APPLIED GEOGRAPHY, A LIFE EXPERIENCE

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How do you become an "applied geographer" when nobody is teaching "geographie active" or "geographie appliquee" in your home country? There are three essential ingredients: a professor involved in similar research, Paul Claval, a willingness within local institutions to contribute to this type of research, and an attraction for academic life. I had the opportunity and freedom to pursue these three ingredients at The University of Besancon (France), Department of Geography. As a Ph.D. student in regional science at Penn, I followed these first steps, learnt new techniques and models, and started to develop my research on urban and regional planning. At Penn, Walter Isard and Thomas Reiner were fabulous tutors, at the start of my career in applied geography.

Together with my Canadian student colleague who I met at Penn, Mario Polese, we had the chance to enter the world of applied regional science in Montreal at the recently created Institut National de la Recherhce Scientifique Urbanisation. As newly appointed young staff, we were paid to do full-time applied research with complete freedom on our chosen areas of interest: on the networks within Canadian cities, on flows of goods and services in Quebec, on the quality of life in Canadian cities. A basic research training to allow me to be appointed as an applied geography professor, in 1979, at the University of Geneva, Switzerland.

Using my experience in pure research I moved into teaching. While I am still, to this day, involved in planning research in France, Switzerland, and Canada, I am primarily a professor in charge of students undertaking Master and Ph.D. programmes. My goal was to show them the potential of geography, building on its theoretical foundations, and its applied side. I started with first year students instead of waiting until the end of their master's programme to introduce them to applied geography. It took me 5 years to convince the authorities of a need for a major course in economic geography and regional science for all first year students of the Faculty of Economics and Social Sciences in the University of Geneva. It was not a compulsory course for all students since they could also choose a more theoretical course in

global human ecology. After the first year the results were greater than my expectations, with more than 300 students each term out of a total of a 1000 students undertaking the course.

By introducing students in their first year to this aspect of geography, and showing them real-life examples of the practical aspects of my research I was able to attract the students to the geography taught masters course. Here they experienced a more theoretical and methodological approach, and encouraged to undertake as much applied research as possible, including a master's thesis which could be done within a variety of local and regional enterprises (mainly in-services).

For the Ph.D. students our research was integral to programmes within The European Science Foundation, the COST European programmes on urban change, and in medicometry, a new applied field, was developed in the 1980s with Jean Paelinck for health care policies.

To be in a position to teach these courses to a high standard, I had to write a series of text books, that we could not find in the francophone world at that time: Comprendre et maitriser l'espace (published by Reclus in 1981, with Jean Paelinck, Alain Sallez, and Bernard Guesnier) for first year students; Introduction a la geographie humaine (published by Masson in 1982) for masters students, and now in its 10th edition; Les concepts de la geographie humaine (published by Masson with a group of geographers and including a special chapter on applied geography), and L'Encyclopedie de geographie (published by Economica in 1992) to complete the collection. Each of these textbooks could be used from the first year through to Ph.D. level, and each had an applied geography perspective.

Different geographical and regional science associations were a great channel to promote this concept of applied geography education. Students were also involved with others around the world. With the French-Speaking Regional Science Association we were involved in contracts with the French Ministry of Planning (DATAR). With the Western Regional Science Association we developed links with U.S. research teams and colleagues such as Lay Gibson. With the Canadian Regional Science Association we were able to work in countries from South and Central America, and develop new themes adapted in particular to the cases of these developing countries.

Applied geography needs to have a better image! Another major opportunity for applied geography was the creation, with Christian Pierret (who later became a French Minister for five years) of the Festival de Geographie. In a medium-sized city, Saint-Die-Des-Vosges, in eastern France, we were able to gather geographers from around the world to present our research to the wider public and the media. With 40,000 participants, each year, for the

three days of the Festival, it is a real success story. The press and TV channels learn what geography is, that it can be useful for society, that it can be applied. This led to a big, and real, change in the image of geography in the francophone world

Promotion of geography, but also a multi-disciplinary approach, provides my basic concepts for geographic education. We have to work with other scientists to show the real potential of applied geography. It is a global field, as we could show through all our medico metric experience, between applied geographers and medical doctors, healthcare managers, policy makers, economists. The only way to be able to answer society's problems with a global and spatial point of view.