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**The regional approach and regional studies method in the process of geography teaching**

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**Abstract:** *We define the regional approach as a manner of relations among the global trends of development of the “Society – man – nature” system and the local differentiating level of knowledge. Conditionally, interactions interlace under the influence of the character of Geography as a science, education, approaches, goals and teaching methods.*

*Global, national and local development differentiates in three concentric circles at the level of knowledge. It is determined as a conception of modern, complex and effective mechanism for young people, through which knowledge develops in regional historical and cultural perspective; self-consciousness for socio-economic and cultural integration is formed as a part of the historical-geographical image of the native land. This way an attitude to the native land is formed as a connecting construct between patriotism to the motherland and the same in global aspect.*

*The possibility for integration and cooperation of the educative geographical content with all the local historical-geographical, regional, profession orientating, artistic, municipal and district institutions, is outlined.*

*Contemporary geographical education appears to be a powerful and indispensable mechanism for organization of human sciences, while the regional approach and the application of the regional studies method stimulate and motivate the development and realization of optimal capacities for direct connection with the local structures and environments.*

*“In order to be able to study our people, first of all we have to study its settlements – the highest symbol of its material culture”  
Acad. Anastas Ishirkov*

**Key words:** *geography, teaching, education, methods, didactics, approach*

**INTRODUCTION:**

In contemporary society geographical education cannot be restricted to simple and short interpretations. The comprehension of reality in its full multilayeredness presumes the complexity of the geographical point of view to it. The philosophy of construction of educational geography can't ignore this fact. In the same time, the didactic realities in geographical education that have been observed, direct to the search of answers: *What is the significance of geographical education encoded into? What is the limit of geographical knowledge? How to give some personal significance to the process of studying geography?*

The methodological basis of geography is the spatial (chorological) approach, and space stays in the base of every geographical research.

Many and various are the research directions, dealing with the problems of regionalization and regional integration. Definitely it comes to differentiation and regionalization of the geographical space. Several branches of

science related to these problems coexist in the academic spheres of the different states. Such examples are area studies, regional science, regional studies and regional analysis. Under *regional science* we usually understand “a field of social sciences, which with the help of different analytic models studies regional problems”. The topics in regional science include, but are not only restricted to them, localization theories or spatial economy, localization modeling, transport, migration analyses, land use and urban development, interindustrial analyses, natural and ecological analyses, management of resources, analyses of the regional policy, GIS and analysis of spatial data. In the most general aspect each analysis of the social sciences which has spatial dimensions, is covered by regional science.

In geography, as in all other sciences there are processes of differentiation. Along with them another one emerges – an opposite process – of integration.

In our time the *regional paradigm* includes the generalizing theories, explaining the regularities in the regionalization of political and economic space, the development of the different types of regions, interregional cooperation.

“The region as a regional *socium* and a socio-ethnic community of people, represents a socio-cultural, historical-ethnic, landscape-geographical economic space, which has been formed naturally in evolution”... The region, as Roland Shturm states, “this is not just a geographical space or combination of the living there people, region – it is people, social life, *regional socium with its cultural-civilizational peculiarities*”. [1].

“Regionality is one of the universal and irrevocable qualities of terrestrial reality. It supports the dynamics, structure and organization of terrestrial reality. ... Geographical regionality occurs through diversity of comparative advantages for development and organization of natural-social systems. ... Without regionality and its research, the geographical science loses its scientific content and heuristicity.”[2].

According to N. Dimov “studying of regionality on Earth is a creative, research process. Existing natural, socio-cultural, economic and geopolitical entities (spaces), which are in the base of planning and management activities are revealed and proved through it. This process includes formation of regions and zoning of space, and without them it is impossible to conduct a founded regional policy.”[2]; “as a finished algorithm for studying of spatial regional natural-social entities, it is in the following consequence: reality – regionality – formation of region – administrative-territorial organization – regional development and policy – regional effectiveness.” [2].

We define regional approach as a way of relations between the global trends of development of the system “Society – human – nature” and the local differentiating level of knowledge.

Conditionally interactions are interlaced by the character of geographical science, education, approaches, aims and methods of teaching.

Global, national and local development differentiates in three concentric circles at the level of knowledge. It is determined as a conception of modern, complex and effective mechanism for young people, through which knowledge in regional historical-cultural perspective is developed; self-consciousness for socio-economic and cultural integration is formed, as a part of the historical-geographical image of the native land. Thus an attitude to the native land is formed as a connecting construct between patriotism to Motherland and the same in global aspect.

The contemporary state of science is marked by an important and substantial characteristic – intensification of integration processes, which responds not only to certain theoretical, but also to some social necessities. This is grounds for the development of bordering problematic areas through interaction between the methodological resource of different sciences and scientific branches.

These integrative tendencies are observed explicitly and implicitly in the sphere of regional studies (local lore) as a cognitive field. The complicated problems, connections and complex phenomena, which are revealed by regional studies, premises opportunities for formation of a whole system with emphasized direction to real scientific and research activity with applicable projections in particular settlement, administrative-territorial unit or region. The interconnections that are created between the separate sciences are traced as relation between entity-parts or system-subsystem. The dichotomy between the theoretical and the praxeological aspect of regional studies determines its multilayerness, multitypical and complex-contextual structure in a whole scientific system.

Regional studies (study of local lore) are also known as bioregionalism. Under regional studies we should understand the exploration of the region as a combination of phenomena – socio-political, economic, cultural and natural.

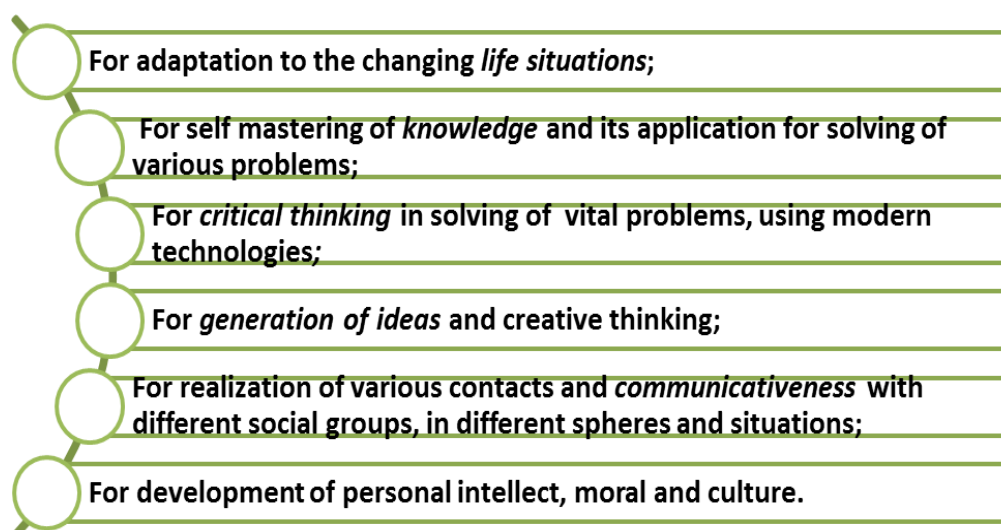
Undoubtedly this interrelation outlines new and concrete scientific interests and problems that can be separated thematically: historical, archeological, geographical, genealogical, orthodox regional studies.

In theoretical and methodological literature and in practical activity regional studies (local lore studies) is a term, which includes activities of state institutions, of public organizations and private persons for searching, collecting, processing, classifying and popularizing of publications, documents and materials about a particular administrative-territorial unit or region, determined by natural, historical or economic boundaries.

The possibility for integration and cooperation between educational geographic content and all local historical-geographic, regional, artistic, municipal and district institutions emerge.

Every person is connected from birth to death to a particular part of the territory of a country. This piece of land has bound us forever to itself with thousands of invisible threads. Every time when we come back to it, we are excited. Obviously, regional studies as an interdisciplinary scientific branch have been stopped by its wandering between history and geography. It is not an object of systematic scientific research. In the process of exploration of the native land are mastered valuable practical skills, capabilities for observation of life, for working with documents, evidences of past events, for orientation in the card-indexes in libraries, or in the fund books of archives.

In the process of scientific regional study is necessary to be cultivated a flair and general insight for integral approach to the diverse material, for its comprehensive interpretation and generalization. This will allow a profound entering of the conditions and preconditions for emergence and development of life in the territory of one or other settlement, of one or another region; to become acquainted with ethnical and language contacts during centuries, that took place on a particular territory.



**Figure 1.** Specific qualities connected with skills

Activating and complex support to regional studies turn it into a means for development of civil and intellectual skills for critical and creative work with these various sources of information.

Undoubted is the role of regional studies for upbringing and education of the generations, for their incorporation to family and homeland, for stimulation of their welfare and activities of public utility.

Regional studies can be defined as a multilateral conception, which includes cognitive part and scientific-research activity with applicable projections. Some define it as a “geographical periphery” (M. Alburt), others “a conglomeration of multilateral reports” ... “little geography” (A. Barakov).

The academic context of the “regional studies method” is bound mainly by procedures – reactions to a given scientific-applicable task, organized with the aim to get certain expected result. Instructors conduct their own research: they analyze, compare, generalize, make short term and long term prognoses, express their own opinion.

The independence of the research presumes active usage of specialized knowledge, skills for realization of critical analysis of information sources on the topic, capability for formulation of conclusions and ratiocinations, creativity in its variants for solving of the problematic research task.

The recommendable model for realization of the regional studies (local lore studies) method presumes answers to some basic questions, related to the specification of short term and long term aims, decomposed to the level of operative tasks; the activities connected with their realization, included in an organizational plan in several stages.

The model scheme is an instrument which allows the realization of the regional approach and the regional studies method, and as starting point can be used each one of its elements. The answer to relatively not so complicated questions allows the realization of all stages of the description of the regional studies research.

In its nature it is an algorithm for realization, and two variants for action are possible: purposeful (from actuality to the result) and interrelated (from the result to actuality).

Regional studies introduces in the social environment of people high extent of spirituality, without which man cannot exist in awareness. Streets, squares, the separate buildings, parks remind of different things ... for those, who have the necessity to feel it. Unostentatiously they enter the spiritual world, forming realized responsibility to the past with a look towards the future. This is one of the main missions of regional studies as an activity and our deep conviction.

Nature, population, economy of the native land has always been a priority field of study by geographers. Knowledge about them and their proper understanding helps for making of professional worldly decisions. Knowledge of the geography of the native land presumes all-embracing work of research, collecting and studying on different levels and for a long time.

In order the research of a particular settlement to be able to be thorough and comprehensive, it is necessary a number of indicators to be analyzed and the correlations among them to be revealed. Especially valuable sources of knowledge and activities are: scientific and scientific-popular literature about the native land, departmental materials, information and materials from the press, field observations in nature of the native land, visits to scientific institutions, museums and others.

Through studying of the native land are given opportunities for expansion of geographical culture and accumulation of knowledge about the nature, population, settlements and economy of the native land; dangerous natural occurrences and the consequences of them; the problems of the native land; the trends of its development.

Skills for self-dependent work with different sources of information are formed; observation, logical thinking, oral and written expression of personal positions; making up of prognoses, work with documents; usage of the acquired knowledge and skills in similar and new situations; discussion of geographical problems.

The regional approach and the regional studies method are very important: their worth as self-regulative instruments for personal and collective development make up the real essence of that, which should be learned and practiced within the frameworks of geographical education. Because of that it is very important the whole potential of the pedagogy of participation to be triggered, and not to be scattered in exercises that are insignificant to the individuals.

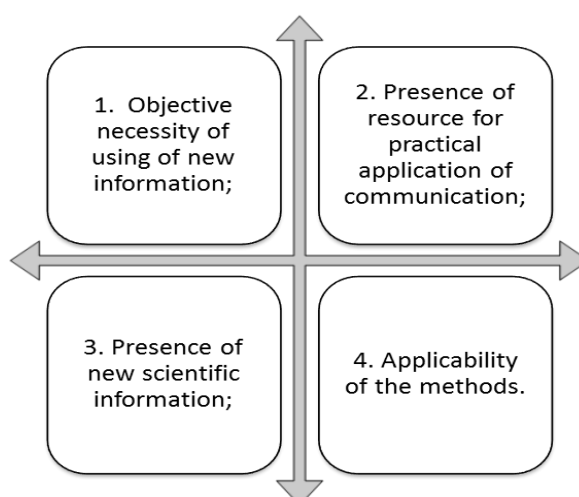
The "student-teacher" interaction is within the heart of the approach and the method of participation and it could constitute the most important contribution for geographical education.

This interaction includes, together with other aspects, the following steps: exploration of the interests and the initial level of students, self-dependent studying, critical attitude to the teaching material, application of what have been learned in the sphere of the students and further explorations.

It is important for the necessity of the regional approach and the regional studies method to be carefully articulated in the frames of the structured possibilities for education and educational programs. The model appears to be compulsory set of instruments when the object of exploration has a significant spatial development.

We should stress upon the importance of development of mechanism for transformation of information also into electronic resources, which should lead to new knowledge and the realization of communication in them to material product.

That requires additional precursory conditions, such as:



**Figure 2.** Preconditions for development of mechanism for transformation of information

One of the most important advantages of the electronic resources and the implementation of the regional approach and the regional studies method is *flexibility*. This encourages students to take all the responsibility for their own education and lets them study: when they want; where they want; with their own pace. Another advantage is the possibility to create resources *completely supplied* with all necessary educational texts, practical applications and other materials. Researches show that this peculiarity is important advantage, which makes them really attractive.

Another one significant advantage is that the so called *reflective teaching* is encouraged. This is a specific approach of teaching which can be described as reconsidering and overthinking of what have been learned and its influence on students by means of the feedback. The summary of *what* was learned and *how* was it learned is of great importance in the process of education. Thinking over the already learned and its influence is also very important, because this allows to be understood what they actually do or they don't do. This is used more and more in all methods of teaching.

This structural model of teaching requires differentiation of the stages of research.

In the first stage is the formulation of educational tasks, and there are some requirements for accuracy and pragmatism. This stage can be expanded by including: an assessment of the significance of teaching; summary about the final results from teaching; making up of precursory strategy and plan of teaching. The next process is creative. It compulsory includes: collection and processing of the necessary information; making up of theoretical formulations as a base for development of interactive materials; choosing of methods for teaching; creation of communication models; creation of methods for inclusion of new information; general assessment of the achieved results; creation of strategy for further development of the communication model.

This creative model in teaching can be considered complete, when the communication models are introduced in practice. The third stage may include preparation of interactive materials, scientific papers and publications, school aids and materials, and others.

Educational materials may be structured in the following way: from the general to the particular (fig. 7.): modules; sections; criteria and indexes.

Regional approach substantiates education that stimulates exercises and develops.

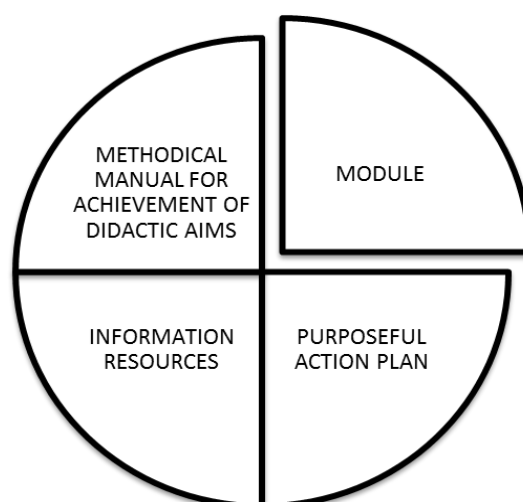
This kind of education looks like an alternative of traditional education. Its basic idea is that students should study alone, and teachers should control the process of studying. They should motivate, coordinate, and consult, control students' activity.

Today educational process in school continues to maintain the old traditional forms and methods of working, from time to time "decorated" by nonstandard approaches (conferences, discussions, situational methods, team



work and others). In spite of this, the main method is the explanatory-illustrative, which doesn't give the student opportunity to develop his intelligence, capabilities, independence and collectivism.

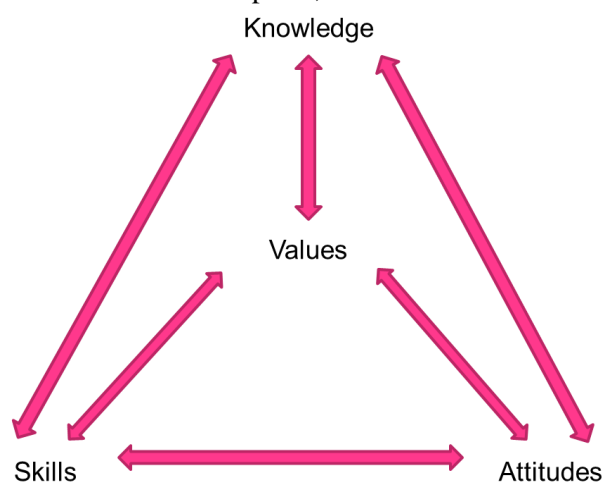
The offered teaching methods allow this problem to be solved practically, to be able to transform totally the educational process. This is a model, in which teaching contents and technologies are combined in one whole.



**Figure 3.** The module as a part of the whole process of teaching

Therefore, the module is means of realization of the regional approach and the regional studies method of teaching through a program for teaching, personalized content, methods of teaching, extent of independence, the pace of educative-cognitive work of students. For the successful work of the technology of this education the actions should be systematized and differentiated. This includes a system of actions of the teacher.

Key competencies are determined by three interdependent spheres, which provide the necessary competency regarding their active participation in society and which should be covered. On the first place it should give knowledge on relevant themes. On the second place is the providing of skills, such as the competency for active participation or abilities for communication. On the last place, it should influence attitudes.



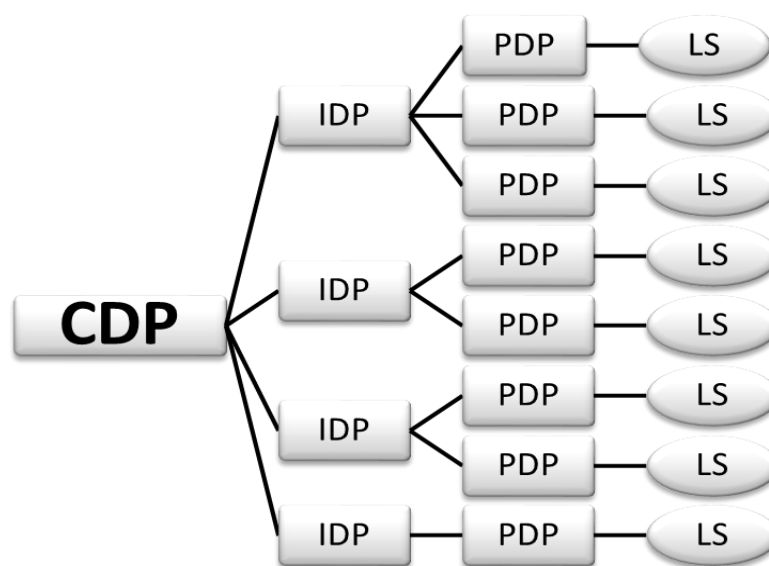
**Figure 4.** Relations between the three spheres forming the key competencies

However, we should state that exactly values should give the identification of aims and be “the attractive center”, the permanent source of geographical education, where all dimensions and spheres are realized and find their balance. Of course it should give young people the possibility to think about their own values, identity and affiliations to community or communities, depending on their choice and should contribute to their transformation into active figures defending, as well as popularizing their own values.

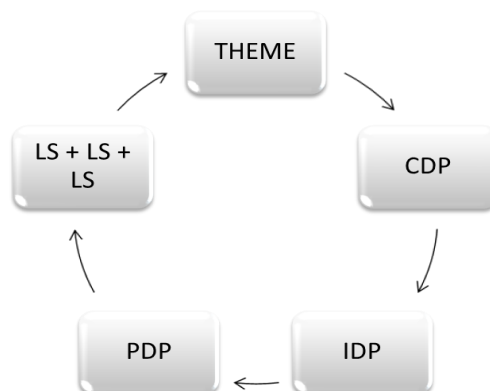
The program for teaching consists of a complex didactic purpose (DP), fixed to each of the modules. From the complex DP is defined and an integrated didactic purpose (IDP). In its turn the IDP module can have a particular didactic purpose (PDP). On the base of PDP are formulated particular education elements (EE). Each separate didactic purpose corresponds to a single educational element (EE).

The formulation of the particular purposes of education programs should come from students’ needs for acquiring of knowledge.

As a result a chain of purposes is formed: CDP – IDP – PDP – LS.

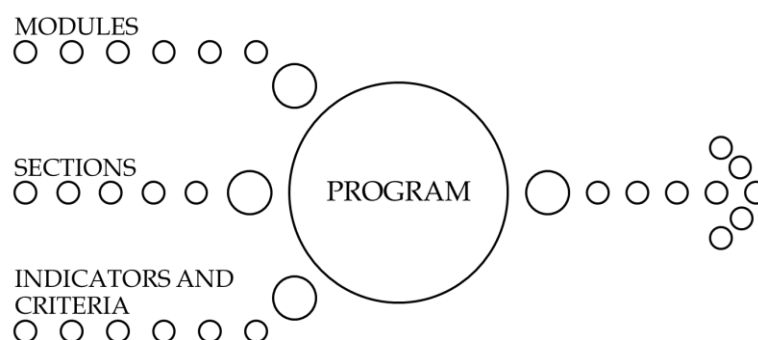


**Figure 5.** From the complex didactic purpose to the formulation of a learning situation (LS)



**Figure 6.** Relations between the theme, the purposes and the learning situations

After the program is made, follows its presentation and explanation. Every one works independently on the modules, using textbooks, dictionary, atlas, map and so on.



**Figure 7.** Structure of the teaching content

In the process of learning the student is advised by the teacher and by other students, through communication and conversations, in the same time preserving the self-dependence. Learning the material, the student himself makes an assessment and presents it on a special place. It is important intermediate control, self-control, mutual control to be made. The control at the exit is always preceded by summary by the teacher (review of the whole theme, stressing upon some complicated problems, and analysis of a joint resolution). In the summary are used various forms and methods.

Two are the main fields, in which the student, using this system, has to take up greater responsibility: personal motivation; self-organization.

This format of education certainly has advantage, compared to the other methods of education.

1. The student studies independently (he plans his work, organizes, controls and evaluates himself and his work).

2. The relation between teacher and student changes, and there is more time for communication individually, as well as on the separate modules. Everyone gets written advices too: how to operate, where to find the answer, in order to formulate an idea, support and so on.

3. The role of the teacher changes, through the skillful structuring of the module content, its purposes, which will help the acquiring of logical knowledge: perception, comprehension, memorizing, application, drawing of conclusion and systematization.

The main disadvantages are related in the first place to not using the advantages of electronic technologies, regarding the diversification and elaboration of educational materials through interactive elements, as well as regarding the monitoring of presentation, testing, evaluation and control during the education process and after it finishes.

Serious obstacle is the absence of precision of the volume of educative contents, which should be conformed to the real capabilities of students.

The achievement of logical consequence and interrelations in the presentation of materials is necessary, as well as the specification of unified criteria for their format.

The system for web-based education represents a convenient way for learning and mastering of skills in each field of scientific knowledge and in practice.

The good interface-design, logical structure of educational materials, fast navigation between the separate sessions and their parts help for the acquaintance with educational content and increase the effectiveness of the process of education.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION:

### Exemplary modules of presentation of regional studies research (local lore study) on a theme:

I. *The determination and definition of the geographic position is performed in the following consequence:*



1. Astronomic geographical position – determination of the geographic coordinates (latitude and longitude) of your settlement; comparing of the astronomic geographic position of the native settlement with that of the capital, district or municipal center; basic conclusions about the natural environment and the development of the settlement, resulting from the particular astronomic geographical position;

2. Natural-geographical position of the settlement regarding the natural zones in the country, on the Balkan Peninsula and in the continent; typical features of the natural environment, resulting from the peculiarities of the geographical position; distinctive features of the natural geographical position of the settlement and the native land, compared to another chosen region of the country;

3. Economic-geographical position – the transport-geographical position is determined with its basic features; the tourist-geographical position is determined with its features; the commercial-geographical position is determined with its basic features; the economic-geographical position is compared to that of other regions in the country;

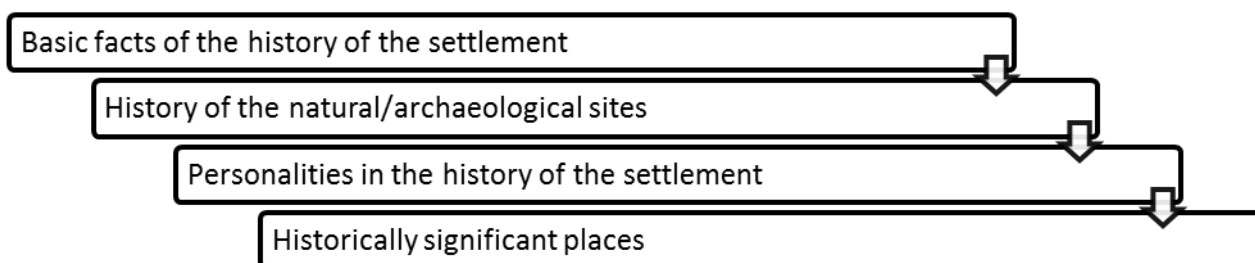
4. Political-geographical and geopolitical position – the main features of the political-geographical and geopolitical position of the settlement and the native land are determined, if there is grounds for their clear differentiation; conclusions and problems resulting from the political-geographical and the geopolitical position; comparison to other regions of the country;

5. Military-geographical (strategical) position – peculiarities of the military-geographical position of the settlement and the native land, if there is grounds to be searched of and revealed; problems coming from the peculiarities of the military-geographical position; comparison to other regions and settlements in the country;

6. Ecological-geographical position – revealing of typical features of the ecological-geographical position of the settlement and the native land; main problems connected with the peculiarities of the ecological-geographical position; comparing with other regions or settlements in the country;

7. General analysis of the geographical position. The advantages and disadvantages of the geographical position are revealed with examples. The main conclusions are formulated. A graphic model, showing the peculiarities of the geographical situation of the native land is prepared.

## II. Aspects of the history of the particular settlement



**Figure 8.** Sequence of the historical information about the settlement

Exemplary questions might be the following: origin of the name; first settlement on the territory of the contemporary town; inclusion within the borders of Bulgaria; relation to religion; importance as a fortress; fall of the town under the Ottoman rule; image during the Bulgarian national revival; famous persons from the Bulgarian national revival; fate of the town regarding the wars for national unification; role of the Patriarchate; symbols of the town – famous landmarks; relation of the names of quarters and streets to history; more famous monuments and commemorative tablets.

## III. Regional studies research of the population:

1. Number and dynamics of the population in the municipality;
  2. Factors and special features of the territorial distribution of the population;
- Average density;

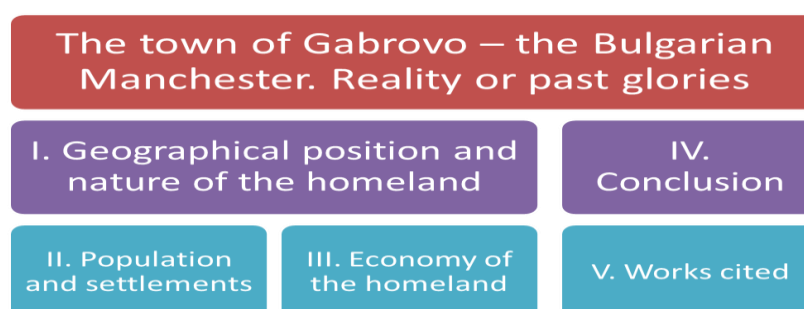
4. Change of the population: birth-rate, death-rate, natural growth; settling and moving out; mechanical growth; commuting; emigration;
5. Structure of the population: sexual; age; urban and rural population; educational structure; marriage structure; ethnical structure; religious structure;
6. Labor resource and economically active population: number of the labor force; population below the working age; in the working age; above the working age; number of the economically active population; distribution by sectors and economic branches; unemployment;
7. Demographical problems and demographical regional policy;
8. Basic indicators and trends of the living standard of the population: human development index; real income of the population; living standard and environment; necessity of new social policy. Conclusions about the influence of the demographic resources on the economic development of the native land are made in the end.

IV. Settlements as an object of regional studies:

1. Development of the settlement network:
  - 1.1. Historical retrospection of the settlement development;
  - 1.2. Contemporary socio-economic characterization;
2. Image of the settlement – type, form, planning, structure, public utilities;
3. Regional studies research on the home street (quarter);
4. Famous persons and families born in the settlement;
5. Social, infrastructural and ecological problems of the home settlement;
6. Perspectives for development of the settlement.

V. The geographical studying of a settlement is a research activity, which includes the following activities: research and interpretation of information from different sources; making interviews with specialists from different institutions, dealing with the problems of the settlement development and the local policy; making an inquiry of the population with purpose to investigate its attitude to the development and the problems of the settlement; finding of the directions of the settlement policy; providing of technological time in order to be completed all of the stages of the study.

VI. Complex scheme for presentation of a settlement, using the Bulgarian town of Gabrovo as an example.



**Figure 9.** Scheme for presentation of a settlement, using the Bulgarian town of Gabrovo as an example

**I. Geographical position and nature of the native land:**

1. Geographical position;
2. Relief characteristics;
3. Climate of the native land:
  - 3.1. Temperature;

- 3.2. Precipitations;
- 3.3. Winds;
- 4. Waters;
- 5. Soils;
- 6. Vegetation;
- 7. Fauna;
- 8. Natural protected sites and reserves on the territory of the district;
- 9. Ecological problems of the town;
  - 9.1. Condition and protection of waters;
  - 9.2. Condition and protection of air.

## **II. Population and settlements:**

- 1. Characteristics of the population;
- 2. Settlement system of the homeland:
  - 2.1. Historical retrospection of the origin and the development of the settlement;
  - 2.2 Types of settlements:
    - 2.2.1. towns;
    - 2.2.2. main villages.

## **III. Economy of the native land:**

- 1. Research of the branches from the Primary sector:
  - 1.1. Plant-growing;
  - 1.2. Stock-breeding;
  - 1.3. Wood industry and woodworking;
- 2. Research of the industry of Gabrovo:
  - 2.1. General characteristics;
  - 2.2. Light industry:
    - 2.2.1. Leather and shoe industry;
    - 2.2.2. Textile and knitwear industry;
    - 2.2.3. Food industry;
  - 2.3. Heavy industry:
    - 2.3.1. Machinery construction;
    - 2.3.2. Plastic articles production;
    - 2.3.3. Production of articles forms nonmetallic mineral raw materials;
    - 2.3.4. Production of sanitary accessories;
    - 2.3.5. Building materials and construction industry;
- 3. Research of the branches of the Tertiary sector;
  - 3.1. Transport;
  - 3.2. Energetics system;
  - 3.3. Water-supplyin system;
  - 3.4. Telecommunication services;
  - 3.5. Tourism;
  - 3.6. Financial mediation.

## **CONCLUSIONS:**

The relative restrictions that are imposed by the algorithm scheme for realization of the regional studies research drop out at the presentation of the results from it. This final event (public presentation), connected with the sharing of achievements, is most creative. Except private-scientific (terminological literacy, argumentative ratiocinations, capability for giving adequate answers to questions coming from the audience), important social competencies as communicative, technological and others are also demonstrated or formed.

Contemporary geographical education seems to be powerful and needed mechanism for organization of the sciences for man, and the regional approach and the application of the regional studies (local lore studies) method stimulates and motivates the development and realization of optimum capabilities for direct contact with the local structures and circles.

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