

## HUMAN GEOGRAPHY

**Carles Carreras**

*Departament de Geografia Humana, Universitat de Barcelona, Spain*

**Keywords:** Culture, Description, Economy, Explanation, Geography, Location, Perception, Population, Social Sciences, Understanding.

### **Contents:**

1. Historical Background
    - 1.1. A Secular Chorographical Tradition
    - 1.2 The First Human Geography of Friedrich Ratzel
    - 1.3. Human Geography as a Social Science, separated from Physical Geography
    - 1.4. The Criticism to Neopositivist Approaches: Recent Debates in Human Geography
  2. The Main Fields of Study
    - 2.1. Population Geography or Geodemography
    - 2.2. Economic Geography or Geoeconomy
    - 2.3. Social Geography or Geosociology
    - 2.4. Settlement Geography
    - 2.5. Cultural Geography or Geoanthropology
    - 2.6. Political Geography or Geopolitics
    - 2.7. Theory and Methodology
  3. Alternative Approaches to Thematic Studies
  4. The Present Human Geographical Problems
- Glossary  
Bibliography  
Biographical Sketch

### **Summary**

The chapter states the generally accepted fact that, in spite of many other older special contributions, the German geographer and anthropologist Friedrich Ratzel created Human Geography as an independent discipline. His two-volume work *Anthropogeographie* (1982) presented for the first time a broad vision of the human settlements and their economic activities and a deep analysis of their complex relationship with a conditioning physical environment. The development of strong specialization in Natural and Applied Sciences after the Second World War, and the Social Science orientation of the Human Geography studies, mainly among the French Regional School had definitively separated Human and Physical Geography. The recent debates, especially among the British geographers try to renew the traditional connection among the two fields.

Human Geography today has also exploded into many separate branches, focusing their studies on Population, Economic Activities, Urban or Rural Characteristics, and Cultural or Political Organization of a territory. Each one of these branches has been analyzed from different and contrasting points of view- from the neopositivist, to the Marxist or behavioral. The combination of branches and points of view together with

the proliferation of data and methods and techniques of analysis has almost paralyzed the capacity of Human Geographers to understand and explain the dynamic changes of the contemporary world. The recent transversal approaches to Cultural, Economic, Social or Political spheres of the global organization of the human territory at different scales or the analysis of new themes like gender, globalization, environmental or multicultural problems could maintain for the Human Geography both the diversity and the efficiency of general interpretations and even prognosis of the future of the humankind.

## **1. Historical Background**

### **1.1. A Secular Chorographical Tradition**

The first Geographical knowledge has been accumulated by many different scholars in the Chinese, Egyptian, classical Greek and Roman, and Islamic cultures, in a more or less **chorographic** way. The description of “exotic” lands and regions used to combine mathematical and astronomical remarks with both physical and human and economic descriptions, generally oriented to manage the agricultural environment, like in Pharaohnic Egypt, as pointed out by the Italian geographer Giuseppe Dematteis, or to military colonization, as noted by the French Yves Lacoste on two so different personages as Herodotus (480-420, aC) or Ibn Khaldun (1332-1406). These chorographic works range from the most ancient coastal descriptions, to local topographies, to more or less a general geographical encyclopedia. So almost each culture, each region, even each city-state has its own chorographical tradition, with no connections and no accumulation of data and knowledge almost till the Renaissance translation of some strategic books. Ancient Mediterranean geographers, in general – Greeks, Romans or Muslims- were normally focused on travel books production, while Chinese were more devoted to cartographic elaboration. Nevertheless this tradition has never completely disappeared, but nowadays it has been marginalized by the community of academic geographers to the journalists or tourist writers’ world, with some intermediate products like the *National Geographic* magazines and films.

The Renaissance period has permitted us to put together many of the historic geographical achievements, throughout Latin translations from the ancient Greek and Islamic texts, and the recent practical knowledge on Astronomy and navigation techniques. Printed books and atlases allow also a very general diffusion of all the new discoveries all around the European states. Astronomy, Geodesy or Cartography became progressively independent disciplines according to Geography which may be said to have some kind of scientific motherhood.

### **1.2 The First Human Geography of Friedrich Ratzel**

The German geographer and anthropologist Friedrich Ratzel (1844-1904) has created Human Geography as an independent discipline. His two-volume work *Anthropogeographie*, published in 1882, presents for the first time a broad vision of the human settlements and their economic activities and a deep analysis of their complex

relationship with a conditioning physical environment. Ratzel has pointed out the relevant scientific problem of the complex and conflicting relationship between Nature and Society, and Human Geography has been located in the centre of this relationship, in such a way that has been considered as **determinist**. The solid naturalistic formulation of Ratzel has helped us to reinforce this conception, very strongly criticized by the antagonist French school of Geography. France and Germany were contemporary struggling for the hegemony in continental Europe, since the last decades of XIX Century almost till the end of the Second World War, and Geography, like History and other disciplines, became a strategic domain of knowledge in the education of the young men, and future soldiers; each state seemed to need to have a different concept of Geography. The more humanistic geographers educated around Paul Vidal de la Blache (1845-1918) and the review *Annales de Géographie*, put their emphasis on the “freedom” of the individuals and societies to keep or to fight the natural conditions. In this way the French school was named as **possibilistic**, against the cold German determinism. Nevertheless, over the different philosophical definitions of the two schools, it was always a real fascination for the recent formulation of many Natural laws during the XIX Century (from the genetics of Mendel, to the classification of Linné, the evolutionism of Darwin or the Ecology of Haeckel) and the end of the era of discoveries in Africa, in the Himalayas or around the poles. The different national geographical associations and the university chairs created in the process of institutionalization of the discipline at the end of the XIX to the beginning of the XX Century had become the privileged centers for the diffusion of all these debates, as pointed out in 1982 by the Spanish geographer H. Capel.

In a relative intermediate position was placed the British school of Human Geography created around the leadership of the Scottish Halford J. Mackinder (1861-1947) and Andrew J. Herbertson (1865-1915). British Geography was closer to the German one in some methodological aspects, but was more pragmatic, integrating some social development on the way of the French sociologist Le Play. The British school has created a very influential Political and a Historical Geography, especially in the United States. German Geography was more naturalistic even in the role of laboratory analysis into the geographic research. The French geographers were more oriented to the fieldwork, and to the application of direct observation techniques. Germans were more general and analytical geographers, developing other techniques, like thematic Cartography and aerial photogrammetry. The French were more descriptive and synthetically developing their **Regional** approach, that could better denominate the whole school. German Geography has been very influential in the traditional German areas of Europe (central and Eastern Europe, Scandinavia and northern Italy) and, throughout Switzerland, in the United States. The best-known deterministic geographers were the Americans- Ellsworth Huntington (1876-1947) and Ellen Churchill Semple (1863-1932). French Geography has been very influential in its political colonies and in other Roman countries, like Spain, Portugal, Canada or Brazil.

Since the beginning of the Twentieth Century the national schools had been progressively integrated into a network of international relations of universities and laboratories, even more after the foundation of the *International Geographical Union* in 1922, in Brussels. Specialization and ideology had progressively become the main features for identification of the Human geographers more than their national belonging.

The mobility of intellectuals, before, during, and after the Second World War has strongly helped this process of internationalization of Geography, especially into the Anglo-Saxon world, according to the summary of R. Johnston and P. Claval.

### **1.3. Human Geography as a Social Science, separated from Physical Geography**

In the first years after the Second World War, the development of a very deep specialization in Natural and Applied Sciences, and a progressive integration of the Human Geography studies into the general Social Sciences field has had as a main consequence the definitive separation between Human and Physical Geography. This second aspect has been most significant among some very influential French Regional scholars, specially Pierre George (b. 1909), that has elaborated a series of every Human Geography branches handbooks in one of the most popular French publishing firm, fully translated to many other Roman languages. The regionalist French methodology has been renovating by Pierre George with a very light and fragmented Marxist (or at least, materialist) approaches with special emphasis in economic activities and in the study of the contemporary “new” socialist world.

From the conceptual point of view, Human and Physical geographers both shifted from only Natural Sciences paradigms to more Physics and Mathematical ones. In this background the recuperation of some pre-war fundamental German works has been very significant. The most important milestone has probably been the congress of Lund in 1960, where Walter Christaller (1893-1969) has found an opportunity to present his famous Central Place Theory, with a widespread influence into the Anglo-Saxon world. This theory has been the first attempt to apply the law of universal gravitation to geographical analysis (at the same time that of the north-American economist Reilly) in order to find a general law to explain the location of cities. Focused only on the service sector, the Central Place Theory put the bases of interurban relationship analysis and spatial networks, with strong emphasis on hierarchy of cities, and on the more general territorial organization. Christaller due to his theory became the most well known geographer among the other Social scientists, especially, among urban and regional economists.

Into this **neopositivist** intellectual background, it is necessary to point out three complementary issues that have totally changed the disciplinary status of Human Geography: the technological, the methodological, and the conceptual. The leadership of this change has been clearly Anglo-Saxon, with many translations to Russian, Spanish or Italian, and even connecting to the French geography throughout some Canadian geographers and reviews.

From the technological point of view, the computer's revolution started on the forties put the base for the so-called **Quantitative Revolution** in Geography, or Theoretical, according to the North-American William Bunge. For the first time it has been possible to manipulate an enormous amount of different data, from official records or fieldwork observation techniques, in order to try to find regularities and correlations. One of the most famous publications in this direction has been *Models in Geography*, of the British geographers Richard Chorley (1927-2002) and Peter Haggett (b. 1933), in 1967. From the methodological point of view, in the 1960s, the development of the *General Systems*

*Theory* by the Austrian biologist Ludwig von Betanlanffy has permitted us to organize a new method to analyze, measure, and explain the relationship among the different geographical elements. The Irish-American geographer Brian J.L. Berry (b. 1934) has been one of the most significant scholars to apply systems approach in different fields of Human Geography. Finally, from the conceptual point of view, the diffusion of the ideas of the philosopher Kuhn has been very important in order to transform Geography into a scientific discipline, as a Science of Space. The British geographer David Harvey (b. 1935) has defined in the same way a unique scientific methodology in Geography in his famous book of 1969. Finally, the publication of the first edition of the Peter Haggett's influential book, *Geography- a Modern Synthesis* in 1972, has probably been a more visible sign of the complete redefinition of the discipline, very soon evaluated by Michael Chisholm (b. 1931).

Running parallel with these changes the significance of Applied Human Geography must also be pointed out. Open to other professional approaches, mainly architects, planners, sociologists and economists, and with almost only technical concerns, with less conceptual ambition, the applied geographers have had a relevant production. In the Anglo-Saxon world it is necessary to mention the work of Dudley Stamp (1898-1966) and of Michel Philipponneau in the French domain. Peter Hall, the British and Jean Labasse, the French have developed an even more restricted field of Regional and Urban planning, both into the same two separate cultural realms.

-  
-  
-

TO ACCESS ALL THE 18 PAGES OF THIS CHAPTER,  
Visit: <http://www.eolss.net/Eolss-sampleAllChapter.aspx>

### **Bibliography**

Allen, J. & Hamnett, C. (1995). *A Shrinking World? Global Unevenness and Inequality*. Oxford University Press, Oxford. [A real handbook of Human Geography that tries to unify all the traditional fields of the discipline putting the emphasis on inequalities].

Bailly, A. and Beguin, H. (1982). *Introductions à la Géographie Humaine*. Masson, Paris. [An original handbook of Human Geography that present the main different approaches of each traditional field, maintaining coherence and diversity at the same time].

Berry, B.J.L. and Horton, F.E. (1970). *Geographic Perspectives on Urban Systems with integrated readings*. Prentice Hall, New Jersey. [A classical handbook of Urban Geography, elaborated from the systemic point of view, and integrating the study of cities and of the City].

Brunet, R., Ferras, R. Et Théry. H. (1992). *Les mots de la Géographie. Dictionnaire critique*. Reclus/La Documentation Française, Paris. [A general work of the new regional French marxist approach of the Montpellier school, that gives an original overview of the traditional and recent concepts of the discipline].

Bunge, W. (1962). *Theoretical Geography*. Gleeurup, Lund. [One of the milestones of the so-called Quantitative revolution; the first handbook elaborated at university level].

Buttimer, A. (1983). *The Practice of Geography*. Longman, Essex. [An original book that assembles the experiences of the author from the analysis of personal motivation to do Geography of some relevant geographer, putting out the interest of the personal values in the general conception of the discipline].

Capel, H. (1982). *Filosofía y Ciencia en la Geografía Contemporánea*. Barcanova, Barcelona. [A handbook on the evolution of the Geographical thinking, from the Enlightenment to the present days, with special emphasis in the institutionalization processes].

Chabot, G. (1948). *Les villes*. PUF, Paris. [The first classical handbook of the French Urban Geography, where urban functions were detailedly depicted].

Chisholm, G.G. (1889). *Handbook of Commercial Geography*. Longman, Essex [19<sup>th</sup> edition, 1975, entirely rewritten by Dudley Stamp and revised by Blake, G.N. and Clark, A.N.] [The most classical handbook of Commercial Geography that had become a model of the traditional Geographical approach to the study of Economic activities].

Chisholm, M. (1975). *Human Geography. Evolution or Revolution?* Penguin Books, Harmondsworth. [A milestone in the study of the evolution of the discipline, issued from the theoretical approach].

Chorley, P. And Haggett, P. (1967). *Models in Geography*. Methuen, London. [One of the most famous works of the theoretical Geography, that had assembled the best specialists on the different fields, affording a lot of case studies and methods].

Christaller, W. (1933). *Die zentralen Orte in Süddeutschland*. Nachdr, Jena. [Probably the most important work of the history of the discipline, because its formulation of the central place theory and also because is the best known geographical work outside the community of geographers].

De Blij, H.J. and Murphy, A.B. (1998, 6<sup>th</sup>). *Human Geography. Culture, Society and Space*. Wiley, New York. [A classical handbook of the Anglo-Saxon Human Geography that is transversally organised from the cultural point of view].

Dematteis, G. (1985). *Le metafore della Terra. La geografia umana tra mito e scienza*. Feltrinelli, Milano. [A very original study of the conceptual evolution of the discipline from the Italian point of view, that allows to present the most relevant questions of the contemporary Human Geography].

Gould, P. (1966). *On Mental Maps*. Inter-University Community of Mathematical Geographers, Ann Arbor. [A short and intelligent methodological work concerning the construction and mind of the perceptual images of the territory].

Gregory, D. (1978). *Ideology, Science and Human Geography*. Hutchinson, London. [An interesting and erudite analysis of the conceptual evolution of Human Geography from a Marxist point of view].

Haggett, P. (1972). *Geography: A Modern Synthesis*. Harper & Row, London. [The most important and well-known Human Geography handbook of the last decades, presenting a real synthesis from the theoretical point of view of all the traditional fields of the discipline].

Harvey, D. (1969). *Explanation in Geography*. E. Arnold, London. [One of the most important methodological works never published in Human Geography, corresponding to the neopositivist period of his author].

Harvey, D. (1973). *Social Justice and The City*. E. Arnold, London. [A collection of articles of the author that allows knowing his travel from the neopositivist approaches to his Marxist ones, concerning Urban studies].

Herbertson, A.J and Herbertson, F.D. (1899). *Man and His Work. An Introduction to Human Geography*. A.&C. Black, London. [A classical and well-known handbook of the first Anglo-Saxon Human Geography, located in a middle point between the German determinism and the French possibilism].

Johnston, R. J. (1986). *Dictionary of Human Geography*. B. Blackwell, Oxford [2<sup>nd</sup> edition] [A brief collection of the main concepts in Human Geography, analyzed with a very empiricist point of view].

Johnston, R. J. and Claval, P. (1984). *Geography since the Second World War. An International Survey*. Croom Helm, London. [A reader on the recent evolution of the Geographical National schools done from an International point of view, connected with the works of the International Geographical Union].

Labasse, J. (1966). *L'organisation de l'espace*. Hermann, Paris. [An innovative French analysis of the planning problems, introducing an applied emphasis to the classical regional vision].

Lacoste, Y. (1976). *La Géographie ça sert d'abord à faire la guerre*. Anthropos: Paris. [A milestone on the radical revolution of the 1970's, reintroducing the need of a new Marxist Geopolitics and developing the methodology of the multiscalar analysis].

Livingstone, D. (1992). *The Geographical Tradition*. Blackwell: Oxford. [One of the most erudite and complex analysis of the evolution of the Geographical thinking of the last five centuries].

Massey, D., Allen, J. and Sarre, P. (1999). *Human Geography today*. Polity Press, Cambridge. [A very recent handbook of Human Geography rethinking the main concepts of the discipline and introducing imagination, difference and power as a main approaches].

Quaini, M. (1974). *Marxismo e geografia*. La Nuova Italia, Firenze. [A Marxist analysis of the evolution of the Geographical thinking from the Enlightenment to the present days].

Ratzel, F. (1882). *Anthropogeographie*. Stuttgart [2 volumes]. [The foundational book of the discipline, that had defined the main stream of the further German Human Geography, and had obliged also to the French Geographical school to take an opposite position in the main questions].

Santos, M. (1996). *A Natureza do espaço. Técnica e tempo; razão e emoção*. Hucitec, Sao Paulo. [One of the most important contributions of the Brazilian geographer to the redefinition of the conceptual framework of Human Geography].

Soja, E. (1996). *Thirdspace. Journey to Los Angeles and other Real-and-Imagined places*. B. Blackwell, Oxford. [One of the most general works of the post-modern Geography, mentioning the relevance of space and of spatial analysis in the explanation of the contemporary world].

Tuan, Y-F. (1977). *Space and Place*. The University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis printing, 2001. [The most important book of the Humanistic approach to Human Geography, very influential also in many other different fields].

### **Biographical Sketch**

**Carles carreras i verdaguer** (maó, menorca, 1948) graduated in geography at the universitat de barcelona in 1972, with an urban research on the Barcelona neighborhoods (Selecta, Barcelona, 1974).

Doctor in Geography at the Universitat de Barcelona in 1978, with a research on social production of cities (Serpa, Barcelona, 1980)

Teaching at the Human Geography Department of the Universitat de Barcelona since 1972, from 1986 as a Professor. Invited Professor at the universities of Napoli (Italy), Sao Paulo (Brazil) and Bryn Mawr College (United States), has done many lectures at many different European and American universities. Published a handbook on Human Geography (Ed. Universitat de Barcelona, Barcelona, 1998)

Specialized in Urban research, had published some general works (*La ciudad. Enseñanzas del fenómeno urbano*, Ed. Anaya, Salamanca, 1980; *Geografía urbana de Barcelona*, Ed. Oikos-Tau, Vilassar de Mar, 1993; *Universitat i ciutat*, 2000), and some commercial approaches (*Les àrees de concentració comercial de Barcelona*, COCINB, Barcelona, 1990; *Els eixos comercials metropolitans*, Ajuntament de Barcelona, Barcelona, 1999). The current research is focused on the consumption Geography at urban, national and international level with many articles published.

From 1976 has published many papers and articles on the field of politico-administrative organization, and since 1998 belongs to the official commission on Territorial organization of the Catalan Government. Also has different publications on regional geography of Catalonia (*Catalunya, la Gent i el territori*, Galaxia Gutenberg, Barcelona, 1999; *Atles Regional de Catalunya*, Ed. La Galera, Barcelona, 1999).

Director of the *Revista Catalana de Geografia*, published by the Institut Cartogràfic de Catalunya, from 1985, and of some different series (*Geografia Universal*, Ed. Gallach, Barcelona 1988-90, in 8 vols; *Geografia General dels Països Catalans*, Enciclopèdia Catalana, Barcelona, 1992-94, in 7 vols.; *Geografia de Espanya*, Ed. Gallach, Barcelona, 1994, in 14 vols.).

Since 1996 is the Director of Institutional Activities of the Universitat de Barcelona, that organizes different summer courses: *Els Julols de la UB* (from 1997), *Universitat Internacional de Menorca Illa del Rei* (from 1996) and the *Barcelona-Sarajevo Joint Summer University* (from 1999).

UNESCO – EOLSS  
SAMPLE CHAPTERS