

Meaning of economic geography

Economic Geography is the study of man and his economic activities under varying sets of conditions but Geographers are of the opinion that Economic Geography is the study of the spatial distribution of man's economic activities in relation to its environment be it physical or non-physical. According to **Dudley Stamp** Economic Geography involves consideration of the geographical and other factors which influence man's productivity, but only in limited depths, so far as they are connected with the production and trade."

Professor **E.W. Zimmermann** pointed out that "Economic Geography deals with the economic life of man with relation to environment." According to **J. Mac Farlane** Economic Geography as the study of "influence exerted on the economic activity of man by his physical environment, and more specifically by the form and structure of the surface of the land, the climatic conditions which prevail upon its and spatial relations in which its different regions stand to one another."

According to **Hartshorn and Alexander** "Economic Geography is the study of the spatial variation on the earth's surface of activities related to producing, exchange, consuming goods and services. Whenever possible the goal is to develop generalizations and theories to account for these spatial variations."

Surpassing all, **Chisholmes** says that "Economic Geography is presumed to form some reasonable estimate of the future course of commercial development, as determined by geographical factors"

Here are some definitions of economic geography by different scholars:

- a. "Economic geography is the study of the location, distribution, and spatial organization of economic activities across the Earth." - **Paul Krugman and Anthony Venables**
- b. "Economic geography examines the spatial distribution of economic activities and the underlying factors that influence these patterns, including resources, transportation, and market access." - **Richard Peet**
- c. "Economic geography is concerned with the spatial aspects of economic processes, addressing questions of why economic activities are located where they are and how these locations affect the world's economies." - **Trevor J. Barnes**
- d. "It is a subfield of geography that explores the relationship between people and their economic activities in the context of space and place, focusing on the distribution of resources, industries, and trade." - **William D. Pattison**
- e. "Economic geography is the study of the geographic distribution of economic activities, including their patterns, impacts, and the role of geography in shaping economies." - **Neil M. Coe and Philip F. Kelly**

These definitions highlight the common themes of economic geography, which involve the spatial dimension of economic processes, the role of location in economic activities, and the impact of geography on economic systems.

Scope of economic Geography

The scope of economic geography is broad and encompasses the study of how economic activities, such as production, distribution, and consumption, are organized and spatially distributed on Earth. It involves examining factors like resource availability, transportation networks, trade patterns, and the impact of globalization on local and global economies. Economic geographers also analyze regional disparities, urban development, and the role of geography in shaping economic systems. This field is essential for understanding the spatial dimensions of economic processes and their impact on society and the environment. Here are some key aspects of its scope:

- a) **Spatial Distribution of Economic Activities:** Economic geography examines how different economic activities, such as agriculture, manufacturing, and services, are distributed across geographic regions. It analyzes the reasons behind these spatial patterns.
- b) **Location Theory:** This field explores the factors that influence the location decisions of businesses, industries, and services. Central to location theory are concepts like agglomeration, clustering, and the role of transportation and infrastructure in determining the ideal locations for economic activities.
- c) **Globalization:** Economic geography plays a crucial role in understanding the effects of globalization on the world economy. It examines global trade, multinational corporations, and the flow of capital, goods, and services across borders.
- d) **Regional Development:** The discipline focuses on regional disparities in economic development, looking at why some regions prosper while others lag behind. It explores strategies for regional development and policies to reduce economic inequalities.
- e) **Urban and Rural Economies:** Economic geography delves into the economic dynamics of cities, metropolitan areas, and rural regions. It studies urbanization, urban-rural linkages, land use patterns, and the role of cities as economic hubs.
- f) **Transportation and Infrastructure:** Infrastructure, including transportation networks and communication systems, is critical in economic geography. It examines how infrastructure influences economic activities, trade, and connectivity.
- g) **Resource Geography:** This subfield investigates the distribution and utilization of natural resources, such as minerals, energy sources, and agricultural land. It also considers the environmental and sustainability aspects of resource management.
- h) **Trade and International Economics:** Economic geography explores trade patterns, trade routes, and the role of ports and transportation hubs in facilitating global trade. It also studies international economic relations and the geopolitical aspects of trade.
- i) **Environmental Economics:** Economic geography considers the interaction between economic activities and the environment. It

explores issues like sustainable development, resource depletion, and environmental impacts of economic processes.

- j) **Geopolitics:** The geopolitical dimension of economic geography involves the study of international relations and conflicts related to economic interests and resources, including issues such as territorial disputes and access to critical resources.
- k) **Innovation and Technology:** Economic geography investigates the role of innovation, technology, and knowledge clusters in shaping economic development, particularly in the context of high-tech and knowledge-based industries.

In summary, economic geography is a multifaceted field that examines the spatial aspects of economic activities, their underlying factors, and their impact on regions, nations, and the world. It is crucial for policymakers, businesses, and researchers to understand how geography influences economic processes and to develop strategies for sustainable and equitable economic development.

Approaches to Economic Geography

In geography, several approaches have been developed for systematic the subject. The same has also been adopted in economic geography. The approaches to study economic geography can be divided into three categories:

- a) Traditional Approaches
- b) Philosophic Approaches
- c) Modern Approaches

a) Traditional Approaches: These are the approaches which are common in geography and frequently used in economic geography. These are: (i) **Regional Approach**, (ii) **Commodity or Topical Approach**, and (ii) **Principles Approach**.

(i)Regional Approach: The term 'region' is very popular in geographical literature and refers to a suitable areal unit, e.g. a climatic region, a natural region, an industrial region, an agricultural region, an administrative or political region and so on. A region is having common geo-economic characteristics, are source base, economic development and to some extent similarities in culture and demographic structure. Therefore, several geographers have chosen this region approach in economic geography. An advantage of the regional approach is that it gives a better knowledge of different parts of a unit, their relationship to each other and to the unit as a whole.

(ii)Commodity or Topical Approach: This approach provides a systematic description and interpretation of the world distribution pattern of a commodity (wheat), or an industry (cotton textile industry), or a human

occupation (fishing). It analyses the whole sequence of their development, and catches them on their march to progression or retrogression. This topical or commodity approach is very popular.

(iii) Principles Approach: Economic regions are based on certain fundamental principles; and similar is the case with the extraction of minerals (coals, iron ore or diamond), or the localisation of industries (metal fabricating or textile industries), or the exchange of commodities. At least four principles, viz., the principle of geonomic relationship, the principle of optimum location, the principle of regional specialisation and the principle of geonomic succession appear to be valid generalisations under all conditions.

b) Philosophic Approaches: The 1990s research in economic geography may be characterised by three major philosophic approaches. These are:

(i) Positivism, (ii) Structuralism, and (iii) Humanism.

(i) Positivism: It employs the scientific method to interpret and understand issues in economic geography. The scientific approach is based on empirically verifiable and commonly agreed upon evidence through replication of analytical results. It involves informed hypothesis testing leading to empirical generalisations and law-like statements. GIS (Group Information System) is central to analytical and positivist approaches to geography in general and with especially numerous applications in economic geography.

(ii) Structuralism: In economic geography, structuralism, posits that what we see in the world does not reveal the causes of what we see. The structure of the economy cannot be directly observed, and we should therefore, develop ideas and theories that will help us understand what we see and experience. While there is no way to directly test such theories, we can debate about them to achieve better understanding.

(iii) Humanism: It is a part of critique of positivism. Humanistic economic geographers object to both positivism and structuralism on the basis that these approaches view people as responding mechanically to spatial and structural forces.

C) Modern Approaches: In economic geography, three approaches have been developed during last three decades that can be considered as modern approaches. These are: **(i) system analysis, (ii) behavioural approach, and (iii) institutional approach.**

i) System Analysis: A system is a set of identified elements so related that together they form a complex whole. System analysis is an approach or methodology rather than a philosophy or scientific paradigm. Economic geographers utilize the system concept in order to better understand the component elements of some part of reality, and the relations between them.

ii) Behavioural approach: In economic geography behavioural approach now has become very common. Economic geographers study the overall results of economically-oriented behaviour as they appear in the landscape. In economic geography, the study of decision-making process is an important

aspect. The type of decision-making, which is the concern of economic geography, can be classified as problem-solving or behavioural decision-making with such results as new locations for shops, farms or factories. Similarly, the study of consumer behaviour, movement or trip behaviour, etc. are considered to be important. The decision-making process and other aspects of behavioural analysis will be discussed in detail in other chapters of the book.

(ii) Institutional Approach: Ron Martin (2003) has emphasized the need of institutional approach in economic geography. He stated that the form and evolution of the economic landscape cannot be fully understood without giving due attention to the various social institutions on which economic activity depends and through which it is shaped.

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