

Environmental Geography: Some Evolving Trends

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Geography in America over the last 30 years has witnessed much positive growth: there are several reasons for this. Firstly, Geographers are actively promoting their discipline to public school students, undergraduates and the general public. Secondly, Geographers in America have strengthened the discipline through a gradual, but quite noticeable shift in emphasis. Geographers have progressively emphasized three areas of contemporary public importance:

- 1) Geographic Education (especially training of better Geography teachers in the public schools),
- 2) GIS and remote sensing and their potential for comprehensive spatial data matching, and
- 3) Environmental Geography, with its understanding of the linkages between the environment and the activities of people.

The third newer emphasis in the field of Geography has searched to understand the interrelations between people's activities and the earth environment. This paradigm, in my estimation, will be the longest lasting of our recent resurgent interests. The paradigm is in reality a rebirth of the man-land paradigm of the early 20th century, one which emphasized the impact of the physical environment on people. The new population-environment interface has approached man-land interactions in a more sophisticated way: from both directions. We must examine both the impacts of nature on culture as well as man's impact on the physical environment.

This paper then discusses the historical roots of modern Environmental Geography in the work of Gilbert White on natural hazards, Risa Palm's studies of earthquake hazard perception, and Susan Cutter and her students' research on both natural and technological hazards. In addition, a new generation of environmental geographers has emerged, studying topics like the effects of aerial farm spraying on nearby residential settlement, the effects of killing citrus freezes on the economy of South Texas and California, the effects of coastal development on land use, the effects of historical river flooding patterns on residential property values and use in San Antonio, Texas, tornado scars (the visual reminders of past tornadoes) and places of increasing mountain lion attacks on people in the U.S. and Canada.

The paper concludes by briefly discussing the wide range of research by Masters and Ph.D. students in Environmental Geography at Texas State University. It concludes in suggesting that perhaps one of the most fruitful areas of research today in Geography is searching for multiple explainers of spatial phenomenon (maps) with both physical and human variables. Environmental Geography ties Geography into a resurgent interest in the environment by governments, international agencies like the U.N., and private environmental groups like Greenpeace and the Sierra Club, and indeed, political parties, such as the Greens, who are making an impact on contemporary German politics. It is important for Geography not to miss the boat on a very germane topic again. Geography, albeit slowly but in contrast to the 1960s, jumped onto the environmental bandwagon in the 1990s. Environmental concern and geographic study are a very close fit. Perhaps this loosely defined topic conceptually fitted within the "population-environment interface" will lend the field of Geography a focus with which permits a more profound understanding of our increasingly complex world. Hopefully, we, and our students, will also be able to suggest some solutions to these world problems as well.