

What is the future of human geography

[Technology](#), [Future](#)



Discuss the future of human geography with reference to the approaches that have emerged since the 1950s. Geography found its roots during periods of exploration when man's knowledge of the world was still subject to the imagination. For many decades, Europe and the British Empire in particular formed much of what cartography is today, and environmental determinism was widely used to serve imperialist needs. Many ideas and theories were highly influenced and composed by upper class academics and soon critiques were formed. During the mid 1930s, environmental determinism lost much of its support and regional geography fell into to favour.

Soon however, regional geography was also criticised due to its limiting scope and constricting laws. This resulted in post war geography entering a dark period with a dwindling future due the feeling of the subject's uselessness. Geography progressed well since the founding of the AAG and each well-known definition had its success. These definitions tended to aim to displace one another turn by turn and each definition spoke something true of geography but soon from the vantage point of the future we also saw the failures in them (W. Pattinson, 1964).

Each definition had its own shortcomings and that was a result of professional specialization of certain fields yet still contributing to geography as a whole. But during the late 1950s to early 1960s the quantitative revolution shifted the paradigm of spatial geography. Many saw that geography was losing support and it certainly was in universities, Harvardabolished the subject in 1948. Geography and the disciplines related to the subject needed to turn to physical and engineering sciences for the

vitality it lacked (A. Strahler). Therefore the subject entered a far more scientific era and soon gained greater credibility as a result.

Essentially this revolution led to a change from idiographic geography to law-making geography. Two of the leading geographers in the revolution were Richard Hartsthorne and Fred Schaefer. Hartsthorne's manifesto for the discipline depicted the discipline as a coherent academic subject that used formulae to map landforms as well as to describe areas. However, Hartsthorne was heavily criticised for being overly descriptive and unnecessary. Schaefer argued that there was a need for the subject to be treated as a proper science, in particular he said there was a need for scientific analysis and not "mere description".

He wanted generalisations to be brought back into geography such as systematic analysis. Soon other definitions were being discredited during this paradigm shift such as military geopolitics (F. Ratzel) because geography had become more scientific. A few definitions were created to try and distinguish what geography was and where it was. Richard Hartsthorne's publication in 1939 spurred geography on to be far more scientific and law based. Hartsthorne defined 3 variables; humans, landscape and industry which became apart of his overcomplicated formulas that described regions and features.

His findings were still heavily influenced by spatial geography causing them to be restricted by laws that allowed no room for human geographers to present their views. In a sense, you could take this as a positive, in that Hartsthorne was trying to unify geography under one banner but as we have seen over time, this is against the nature of the discipline. This numerical

approach sparked other geographers to think of a more descriptive angle that asked more, why things happen. William D. Pattinson's journal titled the "Four Traditions of Geography" classifies geography into 4 distinctly logical areas.

Originally written in 1964 and then revisited in 1990, Pattinson tries to distinguish geography into 4 areas, 3 of which are applied to human geography and the 4th is mainly physical yet still linked to the aforementioned 3. The 4 traditions as defined by Pattinson are Spatial, Area Studies, Earth science and man-land and although they are 4 diverse and distinctive they still fall under the same heading of geography. Pattinson hoped "that through a widened willingness to conceive of and discuss the field in terms of these traditions, geography will be better able to secure the inner unity and outer intelligibility" (W.

Pattinson, 1964). This approach to geography aimed to quell the discourse that was prevalent within geography and tried to pave a clearer way for geographies future. On the other hand, thinking in such a law-based manner, restricts dynamic thinking, which is where human geography draws its strengths. I felt that Pattinson still asked more how than why but he certainly helped promote the growth of geography. Subsequently, "The Big Questions" was an article written to try and stimulate thoughts of for the future as well as trying to gain the attention of the media and the public eye. Susan L.

Cutter, Reginald Golledge and William L. Graff wanted to create a dialogue for the future whilst tackling questions that already plagued the discipline of geography. As for the future of geography, this article ask some thought

provoking questions such as “ when does geography start and finish? ” (S. L. Cutter, R. Golledge, W. L. Graff, 2002) and “ what are likely to be the major problems of doing the geography of other planets? ” (S. L. Cutter, R. Golledge, W. L. Graff, 2002) If we are to answer or even begin to answer these questions, we must draw upon the past and in particular what has transgressed over the 60 years.

Over these years of the evolution of geography naturally resulted in a greater divide between physical and human geography. As a result of different approaches to geography emerging from the 50s, physical geography had grounded its roots in the universities of the UK and human geography was also doing well with a similar level of success. Towards the end of the 20th century, physical geography had had a number of successes and was frequently having science group's works published in the pages of Nature or Science (N. Thrift, 2002).

Human geography was also finding success in its own right. Human geographers were having their works published in numerous credited journals. However the problem that was arising was that geography needed to branch itself out, away from its own circulating community. So in order to evolve and adapt to its every changing environment, geography took a technological leap forward. After the terrorist attacks of September 11th 2001, new interest emerged in geographic information systems (GIS) to help with the response to hazardous events (S. L. Cutter, R. Golledge, W. L.

Graff, 2002). As a result of this, large public interest began to become prevalent in geography, maybe not necessarily as an academic subject but as an overall discipline. An example of this can be seen in online <https://assignbuster.com/what-is-the-future-of-human-geography/>

phenomenon surrounding the Haiti earthquake of 2010. Within days of the hazard occurring, the people of Haiti created a real time map via Openstreetmap thus allowing the emergency services to act quickly to effect areas. This is an impressive display of how geography is being used to engage the mass audience as well as being an effective tool in saving lives.

Geographic information systems are now playing a vital role in hazard response and in devising hazard maps. Nigel Thrift thoroughly supports the idea that in order for geography to flourish it needs to move away from traditional mapping techniques and into the realm of the media, social networking and politics. This means widening geographies scope and broadening its audience. Thrifts example of this involves aligning professional geography and pedagogical geography. He talks of the combination of technology and geography to enhance the learning of school children and therefore give geography a greater impact in the educational system.

The geographers Ian Cook and Peter Jackson and the anthropologist Danny Miller are in the process of trying to get commodity chains introduced into schools (N. Thrift 2002). These commodity chains allow students to gain an appreciation of where the products they buy, come from. I feel that projects like this one are important for the future of geography, as education is key in producing the next generation of geographers. This concern is dominant in Ron Johnston's "Reflections on Nigel Thrift's optimism: political strategies to implement his vision".

Johnston reflects on what Thrift has written and flags up the concerns of geographies future in oppose to Thrift's optimistic ideas of the future. He

opens his article by stating “ The future of an academic discipline” after which he goes on to devise three factors that underpin a subject’s survival. What I derived from Johnston’s review of Thrift was that for geography to thrive, it needs to be constantly vigilante in its up keep with other academic disciplines as well as public interest. If we look to the past we can see this is true, numerous definitions were devised and adapted to keep up with the changing times.

Overall, I feel the future of geography needs to define and ground itself, as a discipline whilst at the same time being dynamic in its approach to the future. Concerns have been raised as to the sustainability of the subject in an academic sense but if we look to the past we can see that geography has always adapted and moved on. But if we move away from the sustainability of the subject, I think that technology is the way forward, especially in grasping the attention of the mass media as well as its audience. It has shown in recent times it can be very effective in hazard response as well as everyday life.

Representation of data has never been easier with new software constantly being developed to make this task easier. To ensure the vitality of their discipline, geographers are going to need to take a more political approach if they want sustained funding and interest. Word Count - 1568 References Cutter S. L, Golledge R. , Graff W. L, (2002) ‘ The Big Questions in Geogaphy’, The Professional Geographer, 54: 3, 305-317 Hartshorne R 1939 The Character of Regional Geography in Agnew J, Livingstone DN and Rogers A (eds) 1996 Human Geography: an Essential Anthology Oxford: Blackwell. Pp. 388-397 Johnston, R. 2002) ‘ Reflections on Nigel Thrift’s optimism:

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