The 2016 International Charter on Geography Education

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Antecedents to the 2016 Charter on Geographical Education

In 1992, The International Charter on Geographical Education was endorsed by the General Assembly of the International Geographical Union at the 27th International Geographical Congress in Washington, D.C., U.S.A. in August 1992 (www.igu-cge.org). In the Charter, the Commission on Geographical Education of the International Geographical Union proclaimed it was:

Convinced that geographical education is indispensable to the development of responsible and active citizens in the present and future world,

Conscious that geography can be an informing, enabling and stimulating subject at all levels in education, and contributes to a lifelong enjoyment and understanding of our world,

Aware that students require increasing international competence in order to ensure effective cooperation on a broad range of economic, political, cultural and environmental issues in a shrinking world,

Concerned that geographical education is neglected in some parts of the world, and lacks structure and coherence in others,

Ready to assist colleagues in counteracting geographical illiteracy in all countries of the world,
Supports the principles set out in:

- the Charter of the United Nations;
- the Universal Declaration of Human Rights;
- the Constitution of UNESCO;
- the UNESCO Recommendation concerning Education for International Understanding, Cooperation and Peace;
- the Declaration on the Rights of the Child; and
- many national curricula and statements on geographical education,

commends this International Charter on Geographical Education to all people of the world.

In subsequent years, the Commission on Geographical Education, on behalf of the International Geographical Union, published further Declarations as follows:

- **The International Declaration on Geographical Education for Cultural Diversity** was proclaimed at the 29th Geographical Congress held in Seoul, South Korea in August 2000.
- **The Lucerne Declaration on Geographical Education for Sustainable Development** was proclaimed at the IGU CGE Regional Symposium in Lucerne Switzerland in July 2007.
- **The International Declaration on Research in Geography Education** was proclaimed at the IGU Regional Conference held in Moscow, Russia in August 2015.

Purpose

Since 1992 the world has changed and with it the discipline of geography and geography education. To address these changes the Commission on Geographical Education has redrafted the Charter to assist policy makers, curriculum developers and teachers by presenting the essence of the charter as an action plan.

The 2016 Charter affirms the proclamations of its antecedents and asserts that:

- Geography is the study of the Earth and its natural, physical and human environments. Geography enables the study of human activities and their interrelationships and interactions with environments from local to global scales;
- While geography often bridges between natural and social sciences, geography is the only discipline that deals with spatial variability, i.e. that phenomena, events and processes vary between places and therefore is an essential part of the education of all citizens in all societies;
- Geographical education is neglected in some parts of the world, and lacks structure and support in others.
Accordingly this Charter specifically addresses educational policy makers, curriculum planners, and geography teachers in all nations and jurisdictions of the world to help them to ensure that all young people receive an effective and worthwhile geographical education, and to help geographical educators everywhere to counteract geographical illiteracy.

The Contribution of Geography to Education

When taught effectively, the study of geography can fascinate and inspire young people. Ensuring the quality of geography in schools is, consequently, an essential duty of policy makers and education leaders internationally. Whether it is through appreciating the beauty of the earth, the immense power of earth-shaping forces or the often ingenious ways in which people create their living in different environments and circumstances, studying geography helps young people to understand and appreciate how places and landscapes are formed, how people and environments interact, the consequences that arise from our everyday spatial decisions, and Earth’s diverse and interconnected mosaic of cultures and societies.

Geography is therefore a vital subject resource for 21st century global citizens, enabling us to face questions of what it means to live sustainably in an interdependent world. Geographically educated citizens understand human relationships in the world and their responsibilities to both the natural environment and to others. Geography education helps young people learn how to exist harmoniously with other creatures as well as human beings.

Geographical investigation both satisfies and nourishes curiosity. Geographical perspectives help deepen understanding of many contemporary challenges such as climate change, food security, energy choices, overexploitation of natural resources and urbanization. In this way teaching geography serves several vital educational goals. Building on young people’s own experiences, studying geography helps them to formulate questions, develop their intellectual skills and respond to issues affecting their lives. It introduces them not only to key 21st century skills but also to distinctive investigative tools such as maps, fieldwork and the use of powerful digital communication technologies.

Research in Geography Education

Geographical Education is vital to create the next generation of people with the knowledge, skills, attitudes, values, and practices to value, care, and make reasoned decisions for the planet. How best to teach geography to a range of learners is a deep concern and will require significant and ongoing research. We encourage policy makers and geography educators to build capacity in this endeavour in order to conduct both theoretical and applied research. Specifically we encourage policy makers and geography educators

• to build capacity in research and its application to the classroom
• to value current research and knowledge building in the field of geography education, and
• to identify future research priorities in the field.

The IGU Commission on Geographical Education supports and promotes research in geography education both within individual nations and across nations. It aspires to develop an international culture of research in geography education to enable the improvement of policies and practices that enhance the quality of geography teaching and learning for all educational settings.

Those who teach geography in primary and secondary schools and in further and higher education must be supported by research intelligence. They need the best, critical insights into (for example) the use of new technologies, problem based learning strategies and futures education. This is because teachers are the key to improvement in education, and good teachers need the best tools to work with.

Important research questions include:

• What do students need to know geographically? What are their misperceptions and preconceptions? How can we enhance their geographical knowledge, understanding and skills?
• How do we understand students’ learning progression in geography? How is this best calibrated and assessed?
• Which are the characteristics of effective teaching and learning materials and resources in improving the quality of geographical education?
• What teaching methods in geography are efficient and effective in improving the quality of geographical education?
• How can the training of geography teachers be improved to raise levels of achievement in geography in schools?

As a result of such research, curriculum developers and geographical educators at all levels will be able to

• refine curriculum, pedagogic and assessment practices used in the teaching and learning of geography;
• develop a ‘research orientation’ amongst geography teachers and educators that enables reflective and critical engagement with habitual practices, and professional ‘habits of mind’ that demand improvement in the quality of geography education; and
• clarify the purposes and goals of geography education; no matter how the geography curriculum is expressed locally.
International Co-operation

Geographical education, at its best, makes a unique contribution to the emergence of critical global perspectives in young people. However, geography education has a different status in countries around the world: some young people have less access to a geography education than others. One way to support the global development and awareness of quality within geography education is to promote and encourage international co-operation by sharing limited resources and assisting educators in different countries to learn from each other.

International co-operation among geographical educators should be promoted and developed in the form of bilateral or multilateral exchanges of experience and research. This should include the exchange of students, teachers, and teacher educators and may usefully focus on teaching materials, and research-led developments in curriculum, pedagogy and assessment.

Geography educators and teachers in all countries are encouraged to promote such exchanges through the work of the Commission on Geographical Education of the International Geographical Union and through many other geographical societies and associations.

Policy makers are encouraged to stimulate and facilitate international co-operation.

An international Action Plan

In order that all young people can benefit from a geographical education as explained above, the International Geographical Union through its Commission on Geographical Education proposes the following action plan for policy makers, curriculum developers and geography teachers to improve the quality of geography education and geography education research internationally,

1. National and local education policy makers, as well as geography teachers, should make the focus and contribution of geography education for society more explicit to encourage higher levels of public support for its place in the curriculum.

   Strong arguments for geography education are:
   - Geography is much more than learning many facts and concepts. Its focus is on the patterns and processes that help us to understand an ever-changing planet. Geography helps to think critically about sustainable living locally and globally and how to act accordingly.
   - Geography is concerned with human-environment interactions in the context of specific places and locations and with issues that have a strong geographical dimension like natural hazards, climate change, energy supplies, migration, land use, urbanization, poverty and identity. Geography is a bridge between natural and social sciences and encourages the ‘holistic’ study of such issues.
• Geography is concerned with both the local and the global and the interconnections between these scales of human experience.
• As location is a key factor in life, especially in an era of globalization and internet, geography is very practical and useful in everyday life.
• Geography is the discipline where knowledge about locations and regions has its base. The appreciation of unique contexts and circumstances in an interconnected world helps deepen our understanding of human diversity.
• Geographical knowledge and skills, especially when mediated through geospatial technologies offer unique opportunities to make sense of the modern world. Together they form an invaluable 21 century skill set for today and tomorrow.

2. National and local education policy makers should set minimum requirements for geography teaching and the geographical literacy of those who teach geography.

This requirement is based on the convictions that:

• All children at all levels in primary and secondary school need access to high quality geography education as an important part of their curriculum.
• As teachers are the key to innovation and quality in education, highly qualified geography teachers should be present in all schools to ensure effective curriculum leadership and implementation. Initial teacher training regulations should specify a minimum requirement for teachers of geography at both primary and secondary schools.
• Geography teachers at all levels should be qualified in both physical and human aspects of geography in order that they may integrate both aspects of the discipline as appropriate for primary and secondary levels.

3. National and local education policy makers and geography teacher subject associations should develop processes to encourage (inter)national exchanges of good practices.

Enhanced co-operation and exchanges between geography teachers in both local jurisdictions, nations and internationally has the potential to

• strengthen the position of geography in schools;
• clarify the purpose of geography education for all students; and
• develop pedagogic practices in geography education.
Comparison of geography standards from different countries and opportunities for international teacher exchanges should be encouraged in order to disseminate the knowledge, skills and values that are basic in geography education.

4. **National and local education policy makers and geography teacher subject associations should develop a locally relevant research agenda for geography education.**

Geography teaching in all jurisdictions may be enhanced by ensuring that all aspects of the geographical education enterprise are guided by evidence based on strong, peer reviewed, relevant research findings. In order to achieve this:

- Policy makers and curriculum developers should review internationally published research in geography education in order to determine identified best practice and where further research may be necessary.
- Where current research appears to be lacking, policy makers should develop mechanisms to encourage and improve the quality of published research in geography education.
- Policy makers and curriculum developers should develop mechanisms whereby teachers in their schools can access international geography education research in their own languages.
- Teachers should be encouraged to undertake quality research in geographical education as part of in-service higher degree study and such research may be enhanced through the work of international research groups that enable researchers to draw upon the resources, intelligence and expertise which may be unavailable locally.

5. **National and local education policy makers and geography teacher subject associations and teachers should create and maintain a strong professional network structure.**

National and international professional network structures are necessary to open new horizons for geography education. These networks need support from a large range of educational policy makers, geographical organizations and other stakeholders. In particular,

- Continued professional development in geography education within and across networks needs to be encouraged and facilitated for all teachers.
The visibility of the discipline and appreciation of the significance of geography in education requires a higher media profile. Professional networks locally, regionally, nationally and internationally should be encouraged to engage the public in their work.

The geographical education of all young people should be designed to address local and/or national priorities but be based firmly on the five points outlined above. While it is acknowledged that school curricula around the world will differ in significant ways, it is important that all geography curricula are recognizable around the world as reflecting the best of contemporary geographical scholarship.

This International Charter, drafted by the International Geographical Union Commission on Geographical Education, was presented and discussed at the International Geographical Union Regional Conference in Moscow, August 2015 and endorsed by the General Assembly of the International Geographical Union at the International Geographical Union Congress in Beijing, August 2016.

The International Geographical Union reasserts the principles of the 1992 Charter on Geographical Education and subsequent documents of the Commission on Geographical Education and commends the principles and practices presented here as an International Action Plan whereby young people in all jurisdictions around the world may receive the geographical education to which they are entitled. The International Geographical Union, at its Congress in Beijing in 2016, proclaims this Charter to all governments and peoples of the world and commends these principles and practices as the basis on which sound geographical education in all countries should be maintained.

Signed

Prof. Vladimir Kolossov
President of the International Geographical Union
Beijing, August XX 2016