

REGIONAL GEOGRAPHY OF EUROPE

Section D of the syllabus (Section C of HL Geography Exam) involves the study of regional geography with regard to Europe. The evolution of the European Union has increased the importance of the idea of Europe as a union of interdependent countries with common characteristics distinct from other parts of the globe. Greater political and economic integration highlights the importance of a knowledge and awareness of Europe. Two approaches may be taken in the study of Europe:-

1. Thematic approach Agriculture, Manufacturing, Transport etc., across Europe
2. Systematic approach A country by country study of Europe examining themes for each country

Before examining what makes Europe distinctive it is important to understand the idea of a REGION.

A region may be defined as a differentiated segment of the Earth's surface. This is just a fancy way of saying that a region is a part of the Earth **which is different from all other areas** in one or more ways. These differences may be studied under a number of **themes**:-

PHYSICAL

GEOMORPHOLOGY

Regions with distinct land formations and structures

OCEANOGRAPHY

Regions covering certain seas and oceans

CLIMATOLOGY

Regions with distinct climates

HUMAN

SOCIAL

ECONOMIC

HISTORICAL

CULTURAL

Regions with distinct Race, Religion, Language, Agriculture, Manufacturing, History and ways of living.

As you can see, any criteria can be used in region 'building'. If we divide Europe into different agricultural regions we may find that they are intersected by manufacturing regions, or linguistic regions. There is probably no region on Earth completely distinctive in all areas of physical and human geography.

When examining the idea of a region we must decide on the **scale** of the study we are undertaking since by definition a region can be of a variety of sizes.

Local	Regions within a city
County	regions with a county (compare North Dublin with South Dublin)
Province	regions within a province eg. Leinster
Country	regions within a country eg. West of Ireland vs Dublin
International	Northern Europe vs Southern Europe
Global	The North vs The South

Within any chosen region one may identify or establish a series of **sub-regions**. In the context of planning by the European Union, Ireland was considered as a single region. This changed with the Irish governments successful efforts to have Ireland redefined as two regions in order to access further **structural funds** in 2000. There are considerable differences within Ireland suggesting the presence of many smaller scale regions. These were accentuated by the uneven development resulting from the Celtic Tiger. On a European scale these smaller regions are sub-regions. On a national scale they are regions of Ireland.

The study of geography along regional lines was the first way in which geographical phenomena were studied. This is because it proved to be 'one of the most logical and satisfactory ways of organising geographical information'. It **helped identify similarities and differences between different locations, helped identify problems and propose solutions to regions experiencing problems**. This has been important in helping reduce 'regional inequalities', a stated aim of the European Union.

DEFINING EUROPE

Europe is essentially a peninsula of the Asian continent however this does not explain why Europe is a distinctive global region. The reason for this is that there is no clear-cut answer to the question of where Europe begins and where it ends. Some geographers consider Europe to be the area which stretches from the Urals and the Black Sea in the East to the Atlantic in the West, and from Scandinavia in the North to the Mediterranean in the South. Yet The Mediterranean is bordered by Turkey, Israel, and many North African countries none of which are considered European if only by virtue of politics, history and religion (although they do take part in the Eurovision Song Contest!).

The European Union fails to provide an adequate definition of Europe also. It does not include Norway, Switzerland and virtually all of Eastern Europe. Some writers have attempted to find a more satisfactory definition in human terms. They have sought to identify and define the characteristics which makes people 'European'. This is known as the Cultural Area Concept, or approach to defining Europe. Three common characteristics are :-

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| 1. Religion | Judeo-Christian. |
| 2. Language | Indo-European. |
| 3. Race | Caucasoid. |

People and society are characterised by an industrial urbanised market economy with low population growth marked by low Birth Rates and low Death Rates. People are generally well fed and educated. Another writer identified five characteristics:-

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| 1. Physical geography | Resource secure, great environmental options |
| 2. Ethnography | Judo-Christian Caucasoid |
| 3. Technology | Advanced labour and energy saving |
| 4. Values | Openness of attitudes, open to new ideas (democracy) |
| 5. Territorial organisation | Nation-States |

This last characteristic is especially important because it was the evolution of Nation-States which led to the nationalist tensions which ultimately required greater political integration to prevent war. In this way Europeans share a close common history which makes them distinct from other people.

Historically Europe was the cradle of the Industrial Revolution. There is a number of reasons for this:

- Technical acumen and commercial expertise allowed Europeans to flourish with several nations amassing great empires by land or sea,
- Technology, colonialism and trade added to Europe's advantages,
- The evolution of Nation-States.

In a global context Europe represents the 'old' predominantly industrialised and urbanised nations which are served by dense transport networks and communications. Europeans generally live long and healthy lives. European agriculture is characterised by highly productive systems which regularly generate 'mountains' of surplus grain, butter, fruit, and 'lakes' of surplus milk and wine. While experiencing economic expansion in the 1950's and 1960's, the 1970's witnessed gradual economic decline, partly due to dependence on oil imports, the predominance of the United States and the emergence of Japan as a leading international manufacturer and financier. Decolonisation and a greater openness to world influences decreased the uniqueness of Europe. Increased trade and international telecommunication exposed Europe to a greater degree of multiculturalism. Political and economic convergence led to changes in political concerns especially in to late 1980's which became characterised by postmodernist single issue concerns, for example 'Green' issues, nuclear power and the search for rights. Therefore while Europe has outwardly become more unified, a closer examination reveals a more fragmented society making a definition of Europe and European more elusive.

The differences which exist in Europe may be classified according to -

1. Physical geography
2. Climatology
3. Human geography population, agriculture, manufacturing, economic development etc.
4. The evolution of the European Union

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE EUROPEAN UNION

In the aftermath of World War II Europe lay in ruins. Vast areas of building had been destroyed, agricultural and industrial production had been decimated and the threat of famine hung over the heads of millions of displaced survivors. The immediate task facing Europe was to rebuild. To assist reconstruction the United States of America promised financial aid under a scheme called the Marshall Plan on the condition that Europe strive to form a union which would prevent another war from occurring. The aid was also aimed at preventing communist intervention in Western Europe.

The first steps towards European Union were made with the treaty establishing the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) in 1951. This aim of this treaty was to gear Europe towards re-establishing pre-war production levels of coal and steel, the two main agents of industrial development in Europe. In addition to this plans were laid to return to pre-war levels of agricultural production.

In 1957 the European Atomic Energy Commission Treaty (Euratom) and the European Economic Community Treaty were signed collectively as the Treaty of Rome. This treaty, signed by Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, Luxembourg and The Netherlands (often referred to as The Six), established the European Economic Community as a legal entity. The aim of these two treaties was to programme a common nuclear energy policy and to build a trade tariff-free zone to promote free trade between The Six.

The end result of these treaties was the creation of the European Economic Community. In 1986 these treaties were superseded by the Single European Act. The focus of this Act was the creation of a single market allowing the free-flow of goods and services between member states. This however proved an unsatisfactory plan and was effectively replaced by the Treaty of European Union, otherwise known as the Maastricht Treaty in 1992. This treaty created a single market with a single currency with the implementation of the single currency called the Euro in January 2002. However in order to qualify for inclusion in the single currency, member states must prove their 'suitability' by reducing national budget deficit to within 3% of GDP and the national debt to within 60% of GDP.

The European Union is also facing problems with regard to expansion. In 1981 Greece joined the EEC. Spain and Portugal were admitted in 1986 and in 1995 Austria, Finland and Sweden joined. These additions have placed more pressure on the EU to develop the peripheral areas of the union. The Amsterdam Treaty (1998) allowed for the addition of six countries to the Union. There is pressure on the European Union to allow former Eastern Block countries to join the Union. This was recognised in the Nice Treaty (2001) which allowed for the expansion of the Union to 27 members. Most EU countries can implement EU treaties however in Ireland referenda must be held before EU treaties can be ratified. In June 2001 the Irish electorate rejected the Nice Treaty. Initially it was thought that this was a rejection of the idea of enlargement. Enlargement would place at risk Ireland's ability to attract US investment since Eastern European countries have lower labour rates. However it is clear that the issue of changes to the representative structures of the European Union played a key role in the rejection of the treaty. These changes would see Ireland losing their place on the European Commission for 5 years in every 30 years. The reduction of MEP's from 15 to 12 was also an issue.

It is clear that in the event the Irish government holds another referendum (for which it has received much criticism from public commentators) a second rejection would kill off the Nice Treaty in its present form. It obvious solution would appear to be a constitution. Instead of Europe producing new treaties every 6 years or so, a European Constitution would ensure that a consistent legal basis would exist for Europe and that citizens rights would be safeguarded in an institution that began like primarily to promote economic development. Shortly after the rejection of the Nice Treaty by Ireland the Benelux countries submitted a communiqué requesting such a constitution.

Perhaps the biggest difficulty facing the Union is in the area of common policy. Central to the whole idea of the union is that all member states, as far as possible, act as one. This requires a number of policies, each of which must be common to all member states. The most well known is the Common Agricultural Policy. Briefly, this policy attempts to guarantee agricultural production and farmers incomes. However the fact that it consumes the lion's share of the Union's budget and the inefficiency of the system has led to calls for reforms. Reforms could benefit European Union consumers who

currently pay above the world price for agricultural produce, but would also adversely affect farmers and farmer interest groups.

Other common policies include a Common Fisheries Policy, Common Regional Policy and a Common Social Policy. Discussions are currently being held to formulate a Common Foreign and Security Policy which would liase with the Western European Union (a separate military alliance). It is clear now that the European Union is **moving from a purely economic union to a political union** in which European countries would unite politically in a manner similar to the United States of America. Indeed, Europe is already trying to establish an alternative approach to global politics. This was seen in France and Germany's attempts (together with Russia) to oppose American action in Iraq in March and April of 2003 in the United Nations.

STRUCTURE OF THE EUROPEAN UNION

1. COUNCIL OF EUROPEAN UNION MINISTERS

Ministers of 15 member states
Foreign Affairs, Agriculture, Industry etc.

Produces legislation - Regulations/ Directives/ Decisions/ Opinions

2. EUROPEAN COUNCIL

Meetings of Heads of Government
informal pre 1987, now formal

3. EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

626 Seats
Mostly a 'talk shop' but has a role in deciding non-compulsory expenditure
2/3 vote can dismiss the Commission

4. EUROPEAN COMMISSION

One Commissioner appointed by each member state
Supposed to be above own country's interests
Has its own civil service - 26 departments called Directorates General
Responsible for the development of common policies inline with EU Treaties

5. COURT OF JUSTICE

15 Judges and 9 Advocates General
Appointed for a renewable 6 year term
rule on issues related to community law only

6. COURT OF AUDITORS

15 members appointed for a 6 year term
prepares audits of communities income and expenditure

7. ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE

222 members
Must be consulted on issues in which it may have an interest.

8. COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS

222 MEMBERS appointed by regional and local authorities