

CHARACTERISTICS AND EVOLUTION OF THE *DIDÁCTICA GEOGRÁFICA* JOURNAL

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1. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Although the task of analysing any journal is apparently simple, it actually proves quite complex in practice. Among the difficulties encountered, it is quite likely that one of the main tasks involves selecting the criteria and arranging information in specific fields or categories. Having read different articles about analysis procedures led to the conclusion that each researcher selects the criteria in accordance with the purpose pursued, and that there is no single model that can be generalised. The *Didáctica Geográfica* journal is a basic reference of innovation and diffusion of teaching Geography in Spain, and is the forerunner of this area of knowledge in Spain.

This journal began in 1977, when the Geography Didactics group had still not been set up within the Spanish Geographers Association, and no special interest was being paid at that time to teaching Geography in congresses on the reference science.

During its first stage, the *Didáctica Geográfica* Journal covered the concerns at the time, which coincided with a transformation period for the Spanish education system; the preparation of White Books on Educational Reforms, the creation of CEPs (Private Higher Education Councils - Royal Decree 2122/1984, of 14 November, published in BOE 24-XI-1984 –Official State Bulletin), and the passing of the Organic Law on the Right to Education (LODE) in 1985.

This journal was not published at a key time of what Spanish education was to become, specifically during the presentation of the legal reform known as Organic Law on the General Organisation of the Education System (LOGSE) in 1990, and the subsequent development during which the Spanish Autonomous Communities proceeded to adapt curricula. There were many reasons why it was not published at the time, but they were not specified after it recommenced publications in 1996.

In the curricular context of the 1970s, Geography had faded within the social sciences subject matter with the reform by the so-called Villar Palasi Law, or the General Law on Education (LGE) in 1970.

This was a complicated time with major changes taking place, which its agents were well aware of (*Didáctica Geográfica*, 1977, 5).

As a background to the concern for Geography teaching, the first Colloquium, or meeting of university Geography teachers, is worth stressing. It was held in Zaragoza in December 1961, and was entitled *Colloquium on the problems of teaching Geography*. The contents of this meeting centred on the situation of teaching Geography at various levels of education: Primary Education, Secondary Education and Higher Education. During later colloquia, like those held in Madrid, Salamanca, Oviedo and Barcelona, other problems were dealt with, which related more with teaching Geography than learning Geography (Melón: 1962: 79-85).

The interest in teaching Geography was once again present in the 9 Colloquium for Spanish Geographers, held in Murcia in December 1985, where there was a speech on teaching Geography presented by Hernando Rica and Plans Sanz de Bremon, entitled *Geography Didactics*.

In the same year of the 9 Colloquium, other meetings were held, for example, in Barcelona and Cáceres in 1985, and they covered the matter of teaching Geography. Furthermore in September, there was the first encounter for Geography teachers from normal schools held in Barcelona.

Thus, there was growing interest in teaching Geography in the Spanish society from the 1970s to 1985.

2. BACKGROUND: DIDÁCTICA GEOGRÁFICA (ITS FIRST STAGE, 1977-1986)

The *Didáctica Geográfica* Journal commenced in 1977 and was edited by the Secretariat of publications at the University of Murcia. The journal was to publish on a six-monthly basis. According to the publishing house (*Didáctica Geográfica*, no. 1, 1977, 3-5), the publication emerged from the teachers' concern, particularly non-university teachers, about the lack of an encounter instrument and the means to diffuse innovation in Geography didactics. The *Didáctica Geográfica* publishing house considered the need to favour an educational relationship among the various academic levels. Specifically, the objectives that were formulated were also specified since the journal's first edition.

The *Didáctica Geográfica* Journal's management for the first of its 14 editions was in the hands of Plans Sanz de Bremond; great masters of Geography also formed part of the Editorial Board, such as Terán Álvarez, Solé Sabarís, Vila Valentí and Casas

Torres, among others. The Editorial Board compiled the different ideological concerns at the time, although the Director's influence was evident. From edition no. 11, a crisis within the journal became evident, bringing about complete renovation which came into being as from edition no. 14 with the incorporation of new teachers and, of two female teachers for the first time: Gil Meseguer and Marrón Gaite.

The Editorial Board was highly represented by teachers from the province of Murcia and with university teachers from Barcelona, Madrid, Granada, Navarre and Alcalá de Henares. The Editorial Team included members from all levels of education: General Basic Education, High School, Inspectors of Secondary Education, teachers from University Teacher Training Schools for General Basic Education and University levels; however, the preeminence of university teachers was obvious.

The first stage of the *Didáctica Geográfica* Journal was critically studied by Luís Gómez, which was published in the Acts of the 3 Iberian Colloquium on Geography (1984). This publication stated that Spanish journals specialised in themes relating to Geography teaching were lacking at the time, although some journals occasionally covered matters on this theme.

Luís Gómez's review of this journal during its first stage could have been broader, like this review is, and it could have included an analysis of the members of the journal's Editorial Team. If this were the case, other questions, like gender equality, would have been unveiled. The Editorial Team at the time was clearly male-dominated, with 28 men and only 2 women (see Document 1). This gender difference was uncovered and explained in general to Spanish Geography by Albert Más; García Ramón, and Nogué Font (1992: 49-57). These researchers, however, pointed out that, in 1992, this situation was changing and that women were gradually being incorporated. The incorporation of women into the *Didáctica Geográfica* Journal took place for the last edition of this its first stage. Another gender matter which was not included in this analysis and which the aforementioned researchers (Albert...) have dealt with, was to discover if there were differences in research preferences between men and women.

To finish this section, it is noteworthy that, fortunately, the future of the journal as foreseen by Luís Gómez evidently did not come about because this journal, despite not publishing for some years, is making great efforts to become a dynamic publication by adapting to the new times, and by acting not only as a point of encounter, but also as a centre for research, innovation or educational diffusion. Nonetheless, there are some major obstacles it must overcome in order to continue; these obstacles do not result from the desires of an increasingly wider community concerned about Geography teaching, but from chrematistics-based problems.

3. *DIDÁCTICA GEOGRÁFICA* (SECOND STAGE 1996-) AGENTS AND OBJECTIVES FOR THE SECOND STAGE

The second stage of the *Didáctica Geográfica* Journal began in 1996 after a decade without publications. At this time, the journal was linked to the Geography Didactics Group within the Spanish Geographers Association (AGE). Publications are annual, although this frequency has not always been possible. Edition no. 4, for example, had editing problems and, in the end, it was never published. The first journal edition was published in 1996, no. 2 in 1997, no. 3 in 1999, no. 5 in 2002, no. 6 in 2004, no. 7 in 2005, no. 8 in 2006, no. 9 in 2007, no. 10 in 2009 and no. 11 in 2010. The 2008 edition was delayed as a result of adapting to the demand imposed to improve the journal's external evaluation.

The *Didáctica Geográfica* Journal, as its first stage has evidenced, was not ideologically linked to any trend and it indicated that the responsibility of the contents of its articles corresponded to its authors (*Didáctica Geográfica*, 1996, 3).

The journal's layout during this so-called second stage has undergone changes.

Firstly, it has proceeded to edit monographic editions quite regularly.

Secondly, reviews, remarks or conferences have been sporadically included.

Thirdly, it is worth mentioning that it has undergone profound restructuring since its last edition (no. 11), which is in line with how journals should be in the 21st century.

The *Didáctica Geográfica* Journal's edition counted on the wholehearted support of the University of Burgos for its first two editions during its second stage. Later, as of edition no. 3, the baton was taken by and has remained at the Complutense University of Madrid. It has counted on the ECIR Publishing House's collaboration for its editions nos. 5-10, while its last no. 11 edition was exclusively edited by AGE's Didactics Group.

During this time, the Editorial Team enjoyed the participation of members from these universities: Granada, Barcelona, Murcia, the Autonomous University of Madrid, León, Oviedo, La Laguna, the UNED (National Distance Education University) and Alicante.

The Advisory Board is made up of representatives from these universities: the Autonomous University of Madrid, Lisbon, Vaikato University (New Zealand), Fatih University (Turkey), León, Freiburg (Germany), Education Manager Esri (USA), the Spanish High Council of Scientific Research (CSIC), University of North Texas (USA) and Alicante. This suggests that the journal has opened up beyond Spanish frontiers.

During this second stage, we can see a change taking place with women progressively being incorporated into the research, management, etc. domains of science, as confirmed in this journal's last edition. We should remember that the first

two women joined one edition during the journal's first stage. Nowadays, there are seven women participating in the journals' management during its second stage, which has a total of 16 members. Furthermore, management responsibilities are in the hands of two of these women (Marrón Gaite; Lázaro y Torres).

The objectives formulated for this second stage have never been explicitly presented. Objectives should be drawn from reading the various articles and sections. The purpose of the first journal of the second stage was to "*achieve a quality, open, useful and long-lasting journal*". In its latest edition, coordinator María Luisa de Lázaro y Torres states her concern about the quality of the journal.

4. EXTENDING THE JOURNAL ARTICLES (SECOND STAGE)

The first question dealt with in this analysis has been to quantify the number of articles, reviews, remarks, conferences, etc., into which the information presented in the journal is distributed. This section aims to discover the formal regularities of the *Didáctica Geográfica* Journal.

The amount of articles, reviews, remarks, conferences, etc., varies widely from one edition to another. The journals with less contribution have been monographic editions, whereas the miscellaneous editions, that is those without a reference subject matter, coincide with those with a larger number of contributions.

The difference in articles per journal depends on the work of the coordinator of the given edition, the monographic theme, how the journal is diffused, etc. Likewise, the number of articles in some journals has been low because there is more concern in a given sector of Geography teachers about research into the reference science than about the teaching practice. Finally, real practical classroom-based articles are missing, which could encourage many interesting contributions, even though the journal is specialised in research into didactics.

An analysis of the total number of articles and pages of all the journal's publications reveals there is considerable irregularity.

The inclusion of new sections within the journal, and the emergence of contents and miscellanies, could help guarantee a minimum number of participants.

5. AUTHORS OF ARTICLES

The authors of articles have been mainly (85%) Spanish, with foreign authors making up the remaining 15%. These figures reflect the very high participation rate of Spanish researchers; thus, the challenge lies in opening up beyond Spanish frontiers.

To a great extent, Spanish researchers are from the Spanish Autonomous Community of Madrid. Researchers' territorial origin is further concentrated if we

include the UNED (5.49%), and it may be stated that 40.56% of the authors of articles are from this particular Autonomous Community. Thus, the study into the researchers' territorial distribution confirms unequal distribution.

Regarding international origin, it is worth stating that all overseas authors are Latin Americans; therefore, language is a clear influence. The fact that articles from other European countries are missing is significant.

From the gender perspective, when we consider the first author who signs the article, we find that 62.6% correspond to males. Hence, progress towards gender equality has progressed if compared to the journal's first stage, but there is still a long way to go.

6. ANALYSIS OF THE CONTENTS IN THE SECOND STAGE OF THE *DIDÁCTICA GEOGRÁFICA* JOURNAL

The analysis of the journal's contents requires more complex procedures because it is necessary to previously establish criteria to process information. The process employed to categorise information was subjective. Categories have been determined by concentrating more on the journal's actual didactic nature. In parallel, it is necessary to point out that one article can be placed into more than one category. In general terms, the categories in our analysis were also grouped into blocks: Block 1 corresponds to the nature of the Geography; Block 2 refers to current Geography teaching and its temporal evolution; Block 3 relates to contents; Block 4 focuses on didactic resources; and Block 5 concerns psychopedagogic matters.

The category with the largest number of articles during the study considered is, perhaps surprisingly, education in values. The significance of this category is greater if it is compared with the remaining blocks because, except for the contents block it forms part of, it exceeds all the others, even *Resources and didactic materials*.

The following categories which contribute more to the *Didáctica Geográfica* Journal also relate to the concern about what to teach and, in this case, it is worth citing *Cartography* (11.19 %) and *Landscape* (10.45%).

The next most interesting category to follow falls in the *Resources and didactic materials* block and corresponds to *Didactic itineraries* (10.45%) which, in statistical terms, is on a par with *Landscape*.

The next category is related with the *Nature of the geographical science* itself, with its evolution, trends, paradigms and interpretations.

The rare presence of articles about *New Technologies* (5.97%) comes as a surprise within a society which places so much importance on them.

It is worth noting the rare presence of psychopedagogic considerations if the *Curricular Diversification* (3.74%) category is excluded. *How to teach* is just as

important as knowing *how* it is learnt. It is not possible for any didactic innovations to be designed without the backing of some psychopedagogic principles.

The *History of teaching* and *Curricular diversification* categories receive very little attention and, quantitatively, their presence is similar (2.99%). The former might seem strange given that the journal's central theme is didactics; nevertheless, it is essential to discover the roots of today's practices and to orientate didactic innovation. Curricular diversification is another contribution directed to cover the shortfalls of standardised educational systems which have not contemplated the various forms of learning and types of students, which is an absolutely crucial practice for teaching to be successful.

The curricular reference level of the articles is not indicated and proves difficult to determine but, in general lines, the results are provided below.

Finally, it is worth stressing the high percentage of the articles about secondary education, as opposed to the low incidence of other educational stages, such as primary education.

7. THE ICONOGRAPHY ANALYSIS

Journals not only transmit written information, but also visual information. An image is essential for a Geography journal, particularly in relation to cartography, considered to be the geographer's language. This demand in visual communication increases when a landscape, a structuring concept among others, is considered much easier to explain when accompanied with images like photographs, engravings or diagrams, etc.

Different graphical representations are included in iconography which, without overdoing things, comprise photographs, engravings, pictures, sketches, graphs, plans, maps, diagrams, group pictures, conceptual maps, etc. and, in general, any unwritten but visual representation.

The criteria, or categories, used were: the *size* and *nature* of the image. The size of the images was analysed in detail for each journal and the 11 publications as a whole. In order to assess the iconography presented in the journal in more detail, density was calculated (pages/number of images). In this way, the values indicate the number of pages we pass before coming across an icon. The conclusion drawn is that iconography, as a resource or language to transmit information, is not sufficiently present when producing the journal.

Based on size, the iconography analysis confirms that small-sized images predominate which, as a whole, allows us to state that the journal contains very few and small-sized images.

In terms of the images' *nature*, the type classified as *diagrams* predominates (28.28%); in other words, graphic and written representations that structure, organise and explain the contents presented in the articles. It is obvious, in this case, that the inclusion of diagrams is because of the need to help complex and more abstract contents to come over more clearly.

The images corresponding to the type classified as *photographs* follow in second place (23.49%), and practically equal the *materials* type (23.28%). The images of *materials* are vital to communicate didactic specificities when the theory requires certain resources, or when didactic units, activities, etc., are specified in some products. The classification section corresponding to *cartography* takes an intermediate position (17.26%). The section corresponding to the *drawings* classification occupies the last-but-one place (4.99%). This iconography should be emphasised more in a journal dedicated to Geography teaching; after all, it is an essential practice to which not enough interest is paid.

Finally, the section on *graphs* represents only 2.70% of the journal's iconography. Graphs tend to prove most useful to transmit the intensity and proportionality of the phenomena considered.

8. THE INTERNET IN THE *DIDÁCTICA GEOGRÁFICA* JOURNAL IN ITS SECOND STAGE

Another relevant journal characteristic to analyse is the incorporation of new technologies. In this case, attention has been paid to the citations or to the introduction of Internet addresses. It is worth stressing that, to date, studies into pages and citations of journals on the Internet about teaching Geography have not yet proliferated, similarly to bibliometrics studies.

The vast majority of the Internet addresses cited in the journal during the study period tend to be of a unidirectional type; that is, they are used to do research by obtaining statistics, maps or press articles. The information exchange level, what is known as Web 2.0, is practically non-existent. However, there is a relatively simple explanation for this: this form of communication is still quite recent. Frequency of citations is not regular, although this tendency appears to be on the increase. Likewise, within the journal, it is worth mentioning that there does not seem to be a dispersion of citations among the various authors; indeed, there is only one article that contains all the citations of one journal edition number. The use of the Internet as didactic material is well worth emphasising.

9. FUTURE EXPECTATIONS FOR THE JOURNAL

The immersion of the University into an evaluation philosophy by state agencies dedicated to this activity, such as the National Agency for Quality and Accreditation Evaluation (ANECA), and autonomous agencies, and the fact that they are essential for teachers' accreditation, such as research activity evaluation by the National Research Activity Evaluation Council (CNEAI), have altered the interest in publishing in journals. By adapting to these new circumstances, the journals themselves have had to resort to restructuring and modernising themselves in order to adapt to quality bibliographic criteria. At the same time, the *Didáctica Geográfica* Journal has become enriched with new more up-to-date approaches and subject matters. Similarly, great efforts are being made to improve frequency and to promote diffusion with the help of new technologies.

In general, the evaluation agency considers it highly positive that the journal which includes the publication is also included in the lists of foreign databases such as the *Subject Category Listing of Journal Citation Reports*, the *Social Science Citation Index* and the *Science Citation Index* (Institute for Scientific Information –ISI–, Philadelphia, PA, USA).

Evaluation agencies contemplate other national or international databases (for instance, ERIH, INRECS, LATINDEX, SCOPUS, DICE-CINDOC, etc.), or those journals accredited by FECYT, provided that, according to the Advisory Committee, their scientific quality is similar to those included in the aforementioned indices and that they fulfil certain criteria.

Nowadays, there are several databases and Internet addresses in which the journal's level of quality can be consulted. These consultant-based addresses include IN-RECS, CINDOC, among others.

In the IN-RECS database, in the last year included (2009), the journal occupies position 15 of the 44 titles included and is located in the second *quartile*.

In the DICE database, the journal appears to be well positioned as it fulfils 32 of the 33 LATINDEX criteria with which journals are evaluated. Moreover, its level of internationality is considered high at 40.63%.

The *Didáctica Geográfica* Journal is also cited in the Dialnet database, where it gradually completes the information; first the journal's indices were introduced during its second stage and, currently (2-12-2011), the editions of its first stage have also been included. It is possible that, in the future, content will be extended by including complete article texts.

It is worth highlighting the interest shown in research into teaching Geography and, in our case, the need to edit a journal that is specialised in this area of knowledge, which is the case of *Didáctica Geográfica*.

The journal's management's current dynamics include the following aims: increase its incidence on the Internet; improve the quality of images; better its on-line diffusion; and extend its opening both nationally and internationally.

Based on all these findings, it is considered that *Didáctica Geográfica* is a scientific reference for research and innovation in teaching Geography.