

# Difference between humanistic geography and positivistic approach assignment



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Difference Between Humanistic Geography and Positivist Approach There are definite differences between positivism and humanistic methods that geographers use. Positivism, which has its roots in quantitative theories, excludes the human element and includes such fundamentals as cumulative data. Humanistic geography has its roots in qualitative procedures and focuses on the combination of research with the people. Positivism is a rigorous and formal way to collect and analyze data that was developed around the 1960's by Auguste Comte (1798-1857) who is also credited with formalizing it.

Studies are clear and straight forward and researchers believe that there is only one method that all sciences should rely on. Positivism believes that human geography should be objective and not take into consideration any personal beliefs. Considering that thinking, human and physical objects can be treated in a similar way. This view point uses the scientific method and begins with facts which lead to a theory and a hypothesis. From this, an answer is concluded that becomes " law".

When developing this research, positivistic geologists will use quantitative methods to develop their theories, often also using a spatial analysis approach. The positivism way of collecting data is controversial because it challenges the regional approach to geography. They believe that the world exists as an objective reality that is totally independent of the mind.

Positivistic researchers are seeking to generalize findings across all of the subject matter. Most often the positivistic approaches uses field work and observe the happenings in an area to help form a hypothesis.

The researchers will measure what they see and use prepared questionnaires so that they can then put the coded responses together and summarize them statistically. The scientific approach offers a more secure, objective knowledge, but limits the researcher to a relatively narrow range of topics. The humanistic methods developed in the 1970's to challenge positivism. This method emphasizes the role of humans as decision makers in the way that humans perceive their world, land, landscapes and regions.

Within the humanistic views there are several different ways of thinking; pragmatism, phenomenology, existentialism, and idealism. While existentialism and idealism have not been very influential in geography, pragmatism and phenomenology have been. Pragmatism believes that every human action is based on human perceptions and experiences. The focus is on groups or societies rather than on individuals. Phenomenology believes that knowledge is subjective and that the understanding of the individual is crucial.

Researchers who use this method need to be able to be sympathetic and have a deep understanding of the issue being researched. Humanistic researchers believe that it is impossible to separate the mind and reality and therefore there cannot be a set of standards and reproducible methods to be used. These geographers will use a more loosely structured set of ideas and consider the individual being studied as well as the geographer's own intuition and interpretation. One prominent geographer named Yi-Fu Tuan, who was born in 1930, was critical of geography that did not include the humanistic factor.

Landscapes, he believed, were often a result of the humans living around or near them. For example, gardens were a person's attempt to control the environment. The humanistic approach allows the scholar to explore a wide range of human experiences, but it lacks rigorous procedures of objective verification. In thinking about the question of whether I agree with the statement that "human geography needs to be objective", I debated with myself as well as other people around me. What struck me as very interesting is that in "researching" my answer I engaged in discussions in a humanistic and subjective way!

I believe that there are very few things in our world that can always be looked at completely objectively. We are humans, each with a unique brain and way of thinking. Using math is almost always objective as there is usually only one answer. One plus one always equals two. However, when there is a shift in what one is counting that answer can change. For example, a person is sent out into a field to count trees and there are ten trees; the answer one might be looking for is "ten". However, one person may look at the trees differently.

There may be different types of trees, trees that look like bushes, new saplings that are just starting to grow and many other variables to consider. In this case as individuals go out to count the trees, they may come up with several different answers based on who they are and what their experiences have been. I believe it would be extremely difficult to research human geography without taking into consideration the relationship between humans and their environment and how they perceive that environment. I believe that it is

possible to research human geography issues without being affected by our personal beliefs.

Having said that I think it is extremely unlikely, and not plausible, however, it is possible. I think that we as humans have the ability to research something that is usually of a personal nature, such as religion, and stay neutral to a point. When researchers gather the data using either humanistic or positivistic methods, he/she may have personal thoughts and beliefs around religion but if they only record the data from the facts, the individuals, or societies then it is possible to leave out their own personal thoughts on the topic.

I think where the difficulties lays is in considering who developed the questions and ways of gathering the data. How much of that person's personal beliefs entered into developing the questionnaire in the first place? There seems that there will always be endless questions and variables to consider. I believe that there needs to be a balance in any research method. As long as human geographers have a commitment of basing their explanation of geographical occurrences on objective evidence then the possibility of an advantageous teamwork exists among the advocates of different philosophical approaches.