

## Reasons for the Wane of Spatial- Quantitative Perspective in Political Geography Studies

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### Extended Abstract

#### Introduction

Following the emergence of spatial perspective and quantitative revolution in human geography, both the “idea” and “methodology” were transformed in the discipline. In 1950s and 1960s, other branches of human geography, except for historical and cultural fields of geography focused mainly on spatial school in their researches and published many scientific works. However, political geography did not manage to adapt itself to these transformations. The result was separation of political geography from the main stream changes of geography in the 1950s and 1960s. The present study tries to find answer to the following question: why did spatial perspective entered political geography with delay, and afterward, in the 1970s, was removed from the center of political geographical studies?

#### Methodology

The present study is a basic research conducted through descriptive-analytical approach. The data were gathered using library and computer research, and then, were analyzed in a qualitative approach.

#### Results and Discussion

The following reasons can be put forward for the question why political geographers applied this perspective late in their studies:

**Incongruity of basic researches with positivist method in political geography.** Basic researches in the realm of politics cannot be adapted to positivist perspective. Hence, quantitative revolution led to a disturbance in political geography, as quantitative works were of limited use in political geography and, initially, had little to offer research for “spatial laws” except for the case of election.

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**Inappropriateness of basic theories of spatial – quantitative perspective with problems of political geography.** Quantitative geography developed as a response to the current challenges, particularly economic stagnation of Western countries. One outcome of spatial-quantitative was focus on Location Theory. However, this theory was primarily applied in urban and economic geography and did not have much relevance in political geography.

**Disregarding of the factors of power and politics in spatial perspective.** The positivist political geography was faced with cognitivist shortcomings. This perspective was political and independent of the politics. Location theory was largely spatialization of neoclassic economy of those days. In common economy and, hence, location theory, the problem of power can easily be ignored. In other words, with focus on the neoclassic economies as a self-regulative system, the problems of conflict and unequal distribution are ignored. Thus, a real political geography could not flourish within such perspective; as political geographers had to ignore the agent in their studies and investigate the “processes” rather than “causes”.

Although political geographers joined to spatial perspective too late but they did valuable contribution, especially in election geography. Study of urban politics experienced changes in administrative areas during 1970s. After 1970s, spatial perspective went out of the centrality of studies. Regarding the decline of spatial perspective in the studies of political geographers, two reasons can be put forward.

**Paradigm shift in the science of geography.** Evidently, the existing ideas in political geography are always (of course, with some delay) a function of thoughts in other branches of geography. By the emergence of economic and political crises in many western countries in the 1960s, most of the geographers inclined toward radicalism-Marxism and structural perspective since 1970s. Also, since 1970s, the humanist school of geography has been established and developed. The main criticism of humanists from positivist was that in the positivist methodology and spatial thought school, sufficient attention has not been paid to explanation of humanist problems. In the 1980s and 1990s, the thought framework of geographers shifted significantly and the development of perspectives since 1970s entered into humanist geography led to the formation of trends such as critical geography, post-structuralist and post-modern geography.

**Changes in international system.** Clearly, the ending years of the 1960s, due to changes in the international system, political geography was gradually recovered. Some of these changes are including emergence of new actors in the international stage due to decolonization, emergence of nationalism in the third world, Cuban revolution, and the growth of evolutionary movements in other regions of the world. By the changes in the national system, political geographers were no longer obliged to hide themselves behind the shield of positivism which claimed to be positive and impartial, and remove the problems of power and politics from their writings.

## Conclusion

Spatial perspective affected sub-branches of geography in varying degrees. Meanwhile, political geography was one of the branches least affected by the perspective and had the most traditional orientation in 1950s and 1960s. The main factors which, during 1950s and 1960s, prevented political geographers from adapting to the major thinking school of the spatial perspective are incongruity of basic researches with positivist methodology in political geography, inappropriateness of basic theories in spatial-quantitative perspective with the issues of political geography, and ignoring power and politics in spatial perspective. But the reason for the decline in the importance of spatial perspective in the 1970s in the studies of political geographers is the paradigm shift in the science of geography and changes in the international system. At the end,

it must be pointed out that despite all challenges and deficiencies of spatial-quantitative perspective; this perspective has had useful reflections, i.e. the expansion of behavioral geography. Agnew believes that spatial perspective paved the way for recovering political geography, as the new political geography was developed in a critical context of spatial-quantitative revolution. According to Cox, spatial perspective is one of the three main traditions of studies in geographical science. Also, Agnew believes that spatial analysis is of the three main thinking trends entered political geography since the 1960s, and that it has been placed successfully in landscape of this discipline. In fact, nowadays, we witness pluralism in political geography in terms of both subject and methodology, and spatial-quantitative perspective is one of those numerous perspectives used by political geographers, since sometimes, it is the only approach to investigation of a problem.

**Keywords:** quantitative method, political geography, spatial perspective, spatial science approach, systemic approach.