

FIELD WORK AS A WAY OF IMPROVING THE UNIVERSITY TEACHING OF GEOGRAPHY

Mila Pavlović¹, Filip Krstić¹

¹ *University of Belgrade – Faculty of Geography*

Abstract: Field work is very important, because it makes it easier for students to understand the laws and processes of generalization. A teacher is an important factor in this kind of improvement of university teaching of geography. The quality and effectiveness of this kind of teaching depends on his/hers didactic preparedness and capability for field work. In addition, it is necessary to bear in mind the intellectual maturity of the students. This is very important because the field work with the "unskilled" teachers can be turned into a mere formality, and classes will remain verbal and inefficient. In that case, field work isn't the source and foundation of knowledge of the outside world. Department of Regional Geography, at the Faculty of Geography, pays great attention to improving the teaching quality. One of the aspects is the field work. Department of Regional geography has continued to nurture excursions - field work, as one of the important aspects of quality improvement.

Key words: geography, field work, opinions of students, university, improvement, quality

1. Introduction

Geographers are constantly emphasizing that the observation is the oldest method of learning about geographic reality. Teaching geography is most evident when it occurs in the contemporary "geographical laboratories" - the geographical area. Geography should be taught outdoor, in the field, not in the classrooms, as it is usually the case. The didactic idea which has long been proclaimed is that objective reality, with richness of its manifestations and changes, is the basic source of human knowledge. The most important element of obvious field work is organized, conscious and planned observation of objects and phenomena. Students should be trained for such observation during their education at universities. The theoretical knowledge allows us to determine which of the many visible features of the observed object or process have greater importance. For that reason field work is very

important for students of geography, because it makes it easier to understand the facts and processes of generalization. The teacher is also an important factor in this kind of improvement of university teaching of geography. The quality and effectiveness of this kind of teaching largely depends on his didactic readiness and capability for field work. In addition, it is necessary to bear in mind the intellectual maturity and level of development of students. This is very important because the field work with the "unskilled" teachers can be turned into a mere formality, and classes will become more verbal and inefficient. In that case, field work becomes an end in itself rather than a means, the source and foundation of knowledge of the outside world.

2. Field work teaching at the Department of Regional Geography, University of Belgrade – Faculty of Geography

Department of Regional Geography at the Faculty of Geography in Belgrade pays great attention to improving the teaching quality of regionalgeographic subjects. One of the aspects of improvement is field work teaching, which is performed as a one-day or multi-day excursions. During the shorter field works (usually one day) students visit Deliblato sands, DjavoljaVaros, Fruska Gora and Radjevina. This kind of field work is carried out for the undergraduate studentson third and forth year of Geography, and more recently for the third year students of Spatial Planning. Three and five day excursions are realized in the area of StariVlah and Raska in southwest Serbia (the third year students of Geography and the second year students of Turismology) and in the area of Prokletije and Durmitor in Montenegro (for the fourth year students of Geography).

Field work represents an efficient means for the education of future geographers. Accordingly, those who want to be successful geographers must see real objects and processes in nature, such as those who are preparing to be physicists or chemists must perform experiments in laboratories. Field work should contribute to proper and comprehensive understanding of the geographical phenomenon, and especially to awaken student interest for the development of these phenomena. Borivoje Z. Milojević pointed out: "Once awakened interest will mean striving for continuous improvement, and this will create an expert in geography who will always be ready to respond to all those tasks, which are required of him" (Milojević, 1950). And after 65 years

after these statements, we can rightfully ask what is the position of geographers in modern science.

In order to geography to take its rightful place in the education system (and we have to ask ourselves where is geography in the middle of the second decade of the 21st century) continuous improvement of teachers is a necessity. By constantly improving the quality of teachers we are improving the teaching of geography. In this way the geography would gain importance in general education, which it deserves. One of the aspects of the implementation is to improve the quality of teaching, primarily the quality of field work. However, the big issue for this kind of work are abilities and qualifications of teaching staff at universities, and staff which are employed in elementary schools and high schools.

The author of this work, remembers several one-day excursion, which were organized by professors from the Department of Regional Geography (prof. KosovkaRistic and prof. MiloradVasovic, prof. DusanGavrilovic from the Department of physical geography and prof. MilutinLjesevic). These excursion were held in the area of Banat sands, Šumadija, Zapadna Morava valley, Novi Sad, Pinosava plateau etc.

After these field works the author of this paper has truly realized the true meaning of geography. The author then made the decision to take the students on field trips as often as possible.

The teaching staff at the Department for Regional Geography, which was succeeded by professors who have retired during the period 1990 - 1995, has sought to implement a one-day and multi-day field trips (as far as the material conditions allowed). The greatest satisfaction for professor, the author of this paper, is to hear the positive comments made after the field work, because then she really realizes that her beliefs and decisions, even from her student days, have a real confirmation.

Department of Regional geography has continued to nurture excursions - field works, as one of the important aspects of improving the quality of teaching of regional geographic subjects. However, in the period from 1978 - 1995 the field work were not carried out. Until 1978, field works were carried out by prof. Jovan Dj. Markovic, prof. MiloradVasovic, prof. Dragan Rodic and prof. KosovkaRistić. Some generations went to Slovenia and Istria, and then using Adriatic road to Dubrovnik and Popovopolje in Herzegovina. Excursion in 1978 carried out by prof. Jovan Dj. Markovic (participants were also prof. VujadinRudic and assistant Dragica Zivkovic)

was realized in the area of Durmitor, Niksicpolje, Skadar depression (Podgorica), via Cetinje and Kotor to Dubrovnik. Then the students visited Popovopolje, Trebinje, Bileca, Foca, Uzice and Belgrade. Over 100 students participated in this field work. The participant of this field work was the author of this text and this field work was crucial to define her scientific work in the field of regional geography. The realization of field works was not interrupted despite the economic problems that the country faced and the socio-political developments in the last decade of the 20th century. Unfortunately, there was only a decrease in the number of days from eight to seven, and then finally five days of excursion. We can responsibly say that this is a short period, and that the professors of the Department, as well as faculty management should be more involved in finding financial resources for the implementation of this kind of teaching. Students themselves pay all the cost of field works. Therefore, we can rightly wonder, whether this society is so poor that it doesn't have funds to finance this important segment of teaching which is necessary for future geographers. Such an attitude toward field work for all students of geography, arises the following question: can someone become a professor of chemistry or physics, without working in laboratories and conducting experiments?

Since the 1995 Department of Regional geography, after the discontinuation, has organized multi-day excursions (in accredited curriculum called fieldwork), for students of the third and fourth year of Geography and second year of Turismology. Students of the third year of Geography have three-day field work realized in the area of StariVlah and Raska, including visits of the Pester plateau - KarajukicaBunare. Sjenica and Uvac canyon. The field work is carried out with the involvement of local geographers and historians.

After the discontinuation, multiday field trips for fourth year students of Geography have been carried out for 22 years. Field work is carried out by prof. Mile Pavlovic and prof. MilutinLješević and the former assistants of the Department (prof. Mirjana Gajic, prof. Snežana Vujadinović and prof. Dejan Sabic). Field work is implemented on the territory of Durmitor, Niksicpolje and the Montenegrin coast (Bay of Kotor, Ulcinj coast and Skadar Lake). The field work was carried out with a large number of students (sometimes up to 120), which may burden the quality of teaching, because they couldn't all be actively involved. However, experience shows the great interest of students for this kind of teaching in geography. Field work is the

main event, which they will remember after studies. They found particularly interesting the cruising in Bay of Kotor, by school boat from Hydrological Institute from Kumbor.

In the last ten years fieldwork for the fourth year students of Geography is still performed in the area of Durmitor and Prokletije. The organizer is the Department of Regional geography and it is implemented under the leadership of prof. Mile Pavlovic and assistant Filip Krstic. And this fieldtrip causes a lot of interest among students and almost all students are included. Contribution to the quality of field work give colleagues - professors, and also graduate geographers from the area. These are, first of all, prof. Slobodan Kasalica and prof. Miroslav Doderovic from the Faculty of Philosophy in Niksic, and prof. Marko Knezevic, a retired professor.

In order to improve university teaching, a survey was conducted among the students on how to improve the teaching of geography. Students from the following institutions were involved in the survey: University of Belgrade – Faculty of Geography, University of KosovskaMitrovica – Faculty of Science, University of Niš - Department of Geography, Faculty of Sciences, and University of Belgrade - Faculty of security studies. In the table below are the questions to which the students responded and the survey results are very interesting: 81.7% of students at the Faculty of Geography in Belgrade believes that the organization of field work the best form to improve teaching, 95% have such an opinion in KosovskaMitrovica, 80.0% at the Department of Geography in Nis and at the Faculty of Security studies (Pavlović et. al., 2014).

Table 1 – Results of the student’s survey on ways to improve university teaching (in %) Source: Pavlović et al., 2014

Ways of improving university teaching \ Institution	University of Belgrade – Faculty of Geography	University of Priština - Faculty of Science and Mathematics	University of Niš - Faculty of Sciences and Mathematics	University of Belgrade – Faculty of security studies
A) Good organized lectures	16,3	5,0	13,3	15,0
B) Interest of professor for teaching	2,0	0,0	6,7	5,0
B) Organization of field work	81,7	95,0	80,0	80,0

On the basis of the surveyed students, 82.3% of respondents said that the quality of the teaching process can be raised to a higher level by organizing field work, while only 4.0% said that the teacher lecture can

improve the quality of teaching. The results are very important for the professors in the Department of Regional geography. The aim of this survey was to point out the attitudes and perceptions of students in the fourth year of Geography and based on their opinions to be more involved in the implementation of field work as a form of improving university teaching of geography.

3. Conclusion

Field work has been an important part of the curriculum throughout the 20th century. One of the reasons for neglecting field work was insufficient training of the professor for performing such way of teaching, but also lack of motive and enthusiasm. The importance and role that professor of geography has are perhaps best illustrated by the following words of Borivoje Z. Milojević: “If something is need to be done by tomorrow afternoon, do it today! None one day should past, without writing a couple of sentences or reading a few pages. The door of your office should always be opened for your student and associates, particularly for ones abroad (Pavlović, 2016).

These spoken words should make all geographers think and reexamine themselves. Without this kind of work, we are deeply convinced that there will be no well organized teaching of geography and no good geographers. All this is reflected in the level of university teaching and the status that geography has in the educational system.

References

- Milojević, B. Ž. (1950). *O univerzitetnoj nastavi geografije*. U. Roglić J. (ur.). Prvi kongres geografa Jugoslavije, str. 83 – 89. Zagreb: Geografsko društvo NR Hrvatske.
- Pavlović M, Mišović, S. and Radivojević A. (2014). Mesto i uloga nacionalne geografije u visokom obrazovanju na univerzitetima u Srbiji. In: Grčić Mirko, Filipović Dejan and Dragičević Slavoljub (eds.): *Geografsko obrazovanje, nauka i praksa: razvoj, stanje i perspektive*, pp 197–206. Belgrade: University of Belgrade – Faculty of Geography.
- Pavlović, M. (2016). Stavovi Borivoja Ž. Milojevića o mogućnostima unapređenja univerzitetske nastave kroz izvođenje studentskih ekskurzija. In: Šabić Dejan (eds.): *Borivoje Ž. Milojević – životidelo*, pp. 121–134. Belgrade: University of Belgrade – Faculty of Geography, Serbian geographical society, Municipality of Krupanj.