

# Curriculum Concept of Regional Geography at Faculties of Geography in Serbia Prior to Transition to the Concept of University Education According to the Bologna Declaration

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**Abstract** Program contents of regional-geographical subjects at the Faculty of Geography in Belgrade, and the Faculty of Natural Sciences in Novi Sad, and also the program in these subjects at the Faculty of Natural Sciences was analyzed in detail. Based on the subject of research of Regional geography and on definition (concept) of region and basic (leading) method in this science, several recommendations are presented in this paper.

Those recommendations consider the period of attending these programs (after completion of programs in physical and social geography). Furthermore, the number of classes per semester for regional-geographical subjects and the possibility for creating a unique curriculum for all faculties in Serbia, and also in Montenegro, at which future teachers of geography will be educated, were recommended.

**Key words** Regional geography (Geography of the World and Geography of Yugoslavia), curriculum

Since curricula are the focus of every reform in education, this paper will attempt to critically consider the adaptability of program contents of the subject Regional geography<sup>1</sup> at Faculties of Geography in Serbia as well as their adaptability to the demands of modern primary and secondary schools and trends in modern geography.

There are four universities in Serbia: Belgrade, Novi Sad, Pristina (temporary dislocated to Kosovska Mitrovica), and Nis, which educate future teachers of geography. The education of teachers of geography at the university level started more than hundred years ago in Belgrade, at the time of the leader of youth spirit, geographer Jovan Cvijic. It has continued to present days at the Faculty of Geography in Belgrade. In Novi Sad precursor of university education of geography teachers was Teacher-Training College and later the Faculty of Philosophy (studies with two majors geography-history). In 1960s an independent Department of Geography was founded. Since 1969, the studies of geography have been taught at the Faculty of Natural Sciences in Novi Sad. Simultaneously, university education of geography teachers started at University of Pristina. The youngest institution of higher education of this profile is the Faculty of Natural Sciences and Mathematics at University of Nis, where university teaching of geography has developed in the last few years.

The faculties have continuity in preparing for majors in geography teaching (occasionally, depending on the organizational structure, the students were prepared for major in geography). The students attending this program, future teachers of geography, receive a complex knowledge in geography aimed at

competent experts in geography who would teach geography in primary and in all types of secondary education. The studies comprise subjects from physical-geographical, socio-geographical, and regional-geographical disciplines together with general and didactical-methodical subjects. At all faculties, the studies last four years, i.e. eight semesters (prior to transition to the concept of University of Bologna). Continually, the faculties have offered subjects in regional geography. The subjects have different names but the main topic was geography of the native country (Geography of Serbia, Geography of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, Geography of Yugoslavia, Geographic regions of Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, and etc.) and geography of the world (Geography of Europe, Geography of other Continents, Characteristic regions of the world, and etc.) Undergraduates at these faculties had to pass those obligatory subjects in order to obtain their degrees. What is the position of those subjects in the curriculum for major in geography (teacher of geography)? Critical review of the issue will be dealt in the following chapters of this paper.

## Program Content of the subject Regional Geography

This geographic discipline comprises program contents of Geography of Yugoslavia and Geography of the World. It has been approved at other European and universities all over the world that the knowledge of the native country has to be attained first. Apart from the basic goal, the program contents of this subject have to include more components than the program contents of other subjects e.g. Geography of a neighboring country or Geography of a state in the southern hemisphere.

The analysis of the program contents<sup>2</sup>, will start first with the detailed view of the program contents of problems in teaching Geography of Yugoslavia and then Geography of the World.

## Geography of Yugoslavia

Geography of Yugoslavia and Geographical Regions of the World are subjects, which are taught at the Department of Regional Geography, Faculty of Geography, University of Belgrade. Geography of Yugoslavia is a third year subject at the studies of geography and Geographic

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regions of Yugoslavia is a fourth year subject at the studies of geography (future teachers of geography) and at the studies of spatial planning (future spatial planners). In 1920, Geography of Yugoslavia as a national subject was first introduced at the Department of Geography, and later at the Faculty of Geography and it has attained its position until present. It only experienced slight changes considering the number of classes or the year it was taught at. In the curriculum for major in Geography in 1961, another national subject was introduced: Geographical regions of Yugoslavia. The subject retained its name until 1971. In the new curriculum in 1971 the name was changed into Regional Geography of Yugoslavia, and in 1995 into Geographic regions of Yugoslavia. The number of classes per week is: 2 lectures and 2 practical exercises for these two subjects.

At the Faculty of Natural Sciences and Mathematics in Novi Sad, national geography is represented with the subject Geographic regions of Yugoslavia taught at the 6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> semesters, 4+2 classes per week. At the newly formed Faculty of Natural Sciences and Mathematics in Nis, Department of Geography, Geography of Yugoslavia is represented at the fourth year with 3+2 classes per week and at the Faculty of Natural Sciences and Mathematics in Pristina (Kosovska Mitrovica), Department of Geography it is taught at the fourth year, 3+2 classes per week.

### Program contents at the Faculty of Geography in Belgrade

**Subject: Geography of Yugoslavia**

**Semester: V and VI**

**Number of classes per week: 2+2**

**Introduction:** Theoretical base of Geography of Yugoslavia, Development of Geography of Yugoslavia; Subject, methods and tasks of the study; Position of Geography of Yugoslavia in the system of geography and in the system of education.

Geographical-historical development, size and borders of Yugoslavia: Specific features of the geographical position of Yugoslavia on the Balkan Peninsula and in Europe.

Natural features and their influence on other geographical characteristics: Geological history and morphotectonic evolution and relief features; Types of climate; Hydrological features, Pedological structure of the territory; Flora and fauna.

Population of Yugoslavia historical view (pre Slovene population on the territory of Yugoslavia, Settlement of Slovenes on the Balkans and formation of Serbian medieval states). Demographic features; Geographical dispersion of population and its influence on commercial development, Government system in Yugoslavia;

Development of commerce in Yugoslavia; Natural resources as elements of development; Agriculture – its development, problems, and significance, Measures for improvement of production in agriculture, Structure of the land fund, Dispersion and structure of agricultural production. Economy, bases and conditions for development, Territorial and branch structure, Condition and perspectives for industrial development, Traffic – factors for development; Role and importance of traffic in connecting areas, development structure and trends, Tourism – factors of development, condition and perspective, Other industrial branches,

Geographical dispersion and types of settlements, origin and development, factors of locations, typology of settlements, condition and possibilities of development of rural and urban settlements in Yugoslavia, growing of rural settlements into urban, Development of functions in urban settlements, Rural settlements – from old types to modern villages.

**Subject: Geographic Regions of Yugoslavia**

**Semester: VII and VIII**

**Number of classes per week: 2+2**

**Introduction:** Theoretical base of Regional geography; Development of regional geography in our country; Subject, methods and tasks of the study; Terminology and hierarchy of regions; Borders and names of regions; Structure of regions; Development and achievements of regional geography in Yugoslavia;

Pannonian macro region – Vojvodina – Banat, Srem, Backa, Peripannonian Serbia – Posavska Serbia, Podrinjska Serbia, and Podgorina, Western Pomoravlje, Sumadija, Belgrade macro region, Great Pomoravlje, Stig and Branicevo.

Macro region of mountains, lowlands and valleys – Eastern Serbia – Carpathian Serbia, Balkans Serbia, Southern Serbia – Southern Pomoravlje, Vlasina, and Krajište, Toplica and Jablanica, Southwestern Serbia – Old Vlah and Raska, Ibar-Kopaonik Region, Kosovo and Metohija, Mountain and valleys of Montenegro.

Adriatic macro region – Coastal Montenegro – Boka, Montenegro coast, Zeta.

Regional-geographic features of some geographic units of former Yugoslav republics – Baranja, Banija, and Kordun, Lika, Lower Vrbas and Lower Bosnian region, Specija-Majevice region, Posavska Bosnia, the Una basin, Eastern Bosnia, Adriatic Herzegovina.

### Program contents at the Faculty of Natural Sciences in Novi Sad

**Subject: Geographic Regions of Yugoslavia**

**Semesters: VI, VII, and VIII**

**Classes per week: 3+2**

Department of Geography at Faculty of Natural Sciences and Mathematics in Novi Sad, similarly to Faculty of Geography in Belgrade has the subject Geographical Regions of Yugoslavia as one of the basic final subjects, the subject which is elaborated in every detail during the studies, which is reasonable, as it is related to our homeland geography. At the same time the previous knowledge enables the better understanding of complex geographic characteristics. The program of Geographic regions is identical to the one at the Faculty of Geography in Belgrade.

Geography of Yugoslavia in Nis and Pristina (Kosovska Mitrovica) is studied at the fourth year and its program comprises subjects Geography of Yugoslavia (as at the third year in Belgrade) and Geographic Regions of Yugoslavia. The number of classes per week: 3+2

### Geography of the World

Regional Geography of the World at Faculty of Geography in Belgrade is studied in two subjects: Geography of Euro-Asia and North America (the subject is popularly known among students as "Regions I" or "Northern hemisphere", and partly established among lecturers) and Geography of South America, Africa and Australia (popularly known as "Regions II" or "Southern hemisphere"). In Novi Sad at the Faculty of Natural Sciences and Mathematics, Department of Geography, program content of Regional geography of the World are divided into four subjects: 1. Characteristic regions on the Earth, 2. Regions of the World I (Europe), 3. Regions of the World II (Asia and Africa) and 4. Regions of the World III (North America, South America and Australia). The whole program content at both faculties is presented at final years, the third and mainly the fourth.

## Program contents at the Faculty of Geography in Belgrade

**Subject: Regional Geography of Euro-Asia and North America**

**Semesters:** V and VI

**Number of classes per week:** 3+2

**Introduction:** Theoretical background of regional geography. Development of regional geography in the world and in our country. Subject and methods of regional geography. Problem of regionalization. The position of regional geography within the system of geographical sciences and educational process.

Regional geographic survey of Euro-Asia; Geographic position. Geological history and morphological entities as its outcome. Climatic characteristics of Euro-Asia. Hydrographic features (oceans, lakes and rivers) as prerequisites for population distribution. Features of flora and fauna on the continent. Presence of man in Euro-Asia (post Pleistocene, Paleolithic Age and Neolithic Age). Centers of ancient cultures. Formation of Euro-Asian nations (ethno-genetic division). Lowland regions as centers of concentration of population. Geographic view of larger urban agglomerates in Euro-Asia. Global economic characteristics of Euro-Asia.

Regional entities of Euro-Asian continent and countries: Basic geographic view of regional geographic entities in Euro-Asia. Geographic view of some countries (as representatives of the region they belong to): France, Spain, Sweden, Germany, Russia, China, India, and Iraq (complex review with the emphasis on geographical regions of these countries, whereas for the other countries general geographic review within the entity to which they belong to has been given).

Regional-geographic review of North America: Geographic position of the continent. Geo-morphologic evolution. Types of climate. Hydrographic features of the continent (lakes and rivers). Global bio-geographic features. The Conquest of North America and European settlements. Autochthonous and immigrant population. Geographic view of larger urban agglomerates. Global industrial characteristics of North America.

Regional units of North America and its states: basis geographical view of regional-geographic units of North America. Geographic view of the United States (complex description emphasizing geographical regions) and basic geographic view of Canada.

Contrasts between regional units, interrelations and unity of geographic regions (in general), examples of Euro-Asia and North America.

**Subject: Regional Geography of South America, Africa and Australia**

**Semesters:** VII and VIII

**Number of classes per week:** 2+2

**Introduction:** Development, subject, methods and tasks of regional geography. Concept of region, regionalization, hierarchy and application of regional geography.

General geographical characteristics of South America (physical and social geography). Regional units of South America (Andes Mountains, Cordilleras, Pampas Sierra, Brazilian Highlands, Guiana Highlands, lowland regions: Llanos, Amazon, Mramore and Gran Chaco, Pampas, Patagonia and Atacama Desert). Northern tropical, Atlantic and Pacific States of South America – general geographic view. Detailed geographic view of certain states, as representatives of regions they belong to: Brazil, Chile and Argentina.

General geographical characteristics of Africa (physical and social geography). Regional units: African Mediterranean, Atlas, Sahara, Sudan, Guinea region, Congo, East Africa, and South Africa. Geographical view of certain states, as representatives of regions they belong to: Tunisia, Egypt, Ethiopia, Congo (Zaire), and South-African Republic.

General geographical characteristics of Australia (physical and social geography).

Regional-geographic units of Australia. Administrative and political units of Australia.

Interrelations and unity of geographic regions (in general), example of the continents in the southern hemisphere.

## Program contents at the Faculty of Natural Sciences in Novi Sad

**Subject: The Characteristics of the Regions of the World**

**Semesters:** VII and VIII

**Number of classes per week:** 2+1

It has a number of characteristics, which with their contents should make and introduction to a more detailed geographic analysis of some continents, continental macro regions and state in them. In that sense, it covers the

theoretical basis of regional geography, then, particularities of lowlands, mountain, polar and desert regions on the Earth. Finally, it attempts to summarize, find connections and unity of geographic regions of the Earth.

**Subject: Regions of the World I (Europe)**

**Semesters:** VII and VIII

**Number of classes per week:** 2+1

This course has a specific regional-geographic character intended to consider Europe in detail. Classical regional-geographical methodology is applied and the following is included: general geographic review of the continent, some continental macro regions and within them the review of all countries.

**Subject: Regions of the World II (Asia and Africa)**

**Semesters:** VII and VIII

**Number of classes per week:** 2+1

Its concept is primarily to deal with the regional and geographic characteristics of Asia, and then Africa, not only as a whole unit, but also in some regional units, which make their regional parts, and also some states chosen by the principle of representation. The course is very interesting as besides theoretical part there are practical activities in which there are possibilities to get to know the most characteristic and the most interesting parts of these continents and their smaller regions.

**Subject: Regions of the World III (North America, South America and Australia)**

**Semesters:** VII and VIII

**Number of classes per week:** 2+1

This subject consists of complex, interdisciplinary review of North, Middle and South America, as well as Australia. The contents deal with the general characteristics of the mentioned units, criteria of their division, as well as a complex geographic review of states applying the principle of representation, mainly with the states of Middle and South America. On the other hand, the states of the North America, due to their importance, are reviewed completely.

## Conclusions

Let us remind of the basic task in studying the subject Regional geography (or Geography of the World or Geography of Yugoslavia). Namely, it is certain geographical area- region (either on the territory of Yugoslavia or any other country) in the northern or southern

hemisphere or geographically characteristic region stretching over territories of several countries.

What is *geographical region*? Let us remind of the definition of the word region from which the name for this subject (Regional geography) has been derived. The first scientific definition was given by A. Hetner in 1927. Professor M. Vasovic (1971) gave the definition of region: "Geographical region is a part of the area of the earth's surface filled with objects of inorganic (relief, climate, waters), organic (plants, animals, and humans as physical beings) and – anthropogenic origin (human society and its visible creative work)". The definition is partly modified version of R. Rsumovic's definition (1964).

What is the basic *scientific method* in regional geographic study? There is not any science that uses only one method, however some methods appear dominant depending on the discipline. Synthetic method is mainly used in regional geography, although analytical and evolutionary-spatial methods are used to a certain extent.

In analyzing the number of classes of Regional geography at the universities in Serbia, the largest number of classes has been noticed at the Faculty of Natural Sciences and Mathematics in Pristina in comparison to the Faculty of Geography in Belgrade and the Faculty of Natural Sciences and Mathematics in Novi Sad. Assuming that the semester starts October 1<sup>st</sup> and finishes May 31<sup>st</sup> that is 15 working weeks (holidays included). If that is the case, than the students at the Faculty of Natural Sciences and Mathematics in Pristina attend 270 classes of Regional geography during their studies, the students in Novi Sad 240 and the students in Belgrade 150.

The analysis of the period of attending has shown that the course in Regional geography of the World is held in the final, i.e. fourth year of the studies in Novi Sad. In Belgrade the course is equally divided and held in the third (50%) and the fourth (50%) year, whereas in Pristina 2/3 of the course is held in the fourth year and 1/3 in the third year.

It is important to underline that the students with major Teacher of geography, after graduation teach geography in primary and secondary schools. It is well known that topics from regional geography occupy 3/4 of the curriculum for the subject geography in primary

schools (4<sup>th</sup> grade – Europe, 7<sup>th</sup> grade – other continents and 8<sup>th</sup> grade – geography of Yugoslavia).

Having given a brief review of the subject, concept of region, and basic method of regional geography, analyzed the number of classes at universities, studied primary and secondary school curricula and the periods of listening to the subject, than we reached the point at which certain thoughts, instructions and messages connected with the curriculum concept of teaching Regional geography (Geography of the World and Yugoslavia) at faculties of geography in Serbia should be expressed.

Having understood the subject of Regional geography, definition (notion) of region and the basic (leading) method of this science, the following instructions might be given.

Students of geography who study to teach geography either in primary or secondary schools should attend lectures in Regional geography only after they have attended lectures and preferably passed exams in all general geography disciplines (i.e. all the subjects in physical and social geography). Without the knowledge of physical and social geography, the students would be unprepared to cope with the tasks of lectures in Regional geography. That is the issue to which the basis synthetic method of Regional geography directs. The subject matter in Regional geography is synthesis and application of knowledge of general geography disciplines.

Has this instruction been followed in making curricula at our universities? Yes and no. At most of the faculties subjects in general geography are at 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> year of the studies. According to the instructions given, the subjects in regional geography should be taught at 4<sup>th</sup> year. The instructions have been completely followed for the subject Regional geography of the World at the Faculty of Natural Sciences and Mathematics in Novi Sad, mainly followed at the Faculty of Natural Sciences and Mathematics in Pristina and partly followed at the Faculty of Geography in Belgrade. The second subject Geography of Yugoslavia the instructions have been completely followed at the Faculty of Natural Sciences and Mathematics in Pristina (4<sup>th</sup> year), partly followed at the Faculty of Natural Sciences and Mathematics in Novi Sad and at the Faculty of Geography in Belgrade.

According to the analysis of the number of classes in regional-geographical disciplines (e.g. Regional geography of the World) the following data were obtained. The total number of classes ranges from 150 (Faculty of Geography in Belgrade) to 270 classes (Faculty of Natural Sciences and Mathematics in Pristina), whereas in Novi Sad the total number for the subject 240. Similarly, the total number of classes for the subject Geography of Yugoslavia ranges from 90 (Faculty of Natural Sciences and Mathematics in Pristina) to 180 (Faculty of Natural Sciences and Mathematics in Novi Sad), whereas the Faculty of Geography in Belgrade has the total of 120. It is possible that the most realistic and closest to the needs of Regional geography of the World is the total number of classes in the curriculum of the Faculty of Natural Sciences and Mathematics in Novi Sad, i.e. 240 classes. As far as Geography of Yugoslavia is concerned, the closest to the needs is the total number of classes in the curriculum of the Faculty of Geography in Belgrade, i.e. 120 classes.

The present total number of classes at universities is in discordance with the total number of classes in primary schools. We do not recommend full concordance but at least to preserve the present total number of classes of this subject so that the abundant subject matter in Geography of the World could be thoroughly presented to students – teachers of geography in primary and secondary schools according to trends and achievements of modern geography.

The best organization of period for listening to this subject is in Novi Sad, i.e. it is during 4<sup>th</sup> (final) year (the reasons have been discussed earlier).

The total number of classes stands for quality to certain extent, but at the same time it is not the measure of quality. The quality is determined by program content. What subjects are to be studied within the regional-geographical disciplines and what are the program contents for those? It is necessary to use the current contents modified to meet demands of modern education and divided into different subjects according to the instructions and suggestions quoted. What are the subjects and contents modified to meet demands of modern education and trends in modern geography? It would be exaggeration to have only two university professors (M. Pavlovic - lecturer of

Geography of Yugoslavia and R. Davidović - lecturer of Regional geography of the World) to answer the question. The answer should be searched for among the lecturers of these subjects at universities in Serbia and Montenegro. Certainly, more experienced geography teachers from primary and secondary schools should be included in the research. They would supply us with the information about the knowledge they lack when they have finished their studies so that it could be used to improve the future curricula. This expert discussion should also include retired university professors. Their broad experience could contribute to the discussion of the issue, because most of them are founders of the educational-scientific discipline at our universities. In this way, a unique curriculum content for these subjects would be achieved and it would be valid for all faculties in Serbia and Yugoslavia, which educate future teachers of geography. It would also be modified to meet modern education and present achievements in geography.

This suggestion might launch initiative for creating a unique textbook or literature which would be used at all universities. The authors of the textbook, of parts of it, would be the lecturers at our universities who would present

the matter they have the most knowledge in. The basis for the new textbook would be the textbooks written by our predecessors. In making new textbooks it is necessary to involve retired professors if they are willing to participate. For the present teaching staff it would not be a matter of choice but obligation, if the expert scientific group agreed on the issue in advance and faculties supported it and proclaimed it a normative. In this way, the problem of "creating" subjects according to the available staff, which is more frequent at other faculties, would be avoided.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> program contents of the Geography of the World and Geography of Yugoslavia at the faculties will be analyzed according to the curricula. The two subjects are the basic subjects in regional geography for future geography teachers.

<sup>2</sup> Curricula of the Faculty of Geography, Belgrade and Department of Geography, Tourism and Hotel Industry will be analyzed in detail here. The curricula of the faculties in Pristina and Nis are similar to those in Novi Sad or Belgrade, but we failed to obtain the actual curricula at these two faculties. It is our belief that the paper would not lose of its

actuality and that it would succeed to portray the teaching of Regional Geography at the faculties of geography in Serbia at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

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