

The Status of Geography; an issue of grave concern?

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References:

Holt-Jensen, A.(2005 in prep): Vidal de la Blache's regionalgeografiske forskningsmodell. In Ugelvik Larsen, S. (red): Modeller i geografi. Bergen.

Holt-Jensen, A. (2000): Territoriality, space and place. Fennia 1,2000.

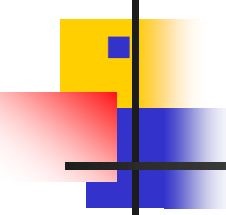
Holt-Jensen. A. (1999): Geography; History and Concepts. 3rd ed. Sage; London.

Sack, R.D. (1997): Homo Geographicus.

- ***The uneven status of the discipline of geography from country to country is a theme that has not been much analysed.***
- ***One reason is clearly the lack of data, but this can be helped by the TUNING PROJECT (presented yesterday)'.

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- ***Some of the data collected will make comparison possible***
- ***Still : How to measure 'status'?***
- ***Number of students enrolled compared to other disciplines?***
- ***OR by the relative mass of scientific publications,***
- ***by public opinion polls for ranking useful disciplines***
- ***by number of teaching hours in the school system***
- ***In 1988 I made a survey in the Nordic Countries based on relative student enrollment and academic staff.***
- ***Conclusion was and still is: geography has a weak position in the Norwegian University system, strong in Finland and***
- ***the discipline is rather strong in many other countries at the same level of development (UK, Canada, Eastern and Central Europe, Netherlands) but WEAK in USA.***
- ***A number of hypotheses can be assessed***

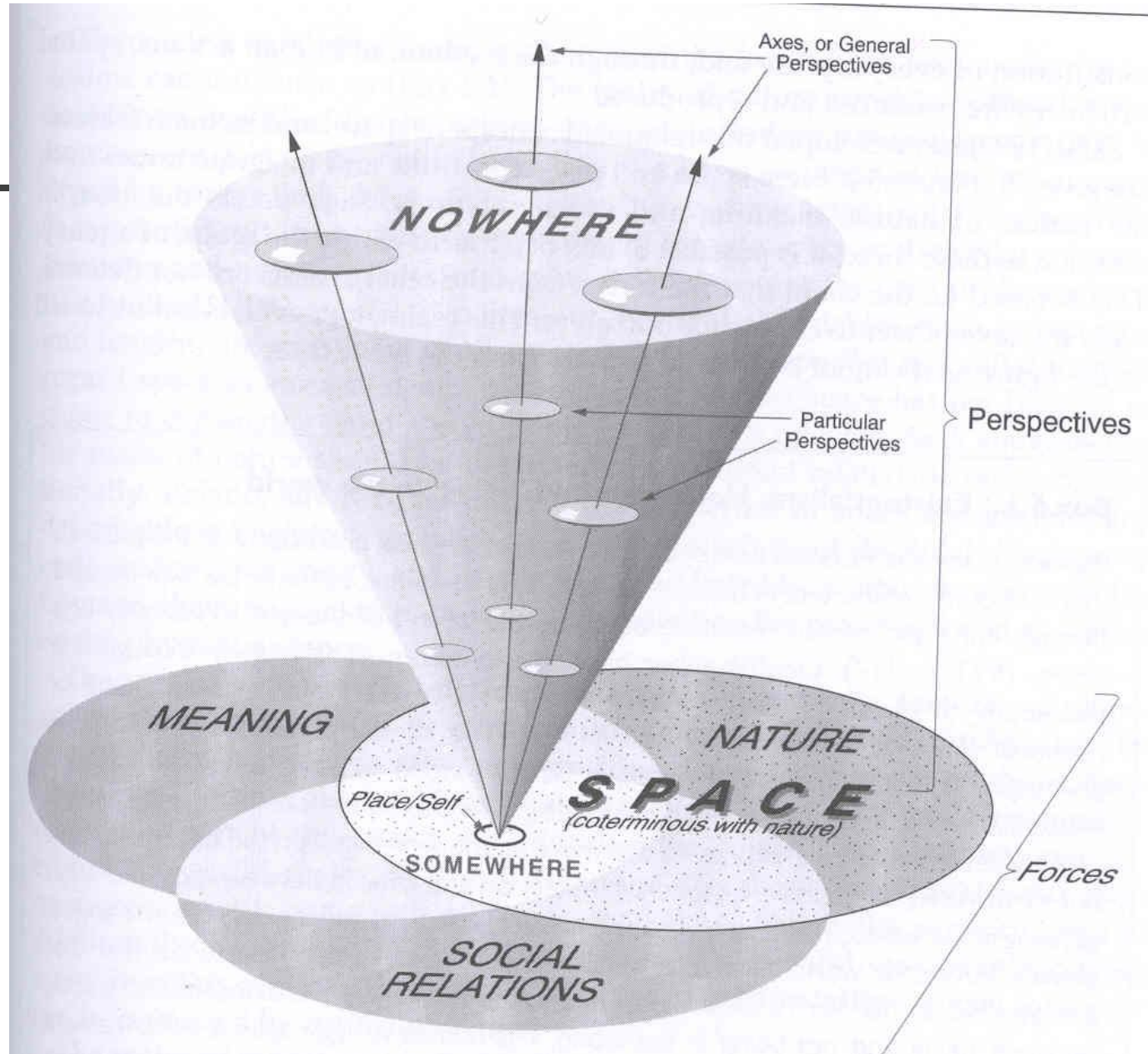
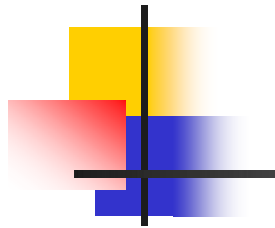
HYPOTHESES (1)

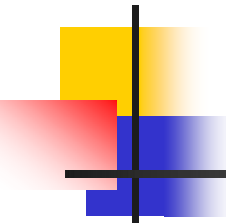


The status of geography in a country is directly correlated to the position of geography in the school curriculum.

- The status of geography is dependent upon how early it was institutionalised , i.e. when a university degree in the discipline was required to teach geography in high school.
- The strength of school and university geography today depends on the degree to which the subject in the past was considered to further the cause of *national identity*.
- The status of the discipline is dependent on the degree to which geography is maintained as a united discipline encompassing both man and nature (Sack 1997: *Homo Geographicus*)

The realms of nature, social relations and meaning

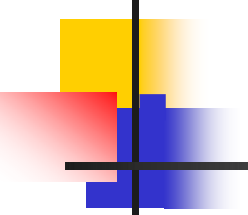




Homo Geographicus: 'place' and 'self' is linked in the same framework; This is basic understanding of life and the core of geographical learning.

- The perspectives of natural sciences (including medicine and architecture), social sciences and humanistic sciences give 3 different perspectives and understandings of the world, but none gives the full truth. The geographical consciousness and place analyses is needed in addition!!
- But we cannot cover everything! How to tackle our vast task?
- Real problems when discipline is weak as in Bergen when I am told: when you retire in 2 years URBAN GEOGRAPHY and Planning is OUT!
- And when the Faculty which geography is linked to (Social Sciences in Bergen) cannot understand why we need physical geography! Or social geographers in Torun???

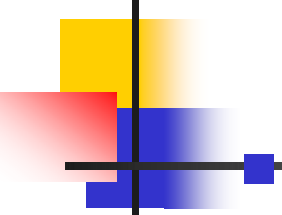
HYPOTHESES (2)



Leading personalities (iconoclasts) or lack of such may in many cases explain the growth or decline of the discipline.

- The status of geography is to a large extent dependent upon its image in the press and among common people.
- The status is dependend upon the degree to which we have succeeded in educating candidates for *planning* and other jobs outside the educational system (NL, D, SE, NO)
- The status of geography is dependent upon its ability to adjust to new developments in society and adopt new research (GIS).

HYPOTHESES (3)



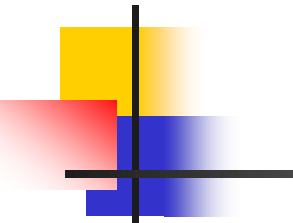
— Growth has a tendency to foster growth, decline may accelerate decline.

- Student enrollment reflects current happenings and 'fashions' as reflected in media, diciplines that market themselves by what is seen as 'oldfashioned' suffer.



Some positive trends

- When you are weak, but still fighting , you either recover and improve, or die.
- We just won a position in social science didactics for geography (1 of 2 in Social Sc.Faculty)
- The first book in didactics of geographical teaching just appeared in Norwegian and we got the first PhD students in the field.
- The new BA in geography attracts students, but still only 50% of what BA in *Social Anthropology* gets!!!!
- GEO 100 Intro in GEO: GLOBAL PROCESSES and LOCAL RESPONSES have this year 50 students, double as many as last year.
- GIS attracts student but depends on 2 staff members



We need unified geography! We need focus on place and local contingent adaptations to global structural forces! WE need to teach physical geography, ecogeography and social geography in systematic and regional contexts.

**GEOGRAPHY IS A VERY NEEDED
DISCIPLINE
IN EDUCATION OF THE NEXT GLOBAL
GENERATION!**

- Thanks for your attention!