

Regional Concept of Geography: Attributes, Classification of Regional and Regionalism

Regional Concept of Geography: Attributes, Classification of Regional and Regionalism!

Region is a dynamic concept which has been defined differently by different geographers.

In the concluding part of the 19th century, the French geographers like Vidal de Lablache called the areas of similar physical and cultural characteristics as pays. A more comprehensive and widely acceptable definition of region can be given as “an area having the homogeneity of the physical and cultural phenomena”. It has also been defined as “an area that is differentiated from other areas according to the specified criteria”.

Herbertson (1905) was the first to divide the earth into major natural regions on the basis of climatic parameters and thus having some links with the determinism. On the smaller scale, geographers attempted to identify individual areas with particular characteristics.

The fundamental idea behind the small geographic regions was to show some distinct individuality, if not necessarily entire homogeneity through a study of all its geographical features, i.e. structure, climate, soils, vegetation, agriculture mineral and industrial resources, settlement and distribution of population.

Some of his work, exemplified by Herbertson’s (1905), was the precursor of the concept of ecosystem.

The basic objective of the discipline of geography is to provide accurate, orderly, and rational description and interpretation of the variable character of the earth surface (Hartshorne in Perspective on Nature of Geography, 1959). In fact, the geographer’s main concern is how things are distributed over the surface of the earth, how physical and cultural features of areas are alike or different from place to place, how the varying content of different places came about, and what all these differences and similarities mean for people.

Thus, region is a device of area generalization. It has also been defined as “a differentiated segment of earth surface” (Whittlesey, 1929). The generalization of the features of the earth surface is to make the infinitely varying world around us understandable through spatial (regional) summaries. It is, however, difficult to divide the earth surface into neat regions of uniformity.

As many possible regions exist as there are physical (topography, relief, climate, soils, natural vegetation, minerals, etc.), cultural (religion, language, population, agriculture, industries) or organizational (socio-economic institutions) phenomena.

The number of regions may be enormous and vary greatly, they may all share certain common characteristics which are given below:

Attributes of Region:

(i) Regions have location:

All region—physical or cultural—are often expressed in the regional name such as the Middle East, the South-East Asia, the North-West Europe, the Far East, etc.

(ii) Regions have spatial extent:

The homogeneous physical and cultural attributes of the earth surface have spatial (areal) extent. For example, the Thar Desert, the Sahara Desert, the Latin America and Anglo-America cover certain areas of the earth surface. Thus, regions are not in abeyance; they have a personality on the ground.

(iii) Regions have boundaries:

Each region—physical or cultural—has a boundary. The boundary of a region is drawn at the outer edge where the phenomenon (feature) no longer occurs or dominates. For example, where the Himalayas and the Siwaliks end, the Indo-Gangetic plains begin, and where the Gangetic plains end, the Deccan plateau begins. Similar may be the case of the language regions in India. There is a line of demarcation between the Telugu, Tamil and Malayalam regions in India.

Similarly, we find the tribal and non-tribal regions in the different states of India. Likewise, at some defined point, urban is replaced by rural, or the rain forest ceases and the savanna emerges. Regions boundaries, are however, not like the walled medieval city,

(iv) Regions may be either formal or functional:

Formal regions are areas of essentially uniformity throughout in one or limited combination of physical or cultural features. The equatorial region, the monsoon region, the Sahel region (Africa), the Tundra region, the mountainous region are the examples of formal physical regions. Similarly, we may observe the homogeneity of language, religion, ethnicity and lifestyle in certain areas. Such regions are known as the formal cultural regions. Whatever the basis of its definition, the formal region is the largest area over which a valid generalization of attribute uniformity may be made. Whatever is stated about one part of the region holds true for its other parts also. Up to 1960, most of the regions demarcated by geographers used to be formal regions. Functional region, in contrast, is a spatial system defined by the interactions and connections that give it a dynamic, organizational basis. Its boundaries remain constant only as long as the interchanges establishing it remain unaltered. ‘City region’ may be cited as a good example of functional region. The city region is “an area of interrelated activities, kindred interests and common organizations, brought into being through the medium of the routes which bind it to the urban centres”. We can delineate the commuting regions of Delhi, Bombay, Calcutta or any one of the

metropolitan and mega cities. Similarly, functional regions of the national capital of India may be demarcated by taking the supply of milk, fruits, vegetables and newspapers. The functional region is, however, a dynamic concept which changes in space and time.

(v) Regions are hierarchically arranged:

Although regions vary in scale, type and degree of generalization, none stands alone as the ultimate key to areal understanding. Each defines only a part of the spatial (regional) reality.

On a formal regional scale of size progression the Ganga-Yamuna Doab may be seen as part of the Upper Gangetic Plain, which in turn is a portion of the Sutlej-Ganga Plain. Similarly, the Central Business District (CBD) of Delhi (Connaught Place) is one land use complex in the functional regional hierarchy that describes the spatial influences of the city of Delhi and the National Capital Region of which it is the core. Each recognised regional entity in such progression may stand alone and at the same time exists as a part of a larger, equally valid, territorial unit. The above generalizations about regions and the regional concept show that regions are human intellectual creations designed to serve a purpose. Regions focus our attention on spatial uniformities. They bring clarity to the seeming confusion of observable physical and cultural features of the world we inhabit. Regions provide the framework for the purposeful organisation of spatial (regional) data and information.

(vi) Regions have transitional boundaries:

Generally, regions do not have sharp boundaries. In most of the cases their boundaries are transitional. It means there is some overlapping of one phenomenon over the other.

Classification of Regions:

The regions may be classified as under:

- (i) Regions based on physical characteristic.
- (ii) Regions based on cultural characteristics.
- (iii) Regions based on an amalgamation of the physical and cultural variables.

(i) Physical Regions:

The simplest of all regions to define, and easiest to recognize is the formal region based on a single variable or single characteristic. The island is land, not water, and its unmistakable boundary is naturally given where the one element (land) passes to the other (water). The dense forest may break dramatically upon the open grassland. The nature of change is singular and apparent.

The physical geographers, who explain the natural environment, generally deal with single factor formal regions. Many of the earth features (physical features) do not exist in simple, clearly defined units. They must be arbitrarily and statistically demarcated or regionalized by the application of boundary definition. For

example, the rainfall regions, the variability of rainfall regions, the plants association regions, soil regions (black-earth region of India), etc., must be decided on as regional limits and all such limits are subject to change through time or by purpose of the regional geographer. These regions and their boundaries change with the passage of time

(a) Landform regions:

The landform regions are classified and demarcated on the basis of structure, relief, configuration, genesis and age. These regions are independent of human influence and unaffected by time on the human scale. Landforms constitute basic, naturally defined regions of physical geographic concern. The Himalayan system, the Vindhyan system, the Aravalli system, the Alpine system, the Kashmir valley, the Brahmaputra valley, plateaus and mountains, humid landform areas, dry landform areas, and glacial areas are some of the examples of the landforms regions.

The landforms regions are the result of the internal and external physical forces. These have a close influence on climate, natural vegetation, and soils. The basic human activities are also largely influenced by the landforms regions.

(b) Climate region:

A specific area in various combinations of climatic elements (temperature, rainfall etc.) may be recognized as a climatic region. Numerous attempts have been made to identify and classify climatic regions: (a) based on latitudinal temperature zones, we have the torrid, temperate, and frigid zones; and (b) based on temperature, rainfall and climatic effects, we have Koppen's, Thornthwait's and Miller's climatic regions.

Although weather deals with the state of atmosphere over short duration, regions may also be recognised on the basis of weather conditions. For example, the air mass region or air masses.

(a) Air masses:

An air mass is a vast body of air whose physical properties (temperature and humidity) are more or less uniform in the horizontal plane.

On the basis of these characteristics we have:

(i) Arctic, (ii) polar-continental, (iii) polar-maritime, (iv) tropical- continental, (v) tropical-maritime, (vi) equatorial air masses, and (vii) the monsoon. The climatic regions are dynamic in nature. Climates like vegetation and soils change through time by natural process or by the action of humans. Boundaries shift as witness the recent migration southward of the Sahara.

(d) Ecosystems as regions:

Ecosystem is an ecological concept defining the relationship between a set of living and non-living objects. One of its clearest definitions was given by Fosberg (1963) who states:

Ecosystem is a functioning, interacting system composed of one or more living organisms and their effective environment, in a biological, chemical and physical sense. It is a concept applicable at any scale ranging from the planet earth as an ecosystem down to the smallest patch of moss and lichen on a rock surface.

The main advantage of the ecosystem as region is that it brings together in a single framework environment, humans and biological realm, permitting an analysis of the relationship between these components of area. The ecosystem concept or ecosystem region provides a point of view for investigating the complex consequences of human impact upon the natural environment.

(ii) Cultural Regions:

A cultural region refers to an area over which the cultural traits of human group may be identified. The culture and cultural environment of human groups (ethnic groups) varies from place to place. This variation in cultural traits results into variation in human occupation and his organization of space.

Some of the important cultural regions are:

(i) population regions, (ii) linguistic regions, (iii) religious regions, (iv) agricultural regions, (v) industrial regions, and (vi) transport and trade regions.

(a) Population regions:

Population and its demographic attributes constitute an important aspect of cultural landscape. To delineate an area into the high density and low density areas is known as population regions. The age and sex composition, birth, death and growth rates patterns, the literacy, occupations and patterns of migration may also be delineated. All these are known as population regions.

The delimitation of population regions was emphasised by the American geographer, Glenn Trewartha. He also suggested the tools and techniques of delimiting the population regions.

If we divide India into population regions, it may be stated that the alluvial plains are densely populated, while the mountainous, deserts and plateaus of the country are less densely populated. Similarly, the world may be divided into the areas of high and low concentrations of population.

For example, all the plains of the world, especially those of the lower latitudes, are densely populated, while the deserts, equatorial forests, tundra and mountainous areas are less densely populated. The regional distribution of population in Latin America has a strong nucleated character as most of the population is confined in isolated clusters. Moreover, the individual clusters show considerable variation in density. The clustered nature of Latin American countries may be attributed to the search of gold and the zeal of missionaries that imbued the Spanish colonialists.

(b) Language regions:

All over the world, different social groups speak different languages. The delineation of different language areas on a map is known as language region.

Taking language as the criterion, the world may be divided into: (i) Indo-European, (ii) Indo-Iranian, (iii) Sino-Tibetan, (iv) Afro-Asiatic (Arabic), (v) Austro-Asiatic, (vi) Amerindian, and (vii) Negro language regions.

A typical example of linguistic regions may be cited from India. The Indian states have been demarcated on the basis of languages. For example, the states of Gujarat, Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Assam, West Bengal, Orissa and Punjab have their own regional languages.

We may delineate macro, meso and micro level language regions to examine and interpret the cultural personality of a country, nation or area.

(c) Religious regions:

The world may be divided on the basis of religions, e.g., regions of Christianity, Islam, Judaism, Hinduism, Buddhism, Sikhism and Jainism. Each religion has its own basic tenets.

(d) Political regions:

The most rigorously defined formal cultural region is the national state. Its boundaries are carefully surveyed and in many cases are marked by fences and guard posts. There is no question of any arbitrarily divided transition zone. This rigidity of a country's boundaries, its unmistakable placement in space and the trappings—flag, anthem, army, government—that are uniquely its own give to the state an appearance of permanence and immutability not common in other, more fluid cultural regions. But its stability is often more imagined than real. Political boundaries are not necessarily permanent. The artificial political boundary in the form of Berlin Wall was demolished in 1990. They are subject to change, sometimes violent changes, as a result of internal and external pressure. The Indian subcontinent illustrates the point.

The history of the sub-continent since about 400 B.C. has been one of the alternating creation and dissolution of empires, of the extension of central control based upon the Ganga Basin, and of resistance to that centralization by the marginal territories of the peninsula. In 1947, the British rulers partitioned the subcontinent of India on the basis of religion. The independent state of India was created out of the largely Hindu areas, while the Muslim majority area was declared as Pakistan. The East and West Pakistan wings of that country could not remain united as there was great diversity in the ethnicity, language, customs, food and economy. Consequently, the East Pakistan became Bangladesh in 1971. The violent history of the subcontinent shows that nationalism may be sought on the religious basis, but its maintenance may be difficult because of the physical and socio-economic and cultural regions.

(e) Economic regions:

Economic regionalization is among the most frequent, familiar and useful employment of the regional method. The economic regions in geography identify

economic activities, and resources over space. The economic region serves as a useful tool for planning and a framework for the manipulation of the people, resources and economic structure of a formal region. Problems like poverty, hunger, outmigration, cultural deprivation, underdevelopment and malnutrition may be systematically examined with the help of economic regions. Economic regions are generally delineated with the help of several socio-economic indicators.

(f) Natural resource regions:

The unevenly distributed resources upon which the people depend for existence are logical topics of interest in regional concept. Resource regions are mapped, and their raw material qualities and quantities are discussed. The availability of resources, their role in the development industries and tertiary sector have great planning importance. We can delineate world into oil, natural gas, coal and iron ore regions.

(g) Urban regions (megapolis):

Urban centres may be formal or functional regions. Cities and urban centres are the areas of production, exchange, administration, distribution and consumption. They have hierarchical structure. Internally, they show complex patterns of land use and functions.

The north-eastern seaboard of the United States is the leading megapolis in the world. It is a continuous stretch of urban and suburban areas from New Hampshire to Northern Virginia, and from the Atlantic coast to the foothills of Appalachian mountain. The people of this area have a unique way of life. Here, there has been developed a kind of supremacy in politics, in economics, and in cultural activities. This is an urban system (region) of deeply interwoven urban and suburban areas with a total population of over 80 million.

(h) Agricultural regions:

These are: wheat, rice and jute regions of India; and cotton belt, corn belt and wheat belt of U.S.A.

(i) Industrial regions:

Industrial regions are demarcated by taking into consideration the industrial parameters. Hoogly basin, Bombay- Ahmedabad region, Madra-Coaimatre region, Delhi industrial region, Donetsk basin (Ukraine), Central industrial region (Moscow), Rhine region, Saar basin (Germany), Tokyo region, Kobe and Yakohama region (Japan), and Birmingham and London industrial regions of U.K. are some of the examples of industrial regions.

(j) Mental regions (mental map):

Mental region is a distorted egocentric image of place. The images which constitute mental maps (the political, social, cultural, and economic values) held by men blend into an overall image about the space around him. This image or

mental map differs from person to person. For example, primitive societies, particularly, have distinctive views about place and earth. The mental map of Naga differs from that of Khasis. The Nagas in remote villages still measure the linear distances in their conventional way of smoking pipe, as they are not familiar with the mile or kilometre scale. The Khasis demarcate their territory on the basis of matrilineal society. The perception of space differs from rural to urban areas and from developed to developing countries.

To summarize, region is a mental construct, whose sole purpose is the purposeful organisation of spatial data. The regions help in understanding the man-nature interaction and provide a good tool for the planning and socio-economic development of different segments of a country/world.

Regionalism:

Regionalism, also known as sub-nationalism, is a concept of political geography. It is a movement which seeks to politicize the territorial predicaments of its regions with the aim of protecting or furthering its regional interest. Generally, regionalism is based on ethnicity, caste, creed, language, colour or culture. Regionalism also aims at achieving autonomy and local power (political and economic both).

It is a political rhetoric and self-assertiveness based on a deep-seated mistrust of a more centralized government. All sorts of regionalism have in common a counter-culture. Despite industrialization, modernization and globalization, it is an international phenomenon and may be observed in almost all the developed and developing countries of the world.

Regionalism may help in overcoming and solving some of the socio-political and economic problems of its supporter, but it is a big barrier in the process of national integration. In India also, there seems to be an emerging trend of regionalism. The people of Assam, Manipur, Mizoram, Nagaland, Maharashtra, Punjab, Kashmir, Tamil Nadu, etc., occasionally give the impression of a strong feeling of regionalism. This type of sub-nationalism has posed some serious problems to India, like that of Punjabi and Kashmiri. The Ahoms (Assamese) and Maharashtrians also occasionally give a strong impression of regionalism or sub-nationalism.

Whatever the objective of the regionalists may be, it creates many problems for the government. In recent years, we have seen the disintegration of the mighty Soviet Union and the creation of several independent republics in the erstwhile Soviet Union. For geographers, regionalism may be a good area for research, especially to identify the basis of regional strong biasness in a particular area and to predict the future pattern of behavior of the people of that region.

Regional planning

Regional planning deals with the efficient placement of [land-use](#) activities, [infrastructure](#), and [settlement](#) growth across a larger area of land than an individual [city](#) or [town](#). Regional planning is a sub-field of [urban planning](#) as it relates land use practices on a broader scale. it also includes formulating laws that will guide the efficient planning and management of such said regions

Nomenclature

Although the term "regional planning" is nearly universal in [English-speaking countries](#) the areas covered and specific administrative set ups vary widely. In [North America](#), regional planning may encompass more than one state, such as the [Regional Plan Association](#), or a larger [conurbation](#) or network of settlements. North American regional planning is likely to cover a much larger area than the [Regional Assemblies](#) of the [UK](#); both, however, are equally "regional" in nature.

Overview

Regions require various [land uses](#); protection of [farmland](#), cities, [industrial space](#), [transportation hubs](#) and infrastructure, [military bases](#), and [wilderness](#). Regional planning is the science of efficient placement of infrastructure and zoning for the sustainable growth of a region. Advocates for regional planning such as new urbanist [Peter Calthorpe](#), promote the approach because it can address region-wide environmental, social, and economic issues which may necessarily require a regional focus.

A 'region' in planning terms can be administrative or at least partially functional, and is likely to include a network of settlements and character areas. In most European countries, regional and national plans are 'spatial' directing certain levels of [development](#) to specific cities and towns in order to support and manage the region depending on specific needs, for example supporting or resisting [polycentrism](#).

Principles

Specific interventions and solutions will depend entirely on the needs of each region in each country, but generally speaking, regional planning at the macro level will seek to:

- Resist development in [flood plains](#) or along [earthquake faults](#). These areas may be utilised as parks, or unimproved farmland.
- Designate transportation corridors using [hubs and spokes](#) and considering major new infrastructure
- Some thought into the various 'role's settlements in the region may play, for example some may be administrative, with others based upon manufacturing or transport.
- Consider designating essential nuisance land uses locations, including waste disposal.
- Designate [Green belt](#) land or similar to resist settlement amalgamation and protect the environment.
- Set regional level 'policy' and zoning which encourages a mix of housing values and communities.
- Consider building codes, [zoning](#) laws and policies that encourage the best use of the land.