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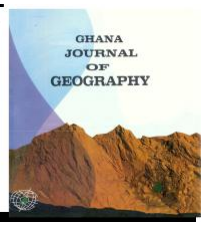

Geography and National Development: Historically and in the Contemporary Period.

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abstract

From its formative years in ancient Greece, the discipline of geography has always been relevant to human endeavours to some extent. It had been a handmaid of history and imperialist colonialist expansions out of Europe to the rest of the known world. However, beyond this colonial project and the partitioning of Africa during the Berlin Conference, spatial analysis and spatial science in its applied form have been at the heart of development imperatives. As the saying goes, 'geographers are not planners, but they are the stuff out of which planners are made'. Social relations and structures ultimately play out in space, while resources are unevenly distributed. The relevance of geography can be exemplified in almost every human endeavour in Ghana. This ranges from the academe to the role of the topical specializations in advancing the course of national development in Ghana. This paper seeks to elaborate on these themes as we strive to advance the course of geography as a science for its own sake and in its applied aspects, given the enormity of Africa's development challenges.

Introduction

This paper elaborates on the nature of geography and its evolution in Ghana. It also articulates the discipline's relevance for national development historically and in the contemporary period. This is to provide a backdrop and a basis for the striving of geographers to advance the course of our discipline as a science and to promote the application of the discipline to solve the enormous development challenges facing our continent and our nation.

One may start by asking the question, 'What is geography?' One method to understand our subject is to look at how it evolved through time. Even though there have been earlier antecedents, geographical inquiry as we know it today, began in the 18th Century. The period between 1750 - 1860 can be regarded as the classical period in the development of geographical thought deriving from the works of Carl Ritter (1779-1839) and Alexander von Humboldt (1769-1859), which was a culmination of a whole process of development predating this period (Broek, 1966, p.15).

In the ancient world, geography grew out of three closely related activities:

- Exploration leading to the accumulation of facts about the Earth's surface,
- Charting and mapping of the areas known, and
- Speculation about the materials collected was an attempt in its nascent period to develop theories.

According to Kant, knowledge can be organised from three different perspectives:

1. According to the kind of objects studied, which give you the systematic sciences,
2. Looking at facts in association through time, which is the domain of historical inquiry, and
3. The domain of geography is the study of phenomena as they are associated in space.

This Kantian division of knowledge provided the philosophical justification for the discipline (Broek, 1966, p.14; Martin, 1961).

Geography essentially studies the interrelationship of natural and human phenomena and their resultant landscapes. "It is about how, why, and where human and natural activities occur and how they are interconnected" [1]. It is the study of the earth as the home of humankind. The difference between geography as a science and spatial policy is that "the latter is by definition a political process. It involves democratically legitimised political choices. It is then the task of the geographer to underpin these choices scientifically" (Cabus, 2009, p. 67).

One may remark that over the evolution of the discipline; it is undeniable that the discovery and mapping of regions have always resulted in trade relations leading to imperialist expansion out of Europe. One crucial gap apart from the technology of production that separated Europe from Africa in both the medieval period of trans-Saharan trade and the mercantilist period of coastal trade was in the means of destruction (Songsore, 2011). This was the period of primitive accumulation and organised banditry of the European feudal ruling classes.

Europe was able to penetrate Africa, thanks to its gun-bearing sailing ships. "The African states were at a great disadvantage when the scramble for Africa began since they had to fight with the same people supplying them with arms" (Goody, 1980, p .28). The negative impacts of slavery in the mercantilist era and direct colonialism, which resulted in the crude partitioning of Africa in 1884 during the Berlin Conference and the unequal trade foisted on Africa stare us in the face even today (Songsore, 2011, p. 46).

As a follow-up from this introductory note, section 2 provides an overview of the Regional Concept as the Pith and Core of Geography; while section 3 discusses the Paradigm Shift of Geography from an Idiographic to a

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[1] "Nature of Geography as a Discipline", http://www.nios.ac.in/media/documents/316courseE/ch1.pdf, (Accessed on 2/8/2018).p.1.

Nomothetic Science; section 4discusses the Relevance of Space in Development Planning while; section 5. provides an overview of Geography in Response to the Challenges of National Development and section 6 is the Concluding Note.

The Regional Concept as the Pith and Core of Geography

The regional concept, at the heart of our discipline, is a tool to comprehend differences and similarities on the earth's surface. A region has some kind of internal homogeneity which distinguishes it from surrounding areas in terms of some criteria or from how all the parts work together in a functional system. It is therefore, an aerial generalization and is always defined in terms of specific criteria.

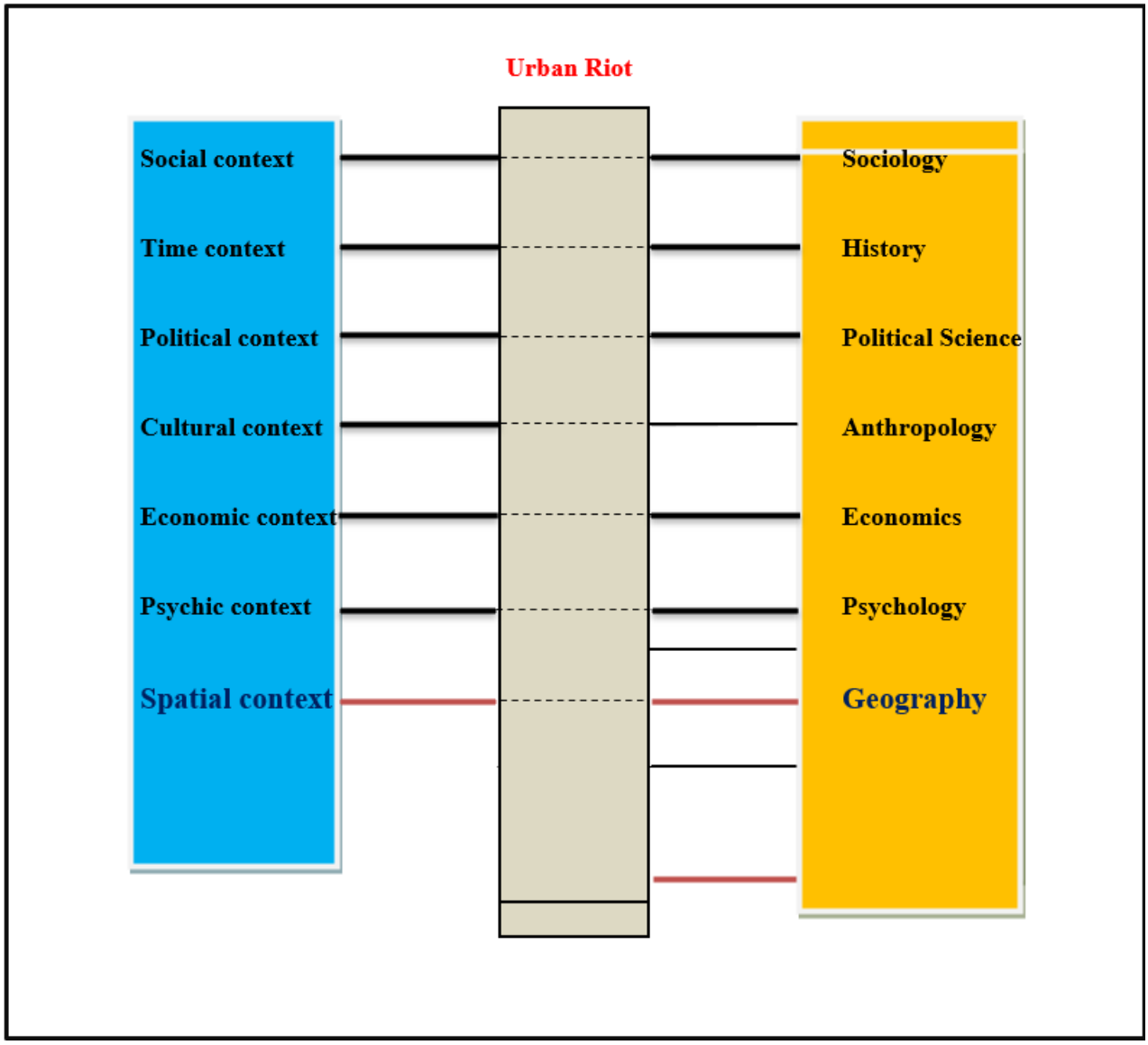
A preliminary observation is that there is no difference between systematic and regional geography. Let us consider regional geography in terms of spatial variations and dynamics based on single themes. Regional geography is systematic since it allows us to identify several parallel systems of regions (Eyre and Jones, 1966, p.22).

However, other deviationist concepts of geography are reconcilable with the regional perspective espoused here. These include the schools of human ecology, landscape analysis, and the locational analysis school as espoused by Hagget (Eyre and Jones, 1966, p.20).

Hans Carol defined total geographic space to extend from the tropopause to the 'M' or moho discontinuity. Gean Gottman argued that total geographic space should not be confined to the earth, but elsewhere where human beings are acting, allowing space age. It should instead refer to that part of the universe directly available to human beings as Bunge would put it. All these are reconcilable to the areal differentiation school (Hartshorne, 1960, pp .24-25)

As Abler et al. (1972, p.54) put it, "we can think of any event we experience as having a certain number of relevant contexts which correspond to the viewpoints held by different disciplines concerned with that event. Consider, for example, the construct urban riot" (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: Some Construct Contexts and Related Sciences



Source: Adapted from (Abler et al., 1972, p. 55)

The Paradigm Shift from Geography as an Idiographic Science to Geography as a Nomothetic Science

The first warning shots of this transition from geography as an idiographic study to geography as a nomothetic science started with the methodological debates between Hartshorne and Schaeffer (1953). Hartshorne, who was on the wrong side of history, argued that in geography, regions or spatial geographies are defined based on a total synthesis of all topical specialisms in geography, both physical and human. This could only lead to the discovery of a total set of regions worldwide that were unique and non-comparable. This is illustrated in the old regional geographies we studied in the high school and the universities.

Schaeffer made the point that geography, consistent with all other social sciences, has to be a generalizing or law seeking science. According to Hartshorne, geography is a study of areal differentiation if we use the homogeneity criterion or the study of the dynamics of spatial organization according to Abler et al. (1972) when we are deploying the interdependency or functional criterion. This is the new consensus since the notions of holism and idiography were expunged from geography following the methodological controversy between Hartshorne and Schaeffer which led to the transformative positioning of geography as a nomothetic or law seeking science rather than an idiographic science which does not concern itself with generalization but rather the unique.

With this transition the distinction or dualism between systematic and regional geography dissolved into thin air as the extraordinary regional geographies of the contemporary era are based on single themes consistent with the various topical specializations in the subject ranging from physical to human geography. Some have therefore said wrongly that geography may have lost its focus as there can be 57 or more regional geographies (Eyre and Jones, 1966, p. 21).

This paradigm shift brings into focus the relevance of space in development planning. This occurred during the post war period, demonstrating the value of scientific and technological inputs in human progress, which filtered down the social sciences. For example, economists had shown how economic progress could be induced with the advent of the Keynesian macro-economic revolution. It was a great advent of social engineering, and all social sciences were compelled to adopt the scientific paradigm to analyse their specific problems and geography could not afford to be left behind.

The Relevance of Space in Development Planning

As a by-product of central planning, attention has come to be paid on regional planning and development issues. According to conventional practice, national planning is divided into global and sectoral. Global planning concerns balancing consumption, investment, exports and imports, supply and demand for employment and establishing national priorities for resource allocation to broad functional sectors of the economy (Friedmann, 1973). Our current political configuration meant 126 ministries under the NPP (2017-2020) and 85 in their second term (2021-2024); and
56 ministries for the current NDC government.

Working within budgetary constraints, sectoral planning involves drawing up sectoral projects and combining them into comprehensive programmes. Nevertheless, there is a limit to macroeconomic and sectoral planning as they remain incomplete without spatial planning because of the impact on space of different macroeconomic and sectoral policies. Regionalization for national planning equals the translation of centrally set objectives into down-to-earth action. Regional planning like global planning provides a second level of integration (see Figure 2).

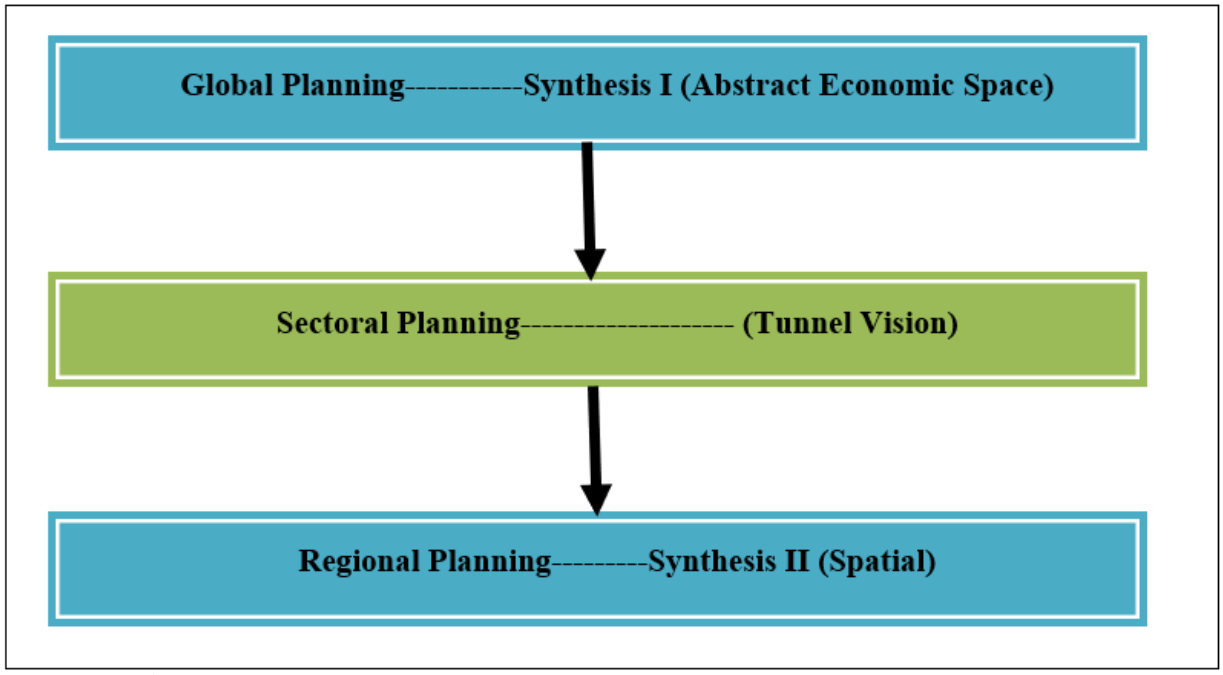
"The social is inextricably spatial and the spatial impossible to divorce from its social construction and content" (Massey, 1995, p. 65). Therefore, social processes occur within a spatial domain and spatial patterns become an expression of social processes (Songsore, 2011, p.17).

Ghana, like most other developing countries face many policy problems relating to uneven development:

- Uneven regional development
- Rural-urban disparities characterized by a concentration of dynamic high wage jobs in urban areas and the lack of effective rural-urban linkages that promote welfare and productivity gains in rural areas
- Disparities between food crop producers and non-food producers with the privilege of export crop producers
- The problem of urban primacy hand in hand with a poorly developed hierarchy of urban settlements
- The lack of national cohesion arising from these geographical inequalities which also sometimes coincide with ethnic identities
- These geographical disparities in development also reflect social disparities as different social groups located in geographic space are concentrated in different branches of production marked by different sets of rewards (Songsore, 2011b, p. 2).

Whilst these inequalities have been occasioned by our peculiar colonial history of uneven development, more recent differential responses to macro-economic reforms have tended to privilege certain economic sectors within certain regions whilst excluding other sectors in other regions from the benefits of state policies in support of growth and development (Songsore, 2011, see also Gore, 1984).

Figure 2: The Relationship between different Levels of Planning



Source: Adapted from (Friedmann, 1973, p. 140)

Consequently, there is a general lack of economic integration as demonstrated by the weak input-output Leontief type of industrial linkages of the national economy. As the saying goes, 'geographers are not planners but they are the stuff out of which planners are made'. This means that a geographer is trained for planning since planners are concerned with the organization of space. Table 1 shows the close relationship between regional analysis from the perspective of geography and regional planning from the perspective of development programming.

Table 1: Regions from the Perspective of Geography and Planning.

Criterion	Geographical Analysis	Planning
Homogeneity	Homogeneous Regions	Programme Area
Interdependency	Functional Regions	Planning Region

Source: (Hilhorst, 1971, p. 54)

The table shows that area-based homogenous regions are defined based on similar criteria. By contrast, functional regions are based on the principle of interdependency which entails the dynamic integration of activity systems organized around major urban systems with their industrial and service functions and catchment areas for raw materials, labour and capital.

Programme areas are regions defined using the similarity criterion for applying similar instruments in their development. Examples include ecological zones or areas with special advantages or disadvantages (problem regions). This is the logic behind the carving out of special development zones.

Planning regions are concerned with the relationship between cities and towns and their catchment areas based on services they provide to outlying areas or inter-industry linkages. This approach feeds into the classical notion of growth poles, growth centres, growth points and rural development service centres with their appropriate level of services that allow for entrepreneurial and consumer innovations that spread growth and development down the hierarchy of settlements, including rural settlements.

Irrespective of the topical specialisation of the geographer from climatology, biogeography, geomorphology from the physical side to population geography, urban geography, etc. on the human side, the regional concept remains the key analytical tool of the geographer. The tool and new mapping techniques, such as GIS and Remote Sensing, are giving much greater visibility to geography across universities in America, especially those that failed to appreciate the role of geography as a spatial science. Technological developments have aided the traditional map-making tool either in the field using the GPS or by aerial and satellite imagery and GIS. "Spatial relationships are at the heart of geography. Using software to analyze spatial relationships among objects being mapped, GIS, in particular, has greatly assisted geographers in depicting the character of place. Not only can they now process larger quantities of data more quickly and with greater refinement, but also they can manipulate variables and thus project alternatives that give geography an applied dimension. Finally, their work can be displayed using advanced techniques of computer-generated mapping" (Semple, p.2, Undated). At the current historical conjuncture, there has been an explosion of interest in Geographical Information Science (GIScience) and GIS globally.

Rebranding of Geography in Response to the Challenges of National Development.

The leadership of geography in Ghana in the various universities has long seen the need to shift away from the Anglo-Saxon tradition of geography, which is based on spatial analysis for and of itself as a discipline, to one geared towards solving the problems of national development. Hence, the course structures have been enhanced to cater for this new trajectory.

For example, the Department of Geography at the University of Ghana has been rebranded as the **Department of Geography and Resource Development since 1988.** This has led to a widening of the scope of the discipline to include Remote Sensing and GIS, Climate Change and Sustainable Development (MSc/MPhil), the Geography of Gender and Development, Disaster Risk Reduction Science (MSc /MPhil), among others.

Indeed, the Department and the Centre for Remote Sensing and Geographic Information Services (CERSGIS) have become the centres of excellence for Remote Sensing and GIS in Ghana. The Department's Remote Sensing and Geographic Information Systems Unit offers undergraduate and graduate courses in Geography and Resource Development and an MSc sandwich modular programme in Remote Sensing and GIS for practitioners. This is in its tenth year, along with other short courses for practitioners.

By contrast, the Centre for Remote Sensing and Geographic Information Services (CERSGIS) Unit is a non-profit unit spawned from Geography which provides geospatial information and data services to a wide range of establishments, including the Environmental Protection Agency, National Development Planning Commission, European Union, USAID, among others. It also provides short courses/ training to government institutions and organisations in the West Africa sub-region. All lecturers have also, in their capacities, been members of trans-disciplinary teams engaged with addressing national development issues.

Similar transformations can be seen in other sister departments at other universities in Ghana. The Department of Geography at the University of Cape Coast is now called the **Department of Geography and Regional Planning,** whereas that at KNUST has been rechristened as **Geography and Rural Development.** The same department in the University of Winneba is christened the Department of **Geography Education,** consistent with its mandate of teacher education. The University of Development Studies has borrowed the key courses in the Department of Geography and Resource Development into its various curricula.

Geographers in Ghana have also been recognised and have performed various roles in the academe. Because of its holistic understanding of problems, it has produced more Deans of the Faculty of Social Sciences at Legon and more Vice-Chancellors in Ghanaian universities. The first ever Provost of the College of Humanities at Legon is a geographer.

The Consequences of Lack of Spatial Planning post Nkrumah

Only during the First Republic was a very serious attempt made to incorporate spatial planning as an integral part of national development planning. Some very good examples are the excellent works in planning the new Tema, Akosombo and Sunyani townships. Doxiadis and Associates were the consultants that provided the blueprint for the development of Tema based on the neighbourhood concept, with each neighbourhood having its designated commercial and educational zones. The light industrial areas were close to the communities housing the working class, while polluting heavy industries were located on the leeward side of the South-Easterly Winds not to pollute residential neighbourhoods to the West. Indeed, Tema and Accra were designed to develop into one big urban agglomeration with transport corridors to the North and South, with opportunities for future expansion. Churches and malls have encroached all these spaces for expansion in the era of neoliberal globalisation.

Although these cities are mostly rundown with decay and the growing bazaar economy of informality, these towns still stand as monuments of orderly spatial development even today. The same goes for industrial estates planned for Accra, Takoradi, Kumasi and Tema. By contrast, post this visionary leader ushered in a period of neoliberal globalisation where the economy has been reduced to discourses of the macro-economic framework and sectors of the national economy hanging in the air.

Conclusion

In conclusion, let me reiterate that spatial planning is an integral part of economic and social investments. We ignore it at our peril since an integrated space economy is important for national integration by preventing economic and social exclusion and marginalization which could lead to state collapse or failure as experienced in some African countries since the nation state project is still in its infancy.

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