



Economic Geography: Scope of Economic Geography (Useful Notes)

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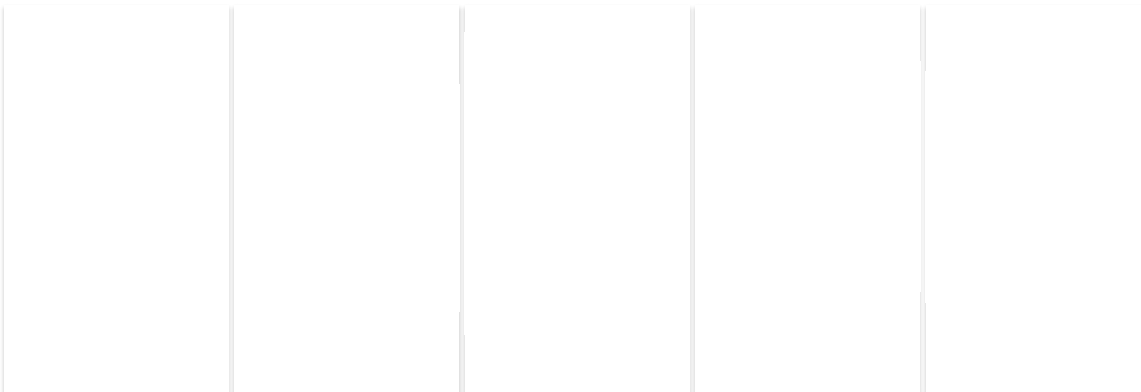
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Scope of Economic Geography!

What is economic geography? This basic question has been explained by several scholars in their own way and also has undergone changes with the change in nature of the study of economic geography. Until recently, it was concerned largely with spatial distribution of economic phenomena.

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In the early 1960s, for instance, the subject saw it as “an enquiry into the production, exchange, and consumption of goods by people in different areas of the world”.

Most of the geographers have defined the scope and method of economic geography in terms of three basic questions, as under:

- (i) Where is the economic activity located?
- (ii) What are the characteristics of the economic activity?

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(iii) To what other phenomena are the economic activity related?

To these three later studies have added two more:

(iv) Why is the economic activity located where it is?

(v) Would it not be better located elsewhere, to better satisfy certain economic and social criteria?

And more recently an answer has been given that these are the result of economic behaviour. This changing nature and change in emphasis on content of study shows that economic geography has proved the importance in various periods of its growth. Therefore, it is necessary to discuss the nature and scope of economic geography both from traditional to modern point of view.

As early as in 1882, the German scholar, Gotz had defined economic geography as “a scientific investigation of the nature of world areas in their direct influence of goods”. Although, Gotz initiated the concept of economic geography but his influence was limited to Germany only.

The abstract principles of that time could not be related to economic geography because they were not in their developed form. Economic geography owes its growth as an academic discipline to the interest of the British people in commerce. It is interesting to note that George Chisholm, the father of modern economic geography, had wanted an intellectual interest to the commerce.

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He thought that the primary use of economic geography is “to forecast the future course of commercial development so far as that is governed by geographical conditions”. In his treatment of the subject, however, Chisholm emphasised commercial development, and considered the physical features and climate in relation to products mainly.

This emphasis on physical features and climate in relation to products led others subsequently to think of economic geography in terms of productive occupations. Jones and Darkenwald (1950) state that, “Economic geography deals with productive occupations and attempts to explain why certain regions are outstanding in the production and exportation of various articles and why others are significant in the importation and utilisation of the things.”

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On the other hand, Ellsworth Huntington (1940), however, considers that all sorts of materials, resources, activities, customs, capabilities and types of ability that play a part in the work getting a living are the subject matter of economic geography.

Bengston and Van-Royen (1957), in his book Fundamentals of Economic Geography, have stated that:

Economic geography investigates the diversity in basic resources of the different parts of the world. It tries to evaluate the effects that differences of physical environment have upon the utilisation of these resources.

It studies differences in economic development in different regions or countries of the world. It studies transportation, trade routes and trade resulting from this different development and as affected by the physical environment.

Some of the other definitions of economic geography are as follows: "Economic geography is the study of influence exerted on the economic activities of man by his physical environment and more specially by the form and structure of the surface of land, the climatic conditions which prevail upon it, and the place relations in which its different regions stand to one another."

—J. McFarlane

"Economic geography has to do with similarities and differences, make a living."

—R.E. Murphy

"Economic geography is that aspect of the subject which deals with the influence of the environment – inorganic and organic – on the activities of man."

—R.N. Brown

"Economic geography is concerned with problem of making a living, with world industries, with basic resources and industrial commodities."

—E.B. Shaw

"Economic geography is concerned with the distribution of man's productive activities over the surface of the earth."

—N.J.G. Pounds

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It thus becomes clear from above definitions that economic geography mainly deals with the man's productive activities and their relationship with environmental conditions. These activities are of three types: primary, secondary and tertiary, the primary activities are those which obtain simple commodities or raw materials from the soil, the sea and the rocks. They are agriculture, forestry, fishing and mining.

These goods are then manufactured, processed or fabricated in factories and workshops; this constitutes the secondary group of activities. After manufacturing, transport services as well as services of insurance, brokers, dealers, etc., are required. These services constitute tertiary activities. All these human activities are in some way or other linked with environmental conditions.

Wheeler, Muller, Thrall and Fik, in their book *Economic Geography* (1998), explain economic geography by considering two continua: a human – physical continuum and a topical – regional continuum. Accordingly, economic geography, emphasising human production, distribution and consumption activities, naturally falls toward the human end of the scale. In which climate, terrain, soil, and hydrology will play a critical role at some level of analysis.

The second continuum represents an approach to the analysis of spatial variation in human and physical elements, in other words study of the economic geography of a region, a second region, a third region and so on, until all the world is covered. It also deals with the principles involved in the distribution of various kinds of economic activities.

A major change has occurred in the nature of economic geography with the inclusion of the theme, 'spatial variation' or 'areal variation'. Alexander and Gibson (1979) and Hartshorn and Alexander (1988) in their book *Economic Geography* have stated that "economic geography is the study of areal variation on the earth's surface in man's activities related to producing, exchanging and consuming wealth".

In pursuit of that goal the economic geographer asks three basic questions:

- (i) Where is the economic activity located?
- (ii) What are the characteristics of the economic activity?
- (iii) To what other phenomena are the economic activity related?

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According to Loyod and Dicken (1972), "As a behavioural science with spatial dimension of economic system, economic geography is concerned with the construction of general principles and theories that explain the operation of the economic system."

A major change in the study of economic geography has been in the form of behavioural approach and systems analysis. Behaviour denotes the actions of individuals or groups, it follows that economic phenomena in some way reflects individual and group values, policies and decisions.

While system is a set of identified elements so related together that they form a complex whole. Systems analysis means considerations of such a whole as a whole, rather than as something to be analysed into separate parts.

Economic geographers utilise the system concept in order to better understand the component elements of some part of reality, and the relations between them. In fact, economic geography now has grown as a

developed branch of geography with specialised branches having their own status and importance.

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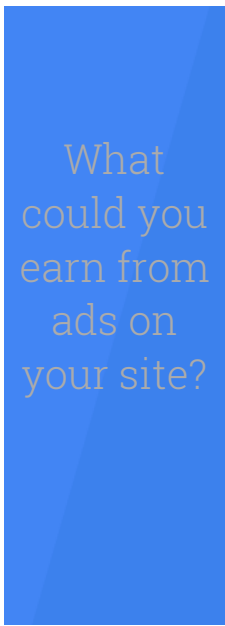
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