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**Professional Culture of the Specialist of the Future**

**EDUCATIONAL AND SCIENTIFIC POTENTIAL OF REGIONAL  
STUDIES**

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***Abstract***

The article presents the experience of scientific research and academic work done in the field of regional studies. A distinctive feature of geographical studies is its interdisciplinarity. Such natural sciences as biogeography, ecology, geology and geomorphology take a great part of its structure. In terms of humanitarian disciplines, history, archeology, ethnology, linguistics, toponymy, semiotics, as well as art criticism, religious studies, economics and political science have very close links with the subject. The factors listed above account for a general educational significance of regional studies as a complex academic subject read in universities. With every year, the demand for teaching regional studies to students of geographical and non-geographic specialties has been growing, since it helps to create an image of the country, region or territory necessary for effective regional planning and adequate assessment of the development level of countries and regions. Knowledge in the field of geographical country studies is necessary for specialists of various scientific and applied fields of activity. Many specialists need relevant information on various natural phenomena. Equally important is the knowledge of linguistic, religious and contemporary political problems in the countries of the world, national characters, customs and manners of peoples, other ethnic features of countries and regions, and the "hot spots" of the modern world. Also, the article claims that regional studies contributes to the enhancement of students' general cultural competencies and raises the level of their socio-psychological adaptation.

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## **1. Introduction**

Geographical regional studies is an indispensable element of modern science and education as it provides an increase in the level of socio-psychological adaptation of a person in the context of globalization and intensive development of communications in the era of the information society.

## **2. Problem Statement**

The main object of geographical regional studies is the country as a basic unit of socio-economic and political organization of the world space. The subject of research is the relationship of man with nature and society and intercultural communication within the borders of separate countries and within the system of international relations in the era of globalization.

Modern regional studies deals with a comprehensive study of separate countries and regions of the world, as well as groups of countries and their regional associations. The scientific and educational task of this complex subject consists in actual synthesis of diverse knowledge about the territories and territorial systems of the world, in the formation of a modern general geographic worldview (Sevastyanov, 2008; Sevastyanov & Grigoriev, 2015).

## **3. Research Questions**

The concept of regional geographic complex is being analyzed. It is argued that besides geographic and ecological information about the country, it includes historical, ethnological, economic, political, and other aspects. And it is the integration of information obtained from natural and human sciences on a spatial, geographical basis that provides a new quality of knowledge. As a result of regional studies, a multifaceted image of the country or territory is being created which can be applied for true assessment of the specific development features typical of both foreign countries and Russia, in view of streamlining regional planning, recreational development of territories, the organization of international tourism, etc. Being created on the basis of a profound regional studies knowledge, the objective image of the country moulds its perception not only by its own population, but also by the world community and foreign tourists.

## **4. Purpose of the Study**

The aim of the research is to identify a modern educational potential for integrated regional studies and to determine how an objective image of the country is formed in the changing world.

In modern conditions of economy and culture globalization in the world, the value orientations and perception of historical, ethno-cultural, political, and other processes in the territories of individual countries and regions of the world undergo considerable changes. The regional science being interdisciplinary, it explores the countries and regions of the world in the logical complex of the "nature - population - economy" triad considering this complex in the process of historical development and complex interaction of its constituent parts. On the geographical and historical basis, the country studies opens up new aspects of vision of modern achievements and new opportunities for interaction and development of national and world culture. Within a university educational cycle, the subject of "regional studies"

contributes to the expansion of its curriculum framework and to further development of a scientific worldview of the students.

## **5. Research Methods**

The study of the countries draws upon the methodology of geographical research based on the priority of the country's geographical location and the history of the territory development. It is the location of the country in geographic space relative to the equator and poles that determines a total flow of matter, energy and information of different levels in relation to the underlying surface and objects of the territory. A set of special methods is used to estimate the parameters of these relations. For example, landscape methods allow to reveal the natural foundation of ethnic culture, while remote methods contribute to specifying the phenomena distribution boundaries. Besides, cartographic and geo-information methods may effectuate studying and modeling spatial structures of the regions. A method of historical cuts makes it possible to identify the direction of evolution and the formation of modern natural and ethno-cultural characteristics of countries and regions.

## **6. Findings**

### **6.1. Interdisciplinarity of integrated country studies.**

The most important feature of geographic regional studies is a systematic approach and interdisciplinarity of research. Country studies systematizes and summarizes various data on the nature of countries and regions of the world, the history of the formation of racial and ethnic composition of the population, the way of life and national traditions of peoples, the economy, culture and modern political organization of states located in the territories of certain regions of the world.

Due to the interdisciplinarity of integrated regional studies, an educational importance of regional studies as a university curriculum subject is steadily growing. In particular, Mashbits, a regional studies geographer, noted that a comprehensive regional study of both foreign countries and Russia with its regions serves an important background for the interdisciplinary study of world development and global problems of mankind (Mashbits, 1998).

In the course of historical development, macro-scale natural and social processes inevitably lead to the collapse and revival of entire civilizations and, accordingly, the inherent cultures. Material traces of the disappeared civilizations have been found by researchers in the territories of different countries and in different regions of the world: in the highlands of the Andes (Nazca Plateau), and on the islands of the Pacific Ocean (Easter Island), in the desert regions of Africa (Ahaggar Plateau), and on the expanses of Siberia (ancient Arkaim settlement). For example, the English ethnographer Fraser showed that the culture of the peoples of the planet was influenced by great floods (Frazer, 1986). Mechnikov (1995), a Russian-Swiss geographer, revealed the connection between the development of various ethnic cultures and civilizations of the world with the great rivers in tropical latitudes.

Diverse paleogeographic studies provide a basis for scientists to conclude that the development of nature and human society in the past occurred against the background of long-term cyclical fluctuations of the planetary climate. The most contrasting were the changes in nature in the arid, highland and polar regions of the Earth, which is confirmed by scientific discoveries in the territories of modern states.

In particular, the results of paleobotanical studies showed that in the era of the climatic optimum Holocene, i.e. 8 to 6 thousand years ago, in the present desert of the Sahara, in the south of Algeria and Libya, in the Niger and Chad, there were tropical forests and savannahs. It is established that the civilization of cattlemen, hunters and fishermen developed there. They left characteristic frescoes on the walls of caves on the plateau and the highlands of Tassilin-Adger and Ahaggar, Tibesti and Air, which reflected a rich animal and plant world of the time. At the same time, Lake Chad, located in the center of Africa, in terms of area was comparable to the modern Caspian. At the same time, in the north of the East European Plain, in the territory of modern Russia, in the Baltic and Karelia, heat-loving broad-leaved forests were growing, and oak groves were found near the coast of the Arctic Ocean where the tundra zone now extends (Ouezdou, 1989).

An important area of regional studies is the study of the relationship of prehistoric (archaeological) objects with the expansion of geo-cultural space and social relations, with the development of international tourism. Massive megalithic structures of the Stone Age, such as cromlechs, stone labyrinths and other objects found in the territory of the Nordic countries (Ireland, Great Britain, Norway, Sweden, Russia) are of considerable interest as objects of cultural heritage of the ancient peoples of the north of Eurasia, and as such, they initiate scientific discussions about their origin and destination (Grigoryev, 2007; Paranina, 2011). For example, the concept of using labyrinths as sun clocks and calendars of the Stone Age reinforces the notion of the existence of a lost ancient Arctic civilization. The need for the instruments of orientation in space-time in the Arctic is consistent with the images of large ships and scenes of marine fishing depicted in rock carvings in the Republic of Karelia (on the Vyg river and White Sea islands), and in Northern Norway (Alt) (Paranina, 2011, 2017; Paranina & Paranin, 2017a, 2017b).

Scientific research done in both country studies and regional studies widely incorporates data from anthropology, ethnology and ethnography of countries and regions. The diversity of ethnic communities in the spaces of macro-regions in which the ethno-cultural features of different peoples and civilizations (forest, steppe, mountain, coastal, etc.) are manifested is of great interest for regional studies (Huntington, 1993; Gladky & Chistobayev, 2002; Sevastyanov, 2008; Grigoriev, 2009). At the same time, much attention is paid to the study of the influence of various natural factors on the formation of ethnic characteristics. In many respects, it is associated with the name of a famous historian and geographer Gumilev who proposed such concepts as "nursing landscape" and "place of development" of the people, which account for the formation of a stereotype of ethnos behavior (Gumilev, 1989).

Thus, the focus of geographers' and country experts' attention has been drawn, on the one hand, to the macro-scale spatial differences between civilizations of the planet and cultures of different peoples, the issues of ethno-cultural or historical-cultural zoning, and on the other, to the diverse "private" issues, such as "Ethno-linguistic geography of Western Europe", "Ethno-cultural development of trans-boundary regions", "Geo-cultural space of the Russian Plain", "Problem-and-program approach to the preservation and use of cultural heritage in the subjects of the Russian Federation" and others (Mechnikov, 1995; Daniels & Cosgrove, 1998; Gladky & Chistobayev, 2002; Zamyatin, 2003; Grigoriev, 2007, 2009; Sevastyanov, 2008; Streletsky, 2008; Gladky, 2010).

## **6.2. "Rossievedenie" (Russian studies) as an important area of regional studies.**

“Rossievedenie” (Russian studies) makes a separate important area of regional studies. Possessing the most extensive territory (17.1 million sq km), the population of Russia is represented by more than 100 different ethnic groups which are carriers of various ethno-cultural traditions that makes them by and large a whole original local civilization (Shapovalov, 2001). It should be noted that the first comprehensive geographical regional description of Russia had been made from 1881 through 1901 and entitled "Picturesque Russia. Our Fatherland in its land, historical, tribal and everyday life significance". The manuscript was published in 17 books, under the general editorship of Semenov. The second Russian multivolume edition is called "Russia. A complete geographical description of our Fatherland. A desktop and road book." The publication of the work was carried out in 19 volumes (by the number of Russian “gubernias”, respectively) between 1899 and 1913, under the general direction of Semenov-Tyan-Shansky (2017), by then already a well-known geographer and statesman, Vice-Chairman of the Imperial Russian Geographical Society. In particular, the Charter of the IRGS proclaimed that "one of the most important tasks of the Russian Geographical Society consists in the geographical study and description of Russia and foreign countries". Further development of regional studies in Russia was continued by Semenov-Tian-Shansky when his currently interesting study entitled "District and country" was published (Semenov-Tyan-Shansky, 2017).

Modern administrative structure of the Russian Federation, being created with deep consideration for national and territorial features, provides a basis for the development of scientific regional studies of Russia involving in-depth study of regions, republics and autonomous entities of Russia as separate objects of integrated country studies.

For example, spatial natural features of the mountainous region inhabited by the peoples of the Caucasus determine the originality of these southern ethnoses, as well as the taiga-tundra territories of the Northwest of Russia populated by Russian pomors, Saami, Nenets and some other small ethnic groups (Veps, Izhora, Vod', etc.).

In the course of long-term coexistence of different peoples, their self-consciousness, way of life, customs, and culture are being transformed. A profound study of the main features of ethnic and cultural identity of the peoples of the north of Russia allowed the historian Terebihin to allocate appropriate ethno-cultural landscapes in the Euro-Arctic region (Terebihin, 2004).

The formation of a single Russian State was developing for many centuries in the harsh conditions of the north of Eurasia. The territory of Russia is permeated with river communications which served as ancient roads in taiga-marsh and tundra landscapes. A particular part in the history of mastering the vast expanses of the north of the European part of Russia and Siberia was played by using a wide network of interconnected water-wagging system of communication routes (including wagging sections and creation of canals in interfluves). These paths are marked by numerous abandoned settlements, churchyards, churches and chapels (Grigoriev, Sevastyanov, & Shastina, 2016; Sevastyanov, Korostelev, & Zelyutkina, 2007; Sevastyanov & Naumenko, 2018). In the opinion of Vedenin (1997), the ancient water-wagging paths, by means of which the Russian ethnos moved to the north and east of Eurasia, are valuable but little-known objects of Russia's cultural heritage.

### **6.3. Distinctive signs of culture of the peoples of the countries of the world.**

The objects of the World Natural and Cultural Heritage scattered throughout the world and marked by UNESCO are the most valuable distinctive signs of the material and spiritual culture of the peoples of the world, and therefore are in the zone of special attention of regional studies (Grigoriev, 2007, 2009, 2012; Sevastyanov, 2008; Esposito & Cavelzani, 2006).

The study of spatial location of tangible and intangible Heritage objects in the territories of the countries of the world, the identification of the peculiarities of national types of dwellings and clothing, folk crafts, folk ornaments, folklore provide an opportunity to understand the aspects of environmental elements perception, yet inadequately researched and refracted through specific culture of different ethnic groups inhabiting this or that country. For example, Kalutskov and his co-authors studying folklore texts and folk songs showed the role of natural factors in the formation of contemporary cultural landscape of the Russian North as revealing the features of its spatial ethnic differences (Kalutskov, Ivanova, Davydova, Fadeeva, & Rodionov, 1998).

It should be noted that a study of humanitarian and cultural geography and related to the latter a study of languages, or linguistics, as well as art and literary studies are particularly in demand while dealing with Heritage objects of any level within the framework of integrated geographical regional studies (Vedenin, 1997; Zamyatin, 2003; Esposito & Cavelzani, 2006; Streletsky, 2008; Grigoriev, 2009; Gladky, 2010).

Sacred geography (the geography of sacred sites) has a close connection with the study of World Heritage sites, which, in particular, deals with the analysis of the origin and landscape confinement of sacred objects to natural, historical, and cultural phenomena. A study of the holy (sacred) places geography in the territories of different countries allows to systematize cultural landscapes, both within one country and in different countries of the planet, to investigate their origin and connections with religious representations of different peoples of the world (Parc, 1994; Daniels & Cosgrove, 1998; Grigoriev, 2007, 2009, 2012).

Sacralism, as an important attribute of any cultural landscape, is largely determined by the features of natural environment components, and not only by religious beliefs and traditions of peoples. Sacred places in the countries of the world, fixing special, specific "points" on the earth's surface, or making up entire "sacred spaces", as a rule, differ in duration of their existence in contact with people and are characterized by their particular properties (sacred mountains, megaliths, individual groves, springs and ponds, temples, graveyards, monuments of military glory, etc.) (Terebihin, 1993; Sevastyanov & Naumenko, 2018).

Geographical studies have shown that many sacred objects were originally used as the places of observation of celestial bodies for the purpose of time orientation, and also served as guidelines for movement in space. Based on that is a proposed geographical criterion of sacredness implying the acquisition and preservation of information that ensures the continuity of Life (Grigoriev, 2009; Paranina, 2011, 2017).

Among new areas of geography is semiotic geography. This science of signs, symbols and images related to geography allows us to identify important, key moments and events in the course of development of ethnic groups and states in terms of space and time. Signs and images of the geo-cultural space of the

countries being created by Heritage monuments permits a better understanding of the historical and cultural characteristics of a particular country.

At that, among the iconic phenomena there could be ancient signs, particular colors, coats of arms, as well as iconic personalities, monuments of natural and cultural heritage, towns, specific ethnic features, etc. Ancient sign systems and symbols of cultures are reinterpreted and understood in a new way by linking them to the primary principle, i.e. to geo-space and the country's natural environment (Grigoriev, 2009; Paranina & Parani, 2017a, 2017b).

## 7. Conclusion

Thus, at the turn of a new millennium, geographic regional studies turned out to be in demand and fit organically into the modern stage of development of geographic science, secondary and higher education. The experience of teaching students at the department of regional studies and international tourism of St. Petersburg State University (St. Petersburg, Russia) and the analysis of communication with the department graduates successfully working in the fields of recreational nature management, guiding business, and tourism shows that a modern professionally effective organization of international tourism and the development of new competitive tourism products require not only a common geographical training but also makes a complex specific regional geography training absolutely indispensable, thus widening a range of graduates' competencies.

In addition, knowledge in the field of geographical country studies is necessary for specialists of various scientific and applied fields of activity - military, diplomats, political scientists, philologists, specialists in international relations, who require a shortened, basic course version of the subject. Many specialists need relevant information on various natural phenomena (e.g. seasonal features of the climate in different parts of the world, the spread of local diseases, poisonous plants and dangerous animals, environmental problems in the countries of the world, etc.). Equally important is the knowledge of linguistic, religious and contemporary political problems in the countries of the world, national characters, customs and manners of peoples, other ethnic features of countries and regions, and the "hot spots" of the modern world. In this regard, requests for the Chair of regional studies and international tourism of St. Petersburg State University with proposals to read short courses of lectures on regional studies come from other faculties of the University (philological, philosophical) and from other universities. Certainly, when developing new programs for regional studies and special courses, the specificity of each training area and the necessary innovations are taken into account in order to make the course comprehensive and comprehensible for different audiences.

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