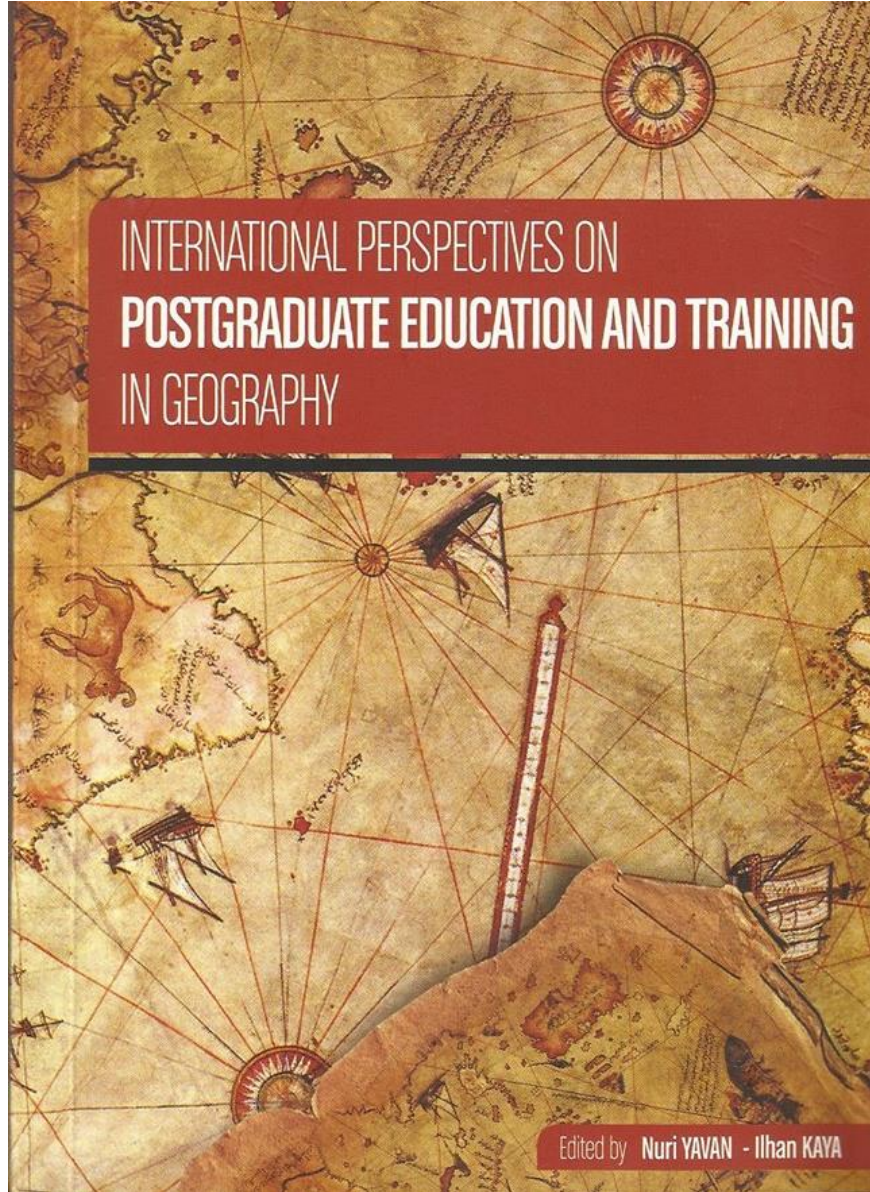


## **International Perspectives on Postgraduate Education and Training in Geography**



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There is a determined effort underway in Turkey to raise the status of postgraduate research in geography in order to enhance the subject further and to develop a strong cadre of geographers engaged internationally and known for the nature and quality of their geographical research. *International Perspectives on Postgraduate Education and Training in Geography* emerged from the Academic Vocational Competences Workshop held at Ankara University in April 2012. This Workshop was an early component in the Piri Reis Project which is focused on enhancing the academic culture and competences of professional geographers and geography educators in Turkish universities. The Workshop examined postgraduate education and training in geography, and papers were given by contributors on the nature and state of postgraduate geographical studies in Turkey and in abroad. The Piri Reis Project has also spurred the founding of the Turkish Association of Geographers.

Introducing the book, Yavan and Kaya (chapter 1) are open and honest about the shortcomings in Turkish geography. Likewise they note the strides being made and the desire among geographers to build on these and enhance both geographical studies and geography's standing academically and professionally. The key concerns they identify include the lack of skills among Turkish geographers to conduct high quality research and to produce high quality publications, the need for a national forum for geographers and new avenues for publications, increased engagement in and presentations at international geography conferences, and limitations in the current state of postgraduate education for strong geography graduates, which needs to be brought into twenty-first century geographical thinking and practices. This reflective and self-critical analysis has led, in an overall climate of enhancing higher education, to a set of aspirations for which the vital underpinning is raising the grade in postgraduate studies in geography. This move is strongly supported by geographers across Turkey, but it needs to be founded on the best practices drawn from around the world. This book provides a start in this process.

Seven of the nine chapters examine postgraduate geography education in countries in and beyond Europe. Three focus on English speaking countries; the USA, the UK and Australia (chapters 2 to 4). Three consider postgraduate studies in Germany, Sweden and Romania (chapters 5 to 7), with chapter 8 examining the situation in Turkey in some detail. While much of the analysis is contributed by Turkish geographers, many of whom have studied abroad; other contributions come from Piri Reis international partners. The purpose of both the Workshop and the book has been to identify the problems Turkey faces and to identify approaches taken in other countries in order to improve their own postgraduate geographical training. These seven chapters provide overviews of postgraduate studies in the respective nations, setting geography in this context, outlining the various national structures in postgraduate degrees at Masters and Doctoral levels. In some more than others the qualities and concerns about postgraduate studies are noted. Approaches, structures and advice on course content can be drawn from them, but some are more informative about how high quality postgraduate geography is effective for students and for the subject.

In chapter 2 Kaya and Aydoğmuş examine graduate geography education in the USA, providing a historical overview. They reflect on the state of geography today, noting, for instance, the global impact of American geographers, while recognizing that geography postgraduate degrees are not as widely available as in some other subjects. A key point made is that in postgraduate research programmes students are involved in the full life of a geography department, that there are well-supported specialisation options, the importance of research training, and the encouragement for students to become involved in national and even international conferences. Donert (chapter 3) sets his review in the broad context of postgraduate courses in the UK, noting the range of postgraduate research areas to be found across vibrant and strong geography departments and the impact of the UK's research assessment processes in fostering research high quality activity. Again the value of the research community in the postgraduate student experience is highlighted, as well as the importance today of employability skills. Arrowsmith, Bellman and Demirci (chapter 4) explain that changes are underway in geography in schools and universities in Australia. Geography is now a named subject in the school national curriculum. At the same time university geography departments have been merging with subjects such as environmental sciences, and multidisciplinary studies in areas such as sustainability and GIS, which include geography programmes is on the rise. Their concern is a declining identity for geography, though the developing interconnections with other disciplines and of the subject in schools seems to offer opportunities for a renaissance in postgraduate geographical studies.

Schmeinek (chapter 5) resettles us in mainland Europe, providing an outline of geography's growth in Germany's universities alongside the increased number of geographical societies over the past fifty years. She gives examples of geography Masters programmes, which contain both taught components and a thesis, while the doctorate is, as

elsewhere, a supervised research thesis, and she notes that to become a university tutor the post-doctoral 'Habilitation' is required. Ari and Uzun (chapter 6) note that only a few Swedish universities offer postgraduate research in geography. The approach is one of 'individualization' for doctoral students to ensure their needs are met, though they may be required to take methodology courses, study in geographical area outside the focus of their research and pedagogical training. There is a particular requirement to engage with the public to communicate their research and its findings to a wider non-geography audience. Voda (chapter 7) notes that in Romania doctoral studies are concentrated in five universities, though more universities run masters programmes. A master's degree is a taught course which provides greater specialism than in undergraduate studies and is a requirement for entry to a doctorate which will focus more specifically in the student's specialism.

Since the 1980s Turkey has seen a trebling of the number of universities. Yavan (chapter 8) notes that twenty-three new geography departments have come into being since the early 2000s. Of the fifty-five geography and geography education departments, only thirty-two are active in teaching and research, and in these twenty-six provide Masters courses and twelve doctoral programmes. This gives a clear indication of the challenges and demands facing postgraduate geography education in Turkey. A key concern has been the need for many more geography staff who are educated to doctoral level. New lecturers also need to have a much deeper sense of geographical thinking and be more strongly grounded in research methods. They need also to be outward looking and engaged with geographers across the world. This requires the development of postgraduate geography training for future university staff, as well as for those who enter the wider workforce, as highly qualified geographers. The increased interest in geography in Turkey in its schools and universities, demonstrating increasing engagement in a globalised world with increasing access to digitalised information and analysis, is reflected in rapidly rising student numbers. The chapter outlines the nature of and the issues facing masters and doctoral geography programmes and identifies opportunities for development. This move has been provoked by younger, western educated geographers who have questioned the system and wish to modernise and enhance geography's postgraduate studies to raise the subject's status nationally and internationally. The authors conclude that there is a need to diversify geography's content at postgraduate levels and to raise the quality level of courses, to ensure that postgraduates take research methods courses in their studies and to develop a monitoring and quality assurance system that demands high quality courses and supports cross-university consistency in postgraduate geographical studies.

In their Conclusion Kaya and Yavan (chapter 9) draw together what is learnt from the foregoing chapters, while noting that change is also ongoing in each of the countries examined and that geography programmes are already developing in Turkey. In particular they draw out the importance for their own future of developments in geographical thinking, research and application, the international contributions of geography academics

and professionals, and the increased employment orientation of postgraduate courses. They note too that students want to know more about the courses they might apply for, the demands made for entry to postgraduate programmes, the need for research training and approaches which are responsive to students' interests and needs, and the wider engagement of postgraduates with conferences and in publishing. The need is for geography departments to be communities of scholars. They see change happening in Turkey and wish to ensure that geography and geography education departments are taking on board the need to raise quality, to engage with new and challenging content and to foster national and international networks to train the geography postgraduates they need.

*International Perspectives on Postgraduate Education and Training in Geography* is an informative and helpful contribution to the development of geography in Turkish universities. It considers approaches elsewhere in the world and takes lessons from these countries. By investigating the postgraduate contexts and approaches in four European and two non-European nations, the team involved in the Piri Reis Project has sought to focus development nationally with a western perspective. This seems important not just for a possible future within the European Union but more positively in terms of engagement with the wider world where advances in geographical thinking and in generating and developing new areas in and approaches to geographical research, analysis and application are evolving. A range of possibilities and ideas for development emerge, even if there is no blueprint for geography departments to adopt. Indeed, what this team has in mind is neither a short-term goal nor a single solution. There are many needs, such as to put revised and new geography postgraduate programmes in place, and to recruit future students and enable them to move into new posts in school education and in active and to-be-activated university geography and geography education departments. This will be a career-long project for those promoting development in geography, but it is a valuable contribution to make. Other publications in the Piri Reis Project are planned, new journals for the national and international market are intended and the recently formed Turkish Association of Geographers is in place. The team is setting itself high aspirations and has marked the ground for important developments in geography in Turkey in the coming decade and for longer. I, for one, wish them well and look forward to their progress.