

THE REFLECTION OF CONTEMPORARY GLOBAL PROBLEMS

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Abstract

A map is an essential base of geography. With its help people study the world that is around them. The map can not only reflect the reality but it teaches to form a personal opinion towards the world that quickly changes and towards some global problems of the human society.

Both the general and the scientific communities benefit from the creation of atlases illustrating the complexities of the global problems. The importance of such efforts, the contribution of foreign cartographic efforts to Russian geography and examples of major atlases presently being developed in Russia are all discussed in this article.

Introduction

Considerable problems always confront humanity and demand urgent solutions. Some of these problems are of local character, while others concern the interests of all human beings. The latter may be called the global problems. These global problems present a complex array of issues that are becoming more complicated every year. Each of them is closely connected with various other global problems, a fact which impedes our efforts to find individual solutions.

What are these problems? First of all we should name the following ones: prevention of the world nuclear disaster, environmental protection, the demographic problem, the problem of food supplying, the problem of natural resources, the cosmos developing, the problem of overcoming the backwardness of the Third World countries, the problem of the liquidation of dangerous diseases, etc.

All global problems in their interaction form a triangle comprised of population, social and economic development and the environment. Their solutions demand the common effort and joint actions of all the countries of the world. There is a heightened interest of all human beings in such world problems. The mass media, including scientific and popular-scientific literature, sheds light on different aspects of these problems from different scientific and political perspectives.

1 The importance of cartographic methods of investigation of the global problems

Initial development and subsequent growth of humanity's global problems cause us to search for methods and means of understanding them. The role of geographic and

cartographic research methods as well as the role of geographic and cartographic information spatially concrete and always fastened to time, increases the result. Scientists and the public expect interesting and informative maps and atlases to accurately expose the complexity of global problems.

Cartographic production involves visual forms and that is why maps and atlases are often more understandable than scientific books and articles. For this analysis, the author chose from a number of popular and scientific atlases designed for audience of all ages and different training levels. Because of the complexity of the problems, these atlases are a source of informative data about the earth and its various parts.

2 Contributions of foreign cartography to the Russian perspective

While cartographic methods can be used for researching territorial systems at any level including national and regional, they are also quite necessary for researching global processes. In analysing global problems it is beneficial to study the best that has been created in the world of cartography and to follow the main cartographic ways and methods.

In the course of our research we have learned about many foreign atlases and have come to the conclusion that they include very interesting information about the world of nature and the economy of the planet, its regions and countries. These atlases give estimates of possibilities for social and economic development for the near and more distant futures. In our opinion the following atlases are among those of special interest: The Gaia Atlas of Planet Management; The New State of the World Atlases; Canada and the World; An Atlas of Resources; Atlas of the Third World; Third World Atlas; Zones of Conflict; An Atlas of Future Wars. There are many others of high quality.

Often, without claiming to be all encompassing, these atlases serve their main function -- they inform the inhabitants of the planet about the complexities of modern global problems, the severity of these problems in different regions of the world and the necessity of their urgent solutions.

For Russian cartographers, many foreign atlases are interesting in structure, subject and a map content, in the variety of cartographic means, original display of material, colourful design and style of explanatory texts accompanying the maps. The use of new thematic maps, dedicated to the global problems and a great number of illustrations increase the richness of the content of many popular scientific atlases. All of these qualities make the atlases brightly individualistic and make it possible for readers to gain knowledge about geography, ecology and the economy.

There are much to say about foreign atlases. They characterise the global problems from different points of view and consider their valued contributions to the farther development of the mapping of modern global problems. In comparison with foreign atlases in our Russian ones the global problems have, until now, not been adequately reflected in the cartographic literature.

3 Some recent Russian cartographic experience

A considerable progress in this sphere has been achieved by the Institute of Geography of the Russian Academy of Science, by Moscow State University and by other Russian universities.

The work on creation of popular-scientific Atlas of Africa (in which the author directly participated) and studying the foreign experience in cartographically representing of global problem of the humanity show, that publishing popular-scientific atlases have both scientific and practical significance.

The popular - scientific atlas of Africa has been worked out on the base of the concept that may be defined as the global regional geography - "globalnoye stranovedenie" (a term introduced by L. V. Smirniagin). This approach presupposes that the complex characteristics of a territory (here Africa) accentuate the peculiarities of the global problems for that particular region within the world economic, social and cultural background, in the system of world economic relationships. For some reasons Atlas of Africa has not been published yet.

Though the danger of the "cold war" had disappeared the humanity now faces the problem of the Third World countries. For these countries the emergence and aggravation of the global problems have their own specific characteristics resulting from the unique features of economic and cultural development.

The problem of overcoming social and economic backwardness is one of the most important and actual in this region. It is closely interwoven with other global problems associated with demographic, food, raw materials, ecology, war and peace.

The overwhelming majority of the Third World country's population continues to be illiterate and many epidemics have not been wiped out. Satisfying the basic needs of people is farther behind than in the other regions of the world. The maps can reflect the problems of agricultural and raw materials monospecialization of the economy in the developing countries, the existence of "modern" and "traditional" sectors in the economy, the presence of foreign capital in the most profitable and important branches of the economy and the low level of educational and health services.

The dependence of the developing countries on importing of the most kinds of food and industrial goods as well as their huge foreign debts, whose liquidation is being carried out at the expense of directly exploiting natural resources are also reflected in those Atlases. Enormous military expenditures, numerous local conflicts and the previously enumerated problems point out the limited opportunities available of getting out of the crisis situation.

The maps characterising the problem of backwardness is one of the global problems, it can be displayed in different parts of the Atlases, but the key maps, those showing the level of development of the economy are shown in the section dealing with "Economy". As it is known, the share of the total world gross domestic product of the Third World countries is several times less than its share of the world population. While witnessing the social - economic backwardness of the world region, however, the average indices conceal both the sharp unevenness in the evolution of the economies of individual

countries of the continent and the increasing gap between a considerable group of The Third World countries and the world's average.

Factors which contribute to the degradation of the quality of life in the Third World countries - famine, unemployment, environmental pollution, military and political instability will also affect the developed countries in the not very distant future.

Conclusion

A fundamental idea that the author wanted to bring to the readers with the opinion of scholars from many countries is the following: the prospects for development apparently must be associated with the world community's efforts to overcome the problem of backwardness of the developing countries.

The cartographic method is very important and necessary as with the help of maps it is possible to characterise the sharpness and complexity of the appearance of the global problems of the human society in different parts of the world.

The circle of consumers of such kinds of atlases may be very large. The atlases' interdisciplinary character is such that it will rouse the interest of both readers and specialists, investigating the global problems.