

# International Research in Geographical and Environmental Education

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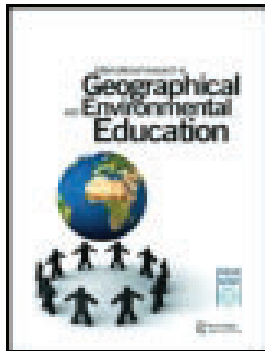
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# The State of Teaching Geography in Ukraine since the Change of Political Regime

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The demise of the USSR and the birth of Ukraine as an independent nation have brought about significant changes in the education aims and curricula of geography. The monopolistic ideology of state socialism has disappeared. There are, however, still serious constraints on the freedom of teaching due to the poor economic situation of the country and the shortage of up-to-date textbooks for ethnic minorities.

In Ukraine, as a part of the former Soviet Union, there used to be a distinctive approach to teaching geography as well as to teaching all other subjects. Geographical factual knowledge had to reflect the 'socialist way of thinking', the socialist lifestyle and socialist values. The situation became rather different after the great political changes of the beginning of the 1990s. The dogmatism that previously characterised the whole system of education has been softened. More and more freedom has been given to educational institutions, to teachers and to textbook writers, though appropriate financial resources for the new initiatives are still not fully provided. For example, the translation of Ukrainian textbooks into the languages of ethnic minorities, living in Ukraine, is often held back by the lack of finances. That makes teaching in ethnic schools sometimes almost impossible, because the school syllabuses were written long before the appropriate textbooks became available.

Let us now turn to the actual characteristics of geographical education in Ukraine. We have a central curriculum issued in Kyiv, and it is compulsory for every Ukrainian and ethnic school all over Ukraine. The time schedule of the curriculum allocates for geography the following classroom periods as shown in Table 1.

After the great political changes, the standardised system of education in Ukraine has also started to change: there appeared the possibility of creating new types of schools. Grammar schools, schools for especially talented pupils, lyceums and many other types of schools have emerged, so they need different syllabuses for the various subjects. Although the basic principles are the same for those schools, there are significant differences between them and the so-called regular schools. From the point of view of geography, the most important difference is that in these new types of schools optional geography courses are added to the main programme, depending on local school and educational management. For example, in my grammar school an extra course is provided for the 11th form (17-year-olds), which contains 'Selected chapters from general

**Table 1** The time available for geography courses in Ukraine

<i>Form</i>	<i>Name of course</i>	<i>Hours per week (per year)</i>
5th <sup>1</sup>	Geography of native region <sup>2</sup>	1 (36)
6th	General physical geography	2 (72)
7th	Geography of continents and oceans	2 (72)
8th	Physical geography of Ukraine	2 (72)
9th	Economic geography of Ukraine	2 (72)
10th	Economic and human geography of the world	1 or 2 (36 or 72) <sup>3</sup>

1. Pupils in the 5th form are 11 years old
2. Ukraine has 25 regions and each student has to study his or her own region in the 5th form (according to the same pattern).
3. Depending on the regional educational administration.

physical and economic geography' (one lesson per week). This is a kind of synthesising course, that sums up the most important geographical knowledge acquired during the previous six-year-long period of geography studies.

According to many teachers of geography, the above-mentioned new central curriculum has several shortcomings. The most significant is that two years out of six are devoted to the study of the geography of Ukraine. A whole year is devoted to its economic geography, despite the fact that the collapsing economy of Ukraine 'doesn't seem to last' or to deserve such extensive treatment. At the same time, only half as many lessons are given for studying the rest of the World: all the continents and oceans (seventh form), which is possibly the most interesting part of geography, appropriate for build up an intrinsic motivation in pupils for more serious study of geography in general. The other big problem is that the textbooks teachers and pupils have to use do not always correspond with the syllabus. That is true, for example, for the economic geography of Ukraine, where teachers have to do a lot of additional research for materials, either because they are completely missing from the textbook or because the information is false or out-of-date. However, even this teacher research is often unsuccessful because of the lack of available and reliable sources of information

This central curriculum gained its present shape after 1991. The most conspicuous changes were in the ideological background determining the educational targets and ways of looking at world affairs. The former socialist ideology has been replaced by the values of a globalised capitalist, market-orientated society. New chapters included in the curriculum reflect the need for transformation to an independent state following the principles of a market economy. More lessons were given for studying the most developed countries of the world and fewer for the countries of the former Soviet Union and the former socialist countries of East Central Europe and Asia (Table 2).

At the same time, chapters connected with state socialism and the planned economic system aimed at strengthening the socialist way of thinking were

**Table 2** The main chapters of the geographical syllabus in Ukraine

<i>Form</i>	<i>Course</i>	<i>Main chapters (the number of lessons)</i>
5th	Geography of native region	Physical geography (20) (a) Geographical location (b) Relief and mineral resources (c) Climate (d) Hydrography (e) Living world (f) Protected areas Economic characteristics (16) (a) Population (b) Industrial features (c) Agriculture (d) Transport
6th	General physical geography	Introduction; Earth and universe (12) Maps and field maps (15) Lithosphere (11) Hydrosphere (12) Atmosphere (12) Biosphere; the environmental protection (10)
7th	Geography of continents and oceans	Basic characteristics of the nature of the Earth (12) Characteristics of the nature of the oceans (9) Africa (10) Australia and Antarctica (9) North and South America (16) Eurasia (16)
8th	Physical geography of Ukraine	Introduction; relief and geological structure (14) Climate, hydrography and soils (11) Living world and geographical regions (12) Natural complexes (14) Physical geography of our region (11) Protection of nature; recapitulation (10)
9th	Economic geography of Ukraine	Introduction; population and human resources (14) Economy of Ukraine; structure of industry (17) Agricultural complex and transport (10) Economic geographical division of Ukraine: economic regions (11) Economic geography of our region (12) Reasonable use and protection of natural resources and conditions (8)
10th	Economic and human geography of the World	Recent political map and population of the world (13) World economy; the global problems of humankind (10) Countries of Europe: France, Great Britain, Germany, Italy, Poland, Hungary, Baltic States (14) Members of the CIS (Community of Independent States): Russia, Belarus, Moldova, Caucasian States, countries of Central Asia (Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Kirgistan) (11) Countries of south-west, south, south-east and east Asia: Turkey, India, China, Japan (8) Countries of America, Africa, Australia and Oceania: The United States (3) Canada, Brazil, Republic of South Africa, Australia, New Zealand (11)

completely excluded from the syllabus. The geography of Ukraine emerged as a completely new subject of a year-long course replacing the geography of the Soviet Union, which had had the same amount of time allocated before 1991. More attention has been given to achieve a new educational aim, a kind of patriotism to Ukraine instead of emotional ties with the former Soviet Union.

Apart from these changes, and compared with the previous Soviet syllabuses, in Ukraine, as in other parts of the world, the educational administration began to realise the importance of environmental education early in the school, and the eminent role the subject of geography is able to play in this respect. Thus environmental protection has lately received strong emphasis. Themes connected with the protection of nature and the environment appear in each course of geography. These include ways of polluting the air, the hydrosphere, the soils, the biosphere and also the ways of preventing negative human impacts. Courses encourage 11–16-years-old pupils to help protect their surrounding environment, and to encourage their younger brothers or sisters to do the same. Pupils also learn ways to protect different species and areas, about the most famous and most important protected areas of Ukraine and the national parks of the world.

As mentioned above, textbook supply is not always satisfactory, first of all for financial reasons. The textbooks officially permitted for use are written in Ukrainian and then translated into the languages of ethnic minorities living in Ukraine. This means that instead of having a broad choice of appropriate textbooks, only one textbook is approved and declared compulsory for the whole country. Later a new edition or a completely new course book may replace it and become compulsory instead of the old one. Although more and more Ukrainian textbooks have been published in the last 10 years, nobody has translated them, for instance, into Hungarian, or they are translated only after a long delay. Therefore schools of ethnic minorities often have to use the previous, out-of-date editions because the new book is not yet translated. Another possibility is for teachers of ethnic schools who speak good Ukrainian to translate selected parts of the Ukrainian edition into their language as preparation for their lessons, then ask the pupils to take notes during the lesson and to learn those notes as homework. Some freedom is given to the new types of ethnic schools (grammar schools, lyceums), as they are allowed to use some course books issued in their mother countries (Russia, Hungary, Romania etc.) and thus change the central syllabus to a limited extent.

In summary, there is not a great variety of course books in Ukraine, but the choice of school sketch maps, atlases and other teaching aids is fairly broad. Almost every region in Ukraine has its publishing house, where different teaching aids are compiled and issued, and there is strong competition among them. Thus teachers can choose the better, the cheaper, the more suitable aids according to their needs and the requirements of the pupils. The problem remains of the course books which are not translated into the languages of ethnic minorities. Consequently, though in Ukraine there is a declared freedom of studying geography and other subjects in the languages of ethnic minorities, the material background is often completely missing or not satisfactory at all.

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