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PERSONAL EXPERIENCES AND IMAGES OF PLACES AS THE BASIS FOR TEACHING GEOGRAPHY. EXAMPLES OF POLAND AND ENGLAND

INTRODUCTION

Research on the perception of space and the space experienced by people has been developed by human geographers for several decades, in Poland since the late eighties. In the scope of dynamic changes and new dimensions of space and place, the potential of the geography of perception as one of the scientific perspective of the modern world seems to be still enormous. The research spectrum is very wide – from freehand sketches, testing images and attitudes towards the environment or social phenomena, to the issues of people's emotional connection and identification with different areas, especially with their place of residence.

Investigating places through personal experiences may be an important element of geographical education programs, as it makes geography closer to everyday lives of pupils, stimulates their curiosity and attention, and at the same time shows that contemporary problems of the world are interpreted by geographers very broadly and as multi-dimensional phenomena.

The purpose of this article is to identify and compare the place and the importance of issues concerning personal experiences, perception and spatial images in geographical education in Poland and England. Firstly, a short introduction has been made about research carried out on personal perceptions and attitudes towards geographical space. The second part of the article underlines the differences in the way of presenting geographical phenomena to pupils in Polish and English secondary schools, involving or not the potential of the geography of perception.

Due to the differences between the Polish and English systems of education, as well as the place and character of geography in school education, this study

focuses primarily on the third level of education, i.e. the level of the Polish *gimnazjum* (students aged between 12 and 15) and English Key Stage 3 (students aged between 11 and 14). In the case of Poland, the analysis has been extended over the first year of the fourth level of education due to the fact that there is a continuation of geography education between the two levels. In brief, geography is a compulsory and independent subject, i.e. it is not joined with any other area of knowledge. In subsequent levels of education, both in Poland and in the UK, geography is an elective subject. Thus, it may be assumed that whatever pupils learn during the third level of education will – for a vast majority of them – constitute their complete geographical knowledge and skills learned throughout school education. Thus, the experiences they gain during geography lessons will serve as the main channel of information about the character of this discipline and the subject matter of its research.

PERSONAL EXPERIENCE AND IMAGES OF PLACES IN THE CONTEMPORARY GEOGRAPHICAL RESEARCH. NEW POSSIBILITIES AND MAIN PROBLEMS

Suggestions to study the manner of perceiving space and the space itself experienced by man appeared in geography soon after World War II, when J.K. Wright (1947) indicated the possibilities for developing the interests and research areas of geographers to encompass the image of the world included in human mind and imagination, regarding it to be the most fascinating *terrae incognitae* of our times. However, the large scale research on the perception of space did not appear until the 1960s, when it served as a departure from mechanistic and deterministic models for explaining the relationship between man and the environment, thus being an effect of the reevaluation of the world and the new research perspectives that accompanied it. All that brought about a necessity to reinterpret the key concept of space in geography, which had traditionally been attributed only the physical (geometric) dimension, and enrich it with social and cultural aspects, paying more attention to individual facts and referring to common knowledge (Lisowski 2003). With numerous polemics in foreign and Polish studies, no one doubts anymore that “the objective and subjective are different levels of the same space. They constitute both a dichotomy and an inseparable pair, like day and night, life and death, good and bad. One cannot separate the objective from the subjective, because by doing that we would deprive the world of one of the dimensions in which we live” (Kaczmarek 2001, pp. 25–33).

Regardless of the discipline they represent, researchers who take up the issue of perception have always referred to the work of K. Lynch *The image of the city*, which changed the manner of thinking about space not only when it comes to geographers but also architects, urban planners, psychologists as well as sociologists, and it continues to serve as a model for the representatives of the disciplines which deal with the issue of interaction between man and the environment. K. Lynch's work features a novel method of analyzing freehand sketches of a city, also referred to as cognitive maps, which marked the beginning of the most 'geographical' part of the research on perception. According to K. Lynch (1960, p. 131), the perception of space is "[...] a two-way process between the observer and his environment. The environment suggests distinctions and relations, and the observer – with great adaptability and in the light of his own purposes – selects, organizes, and endows with meaning what he sees" (Lynch 1960, p. 131). Apart from the attributes of space making themselves easy to be identified by man, K. Lynch (1960) attached great importance to the meaning of particular places and objects, resulting from their practical and emotional valuation. Following K. Lynch (1960), an object must mean 'something' to an individual – it must constitute 'a center of felt values', as Y.F. Tuan (1987) later defined the category of place.

Transforming physical or ecological space into cultural space understood as a set of meaningful places involves giving that space a symbolic meaning in an individual and collective sense (Lisowski 2003). The concept of place is developed within the scope of human geography (e.g. the works of Tuan 1974, 1987, Relph 1976, Sagan 1995, 2000, Wallis 1977, 1990 Jędrzejczyk 2001, 2004, Kaczmarek 2001, 2005, Madurowicz 2002, Paasi 2002, 2004, Rembowska 2002, 2004, Kotus 2007 and others). A common feature of most of these works is a reference to every-day reality as a peculiar depiction of the nature of social life. Different fields of study 'discover' and interpret every-day reality in relation to its various manifestations, one of which being the visual sphere. Saturation of the reality with a vast number of images and ways to perceive them is one of the most characteristic features of the times we live in. Complex visuality, being one of the key spheres of social life, creates a peculiar kind of contemporary culture which utilizes an image and its different variants to shape societies, with their tastes, habits and imaginations. Images convey information, knowledge, emotions, aesthetic experiences and values. They become an object of conscious decipherment on the one hand, but on the other, they also influence the subconscious. According to P. Sztompka (2005), they may be read as text.

In the last two decades, the growing role of visual representations, especially the role of photography in the research on space perception, has been empha-

sized in English-speaking journals and magazines devoted to human geography (e.g. *Progress in Human Geography*, *Professional Geographer*, *Journal of Travel Research*). It results from a general interest of social studies in the creation, interpretation and application of visual representations of the reality due to their domination in the media and the process of communication, as well as in the contemporary social space. It is generally assumed that the photographs taken by the users of a given space, alike freehand sketches, constitute an image of the relationship between the photographer and the environment surrounding them, thus the researcher may try to interpret subjective imaginations and the meaning of particular places from the perspective of their individual and collective substance. It should be highlighted at this point that according to J.K. Wright (1947) 'geosphy' was supposed to concern not only individual imaginations, which H. Lefebvre (1991) referred to as spatial representations, but also spaces of representation such as newspapers, paintings and literature.

Simultaneously, apart from the research on the images of space, the term 'perception' emerges alongside the presentation of a subjective attitude to an object, phenomenon or process. Thus, we are bound to find works concerning the perception of spatial development, new investments, other cultures, etc. Geography of perception interpreted as such seems to have no limitations – it concerns the subjective reality, thoughts, opinions and convictions, and it may be grouped as the so-called 'cultural turn' in social studies, which treat people as reflective beings who assess and value the multidimensional space of everyday life that surrounds them.

Summing up the effects of the theoretical and methodological revolution in geography in the second half of the 20th century, what shall be highlighted are the possibilities of conducting research on experiencing space and its images, which are crucial from both the cognitive and practical perspectives, and stem among all from:

- 1) a strong focus on studying cognitive structures and processes of individuals,
- 2) the implementation of subjective reality as an intermediary element in the relationship between man and the environment, facilitating its understanding,
- 3) an interdisciplinary dimension and different scales of spatial research on the imaginations of space – from the micro sphere – a room or house – to the macro sphere – a country or the entire world,
- 4) the geographers' interest in the multidimensional space being an accumulation of meanings and values.

It seems, however, that the possibilities which emerged together with a new subject for research in the form of subjective space have not been sufficiently

utilized in all areas. Their interdisciplinary character, which determined their power on the one hand, led – on the other hand – to the overabundance of terms and lack of their establishment in theoretical conceptions, without a commonly acknowledged semantic range. In Poland, there was no discussion between the representatives of particular disciplines which dealt with this subject matter; everyone followed their own path, coined their own definitions which – in the end – boil down to the initial terms – ‘perception’, ‘experience’, ‘image’. Furthermore, direct translation to Polish of some of the original terms gives dissimilar associations with the English original term (e.g. perception, image, mental map, cognitive map, freehand sketch). Another serious problem in Poland is a slow process of exploitation of research on geography of perception in practice, whereas before the results of the research conducted by geographers – regardless of their theoretical level – will arouse the practitioners’ interest, they have to be aware that geographers are conducting such research.

It seems that teaching programs and school course books constitute a crucial channel of information about the character of this discipline and the perspectives for research conducted by geographers. It should be noted, that in geography teaching studies authors frequently focused on the humanistic dimension of the discipline and the need for wider use of these theoretical and methodological foundations in school practice (Zajac 1996, Szkurlat 1991, Sadoń-Osowiecka n.d.). P. Bailey (1990, p. 29) appealed to teach geography in the modern way, following the evolution and new concepts of this discipline. Human geography and the holistic concept of space and place as prime categories of its research are one of the aspects of contemporary geography which should be followed by teaching programs.

PERSONAL EXPERIENCE AND IMAGES OF PLACES IN GEOGRAPHICAL EDUCATION IN POLAND AND ENGLAND

Having compared the core curricula and their specific contents included in exemplary series of course books for the third level of education in Poland and in the UK, it may be concluded that the supreme goal of geographical education in both cases is to arouse the pupil’s interest in the surrounding world (Tab. 1). A deeper analysis of particular provisions of the curricula provides information about basic differences in the idea of geographical education between the two countries. Much as teaching geography in Poland focuses on providing knowledge about the dynamic and continuously changing reality, in the UK it is

all about arousing pupils' interest in different places. The assumption behind the latter approach is that a young person who is interested in the world will try to get a deeper insight into the matter by asking questions and thinking critically. The provisions of the core curriculum include fundamental principles of the constructivist model of education, i.e.:

1) how we see and understand the world depends on our existing ways of thinking;

2) each individual sees and understands the world differently;

3) our constructions of the world are not fixed but are being modified continuously (Ginsburg 1997),

clearly emphasizing that in geographical education pupils should use their own experiences to study places at different scales – from the personal to the global. Omitting the personal scale and narrowing geographical knowledge only to the scales from local to global in the Polish curriculum shows that geography teaching in Poland knowingly leaves out the “cultural turn” in social studies and the possibility of making references to every-day reality and searching for meanings which people give to the reality surrounding them in the process of its ordering (structuring) (Rose 2001, Lisowski 2003).

Table 1. Basic assumptions of geographical education in Poland and in the UK
Tabela 1. Podstawowe założenia kształcenia geograficznego w Polsce i w Anglii

Polish curriculum (3 rd level)	English curriculum (KS3)
<p>The study of geography provides the knowledge about a dynamic, everchanging world</p> <p>Learning geography should facilitate the analysis of dynamics and complexity of the relationship between people and the environment</p> <p>Geography helps young people to understand and critically evaluate the phenomena and processes in the contemporary world in different scales – from the local to the global</p>	<p>The study of geography stimulates an interest in and a sense of wonder about places</p> <p>It helps young people make sense of a complex and dynamically changing world</p> <p>It explains where places are, how places and landscapes are formed, how people and their environment interact, and how a diverse range of economies, societies and environments are interconnected</p> <p>It builds on pupils' own experiences to investigate places at all scales, from the personal to the global</p>

Source: author's own work based on: Podstawa programowa przedmiotu geografia.

Comparing key concepts, skills and attitudes which constitute the desired effects of the process of geographical education in Poland and in the UK, it may be concluded that the major difference boils down to the provision concerning

the shaping of geographical images of the world in the case of Poland and to making references and developing these images in the case of the UK (Tab. 2). Once again, one might find here a reference to the constructivist model of teaching. It assumes that every pupil has the knowledge that shall be the basis, or actually a discontinuous set of random information that is completed in the process of further education. The provisions of the Polish core curriculum indicate that a pupil shall be regarded as a peculiar *tabula rasa*, and the channel for shaping his or her images of the world is not their own previous experiences but the school. T. Sadoń-Osowiecka (n.d.) wrote that: “listening to what her pupils and geography students say, one has a feeling that the world they learn about is somewhere far away, excluding the closest backyard from the scope of their exploration”.

Table 2. Key concepts and goals of geographical education in Poland and in the UK
Tabela 2. Kluczowe pojęcia i cele kształcenia geograficznego w Polsce i w Anglii

Polish curriculum (3rd level)	English curriculum (KS3)
Reasoning, thinking geographically Using geography as a discipline integrating natural and human sciences Shaping geographical skills Shaping geographical imaginations and defining geographical terms Evaluating geographical phenomena and processes Forecasting, predicting the direction of environmental and socio-economic changes Stimulating pupils' interest about the world, Poland, own region Making geography practical (close to everyday life) Shaping attitude of understanding and tolerance towards cultural diversity of the world	Place: Understanding the physical and human characteristics of real places Developing 'geographical imaginings' of places Space: Understanding the interactions between places and the networks. Scale: Appreciating different scales – from personal and local to global. Interdependence Physical and human processes Environmental interaction and sustainable development Cultural understanding and diversity

Source: as in table 1.

The English curriculum explains the meaning of one of the key terms in school geography – a place. Following the curriculum, a place is characterized by unique natural and social features and may be interpreted and represented in various ways. Its scale may also vary. Thus, space in English school geography

is regarded as multidimensional – as a set of objects (physical space) or human environment (ecological space), perceivable and bringing certain experiences to people, simultaneously serving as carriers of meanings given to particular places as a result of direct and indirect experiencing.

Consequently, different concepts of school geography written down in Polish and English curricula are best reflected in geography course books. This work analyzes the structure, content and the manner of presentation of geographical information in two selected series of geography course books in Poland – *Świat bez tajemnic* [*World without secrets*] published by Wydawnictwo Szkolne PWN (Kop et al. 2009) and in the UK – *Geog 123* published by Oxford University Press (Gallagher et al. 2008). The choice was intentional and resulted from the availability of both series.

The Polish course books are characterized by a clear order of the content (Tab. 3). In the first year course book, some elements of physical geography are systematically introduced after a series of topics concerning the map as a source of geographical knowledge and the astronomical bases for geography. In subsequent years, the regional approach is used, i.e. the content focuses both on the issues of nature, society and economy, depicting interrelations between them at different scales – selected regions, including the regions of Poland and other countries. In the first year of secondary school, which under the provisions of the curriculum is the continuation of geographical education initiated in the middle school, course books focus on socio-economic geography. The structure of the content, alike the first year of the middle school, is systematic rather than problematic in its character, focusing on topics such as: demography and society, settlement, main economic sectors, which results from the division of geographical sciences.

On the other hand, the content of English course books does not present a clear-cut order in particular years. The structure does not refer to the division of geography as a science, and the topics concerning the natural environment, society and economy are joined or presented alternately – they are clearly problematic in their character (Tab. 3). Some regularity might be noticed only when it comes to the issue of the scale of presented phenomena and interrelations – from the personal to the local to the national and global. The issues presented in course books also refer to the key concepts outlined in the curriculum (Tab. 2). Much as their choice may seem random, all of the topics aim at explaining the phenomena and processes which pupils experience directly or observe indirectly. This is how students attain the goal of developing images and knowledge about the surrounding world. A starting point for this goal is the category of a place with which human emotions are bound and its system of

meanings, as well as the fact that every person must belong to some space. Pupils try to find their place on Earth and “describe” it, as befits geographers, in various ways – as physical, ecological or cultural space, simultaneously learning to be sensitive to different spaces, people and cultures. It should be highlighted here, that such a concept is very close to beliefs of Polish geographers of the interwar period. W. Nałkowski (1968, p. 128) wrote: “When the book is arranged as catechism, pupils’ independence in formulating responses about the surrounding world suffers as they are already given”.

Table 3. The content of chosen geography course books in Poland and England
Tabela 3. Treści wybranych podręczników do nauczania geografii w Polsce i w Anglii

<i>World without secrets</i>	<i>Geog 123</i>
1.1. What is geography; The map as a source of geographical knowledge	1.1-2. It’s geography; Making and mapping connections
1.2. Earth movements and their consequences	1.3. Settlement
1.3. The Earth as the living environment (weather and climate; ecosystems; Rivers and lakes; Processes shaping landforms)	1.4. Let’s go shopping
2.1. Europe – the continent You live on	1.5. Exploring Britain
2.2. Geographical location and natural environment of Poland	1.6-7. Rivers; Floods
2.3. Administrative division and population of Poland	1.8. Sport
2.4. Economy of Poland	2.1-2. Our restless planet; People and the planet
2.5. Regions of Poland	2.3-7. Coasts; Weather and climate; Ecosystems; Our warming planet; Where should we get our energy?
3.1. Neighbors of Poland	2.8. Crime
3.2. Europe. Relations nature-human-economy	2.9. Oi Brazil!
3.3. Chosen countries and regions of Asia (China, Japan, India, South-Western Asia)	2.10. London, your capital city
3.4. Chosen regions and countries of the world. Relations nature-human-economy (Region of Sahel, USA, Brazil, Australia, Arctic, Antarctic)	3.1. Development
	3.2-3. Close-up on China; Off to the USA
	3.4. The global fashion
	3.5. Coffee break
	3.6. Tourism – good or bad?
	3.7. The ocean
	3.8. Our world in 2030

Source: R. Gallagher et al. (2008), J. Kop et al. (2009).

Another aspect that makes the process of geographical education in Poland different from the one in the UK is the character of visual materials used in course books. In Poland, the role of these materials is to illustrate the actual

content included in the course book being an example of generally underappreciated research function of course books. As was noted by W. Okoń (2003), apart from the main – informative function, they should also inspire and activate pupils to discover the world around them. J. Winklewski (1977) discussed the unused potential of illustrations published in geography course books in Poland indicating that instead of exhaustive information relating to the presented phenomena, a guiding question or a task could be added under the picture. In the UK, besides illustrating the concepts and recording the facts, they serve also as a heuristic inspiration, an invitation to deduce, speculate, fantasize, interpret the world more widely, and as a pretext for a group discussion, which increases pupils' interest and motivation during the lesson and allows for a confronting the subjective reality perceived by them (Fig. 1).



Fig. 1. Examples of geography course book layouts in Poland and in the UK
 Ryc. 1. Przykłady szaty graficznej podręczników do geografii w Polsce i w Anglii
 Source: R. Gallagher et al. (2008), J. Kop et al. (2009)

„The what, the how and the why of teaching is always up for grabs. There is no one correct set of things that students should know, there is no one ‘proper’ way of learning; there are no ‘self-evident’ goals of education. Instead there are only ever choices about what to teach, how to teach and to what ends” (Castree

2005). The aim of the above analysis has not been to indicate better or worse conceptions of geographical education. What seems to matter is their effects. Every geographer should care to be perceived not as a person who knows where a given sea, mountain, country or capital city lies, but as a person who interprets the world from a multifaceted perspective, being aware of the fact that – depending on their needs and preferences – people may notice various values in every bit of space.

Geography of perception with its wide spectrum of research possibilities – from freehand sketches to examining the images of and attitudes towards the environment treated as a good or as a source of threat, or towards social phenomena, e.g. tourism, crime, to the issues of people's emotional connection and identification with different areas, especially with their place of residence, may strengthen the role of geography and geographers in explaining the contemporary world.

CONCLUSIONS

Research on the perception of space and the space experienced by people has been developed by human geographers for several decades. The cognitive and application values derived from this area of geographical research are still current these days. We must not only agree with J.K. Wright's (1947) statement that the image of the world contained in human imaginations constitutes the most fascinating *terrae incognitae* of our times, but also notice that we constantly face new possibilities of examining the unknown world we live in.

Although the research on the images of space began in Polish geography in the 1980s, it seems that the enthusiasm associated with discovering a new, subjective reality was rather short-lived. With time, perception began to be identified with social opinion polls on a given subject. Furthermore, the subject matter of space perception has not been included in the teaching curricula. As a consequence, pupils in Poland are aware of the fact that the subject of geographical research is space, yet they are taught mainly about its physical (real) dimension, regarding it as a set of mutually interrelated elements. As noted by T. Sadoń-Osowiecka (n.d.), narrative way of teaching geography could make it possible to meet the requirement of learning about the world in all its forms. Simultaneously the role of geography as a school subject merging other disciplines of knowledge – both natural and social sciences, would grow. Meanwhile, in the Polish system of education geography has been placed among mathematical and natural sciences, which has a direct influence on the core

curriculum and its contents taught at schools. As a result, a social reception of geography is far from the holistic and humanistic conceptions prepared by W. Nałkowski (1968) as early as at the beginning of the previous century.

On the other hand, the English curriculum focuses primarily on humanistic aspects and assumes that all humans are geographers by nature. They can think territorially or spatially and have an awareness of, and curiosity about the distinctive nature of places. Even children possess qualities of geographers, creating carefully mapped realms in tiny places. Therefore, investigating places through personal experiences is the key element of geographical education programs, showing that they are interpreted by modern geographers very broadly and as multi-dimensional phenomena. It makes geography closer to everyday lives of pupils, stimulates their curiosity and attention.

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Summary

The research spectrum of spatial experiences and perception in geography is very wide – from freehand sketches, by testing images and attitudes towards the environment or social phenomena, to the issues of people's emotional connection and identification with different areas, especially with the place of residence. Investigating places through personal experiences may be an important element of geographical education programs, showing that they are interpreted by modern geographers very broadly and as multi-dimensional phenomena.

The article identifies and compares the place and importance of the issues concerning personal experiences, perception and images of places in geographical education in Poland and England.

Key words: personal experience, perception, geographical images, national curriculum in geography, geography course books.

DOŚWIADCZENIA I WYOBRAŻENIA PRZESTRZENI JAKO PODSTAWA W NAUCZANIU GEOGRAFII. PRZYKŁAD POLSKI I ANGLII

Streszczenie

Geografia percepcji z szerokim spektrum możliwości badawczych – od odręcznych szkiców przez badania wyobrażeń i postaw wobec środowiska przyrodniczego, traktowanego jako dobro lub źródło zagrożeń, lub wobec zjawisk społecznych po kwestie emocjonalnego związku i identyfikacji ludzi z różnymi obszarami, zwłaszcza z miejscem zamieszkania, może stanowić istotny element programów kształcenia geograficznego, pokazując jednocześnie, że współczesna geografia interpretuje przestrzeń bardzo szeroko i wielowątkowo.

W opracowaniu wskazano i porównano znaczenie problematyki bezpośredniego i pośredniego doświadczania przestrzeni i jej wyobrażeń w kształceniu geograficznym w Polsce i w Anglii.

Słowa kluczowe: doświadczanie przestrzeni, percepcja, wyobrażenie, podstawa programowa, podręczniki szkolne.