's surface has remained one of the primary tasks of school geography.

Walford (1997) concludes that geography teachers have begun to rediscover the value of subject-focused learning after decades of experiments with amorphous and so-called integrated topics. The reaffirmation of learning goals, which are reflected in the comparison of global, regional and local, as well as in the adoption of a basic framework through location knowledge, is aimed at raising and strengthening the educational basis for building a modern and purposeful teaching process in geography. During the last decade of the 20th century, there was a generalization of educational goals and areas within the geographical education in developed countries, so that the focus was placed on three dimensions – geographical skills, thematic studies and regional geography. In that way, the contemporary model of geographical education and its social role were cleared. Different countries have placed different emphasis on one of the three mentioned educational dimensions, but none of them has been completely neglected. British school geography emphasizes a thematic approach to the study of geographical content, but also cites the following educational goals: exploring different places and topics at different geographical levels, understanding and explaining natural and social processes, as well as interactions between them, and developing awareness of problems. Human interaction with the natural environment are also being studied within this concept, as well as understanding the way in which different places are positioned in a global context, that is, the way in which different areas have become interdependent and susceptible to influence from other parts of the world (Graves, 1997). All these goals can be achieved through adequate treatment of regional content.

5. Position of regional geography within contemporary education in Europe

In 1993, as part of its policy on raising awareness of pan-European values, the European Union adopted a Green Paper on the European Dimension in Education. The concept of the European dimension in education can generally be understood as a set of principles whose purpose is to enable students to actively participate in building a prosperous and integrated European society. In this respect, geography, along with languages and history, is one of the most important school subjects. Initially, geography was viewed as a predominantly descriptive subject in the light of the European dimension, but its modern development has shown that it has much more complex goals.

Among other things, it can have an applicative character, primarily through the use and development of geospatial technology, what is suggested in the Rome Declaration (2013) of the European Association of Geographers (EUROGEO). However, given the essence of the European dimension in education, it is not desirable to completely abandon the so-called traditional geographical concept, the purpose of which is to get acquainted with the natural and social features of Europe as a continent or world region (Avdić and Banda, 2015). This institutionalized trend in European countries in any case gives greater importance to the regional approach in geographical education, at least in terms of the regional geography of Europe.

Due to all the above trends, as well as the fact that the general public primarily views geography as a source of information about the world (planet Earth), regional contents are very common in geographical education in the 21st century. However, there are significant conceptual differences between national curricula. In countries where school geography is approached from a thematic point of view, regional geographic content is mainly addressed through case studies, or as examples within specific thematic units. On the other hand, in a number of countries, the teaching of geography (especially in primary schools) is still primarily structured according to regional units – continents, parts of continents, countries and subnational regions. Depending on the curriculum, regional contents have been more or less modernized, as well as conceptually and methodologically adapted to modern general educational, social and technological trends, so they have incorporated numerous thematic contents, as special focus issues.

Rellou and Lambrinos (2004) conducted a study comparing the curricula of 30 European countries (with a particular emphasis on EU members). The collected curricula are divided into two groups according to the dominant approach – thematic or regional. Geographical education in Denmark, Finland, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Sweden and the United Kingdom has been found to be based on a thematic approach, while in all other countries the dominance of the regional concept is noticeable.

The position of geography in German schools has varied considerably over the past century, but in recent times it has again become determined by the dualism of the general and world regional geography. It should be emphasized that the German educational system is very decentralized, so that the federal states, schools, and also teachers themselves have a great degree of autonomy in the choice of teaching content. The decentralization of the education system is also very pronounced in Belgium, primarily from the aspect of the differences between the Flemish and Walloon communities, but in general it can be stated that geographical teaching in this country is focused on the regional geographical features of Europe.

The regional geography of Europe is an important segment in the school geography of the Czech Republic too, with the principle 'from far to near' being applied in this case. Before Europe, other continents are studied, and the regional geography of Czech Republic come last. The opposite principle applies in Greece and Republic of Cyprus. In these countries, the starting point is study of the natural and social characteristics of these two countries, followed by contents about Europe and other continents. The curriculum content in Cyprus is much more dedicated to Europe than to the rest of the world, while in Greece this ratio is more balanced. Similarly, the Romanian curriculum is primarily oriented towards the national geography and geospace of Europe. Geographical curriculum in Malta is the most specific – it starts from the regional geographical features of home country. Other Mediterranean countries are treated second, with special attention being paid to the Middle East region (Rellou and Lambrinos, 2004).

Geography curricula in the countries that emerged from the disintegration of Yugoslavia are still mutually similar, which is the result of a common past, also manifested through the creation of a unified educational policy in the previous century. The intense changes in understanding of geographical education that took place in the western part of the world did not have a major impact on school geography in the former Yugoslavia, which was based on the German regional approach of the first half of 20th century and the Russian-Soviet orientation to physical and economic geography. In the period after gaining independence, the neighboring countries to Bosnia and Herzegovina tried to modernize their education systems to some extent, including geography as a subject in primary and secondary schools, but due to numerous difficulties in adapting to new trends, inertia and obsolescence in educational approach and still quite visible. From the aspect of regional geography, it is positive that this direction still represents the basis of geographical education, i.e. acquisition of geographical knowledge and skills. However, due to the fact that the regional approach in these countries has not made a significant move from forcing extensive facts and inventory of space, which is an approach that was sharply criticized in the Western countries half a century ago, there is a real danger of further degradation of geography in local education systems in terms of achieving profound learning outcomes.

In all three countries from the Bosnian surrounding area – Serbia, Croatia and Montenegro, geography as a school subject according to current curricula exists in four upper grades of primary school, with the number of scheduled weekly hours differing somewhat. Geography is represented by the most classes in Croatia, where only in the fifth grade one and a half hours per week are reserved to this subject, while in other classes there are two lessons per week (Nastavni plan i program za osnovu školu, 2013). It is similar in Serbia, with the difference that in the fifth grade, only one class is provided for geography at the weekly

level (Nastavni plan za drugi ciklus osnovnog obrazovanja i vaspitanja, 2013). The least space for this subject is provided in the school schedule of the primary education system of Montenegro – from the sixth to the eighth grade geography belongs one and a half hours per week, and only in the final (ninth) grade it is allocated two hours (Predmetni program – Geografija, 2012). The concept of teaching content arrangement is very similar in all three countries. Regional geographical contents dominate in three of the four grades of primary school in which geography is studied. Only the lowest (fifth or sixth) grade is dedicated primarily to general geography, which has the function of a basis for the construction of later regional geographical knowledge. Geography in the other three classes is focused on the study of regional geography of Europe, other continents and the home nation. Somewhat more innovations in the educational concept were introduced by Croatia, which adopted the so-called the principle ‘from far to near’ (non-European continents – Europe – Croatia), and has taken certain steps towards incorporating some thematic contents into the framework of regionally oriented thematic units.

6. Conclusion

When looking at the entire history of school geography, a clear conclusion is drawn that it is difficult to imagine geographical education without regional contents. There is also a need for a delicate balance between the two extremes – insisting on a regional inventory of space and too broad factography on the one hand, and complete neglect of regional contents of geospace at various levels on the other. The first extreme leads to the trivialization of geography as a science, which thus can not meet the wider educational goals, and approaching the second means the transformation of geographical learning into something that this subject is not, since it is deprived of a complementary approach and spatial concretization. We should also keep in mind the social perception of geography as a general education subject, which implies that its basic task is to acquaint the student population with the world in which they live and of which they are a part, through different levels – local, national, regional and global. In addition to the general educational dimension, modern educational and social trends dictate the need for the adoption of meaningful knowledge and skills, as well as the development of critical thinking. It is a segment in which traditional regional geography is at odds with the dynamic needs of the modern age, and its adaptation to modern educational principles is necessary.

7. References

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