

How is your country moving geography into the future? – Poland

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Nowadays Polish geography as a scientific discipline is experiencing a crisis. The contemporary condition of Polish geography is an effect of our history, especially a specific kind of treating of science during the communist system. A long-lasting isolation from a free exchange of scientific discussions and lack of publishing research on an international forum, slight expenditures on scientific research in the country, censorship etc., meant that apart from significant outputs of Polish geographers their studies either are unknown abroad or they don't meet international standards and they don't answer demands of society in XXI-st century.

Therefore after 1989 when a new political, social and economic reality occurred, the situation of science has also started to change. The new generation of researches, educated in circumstances different from those of their predecessors, has lead to new opportunities and aspirations. These changes caused important discussion on how can we move geography forward? This long-term discussion, which is still alive, has produced some noticeable steps, which should move Polish geography forward.

These steps are:

1. The broadening of the cognitive level of geography and the undertaking of new fields of research.

This pluralism demonstrates itself in the emergence of new disciplines in Polish geography. These are: geography of trade and services, medical geography, geography of tourism, geography of pilgrimages, geography of sport and electoral geography.

These scientific fields could not been developed before mainly because of political reasons. It is impossible to conduct research in the sphere of electoral geography, for example the level of activity of different demographic structures if there are no democratic election in this country. It is also difficult to conduct research into the main streams of pilgrimages when people can-not freely subscribe to their religion.

2. The broadening of the methodological level.

This step is visible in Polish geography in going away form only statistical, quantitative methods and starting to include some qualitative methods into their studies. This trend is especially visible in humanistic geography and the ecology of the landscape.

3. Intensification of usefulness of geography as a science

Polish geography as a science has some traditions in this field, for example geographers have worked on every administrative division in Poland which last time was in 1999. Nowadays the results of geographer's research are often used in

creating the concept of spatial development plans on different levels. Another important step in developing geography for the future is conducting works on monitoring the environment, preparing several analyses for people connected with crisis management and the architecture of landscape. Geographers also see the future of geography in using modern satellite technologies for a modern navigation not only for private people but also for public utility services, for example: ambulances.

4. Intensification aspirations for making up for some delays in computer technologies

GIS in Polish geography is one of the youngest and resilient disciplines. Before 2000 there were no GIS courses during geography studies. There was only a course called computer techniques, because the output of Polish geographers in this area was not large. At the beginning computer techniques of spatial analyses served for collecting environmental data. Nowadays these simple techniques has transformed into GIS which now in Polish geography means collecting, transforming, actualizing and analyzing of geographical spatial information, which means the management of this information. So GIS in Polish geography has evolved from the tool of making digital maps to the system of rich information which are accessible and used by geographers managing the environment. GIS is now a very important stream of scientific research and an important academic course.

5. Increasing concern over the position of school geography.

More and more often Polish scientists start to appreciate close relationship between the situation of geography as a science and geography as a school subject. In the time of transformation geography as a school subject lost its importance on the list of all subjects. One of the proofs of this situation is the withdrawal of geography from the primary school and replacing it with science. Another proof is the small number lessons in geography in the gymnasium and lyceum stage. The first significant step for an improvement of this bad situation was fighting for geography as a GCSE subject. Now geography is one of the most popular subjects among students. It is a big merit of geography teachers which are better and better prepared for their job. In Poland (for example in Pedagogical University in Kraków) there are several research projects connected with the quality of competences of students who are going to be teachers. This kind of research helps to modernize the process of studying. The Polish Geographical Society (PTG) organizes every year a country-wide geographical contests for secondary students. It helps to instil real enthusiasm for geography in the country and gives them an opportunity to compete with peers from other countries.

6. Adapting higher geographical education to the needs of the labour market.

This process of adaption caused many universities to offer full time and part time, and post-graduated students several new specialities. The most popular specialties are: tourism and recreation, the base of enterprise, spatial development, protection of the environment. Each speciality has a few modules. This variety means that

geography studies are still quite often chosen by young people and it increases their opportunities on the labour market. Also almost every university offers PhD courses.

7. Using the offer of the EU in the sphere of scientific studies.

This sphere is still one of the weaknesses of Polish geography because only a small group of scientists uses EU programmes for their research. There are a few reasons for this situation. One of this is our lack of experience in this area (we have been EU members since 2004). Another one is that there are many very good specialists who don't speak foreign languages on such a level which is indispensable for scientific discussions, preparing papers, following discussions on the international web-sites. The time to making up for these backlogs is needed. There is another group of Polish geographers who don't believe that their project can be accepted because earlier projects were rejected.

8. Polish research on the Philadelphia List.

This is also a new sphere for us and is a very important and essential way of moving Polish geography forward. These publications are quite rare so far. The reasons of such a situation are similar to the reasons presented above. There are not a lot of libraries in Poland where scientists can read all the foreign papers they need. It is still very expensive for Poles to buy these papers individually. Additionally for 4-5 years in most Polish geography departments scientists started to be rozliczany papers published on the Philadelphia List and these papers are very high estimated (from 10 to 25 points) meanwhile the same paper published in Poland gives him from 1 to 4 points.

It is obvious that this process will be rather long but it is very important link in the moving forward of Polish geography.