

The School Geography Curriculum in European Geography Education. Similarities and differences in the United Europe.

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- Aims
 - To gather the school geography curriculum from as many as possible European countries.
 - To locate and discuss the differences and similarities among the geography curriculums in European countries
 - To record the tendency of the geographical education in primary, lower and upper secondary schools in Europe
 - To compare the differences between the European school geography perception and that of USA

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- Data

- The data were drawn from the database of the European Education Systems in Europe

(http://www.eurydice.org/Eurybase/frameset_eurybase.html browsed in March, 3, 2004)

- books – articles
- personal communication by emails
- questionnaires
- the Greek Embassies in the European countries
- 30 countries in total

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Resources

Eurydice web page	e-mail communication	Books- Articles	National Web pages	Questionnaire
AUSTRIA	CROATIA	CYPRUS	BELGIUM-FLEMISH	CZECH REPUBLIC
BELGIUM	DENMARK	HELLAS	FINLAND	GERMANY
CROATIA	FINLAND	THE NETHERLANDS	MALTA	THE NETHERLANDS
CZECH REPUBLIC	POLAND	SWITZERLAND	PORTUGAL	SWEDEN
CYPRUS	ROMANIA	UK	SWEDEN	UK
DENMARK	SERBIA- MONTENEGRO	USA	UK	
ESTONIA	SPAIN			
FINLAND	UKRAINE			
FRANCE				
GERMANY				
THE NETHERLANDS				
HUNGARY				
IRELAND				
ITALY				
LATVIA				
LIECHTENSTEIN				
LUXEMBURG				
POLAND				
PORTUGAL				
ROMANIA				
SLOVAC REPUBLIC				
SLOVENIA				
SPAIN				
SWEDEN				
SWITZERLAND				
UK				

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Table 1. School Geography in Europe

GRADES		ELEMENTARY SCHOOL					LOWER SECONDARY			HIGH SCHOOL					
COUNTRIES		1 st	2 nd	3 rd	4 th	5 th	6 th	7 th	8 th	9 th	10 th	11 th	12 th	13 th	
AUSTRIA		G+H+B	G+H+B	G+H+B	G+H+B	G+E	G+E	G+E	G+E						
CZECH REPUBLIC					G+H	G+H	G	G	G	G	G	G			
DENMARK		G+S	G+S	G+S	G+S	G+S	G+S	G	G			G	CH		
FINLAND		G+B+C	G+B+C	G+B+C	G+B+C	G+B+C	G+B+C	G+B	G+B	G+B	G	G	G		
FRANCE				G+H	G+H	G+H	G+H+C	G+H+C	G+H+C	G+H+C	G+H	Br	Br		
GERMANY		G+H+B				GEOGRAPHY*					CHOISE*				
HELLAS			St	St	St	G	G	G	G						
IRELAND		G+H+S	G+H+S	G+H+S	G+H+S	G+H+S	G+H+S	G	G	G		CH	CH		
ITALY		GEOGRAPHY+ HISTORY*					G+H+C	G+H+C	G+H+C						
LIECHTENSTEIN			G+H+B	G+H+B			G	G	G		G	G	G	G	
POLAND					G+S	G+S	G+S	G	G	G	CH	CH			
PORTUGAL		St	St	St	St	G+H	G+H	G	G	G	Br	Br	Br		
SPAIN		G+H+S	G+H+S	G+H+S	G+H+S	G+H+S	G+H+S	G+H	G+H	G+H	G+H	Br	Br		
BELGIUM	FRENC	G	G	G	G	G	G	G+H	G+H	G+H	G+H	G+H	G+H	G+H	
	GERMAN							G	G	G	G	G	G		
	FLEMISH							G	G	G	G	G	G		
CROATIA						G	G	G	G	G	G	G	G		
CYPRUS				G	G	G	G	G	G	G					
ESTONIA								G	G	G	G	G	G		
THE NETHERLANDS					G	G	G	G	G	G	Br	Br	Br		
HUNGARY								G	G						
LATVIA						G	G	G	G	G					
LUXEBURG								GEOGRAPHY*							
MALTA								G	G	G	G	G			
ROMANIA				G	G	G	G	G	G	G	G	G	G		
SERBIA- MONTENEGRO						G	G	G	G	G	G	G	G		
SLOVACIA						G	G	G	G	G	G	G			
SLOVENIA							G	G	G	GEOGRAPHY*					
SWEDEN		GEOGRAPHY*													
SWITZERLAND											G+H+E+L				
UNITED KINGDOM		G	G	G	G	G	G	G	G	G	CH	CH	CH		
UKRAINE							G	G	G	G	G				

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Table 1 (cont.). Key to table 1

- *Key to Table 1: * geography is taught but we don't know in which grade, G: geography as compulsory course, CH: geography as elective course, Br: geography taught in branches, St: geography through Environment, G+B: geography + biology, G+H : geography + history, G+Sc: geography + science, G+E : geography + economical studies, G+H+Sc : geography + history + science, G+H+C : geography + history + citizenship, G+H+B : geography + history + biology, G+B+C: geography + biology +citizenship, G+H+E+L: geography + history + economical studies + law studies, St: Study of the Environment, Br: Geography in branches*

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Table 2. Countries where school geography is based on Themes

DENMARK	FINLAND	THE NETHERLANDS	POLAND	PORTUGAL	SWEDEN	U K
KNOWLEDGE	KNOWLEDGE		KNOWLEDGE		KNOWLEDGE	KNOWLEDGE &
UNDERSTANDING	UNDERSTANDING		UNDERSTANDING		UNDERSTANDING	UNDERSTANDING OF: PLACES, PATTERNS & PROCESSES
SKILLS	SKILLS	SKILLS	SKILLS	SKILLS	SKILLS	ENVIRONMENTAL CHANGES & SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT
(MAPS, ENQUIRE, ICT)	(MAPS, ENQUIRE, ICT)	(MAPS, ENQUIRE, ICT)	(MAPS, ENQUIRE, ICT)	(MAPS, ENQUIRE, ICT)	(MAPS, ENQUIRE)	
						SKILLS
						(MAPS, ENQUIRE, ICT)
Level of adjustment:	Level of adjustment:	Level of adjustment:	Level of adjustment:	Level of adjustment:	Level of adjustment:	Level of adjustment:
LOCAL	LOCAL	LOCAL		LOCAL	LOCAL	LOCAL
DENMARK & NEAREST SURROUNDINGS	FINLAND	THE NETHERLANDS	POLAND	PORTUGAL	SWEDEN	UNITED KINGDOM
	NORDIC COUNTRIES		EARTH	IBERIAN PENINSULA		
			EUROPE	EUROPE		EUROPE
WORLD	WORLD		WORLD	WORLD	WORLD	WORLD

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Table 3. Countries where school geography is based on Regional Geography

PLACES									
BELGIUM	GERMANY	CZECH REPUBLIC	CROATIA	CYPRUS	HELLAS	MALTA	SERBIA-MONTENEGRO	ROMANIA	UKRAINE
EUROPE	GEOGRAPHY: GENERAL WORLD	BASIC OF MAPS GEOGRAPHY: PHYSICAL – HUMAN CONTINENTS EUROPE CZECH REPUBLIC	PHYSICAL GEOGRAPHY CONTINENTS EUROPE CROATIA	BASIC OF MAPS HELLAS, CYPRUS EUROPE: PHYSICAL – HUMAN GEOGRAPHY COUNTRIES: PHYSICAL – HUMAN GEOGRAPHY	BASIC OF MAPS HELLAS, CYPRUS EUROPE, CONTINENTS: PHYSICAL – HUMAN GEOGRAPHY EARTH: GENERAL GEOGRAPHY COUNTRIES: PHYSICAL – HUMAN GEOGRAPHY	BASIC OF MAPS GEOGRAPHY: MALTA REGIONAL MEDITERANEAN COUNTRIES WESTERN ASIA-MIDDLE EAST	BASIC OF MAPS EARTH: GENERAL GEOGRAPHY HUMAN GEOGRAPHY CONTINENTS: ALL BUT EUROPE (will be included in the new curriculum) SERBIA - MONTENEGRO	GEOGRAPHY: BASICS GENERAL REGIONAL PHYSICAL HUMAN – ECONOMIC ENVIRONMENTAL ROMANIA EUROPE	GEOGRAPHY: GENERAL CONTINENT OCEAN UKRAINE SOCIAL GLOBAL ECONOMY

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Table 4. School geography in USA

THEMES		
ELEMENTS	SKILLS	PERSPECTIVES
THE WORLD IN SPATIAL TERMS PLACES AND REGIONS PHYSICAL SYSTEMS HUMAN SYSTEMS ENVIRONMENT & SOCIETY THE USES OF GEOGRAPHY	ASKING GEOGRAPHIC QUESTIONS ACQUIRING GEOGRAPHIC INFORMATIONS ORGANIZING GEOGRAPHICAL INFORMATIONS ANALYZING GEOGRAPHIC INFORMATIONS ANSWERING GEOGRAPHICAL QUESTIONS	SPATIAL ECOLOGICAL

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- **Results**
- Differences among the geography curriculums are evident not only in the subject itself but also in the different levels of education
- The differences are mainly on the time schedule, the content and the didactical approach
- From the 5th to 8th grade almost all countries teach the subject of geography as “a stand alone” subject.

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- Results (from table 1)
- 16 countries teach geography as a “stand alone” subject
- 14 countries teach geography through other subjects (interdisciplinary subject)
- All countries teach geography in the first two grades of the lower secondary school (except Switzerland?)
- In Austria geography is taught only through the disciplines of history, biology and economy.
- The most common interdisciplinary approach is Geography + History (11 countries out of 14)
- Only Belgium (French part), Sweden and UK start teaching geography from the 1st grade of the primary school. The other countries either start in a higher grade or teach elements of geography from the 1st grade through other disciplines

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- Results (from table 2)
- Geography is taught through
 - a) Themes and
 - b) Regions
- Denmark, Finland, The Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Sweden, and United Kingdom use Themes to teach geography giving emphasis on knowledge acquisition and skills (from local to global). They apply knowledge and skills on regions
 - There is a slight exception in Portugal and The Netherlands where emphasis is given in skills and, especially The Netherlands focuses in local geography

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- Results (from table 2)
 - None the less, the teaching of geography differs in the chosen themes and the way it is approached
 - Common thing is the wide use of ICT, satellite images, maps, air photographs etc. combined with more traditional teaching aids (i.e. the globe)

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- Results (from table 3)
 - The differences are more than the similarities. They all teach about local geography
 - Belgium (Flemish part), Croatia, Cyprus (only in primary school), Hellas, Malta, Serbia-Montenegro, Romania and Ukraine teach regional geography.
 - In Montenegro they don't teach about Europe while in Malta they teach mainly about the Mediterranean region.

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- The USA school geography perception
 - There is no geography curriculum in USA. Instead, geography teaching is based on the National Geography Standards, published in 1994
 - The National Geography Standards (NGS) in fact have the same aims as the European curriculums

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- The USA school geography perception
 - The NGS has three parts (table 4) and are addressed to pupils and students from 4th to 12th grade. These parts are common in many European curriculums, either all of them or part of them especially in those countries which teach geography through themes
 - elements
 - skills and
 - perspectives
 - each element contains a number of Geography Standards and each Geography Standard contains a set of related ideas and approaches to the subject matter of geography (nested formation). Totally, 6 Standards and 18 approaches.

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- The USA school geography perception
- Skills which the pupils and students are going to develop
 - asking geographic questions
 - acquiring geographic information
 - organizing geographic information
 - analyzing geographic information
 - answering geographic questions

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- The USA school geography perception
- Perspectives
 - There are two perspectives:
 - A) the spatial
 - B) the ecological
 - A perspective provides a frame of reference for asking and answering questions, identifying and solving problems, and evaluating the consequences of alternative actions (National Geography Standards, 1994. p.57)

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- European Geography vs. USA geography education
- They both use themes to acquire knowledge and skills. The themes are more precise in USA than in Europe.
- European countries use local and regional geography focusing mainly to national region to approach skills while USA use (mainly) places from all over the States.
- There is a wide interdisciplinary use of geography in Europe. In USA, geography is connected mainly to the environment.
- Europeans focus in different European cultures to understand geography.

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- Suggestions
- A school geography core, same for all European countries, would help European students to form a common basis on geography knowledge. Nowadays, European school geography looks very fragmented.
- As in other disciplines (i.e. mathematics) all students learn basic things (i.e. addition, multiplication, etc.), geography can focus in map reading and interpreting through specific tasks. The tasks can cover those parts of geography that have nothing to do with specific regions (i.e. orientation, longitude and latitude, etc.)
- European Geography Association can monitor the formation of a European school geography main curriculum through an ad hoc committee to promote the European Geography Standards.

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**SCHOOL GEOGRAPHY FACES
AN IDENTITY CRISIS IN EUROPE**