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ACADEMIC INSTITUTIONALIZATION AND SOCIAL RELEVANCE OF GEOGRAPHY

René Matlovič, Kvetoslava Matlovičová, Barbora Némethyová

University of Presov

Department of Geography and Regional Development, Ul. 17. Novembra 1, 081 16 Prešov, Slovakia

rene.matlovic@unipo.sk, kveta.matlovicova@gmail.com, barbora.nemethyova@gmail.com

Abstract: The relevance of a scientific discipline determines its position in the context of other scientific disciplines, which nowadays increasingly compete among themselves for limited financial sources and try to increase the attractiveness of human resources. Therefore, the question of relevance may become a question of its further development or even survival. Academic institutional establishment of geography can be considered as an important signal of confirmation of its social relevance. Institutional changes related to geography can significantly influence its social position and its future. Throughout the history of geography we can differentiate a number of events and turmoil that either significantly strengthened or, on the contrary, weakened the prestige of geography. The first option included establishment or renewal of academic geographic departments. The other involves attenuation and abolishment of geographic departments. In our contribution we will briefly indicate how were the changing circumstances of the institutionalization of geography related to its social relevance.

Key words: academic institutionalization, branding, geography, social relevance,

INTRODUCTION

The relevance of a scientific discipline determines its position in the context of other scientific disciplines, which nowadays increasingly compete among themselves for limited financial resources. Therefore, the question of relevance may become a question of its further development or even survival. Academic institutional establishment of geography can be considered as an important signal of confirmation of its social relevance. Institutional changes related to geography can significantly influence its social position and its future. Throughout the history of geography we can differentiate a number of events and turmoil that either significantly strengthened or, on the contrary, weakened the prestige of geography. The first option included establishment or renewal of academic geographic departments. The other involves attenuation and abolishment of geographic departments. In our contribution we will briefly indicate how were the changing circumstances of the institutionalization of geography related to its social relevance.

STATISTIC FEATURES OF INITIAL ACADEMIC INSTITUTIONALIZATION OF GEOGRAPHY

The question of social relevance of geography is not new. It emerged already in the initial phase of institutionalization of geography as a modern discipline, which begun in the 19th century. Several geographic societies and institutes were formed and geography was continually established as a modern field of study at the university level. The academic institutionalization of geography can be perceived as a means of confirming its relevance, because it enables professionalization and consequent reproduction of human resources, inevitable to ensure the professional geographic research and education. On the other side we have to admit that the academic institutionalization does not have to be the only way for confirmation of relevance of geography.¹

The beginnings of academic institutionalization of geography can be associated with German universities², (the first authentic professorship of geography was established in Berlin, in 1825). It was related to the then university sector changes, which were a reaction to social discontent with their then conditions. Wilhelm von Humboldt developed a new model of university, based on which a university in Berlin was established in 1810. Humboldt principles were then applied also to other universities (Hejwosz 2010, p. 75). Regarding the establishment of geography a key role was the academic freedom of research and lecturing, which released strict academic curricula and enabled to choose the subjects, in which the students were interested in. Humboldt's principle of the unity of knowledge was based on the philosophical assumption that the individual branches of science are complementary and together they form general knowledge and are therefore equally important (Hejwosz 2010, p. 75). A very important factor in the academic institutionalization of geography was the influence of a state. It resulted from the historical-political situation in the 70s of the 19th century, when after the Franco-Prussian War and the unification of several German countries in 1871 a new state needed geographic education for its stabilization, which would contribute to the consolidation of a new territorial identity. It shows that the motives that lead to the institutionalization of geography at German universities were not based on scientific relevance or internal stimuli reflecting natural development of scientific knowledge.

It was proved also by the fact that even the scientific boards of universities protested against

¹ An example may be a geography of Catalonia, which showed quite good vitality, quality and modern approaches and even though it did not have a position of a university discipline. Geographer Paul Vila, influenced by vidalian regional-geographic tradition, under the authority of the Catalan autonomous government in 1932 prepared with his team an innovative project of regional division of Catalonia. At the University of Barcelona the study programme of geography was prepared in the academic year 1936-37, but its implementation was delayed due to the civil war (Albet, Zusman, 2009, p. 296).

² Geography was lectured at the universities also before its official institutionalization. It is evident that at the University of Königsberg (today Kaliningrad) physical geography was lectured by Immanuel Kant in 1784. At the Sorbonne in Paris they established the professorship of geography already in 1809, however it was occupied by historians. The first authentic professorship of geography was established in 1825 at the university in Berlin and the first professor became Karl Ritter (Hess 2009, p. 481). Another professors were G.B. Mendelssohn in Bonn (1847, died in 1857), Eduard Wapäus in Göttingen (1854), Karl J.L. Neumann in Vratislav (1856) and Robert von Schlagintweit in Giessene (1864). After Ritter's death in 1859 the professorship in Berlin remained unoccupied and the lectures were carried out by a historian, associate professor Heinrich Kiepert. It created a hiatus, because in the period of 1859-1871 there was not any new professor appointed. Later in 1871 Oscar Peschel in Leipzig was appointed a professor (James, Martin 1981, p. 164). A major breakthrough occurred in 1874, when Prussian government decided to establish the professorships of geography at all Prussian universities. (James, Martin 1981, p. 165). Under the German influence another geographic departments were created in Central Europe relatively very soon – e.g. in Krakow (1849), where a poet Wincenty Pol became a professor and in Vienna (1851), where the first professor of geography was Friedrich Simony.

state authorities, because geography as a field of study was established largely against their will. It was typical that several newly established departments employed scientists with non-geographic education³ (Filipp 1992, p. 10).

As Filipp (1992, p. 11) reminds, this development caused that geography had become a scientific discipline dependent on state power. Social-political and war events and expansion of nation states in the second half of the 19th century stimulated geographic research and education in other European countries. Prussian victory in the war with France was the result of better geographic knowledge of Prussian military forces. The failure and the loss of Alsace-Lorraine triggered a growing wave of patriotism in France that increased the demand for geographical knowledge about the French territory and inhabitants. State therefore supported the development of geographic curriculum very actively (Benko, Desbiens, 2009, p. 271). As a result, geography was established throughout the number of French universities⁴, even it had to face the resistance of the other sciences as well as left-oriented wings that promoted internationalist ideas (Maddrell, 2009, p. 421). Similarly, the Japan's geographical knowledge was strategically useful in the China-Japanese and the Russian-Chinese war at the end of the 19th and at the beginning of the 20th century. In the military fields, geography was largely represented in the Latin-American countries, which continually established their own military geographic institutes – in Argentina (1904), Chile (1992), Columbia (1935) and Bolivia (1936) (Albet, Zusman, 2009, p. 299). In the USA, the development of geography also ties to the national interests in the expansion and consolidation of territory and national identity. The development of modern geography was closely related to the terrain research of western regions, which was a part of geological research and had the support of federal government. New earth sciences departments at the U.S. universities were therefore mainly common geological-geographical departments or institutes⁵. (Maddrell, 2009, p. 420-421). In a similar socio-political context the primary academic institutionalization of Czech geography took place. The first associate professor of geography at the University of Prague had become Jan Palacký in 1856, who was later in 1891 appointed a professor of geography. In the 90s of the 19th century a national emancipation struggle of the Czech nation culminated. In this period the Geographical Association of Bohemia was established and a new geographic scientific journal was released (Jeleček 2004, p. 13). In Slovakia the first academic department was formed at the Comenius University in Bratislava in the 20s of the 20th century. Geography was already lectured in the academic year 1921-1922. The existence of a separate workplace (Geographic seminar) dates back to 1923 (Lauko 2006, p. 45). It was a period when after the formation of Czechoslovakia in 1918, Slovak institutions of higher education were freely formed, which was not possible in the previous period.

A different situation was in the Great Britain. If we do not take into consideration a short existence of professorship at the University of London in 1830, the first permanent

³ For example botanist and historian Kirchhoff in Halle (1871), philologist and historian Gerland in Strasbourg (1873), geologist von Richthofen in Bonn (1873), philologist, historian and geographer Partsch in Vratislav (1876), mathematician Wagner in Königsberg (1876), botanist and historian Fischer in Kiel (1878) (Filipp, 1992, p. 10).

⁴ The first geographer who was appointed a professor of geography at the Sorbonne in Paris, established in 1809, was Paul Vidal de la Blache in 1898 (James, Martin 1981, p. 190). In 1921 geography departments were established at almost every out of 16 French universities (James, Martin 1981, p. 192).

⁵ Geography as a modern discipline was introduced due to the geologist William Morris Davis at Harvard in 1878, where he began to act as an instructor of physical geography. Consequently new departments providing geographic courses were established also at The Columbia Teachers College (1899), The Cornell University (1902), The University of California (1903), The University of Chicago (1903), The University of Nebraska (1905), The Miami University (1906) and continually at other universities (James, Martin, 1981, p. 280).

professorship was established in 1887 at the University of Oxford⁶, and one year later in Cambridge. Several British universities were rather reluctant to introduce geography as an academic discipline, because they had an aversion to its ties with the empire. It was also criticized for the lack of scientific rigour (Maddrell, 2009, p. 421). Introducing of geography at British universities was mostly the result of The Royal Geographical Society efforts (James, Martin 1981, p. 201). However, less importance of state in the establishment of British geography did not mean that the questions of social relevance of the discipline were forgotten. H. Mackinder had mentioned in his inauguration speech that new geography could serve for the needs of statesmen, businessmen, scientists, historians and teachers (Maddrell 2009, p. 421). British geography in its further development had supported the application line, mainly in the field of urban and regional development (Unwin 2006). This was primarily due to D. Stamp and his followers (Unwin 2006).

CONSEQUENCES OF ETATISTIC INSTITUTIONALIZATION OF GEOGRAPHY

Etatistic institutionalization of geography to some extent influenced the further development of the discipline. A contradictory situation was created inside the geographic community, where on one hand the etatized geography should have been obedient to the state which ensured the support and resources for its survival. On the other hand, the scientific requirements could find themselves contradictory to the requirements of state (Filipp, 1992, p. 11). It resulted in still persisting doubts of several geographers about the role of the discipline and frequent discussions of geographers about the relevance, identity, external position of geography as a scientific discipline and the search for a unifying platform for increasingly fragmented system of geographic disciplines and paradigms (more in Matlovič 2006, 2007, 2009, Matlovič, Matlovičová 2007).

These concerns about the scientism cyclically occur during the development of geography. Already in the late pre-modern era in the 18th century, geography faced a notable criticism. M Bowen (1981 in Wilczyński 2010, p. 87) noticed that the quantitative increase in the number of publications was not accompanied by a qualitative increase in its substantive level. This was probably one of the reasons why geography in the 18th century lagged behind the prestige of physics, astronomy and biology. Criticism had been directed mainly to its descriptive character, stuffiness, excessive popularity and the lack of theoretical foundations based on a consistent philosophy. Insufficient scientism, however, at this time did not endangered social relevance and appreciation of geography. It was proved, for example, by costly expeditions organized from England to Oceania. The importance of geography in the then society was anchored in its practical benefits in expanding of spheres of influence of individual European countries. However, the scientific reputation of geography was not high, which was evident in the negative reactions of university scientific boards on the establishment of geographic professorships in the 19th century. Even more unpleasant consequences in relation to geography were brought after the World War II in the U.S.A. A numerous group of geographers during the war were called into the army and intelligence services. Though, it turned out that their knowledge and skills are inadequate. Geographers had wide, but still shallow knowledge. The solution of problems required rather precise and deep analyses of information. E. Ackerman (1945, p. 124) in his critical contribution suggested that the war revealed the truth about geographers as “more or less amateurs in the subject in which they publish”. Geography reputation had somewhat suffered also from discredited geopolitics

⁶ Halford J. Mackinder was appointed a professor at the Oxford University in 1887. Besides the scientific activities he carried out a number of functions in practice – among other things, he was a member of Parliament in 1910-1922.

(collaboration with Nazis) and criticism of geographic determinism⁷ and exceptionalism (e.g. Schaefer 1953). These facts influenced the decision of the prestigious Harvard University to cancel the Department of geography in 1948 (Castree 2005, p. 61). In the next years it was followed by Yale, Stanford, University of Michigan, Columbia and The University of Chicago. In the prestigious group of American universities which are united in the Ivy League since 1954, only the geography at Dartmouth College was maintained. The leaders of American geographic departments even the decades after these events, for example at the AAG Annual Congress (The Association of American Geographers), worried about the question of maintaining their existence (Cohen 1998). However, in the last decades, positive signals for the improvement of social prestige of geography were recorded. AAG draws its attention to the questions of social relevance since the 90s of the 20th century. This effort is documented in the comprehensive publication from 1997 (Rediscovering...). One positive signal is the renewal of geography at prestigious Harvard University in 2006 in the form of center for geographic analyses, strictly oriented on spatial-analytical geography and geospatial technologies (Nayak, Jeffrey 2011, p. 49).

In addition to the criticism of low scientism of geography, which could endanger the relevance of a science, there appeared another kind of criticism, which is to some extent related to the etatistic support of geography. It was a period of the late 60s and early 70s of the 20th century. Particularly the young generation of geographers in the USA and later in The Great Britain was frustrated by the then government policies, which led the war in Vietnam, or were unable to cope with the growing economic disparities and social injustice. For this reason they were not interested in the activities applying geographic knowledge in favor of government power, because they saw in them the support of hatred capitalism (Unwin 2006). Discontent was fully revealed at the AAG meeting in Boston in 1971. Geographers had claimed there that they intend to be socially involved even outside the auditoriums and libraries, which had led to the formation of politically radical wing directed to Marxism, anarchism, and other critical movements (Unwin 2006, p. 115). As Unwin (2006, p. 116) suggested, in further discussions there appear nontrivial semantic difference between “applied geography” and “relevant geography”, which even could be perceived as binary oppositions. While the applied geography was associated primarily with the saturation of the needs and interests of official establishment, the relevant geography emphasized the solution of social problems, particularly social injustice, poverty and marginalization (Unwin 2006, p. 116). Some critics of the applied geography questioned its explanatory and prediction capabilities, which must be perceived in the broader context of criticism of logical positivism and on its basis developing spatial-analytical geography at the turn of 60s and 70s of the 20th century. This criticism was focused mainly on unrealistic demands on the objectivity of research, dehumanization, extreme reductionism, ignoring the ethical issues and remoteness from the solutions of contemporary problems. A part of the critical wing members therefore avoided applied research and focused rather on the questions of research quality and its framing among the modern theoretical and intellectual discussions. The other group of critical geographers offered an alternative to the existing applied geography. In this context, we could mention the activities of D. Harvey, D. Mitchell in the field of so called People`s Geography, which resulted in an initiative entitled “The People`s Geography Project”. They aimed at the critical evaluation of everyday life in the context of changing power relations and social relations and on the possibilities of transformation these relations in order to achieve social

⁷ German geopolitics which introduced the concept of “*Lebensraum*“, continually developed itself during the interwar period into the doctrine based on geographic determinism and explaining territorial conquests. (Ištók 2003, p. 70). Some authors (e.g. Wojtanowicz, 2009, p. 30) point at the inadequacy of the complete rejection of geographic determinism. They consider this approach as ideological and harmful, because it evokes a total independence of a human on the geographic environment.

justice (<http://www.peoplesgeographyproject.org/>).

Along with the radical movement, based on the criticism of spatial-analytical geography, a new humanistic wing was formed, which also did not neglect the question of relevance. The question of relevance of geography is seen by the representatives of humanistic geography according to Buttimer (1991, p. 111) in the context of a shift of interest by the representatives of the other scientific disciplines (e.g. anthropology, land architecture, history, literature) and applied fields (e.g. law, psychotherapy) – towards the traditional and fundamental geographic concepts such as space and place, openness and closeness, home and country, territory and distance, immobility and mobility. In this context, there are warnings that geographers can become a minority in their own discipline, because other scientists significantly contribute to the development of geography more than the geographers themselves.

CONCLUSIONS

In the paper we have tried to highlight the interdependencies between the academic institutionalization and social relevance of geography. Institutional changes related to geography have significantly influenced its social position and future. Initial academic institutionalization, which we consider as a signal for confirmation of social relevance of geography, had been realized in most countries based on the initiative or significant state support. Besides the indisputable advantages, however, the etatistic institutionalization of geography has also brought some negatives. It is mainly a contradictory situation, where on one hand the etatized geography should have been obedient to the state which ensured the support and resources for its survival. On the other hand, the scientific requirements could find themselves contradictory to the requirements of a state (Filipp, 1992, p. 11). Another consequence were several critical movements within the geographical thinking, which were rather resistant towards the support of official establishment. The accompanying effect involves still persisting doubts of several geographers about the role of the discipline and frequent discussions of geographers about the relevance, identity, external position of geography as a scientific discipline and the search for a unifying platform for increasingly fragmented system of geographic disciplines and paradigms. This, of course, weakens the geography, which must face the competitive struggle for recognition with other sciences. It is a basic assumption for obtaining financial and human resources, which are inevitable for further development or at least survival of a scientific discipline. Geographical community should pay a constant attention to the issues of strengthening the institutional background and social relevance. Based on the fact that the competitive struggle for financial and human resources carries the attributes of market competition, the appropriate tools for the realization of social relevance policy and institutional development of geography could be marketing approaches (Matlovičová 2007, 2008). The most significant tool is branding of geography as a strong, heuristically, educationally, and applicably relevant discipline.

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Akademická inštitucionalizácia a sociálna relevancia geografie

Súhrn

V príspevku sme sa snažili poukázať na vzájomné súvislosti medzi akademickou inštitucionalizáciou a spoločenskou relevanciou geografie. Inštitucionálne zmeny týkajúce sa geografie významne ovplyvňovali jej spoločenskú pozíciu a budúcnosť. Prvotná akademická inštitucionalizácia, ktorú považujeme za signál potvrdenia spoločenskej relevancie geografie, bola vo väčšine krajín realizovaná z iniciatívy alebo výraznej podpory štátu. Okrem nesporných výhod však etatistická inštitucionalizácia geografia priniesla aj negatíva. Ide najmä o vznik rozpornej situácie, keď na jednej strane etatizovaná geografia mala byť poslušnou voči štátu, ktorý jej zabezpečoval podporu a prísun zdrojov a tým aj prežitie. Na druhej strane však požiadavky na vedeckosť sa mohli ocitnúť v kontradikcii vo vzťahu k požiadavkám štátu (Filipp, 1992, s. 11). Iným dôsledkom boli viaceré kritické prúdy v rámci geografického myslenia, ktoré sa dištancovali od podpory oficiálneho establišmentu. Sprievodným efektom sú dodnes pretrvávajúce pochybnosti mnohých geografov o poslaní vlastnej disciplíny a časté diskusie geografov o relevancii, identite, externej pozícii geografie ako vednej disciplíny a hľadani zjednocujúcej platformy pre čoraz viac fragmentizovanú sústavu geografických disciplín a paradigiem. To samozrejme oslabuje geografiu, ktorá musí zvädzať konkurenčný zápas s inými vedami o uznanie. To je základným predpokladom získavania finančných a ľudských zdrojov, ktorú sú nevyhnutným predpokladom ďalšieho rozvoja alebo aspoň prežitia vednej disciplíny. Otázkam posilňovania inštitucionálneho zázemia a spoločenskej relevancie musí geografická komunita venovať sústavnú pozornosť. Vzhľadom na to, že konkurenčný zápas o finančné a ľudské zdroje nesie atribúty trhovej konkurencie, vhodnými nástrojmi realizácie politiky spoločenskej relevancie a inštitucionálneho rozvoja geografie môžu byť marketingové prístupy (Matlovičová 2007, 2008). V rámci nich je to najmä budovanie značky geografie (branding) ako silnej, heuristicky, edukačne a aplikačne relevantnej disciplíny.