

The Representation of Islam in the Hungarian Geography Textbooks

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Abstract

This research has been seeking an answer to the question about what kind of image of the Islam is conveyed by the most popular and densely used textbooks to students. In the course of analysis, primary and secondary school textbooks were examined via quantitative and qualitative methods. The objective demonstration of the research results aims to show a remarkable insight into this peculiar segment of Geography education in Hungary.

Keywords: geography teaching in Hungary, geography textbooks, Islam, quantitative analysis, qualitative analysis

Introduction

Textbooks play an appreciated role among teaching materials. They reflect on the relevant knowledge from the point of view of science and didactics, and on the mindset and intellectuality of a certain era. Consequently they may be studied as historical documents. Scientific results, important social, economic, and cultural changes, but also the expectations of the society make serious effect on textbooks. Based on international principles, the theoretical background of Hungarian textbook

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research and analysis was developed by Ágnes F. Dárdai. In her versatile researches she points out that textbooks also function as the ideological manifestation of the state controlling and regulating schooling and education, furthermore as the legitimate device of a certain social-authoritarian-political order. In the course of every greater social change - revolution or change of regime - textbooks consequently undergo a 'paradigmatic change'. In this very era of globalization, convertible knowledge that has a high value in the labor market has a determining effect on the social ambitions and opportunities of an individual. Therefore the content of textbooks has to be seriously considered (Dárdai, 2005). As mentioned above, textbooks maintain an immense influence, especially in the case of History and Geography textbooks. The content and concepts represented in textbooks play determining role in creating and forming the opinion and ideology of younger generations.

At the University of Pécs, Hungary, a significant textbook researching workshop has been established. Besides the development of theoretical backgrounds, Ágnes Dárdai also analyzed History textbooks (Dárdai, 2005). Present topic has been applied by the Institute of Geography, thus several studies have been published on the images of countries, continents in the Hungarian Geography textbooks (M.Császár, 2002, 2005; M. Császár – Vati 2006, Vati, 2009). The analysis of History and Geography textbooks is internationally appreciated in terms of the image of Africa and the Balkan (Dárdai – M. Császár 2004, 2006).

Due to the reform of the Hungarian national curriculum in the last two decades, the material and education of Geography as a subject has undergone tremendous changes. Its foremost important aim is to present the connection and interaction between terrestrial space and the natural and social-economic environment of mankind within. Geography as a subject focuses on today's people, society, and environment. Its material is elaborated through pragmatism and concentrating on global problems. Its content is complex and attitude shaping from numerous aspects. It aims to raise the awareness of students to understand the important role of geographical knowledge, environmental phenomena, and processes. They should develop a positive attitude towards active participation in seeking solutions for communal, local, national, regional, and global problems. The subject also endeavors to create a new historical-geographical approach to the alternative judgment of the components of geographical conditions. In terms of latter goal, Geography textbooks are expected to reveal facts about the historical, political, and cultural dimensions of each region.

After the establishment of the core curriculum, the content and the material's

inner ratio of Geography education in primary and secondary school have changed (Ütőné 2009). In the decades prior to the change of regime, a tenth grade class usually focused on the economic-geographical features of the time socialist countries and especially the Soviet Union from a descriptive approach. Now students in the ninth grade acquire general natural and socio-geographical knowledge. Next year they analyze global economic processes and study the regional Geography of some determining countries.

The Reason for Topic Choice, the Backgrounds of the Research

In the course of Turkey's accession to the European Union, some people set off the alarm bells about the threat of the 'Islamisation' of Europe. Negative criticism and fears derive from the cohabitation with the 15-16 millions of Muslims (according to some estimates this number exceeds 20 million). An average European may regard Islamic culture as hyper-conservative and intolerant due to the events of the last decades. However, it is less known that about 1000 years ago the Islamic world was more liberal and progressive than Christian cultures in terms of politics, science and even religion.

Recognizing and understanding cultural diversity is essential. Primary schools provide the necessary information. One of the fundamental aims of education is to encourage students to accept and understand the other (not the same as their own) cultures, religions, habits, and lifestyles. Besides History as a subject, Geography is the most eligible subject among all to convey cultural differences and connections. Therefore textbook editors have to endeavor to create a complex image of certain areas.

Present research has been seeking an answer to the question: what kinds of image of the Islam do the most popular and modern textbooks convey? Do they confirm the preconceptions about Muslims or they try to provide an objective approach to the complete topics? Do they contain prejudice and stereotypes? How important do they regard the Islamic world in terms of politics, society, and economics; or do they emphasize its importance, at all? Do textbooks clarify the moral, cultural, and religious differences between Europe and Islamic territories? Do textbook articles, pictures, and diagrams encourage students to understand the distinctiveness of Islam and our former and future connections?

In this research the Islamic territories have to be examined one by one (North Africa, Near East, Middle Asia, Indonesia-Malaysia, and the Balkans) since Geography textbooks are not organized according to religious division.

In the course of the research, five Geography textbooks (three primary and two secondary schools) were analyzed. The researchers aimed to examine books which are the most widespread in present education system to reach the highest number of students.

First of all to be surveyed, to what extent the issues of Islam are discussed compared to other issues and the textbook as a whole. From the exact amount of extent, an obvious consequence can be drawn in terms of significance and importance.

The next viewpoint was the text type analysis. Textbooks contain two main types of texts: editorial texts, or so called main texts, and didactic apparatus which term refers to images, maps, resources, and diagrams.

Finally what should be pointed out is the thematic center of each textbook and the depth of each topic. At the beginning of the analysis, the textbooks are analyzed in general and compared their content with the most current curriculum (national curriculum, frame curriculum).

The following thematic centers were established:

1. The concept of Islam; the historical and geographical territory of Islam
2. Natural facilities of the Islamic areas
3. Economic conditions of the Islamic areas
4. The geostrategic role of the Islamic areas
5. Islamic societies
6. Islamic religious and cultural relations
7. Turkey and the EU

Method

The quantitative and qualitative analysis of the selected textbooks

The curriculum of Geography as a subject and the textbooks

Meeting the requirements of the curriculum, the analyzed textbooks are based upon each other and they follow the features of line concentric curriculum. The knowledge transmitted by Geography is complex and attitude shaping from numerous aspects. A primary aim of Geography education is to target the recognition of diverse judgments of the geographical components and situations through forming a historical-geographical approach. Therefore Geography textbooks

are expected to reflect deeply on historical, political, and cultural dimensions of certain areas. The minimal distortion of the real image may create a negative impression in the students which makes the question reasonable: What kind of attitude does given textbook represent towards Islam?

The research included 7th, 9th, and 10th grade Geography textbooks. 8th grade Geography textbooks were not selected for subject of the research because the curriculum reduces the content to Central Europe and Hungary.

Textbook analysis based on coverage and text types

Földrajz az általános iskolák 7. évfolyama számára (Geography for 7th Grade) edited by Nemzeti Tankönyvkiadó (National Textbook Publisher) endeavours to provide a complex image of natural and social geography determined by the curriculum. The textbook discusses the issues of Islamic countries over 8 pages (4 pages about North Africa, 4 pages about Southwest Asia, and a half page about Bosnia-Herzegovina and Turkey). This amounts to the 4.25 % of the total textbook. The topic is illustrated and documented with 9 colourful pictures. The positioning of the pictures is adequate and appreciated. There is only one map which is not entirely geological. The map of Peoples of Africa demonstrates the several inhabited territories with different colours to ease the recognition. Two diagrams are more remarkable; however these also provide 'only' geological information. The size of the pictures and diagrams is appropriate. The ratio between the main text and the didactic apparatus is regarded balanced, considers the age preferences, and meets the curriculum requirements.

The Földrajz 7. (7th Grade Textbook) of Mozaik Kiadó (Mozaik Publisher) reviews the world of Islam only on 4 pages. This amounts to the 2.27% of the entire textbook. 12 colourful pictures, 3 maps, two charts, and 1 diagram demonstrate the topic. The didactic apparatus is edited in favour of quantity therefore the pictures are rather small. Although it also meets the requirements of competence and attention, the main texts may appear short and incomplete. Although it is inexplicable why the map of Religions of the World appears first discussing the fourth continent. It should also be explained why the text of cultivated plants and the picture of Wailing Wall of Jerusalem are placed directly next to each other.

The third examined textbook for 7th grade is Kontinensek földrajza (Geography of Continents) published by Nemzeti Tankönyvkiadó (National Textbook Publisher). This book discusses the natural and social geographical features of Islamic countries through 14 pages (5.83% of the entire book) including North Africa, Near East, Middle Asia, Indonesia & Malaysia, and Bosnia-Herzegovina. This ratio is reasonably high considering the textbook contains 240 pages in total.

The applied types of didactic apparatus are abundant and certainly useful. Altogether 16 pictures, 7 diagrams, and 3 maps contribute to the variety and effectiveness of the main text.

Általános természetföldrajz (The Fundamentals of Geography) created for 9th grade discusses fundamental natural facts about the Earth. A less extent is devoted to the analysis of economic processes, but human activities are in focus in social and economic relations as required by the curriculum. Because of this, Islamic areas are mentioned only in terms of specific natural phenomena. The three pages include two main texts about the topic. The articles *By Car Through the Lybian Desert* and *The Final Days of Aral Sea* are each 1 and 1,5 pages long. The information about Islam appears separately throughout the textbook instead of one unit. 10 pictures and diagrams are presented in these sections. These details contribute to the deeper understanding of the previously acquired natural scientific facts.

Besides discussing global economic processes, Geography 10 endeavours to analyse the structural transformation of economic life and surveys the global environmental problems of present era. In different chapters, it explores Hungary, the role of countries and regions that determines world economy. Unlike primary school textbooks, Geography 10 discusses the Islamic world in one unit with the Near East. The region is examined in three chapters over 10 pages which amount to the 27% of the complete book. This ratio is remarkable considering that this material is supposed to explore the EU, the American continent, and the significant territories of Asia. The title of the first chapter is *Economies Founded on Fuel Fossils*. It is logically structured, abundantly illustrated (3 diagrams, 2 pictures, 1 map), and current. The second chapter discusses *Egypt, the Most Populated Arab Country* (3 pictures, 2 diagrams). The third chapter accomplishes the analysis of the Near East with *Different Ways in the Near East: Israel and Turkey* (4 pictures, 3 diagrams).

The images are well positioned and reflect to the newest scientific results. Altogether the variety and high ratio of the didactic apparatus can be derived from the specifics of Geography as a subject and the requirements of the new high school graduation system. The types of didactic apparatus have appropriate size and recognition. The images and diagrams are perfectly eligible to encourage student to carry out further studies and inquire to reveal deeper connections.

A Thematic Analysis of the Textbooks

The appropriately construed issues of geographical space, social environment, economic and social processes in the textbook are beneficial both for students and

teachers. Although the analyses of extent and text types have pointed out that these requirements are represented in different ways in the textbooks.

The Concept of Islam, the historical-geographical place of Islam

The concept of Islam should be clarified in the primary school. Only the *Geography of Continents* characterizes Islam in a one-page-long article and provides objective fact with the students.

The two other books deal with the concept of Islam only in the terminology part and give a particular type of definition.³

Geography of Continents represents the geographical definition of the Islamic territories like the Near East, Middle Asia (they are mentioned and explored together only in this textbook!), North Africa, and Bosnia-Herzegovina in the most entire way.

The Geographical Features of the Islamic Territories

Geographical features are the initial points in every textbook and a former basic knowledge is usually required. Therefore there is a lack of chance to start studying the material with the exploration of environment. Still primary school textbooks are expected to prepare students for the recognition of connection between natural, economic, and social aspects. This method is suggested in the methodology of regional geographical analysis. On average, miscellaneous consequences can be drawn. In the case of primary school textbooks, the textbook published by Mozaik Kiadó emphasizes natural geography (3/4 part of the book). *Geography for 7th Grade* reduces the discussion of natural geography in the case of certain areas to a 1/10 ratio. *Geography of Continents* explores the optimal amount of information about the natural geographical features (1/3 part of the book). *The Fundamentals of Geography* reflects only on the most important and significant characteristics of the Islamic areas. The textbook written for 10th grade students focuses partly on climate, the location of minerals, and the climatic conditions of cultivation.

Economic Relations of Islamic Areas

In terms of thematic centre, this field appears to be the most thoroughly discussed in both primary and secondary school books. This approves the economic geographical

³ A typical example for perceptible difference:

"Polygamy and public execution of sinners are part of the tradition" (Mozaik)

"According to Islamic law, the public execution or mayhem of criminals and thieves still occur in everyday life" (The Geography of Continents). It matters indeed, which interpretation is learnt by a 12-13 years old and thus creates his or her right or false image about Islam.

approach of modern Geography education. Primary school textbooks follow the long-standing method of analysing the natural features in a few sentences and assigning minerals, industries, and agricultural products to them to demonstrate the economic relations in the area. In case of the secondary school book, the editor characterizes only the Near East from the whole Islamic world (Turkey and Egypt in two chapters). The curriculum is modern, free from stereotypes, and includes a current database. The economic future and possibilities of the region is discussed with the help of 3 diagrams representing the amount of unrevealed fuel fossil supplies, and the 3 years stability program for the contribution to the Turkish economy of the International Monetary Fund.

The geostrategic role of the Islamic area

The analysis of the geostrategic position appeared to be particularly exciting thus this may over or under esteem curricular attribute of a country. Unfortunately editors discuss this question on the surface briefly without exact explanation. However Turkey belongs to Europe (the Balkans) and to Asia (Near East) at the same time due to its geographical location. Bosnia-Herzegovina is the only Islamic country in Europe. Egypt can be considered as an African and Near Eastern country.

Islamic Societies

It is not obvious why students are provided with minor information about the social relations of the area. For some reason, editors relate fuel fossils only to economy and describe Bedouins and Kurds referring to their autonomic intentions. However such immense topics are avoided such as the dividedness of the Islam (the opposition of Sunni Islam and Shia Islam) and the existence of dictatorships (states of Middle Asia).

Religious and Cultural Relations of the Islam

Either in readings or in terminology Islam (Mohamedan) as a religion appears in primary school textbooks. The more important this issue is the least examined. Only The Geography of Continents offers a detailed and objective image of the Islam and its cultural relations (eating habits, arts) at the end of the chapter about the Near East. In this part cultural distinctiveness is regarded rather as touristic attractions.

Unfortunately and incomprehensibly the secondary school textbook misses even to mention the cultural, religious, and moral distinctiveness of the religion which was revealed to the Prophet of Mohammad in the 7th Century and has 1.2 billion followers now (and seems to be the fastest spreading religion in the world).

Turkey and the European Union

According to the current curriculum, secondary school textbooks should discuss this question. Due to the geographical location of Turkey, it is European (Balkan) and Asian (Near Eastern) at the same time. This unique position places the country into a beneficial and a peripheral situation. In the lack of Historical basic knowledge, the topic is not analyzed deeply but the extent is sufficient.

Results and Discussion

The content of the textbooks is current. Their database is rather recent. Primary school students may experience the image of an area with abundant natural variety, distinctive flora and fauna, but with economically too homogeneous properties.

The secondary school textbooks do not contain a complex image of the Islam. Besides the presentation of the specific natural characteristics, students may not get further important information. Due to the traditional approaches to Geography, economic features are in focus, while population and cultural peculiarities are discussed incompletely.

None of the textbooks possess the eligible background information (The Geography of Continents however approximates the adequate level) to present and clarify the moral, ideological, religious, and cultural differences between the Islam and Europe. The analysed textbooks are abundantly illustrated including useful pictures and diagrams to help students. Although Islam also appears as part of politics, it should be emphasized even more especially as, since 11 September 2001, the Islamic world has become a current political issue. The results of present research show that the teaching materials contain sufficient information about the Islamic world to draw the attention of students.

Conclusion

At the beginning of the research the foremost question to be answered was: to what extent textbooks contribute to creating an incomplete concept about the Islamic world in students. As previously established the image of Islam appears primarily in economic terms and remains limited. Textbooks do not convey sufficient information about the moral, ideological, religious, and cultural distinctiveness of Islam.

Textbooks do not present emotional attitudes towards the world of Islam, but appear to be indifferent. As a positive fact it should be appreciated that the analysed textbooks do not communicate rude stereotypes, prejudices, hurtful or offensive clichés either in the texts or in the didactic apparatus.

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