COMPARATIVE DIDACTIC AND METHODOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF THE GEOGRAPHY PROGRAM FOR ELEMENTARY SCHOOL IN SERBIA AND NORTH MACEDONIA

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ABSTRACT

The beginning of the 21st century is characterised by a digital society in which it is no longer sufficient for an individual to be able to read, write and calculate in order to be considered educated. The development of new technologies, especially information and communication technologies, has changed people's lives dramatically. They have also had an impact on the education system. Pupils are expected to have computer and media skills, the ability to learn independently, think critically, solve problems, work in a team, be creative and take initiative. The didactic-methodical analysis of the Geography Program for elementary schools will determine the extent to which it is possible to contribute to the development of the aforementioned skills in pupils. Geography programs are designed in a special way in all countries of the world. The aim of the paper is to analyze the Geography Program for primary schools in Serbia and North Macedonia in order to observe their similarities and differences. The results of the research indicate a significant similarity in the planned learning outcomes in both countries, while deviations are observed in the order of the studied teaching topics by class..

Keywords: Geography Program, elementary school, Serbia, North Macedonia, learning outcomes

INTRODUCION

Geography is a science that deals with objects, phenomena and processes in the natural and social environment and with the laws of their interpenetration. Since it focuses on both the natural and the social environment, geography represents a link between the natural and social sciences. The main peculiarity of geography as a science is reflected in the particular way in which it studies space and its components. The study of space from a geographical perspective means that it is first broken down into natural and social components, then the objects, phenomena and processes in space are observed and explained, and finally their effects are considered at local, regional, national and global levels. By illuminating the mutual connections between the components of space, distinguishing cause-effect relationships between processes and phenomena in space and observing their mutual influences, geography penetrates into all spheres of the earth - the sphere of human life, the sphere of the natural and social environment. Thank you to all these aspects, geography offers an understandable, interesting and up-to-date view of the world and provides valuable knowledge about it. It is therefore

not surprising that geography is recognized as one of the most important subjects in the educational process in most countries of the world (Живковић, 2021).

Modern society requires a range of skills in order for individuals to function optimally. They are expected to have IT and media skills, the ability to think rationally, critically and flexibly, the willingness to face various challenges, which they can solve independently, but also as part of a team, by offering original and imaginative ideas as solutions. All of the above skills are acquired at school, particularly in geography lessons, through the use of innovative teaching methods and forms of work that give the student an active role and a central place in the educational process (Komlenović, 2003).

This paper analyzes the geography programs for elementary school in Serbia and North Macedonia. Although geography is a unique science, the way in which its contents are selected and studied within the framework of the subject of the same name in elementary school differs from country to country. Based on this assumption, a comparative methodological-didactic analysis of the geography program in elementary school in Serbia and North Macedonia will determine to what extent the programs of the two countries differ and what similarities and differences they have. During the analysis, a brief overview of the characteristics of primary school education in the two countries is first given. Then, the importance of geography in primary education in both countries will be assessed by analyzing the annual number of geography lessons by grade level, the structure of the teaching programs, the teaching topics, the teaching content and the teaching results in the teaching programs.

ANALYSIS OF THE GEOGRAPHY CURRICULUM FOR ELEMENTARY SCHOOL IN SERBIA AND NORTH MACEDONIA

Primary education is considered a fundamental right of every child. In both Serbia and North Macedonia, primary education is free and compulsory. Until the 2007/2008 school year, when the reform was implemented in North Macedonia, it was very similar in both countries. Since this school year, students in North Macedonia start elementary school at the age of six and attend it for nine years, while students in Serbia start school at the age of seven and attend it for eight years. The division of primary school into educational cycles is also not identical in the two countries. In North Macedonia, primary education takes place in three educational cycles. The first cycle comprises grades I-III, the second cycle grades IV-VI and the third cycle grades VII-IX. In Serbia, on the other hand, primary education is divided into two educational cycles (the first cycle comprises grades I-IV, the second cycle grades V-VIII).

Geography in the curricula for elementary school

Geography is a compulsory subject in the last four years of elementary school in both countries. More precisely, geography is taught in Serbia in grades V, VI, VII and VIII (during the second cycle of elementary school education), and in North Macedonia in grades VI, VII, VIII and IX (at the end of the second and throughout the third cycle of education). If we analyze the annual amount of geography taught in elementary school, we find that geography is taught for a total of 248 hours in elementary school in Serbia, while in North Macedonia it is taught for

40 hours more (table 1). In the first year of geography lessons, students in Serbia have one geography lesson per week (36 hours in total), while students in North Macedonia have twice as many lessons (2 hours per week, 72 hours in total). In the second and third years of study, the annual amount of geography lessons is the same in both countries and amounts to 72 hours each. At the end of primary school, in grade VIII, students in Serbia have 68 hours of geography lessons, while their peers in grade IX have 68 hours.

Table 1. Weekly and annual scope of geography lessons in elementary school in Serbia and North Macedonia

Serbia			**North Macedonia**		
Class	W[7]	A[8]	Class	W	A
V	1	36	VI	2	72
VI	2	72	VII	2	72
VII	2	72	VIII	2	72
VIII	2	68	IX	2	72
The total number of hours		248	The total number of hours		288

Source: https://www.pravno-informacioni-sistem.rs/SlGlasnikPortal/viewdoc?uuid=13da23b7-5243-443a-abdd- c73e71a24ecf, (Accessed, 22.03.2024) & https://www.bro.gov.mk/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/NP-Osnovno-2023-2024.pdf (Accessed, 22.03.2024).

In addition to the difference in the annual pool of hours, the analysis of the annual geography curricula reveals further differences. First of all, there are differences in the structure of the programs themselves, then in the sequence of teaching topics by school years and in the selected outcomes.

The structure of geography curricula

The geography curricula in Serbia and North Macedonia are characterized by structural differences. The basic elements of the geography curriculum in Serbia are: the goal of the course, the class in which the program is applied, the annual teaching fund, outcomes defined at the level of the whole class according to the revised Bloom's taxonomy, teaching topics/fields, teaching content and instructions for the didactic-methodological implementation program.

Below you will find the basic elements of the curriculum for geography in North Macedonia: introduction (which lists the objective of the subject, the classes in which the subject is taught, the annual number of hours per class and the principles according to which geography is taught), teaching objectives for a particular class, specific objectives, didactic recommendations, evaluation of student performance, spatial conditions for the implementation of the teaching program, standards for teaching staff, the date on which the implementation of the teaching program began, and the signature and date of approval of the teaching program. From all of the above, it is important to explain in more detail what the specific objectives in the curriculum entail. The part of the program marked as specific objectives contains teaching topics that are covered in the same class. They are organized chronologically, contain the name of the topic, the exact number of hours allocated to the topic and the teaching content that the

[7] Weekly teaching fund.
[8] The annual teaching fund.

topics cover. For each teaching content, there is a list of objectives, concepts, teacher and student activities, teaching methods required for teaching and learning, and outcomes.

From all the above, it can be concluded that the central place in the geography curriculum in Serbia is occupied by the learning outcomes and the learning process, while in the North Macedonian curriculum the focus is first on the objectives and only then on the learning process and outcomes. Given the structure of the program, teachers in Serbia have a lot of freedom in planning and implementing teaching and learning. When creating an overall plan, they themselves determine the number of lessons per subject and the number of different types of lessons. When creating operational plans, teacher determines the results specified at class level and ensures that they form a meaningful whole. Once the lesson plans have been drawn up, lesson planning begins for each teaching. For each lesson, the teacher independently determines the objectives and outcomes, chooses the methods and form of work, plans his or her activities and the activities of the students, and the course of the lesson. In doing so, they take into account the adopted educational standards for the end of compulsory education, the educational objectives and outcomes, the teaching content, the literature, the available teaching materials, the students' abilities, their individual characteristics, their motivation and their interests. All this is done with the intention of (https://ceo.edu.rs/images/stories/obrazovni_standardi/kraj_obaveznog_obrazovanja/Predlog%20standarda.pdf, (Accessed, 22.03.2024)):

- students are trained for independent, lifelong learning,
- develop critical and specific geographical thinking,
- master orientation in space,
- successfully use a geographical map,
- successfully use and process statistical data in the form of tables, diagrams, schemes and models,
- solve problem situations,
- do project and research tasks,
- train to work in a group and in a team;

Thus, the core of geography education in Serbia is to develop students' skills, to enable them to functionally acquire geographical knowledge, connections and laws (in all areas of the Earth's mantle, in the regions of the world, at home) and to develop attitudes that correspond to the set goals.

If we compare the above with the main objective of the study of geography, which is stated in the introductory part of the Macedonian curriculum, we can conclude that both countries strive for the same values: "The study of the subject of geography aims to enable students to acquire basic knowledge about the earth, the significance and connection of natural elements and social phenomena and processes in the modern world, to develop and promote a geographical way of thinking and to develop socially effective skills in students." (https://www.bro.gov.mk/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/Nastavna_programa-Geografija-VII.pdf, (Accessed, 22.03.2024)) However, it should also be said that the goal of geography education is formally defined in the Serbian curricula as follows: "The goal of geography education

is for the student to conceptually and structurally master the natural-geographical, demographic, population, political-geographical, economic-geographical, integrative and global phenomena and processes in Serbia and the world, while cultivating the values of multiculturalism and patriotism." (https://www.pravno-informacioni-sistem.rs/SlGlasnikPortal/viewdoc?uuid=1cd9f883-ccfe-4a73-8ccd-95bc212169e1, (Accessed, 22.03.2024))

When it comes to lesson planning in North Macedonia, teachers can use predetermined specific program objectives when creating overall and operational plans and even when preparing individual lessons. However, in the didactic recommendation it was pointed out that the programs have an orienting character and that it is necessary to adapt them to the individual characteristics of the students in order to ensure the achievement of the set goals and results.

Teaching topics, teaching content and results

In Serbia, geography is taught in the 5th grade of elementary school as part of three teaching topics/fields (https://www.pravno-informacioni-sistem.rs/SlGlasnikPortal/viewdoc?uuid=39629e1d-f299-4641-896c-22822d565c3a, (Accessed, 22.03.2024)):

1. Man and geography
2. Space
3. The Planet Earth[9]

At the same time, geography is taught in 6th grade in North Macedonia as part of two integrated subjects: History and Society and Natural Sciences. The curriculum for geography in grade VI is shown in Table 2. History and Society is conceived as a subject that represents the synthesis of the social sciences. It deals with the subject matter of history, geography and civic education in a multidisciplinary manner. Of the 108 lessons in History and Society, 36 are devoted to geography. The 62 hours of history are followed by two geographical topics. The first is Orientation in geographical space, for which 14 hours are allocated, followed by the Geography of the Mediterranean countries for the next 22 hours. The geographical topics are followed by political education topics, which conclude the course (https://www.bro.gov.mk/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/NP-Istorija-i-opstestvo-6-odd.pdf, (Accessed, 22.03.2024)). The Natural Sciences integrate teaching content from biology, chemistry, physics and geography because, as the name suggests, they are conceived as a subject that represents the synthesis of the Natural Sciences. They include two teaching topics from geography: *Space and the Solar system and The Planet Earth and its geospheres (lithosphere, hydrosphere, atmosphere and biosphere*) (Lameva, 2019).

From all the above, it can be concluded that in the sixth grade of elementary school in North Macedonia, the subject of Geography is taught with an annual budget of 72 hours, in which four topics are covered. Of these four topics, two each are covered within the integrated subject of History and Society and Natural Sciences. Table 2 shows the teaching content covered

[9] It can be seen as a synthesis of 6 doctrinal areas: The shape of the earth and its surface structure, The movements of the earth, The internal structure and relief of the earth, The earth's atmosphere, The water on the earth, The life of plants and Animals on the earth.

in the topics of *Orientation in geographical space, Geography of the Mediterranean countries and Space and the Solar system*.

Table 2. Part of the teaching content for 6th grade in North Macedonia

Teaching topics	Number of lessons of the teaching topic	Teaching units	Integrated subject
Orientation in geographical space	14	– Earth on a globe and map – Scale – Latitude and longitude – Orientation in space – Time zone	History and Society
Geography of the Mediterranean countries	22	– Geographical location and regional overview of the Mediterranean countries – Natural and geographical features of the Mediterranean countries – Sociogeographical characteristics of the Mediterranean countries – Economic and geographical characteristics of the Mediterranean countries	History and Society
Space and the Solar system	14	– Stars and constellations – Solar system – The movements of the Earth (Earth's rotation, Earth's axis, Earth's revolution, orbit/ecliptic) – The moon and the moon (moon, moon phases, new moon, first quarter, crescent, last quarter) – Planetoids, comets and meteors (planetoids/asteroids, comets, Halley's comet, meteors, meteorites)	Natural Sciences

Source: https://www.bro.gov.mk/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/Prirodni-nauki-6-odd..pdf, (Accessed, 22.03.2024) & https://www.bro.gov.mk/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/NP-Istorija-i-opstestvo-6-odd.pdf, (Accessed, 22.03.2024).

The selection of topics covered in geography lessons in Grade 5 in Serbia differs to some extent from the topics covered in Grade 6 in North Macedonia. For example, of the three topics covered in Grade V in Serbia, the topics of Space and Planet Earth coincide with the content of the topics of Space and the Solar System and Planet Earth and its geospheres in North Macedonia. In North Macedonia, the teaching content of the topic of humans and Geography is not covered at all in elementary school geography lessons.

As far as the teaching topic of Geography of the Mediterranean countries is concerned, there is no topic in the Serbian geography curricula that would correspond to it. As far as the subject of Orientation in geographical space is concerned, there is a corresponding subject that is studied in Serbia, Geographical map. However, it should be emphasized that the content of the subjects Orientation in geographical space and Geographical map do not completely coincide and that Geographical map in Serbia is taught only in the next, sixth grade.

In the second year of geography lessons, i.e. in the 6th grade in Serbia and in the 7th grade in North Macedonia, completely different geographical topics are covered. The 6th grade geography curriculum in Serbia aims to introduce students to the social component of geography and to gradually introduce them to regional geography.

Table 3. Curriculum of geography for 7th grade VII in North Macedonia

Teaching topics	Teaching units
Natural and geographical characteristics of the Republic of North Macedonia	– Geographical position, border and area – Mountains of North Macedonia – Basins and valleys of North Macedonia – Relief types in North Macedonia – Climatic factors and meteorological elements and phenomena – Climatic types – Groundwater and springs – Rivers and river basins – Lakes – The plant world – Animal world
Population and settlements in North Macedonia	– Basic demographic characteristics of North Macedonia – Structural characteristics of the population of North Macedonia – Migration and the population of North Macedonia – Rural settlements – Urban settlements – Territorial division of North Macedonia
Economic and geographical characteristics of North Macedonia	– Historical development of the economy in North Macedonia – Factors of economic development and economic branches – Farming – Fruit growing and viticulture – Animal husbandry – Forestry, hunting and fishing – Energy sources and mineral wealth – Industry – Craft and construction – Traffic – Tourism and trade
Environmental protection in North Macedonia	– Natural and anthropogenic environmental elements – Protection of air from pollution – Protection of water from pollution – Soil protection from degradation – Protection of flora and fauna – Protection and self-protection from natural and anthropogenic disasters

Source: https://www.bro.gov.mk/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/Nastavna_programa-Geografija-VII.pdf, (Accessed, 22.03.2024).

Accordingly, the following topics are taught (https://www.pravno-informacioni-sistem.rs/SlGlasnikPortal/viewdoc?uuid=39629e1d-f299-4641-896c-22822d565c3a, (Accessed, 22.03.2024)): 1. Society and geography; 2. Geographical map; 3. Population; 4. Settlements; 5. Economy; 6. State and integration processes; 7. Geography of Europe.

At the same time, 7th grade students in North Macedonia learn topics from their native geography in geography classes (table 3).

The choice of teaching topics in geography is largely influenced by the learning approach. In North Macedonia, students are first introduced to general and physical geography, after which they move on to studying their local environment which is familiar to them. This approach follows the principle of learning from near to far, from local to global, or from the known to the unknown.

Further analysis of the geography curricula in both countries found that the subjects Society and Geography, Geographical Map, Population, Settlements, Economy, State, and integration processes, which are covered in the 6th grade in Serbia, are not covered at all in geography classes in the third grade. educational cycle in North Macedonia, has already been covered in the first educational cycle in the history and society classes. Given that the mentioned contents are taught at a lower age in North Macedonia and the outcomes that are foreseen for them are less demanding than the outcomes defined in the Serbian program. At the end of the 6th grade in Serbia, the teaching topic Geography of Europe is studied. It follows that students in Serbia are introduced to regional geography a year later than their peers in North Macedonia, who were introduced to regional geography during the previous grade through the topic Geography of Mediterranean countries.

In Serbia, students are introduced to the natural and social aspects of Europe in the final year of primary school. Geography lessons cover topics such as Geographical Regions and Regional Geography, Location and Borders of Europe, Natural Characteristics of Europe, Population of Europe, Settlements of Europe, Economy of Europe, and Geographical Regions of Europe. In the following year, students delve further into the regions of Europe with a dedicated unit on Geographical Regions of Europe. This unit comprises various teaching modules that provide a more detailed understanding of the continent's diverse regions:

1. Southern Europe is renowned for its rich cultural and historical heritage, ethnic diversity, tourism, as well as political differences;
2. The countries that make up Southern Europe include Italy, Spain, Greece, and the former countries of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. These countries share basic geographical features;
3. Central Europe is recognized for its cultural and historical heritage, modern demographic trends, natural resources, economic growth, urbanization, and political differences;
4. Germany is situated in Central Europe and shares basic geographical features.
5. Western Europe is celebrated for its cultural and historical heritage, modern demographic trends, natural resources, economic growth, urbanization, and political differences;
6. France and the United Kingdom are situated in Western Europe and share basic geographical characteristics;
7. Northern Europe - natural resources and economic development, peoples, political division;
8. Norway - basic geographical features;

9. Eastern Europe - cultural-civilization heritage, ethnic heterogeneity, natural resources and economic development, political division;
10. Russian Federation - basic geographical features;
11. The European Union - an example of integration processes.

In North Macedonia, students delve deeper into the study of Europe compared to their counterparts in Serbia. The curriculum in North Macedonia includes a comprehensive study of Europe throughout VIII grade, which aligns with VII grade in Serbia (table 4). In addition, North Macedonian students gain insight into the geography of Mediterranean countries during 5th grade, which focuses on the southern European nations. Consequently, the study of Europe's regions and countries is far more extensive in North Macedonia than in Serbia. The geography curriculum in North Macedonia places great emphasis on the study of Europe, evident from the ample time allocated to the subject (22 hours in grade V and 72 hours in grade VII), as well as the significantly higher number of learning objectives. Geography teaching content outcomes pertaining to Europe show remarkable similarities between North Macedonia and Serbia. Despite differences in the structure of their geography teaching programs, North Macedonia's outcomes may appear more extensive, as they are listed individually for each content. However, a closer examination of both programs reveals that the outcomes in North Macedonia align perfectly with the outcomes represented in Serbia's programs.

By comparing the curricula of both countries, it can be concluded that in North Macedonia, all the countries of the Balkan Peninsula, and not only the republics of the former SFRY, are studied as part of the topic Geographical overview of the region of Southern Europe. The entire Apennine peninsula is studied, not just Italy. From the Iberian Peninsula, in addition to Spain, there are also Portugal and Andorra. Within the topic of Geographical characteristics of Western Europe, students in North Macedonia, unlike students in Serbia, study all the countries of the region, not just the United Kingdom and France. Within Northern Europe, along with Norway, in North Macedonia, the remaining countries of the region are studied through two more teaching units: Sweden, Norway, and Finland, Denmark and Iceland. When it comes to Central Europe, Germany is taught as the only representative country in Serbia, while in North Macedonia, Poland, the Czech Republic and Slovakia, Switzerland and Austria, Hungary, and Romania are taught in six teaching units along with Germany. The region of Eastern Europe is studied more extensively, because in addition to Russia, which is the only country in this region studied in Serbia, Ukraine, Belarus and Moldova, Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia are also studied through four teaching units. Also, it should be noted that in North Macedonia the European Union is not studied as a separate teaching unit, as is the case with the Serbia.

In Serbia, geography students in the 7th grade receive a comprehensive education on the various regions of Europe, as well as continents like: 1. Asia; 2. Africa; 3. North America; 4. South America; 5. Australia, and Oceania, along with the Polar regions. Conversely, in North Macedonia, students are introduced to other continents only in the 9th grade, which happens to be the final year of primary school. The course material covers topics such as: 1. Asia; 2. Africa; 3. America; 4. Australia with Oceania, and the Polar regions.

Although the years of study differ, the teaching topics and contents in North Macedonia and Serbia are quite similar. Nonetheless, there are some distinctions between the two countries. In North Macedonia, the geography program allocates a specific number of hours for each teaching topic, with 21 hours for Asia, 19 hours for Africa, 21 hours for America, 11 hours for Austria, and a combined 8 hours for Oceania and the polar regions. The teacher is responsible for determining the exact amount of time to be spent on processing, determining, systematizing, and checking knowledge from the given hours. On the other hand, in Serbia, teachers have more flexibility in determining the number of lessons for each topic, as well as the number of lessons by type, independently.

Table 4. Curriculum of geography in VIII grade in North Macedonia

Teaching topics	Teaching units
Natural and geographical characteristics of Europe	– Geographical location, borders, and size of Europe – Erosion of the European coast – Topographical features of Europe – The impact of climate on the various climates of Europe – Vegetation zones based on climate in the temperate region of Europe – Vegetation zones based on climate in the polar region of Europe – Major rivers and their basins in Europe – Lakes situated in Europe
Socio-economic characteristics and regional division of Europe	– Basic characteristics of the population of Europe – Linguistic characteristics, religious affiliation and diversity of the population of Europe – Culture, traditions and customs of the European population – Settlements in Europe – Regional and political-territorial division of Europe
Geographical overview of the Southern Europe region	– Geographical characteristics of Southern Europe – Bulgaria – Greece – Serbia – Albania – Croatia and Slovenia – Montenegro and Bosnia and Herzegovina – Italy, San Marino and the Vatican – Spain, Portugal and Andorra – Endangerment, pollution and environmental protection of Southern Europe
Geographical overview of the Western Europe region	– Great Britain and the Republic of Ireland – France – Benelux (Belgium, Netherlands, Luxembourg)
Geographical overview of the regions of Northern Europe	– Sweden – Norway and Finland – Denmark and Iceland
Geographical overview of the regions of Central Europe	– Germany – Poland – Czech Republic and Slovakia – Switzerland and Austria – Hungary – Romania
Geographical overview of the regions of Eastern Europe	– Russia – Ukraine – Belarus and Moldova – Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia

Source:https://www.bro.gov.mk/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/Nastavna_programa GeografijaVIII.pdf, (Accessed, 22.03.2024).

After analyzing the curriculum for various geographical topics, it can be concluded that both countries cover the natural, social, and economic aspects of the continent. However, there are differences in the way regions are studied. For example, in the case of Asia, Serbia approaches it by region, whereas North Macedonia only covers China as an economic powerhouse and India as a blend of languages, cultures, and traditions. As for Africa, Serbia divides it into Mediterranean and Saharan Africa and Sub-Saharan Africa, while North Macedonia breaks it down into North, Central, West, East, and South Africa, and South Africa as a country of contrasts. The geography program in North Macedonia covers North and South America separately, with the USA as a world superpower and Brazil as an agricultural giant of the south taught as distinct units. In Serbia, the political divisions of both continents are studied. Australia, Oceania, and the polar regions are taught similarly in both countries.

Due to the factors mentioned above, it is anticipated that the expected results in both countries will be quite similar. However, there are some differences. In Serbia, the outcomes outlined in the curriculum are meant for the whole class, so they are generally broad and applicable to all continents. Some of the outcomes include:

- defines the boundaries of the continent and shows on the map the oceans and seas that surround the studied continent and locates the largest islands, peninsulas, straits, isthmuses, passages, capes;
- finds the studied regions on the state map and names them;
- shows on the silent map: continents, oceans, seas, forms of coastlines, plains, mountains, rivers, lakes, states, cities;
- classifies landforms, water bodies and living world characteristic for the specified territory;
- analyzes the influence of latitude, relief, the relationship between land and sea, sea currents, vegetation and man on the climate;
- finds data on the numerical state of the population by county, region and selected countries and singles out spatial units with the highest concentration of population in the world;
- describes the causes and consequences of urbanization on different continents, regions and in selected countries;
- links natural resources with the degree of economic development of certain regions and selected countries;
- explain the formation of the political map of the world;
- explains the causes and consequences of global phenomena such as poverty, internal and external migration, demographic explosion and overpopulation, diseases and epidemics, political instability;
- link the quality of life of the population with the natural, demographic, economic and political-geographic features of the area;
- describes the role of international organizations in the world.

When comparing the 9th-grade geography programs in North Macedonia and Serbia, it becomes clear that while each program has specific outcomes for their teaching content, there is significant overlap between the two. For example, the outcome in the Serbia curriculum that requires students to explain the causes and consequences of various global phenomena, such as poverty, migration, epidemics, and political instability, aligns with multiple specific outcomes in the North Macedonia program. The North Macedonia program's teaching units, "South Africa - Country of Contrasts," and "Lack of Food and Water: The Most Serious Problem of the African Population" have outcomes that align perfectly with his needs. The results of these two units are precisely what he requires. (https://www.bro.gov.mk/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/Nastavna_programa-Geografija-IX.pdf, (Accessed, 22.03.2024)):

- the student knows the positive and negative sides of South Africa (apartheid, colonial past, economic development, etc.);
- critically thinks about similar phenomena in other parts of Africa and the world;
- detects problems in South Africa;
- identifies the main existential problems of the African population and explains them using geographical thinking
- explains the great inequality between the African population and the rest of the world.

It can be observed that the eighth-grade geography programs of Serbia and the seventh-grade programs of North Macedonia share similar curricular objectives. In line with many Balkan countries, the study of local geography is typically taught in the culminating year of primary school in Serbia (Dermendzhiev and Draganova, 2017). Irrespective of the discipline, the methodology for exploring the topography of one's own nation is remarkably alike in both nations. Table 5, appended herewith for your perusal, presents a comparative synopsis of the subjects linked to the indigenous geography of the two nations, as proof thereof.

Table 5. List of the topics covered in the teaching programs of native geography in Serbia and North Macedonia

Serbia	**North Macedonia**
Teaching topic	*Teaching uit*
Geographical position, borders and size of Serbia	Physical and geographical characteristics of North Macedonia
Physical and geographical characteristics of Serbia	Population and settlements in North Macedonia
Social and geographical features of Serbia	Economic and geographical characteristics of North Macedonia
Natural and cultural heritage of Serbia	Environmental protection in North Macedonia
Geography of the homeland	/
Serbs in the region and the diaspora	/

Source: https://www.pravno-informacioni-sistem.rs/SlGlasnikPortal/viewdoc?uuid=7f60db16-8760-4e25-bc8a- f69fe1fb2e2c, (Accessed, 22.03.2024).

According to Table 5, it is evident that Serbia offers six teaching topics for native geography, while North Macedonia provides four. Although the teaching content is quite alike, North Macedonian students do not have a specific topic that focuses on their diaspora. Therefore, this

particular learning outcome is missing in the Macedonian curriculum. Nonetheless, both programs share a similar structure. It's important to note that the amount of time dedicated to studying native geography can differ between countries. For instance, in Serbia, teachers have 68 hours allocated to studying native geography, whereas in North Macedonia, they have 72 hours to study their geographical homeland.

CONCLUSION

Geography holds a vital place in the primary education systems of Serbia and North Macedonia, but the two countries differ in their approaches to teaching it. Primary education in Serbia spans eight years, from the age of 7 to 15, whereas in North Macedonia it lasts for nine years, from the age of 6 to 15. However, both countries mandate that geography be studied as a separate subject during the final four years of primary education. In Serbia, this takes place during grades V, VI, VII, and VIII, while in North Macedonia, it is during grades VI, VII, VIII, and IX. The annual fund of geography lessons is not the same in both countries. Namely, in North Macedonia geography is studied in primary schools for 288 hours, while in Serbia 40 hours less are devoted to it.

Based on a comprehensive analysis of the geography program, it was discovered that in North Macedonia, geography is taught as part of two integrated subjects - History and Society, as well as Natural Sciences - during the first year of study. The purpose of this approach is to effectively showcase the interrelation between social and natural sciences through appropriate teaching methods. As geography serves as a bridge between these two fields, it is an excellent subject for this purpose. However, this approach has yet to be implemented in primary education in Serbia.

After conducting an analysis of the structural components of geography programs in two nations, it was discovered that there are notable similarities and differences. Although the primary aim of the subject is defined similarly in both countries, the presentation of objectives and outcomes by grade level varies. In North Macedonia's programs, the goals are of utmost importance, whereas in Serbia, the learning outcomes and processes are given more emphasis. In North Macedonia's academic programs, each class and subject has specific goals outlined, in addition to overall subject goals. In contrast, Serbian curricula only provide a general goal for each subject. Outcomes are presented in a general manner for the class, with teachers responsible for specifying them when creating operational plans and preparing individual lessons. North Macedonia's educational programs provide detailed learning outcomes for each specific teaching content, rather than a general outcome for the entire class. As a result, the number of outcomes may appear higher than those in Serbia. However, upon closer examination, it becomes clear that the increased specificity of North Macedonia's outcomes typically aligns with only one class outcome in Serbia's program. Therefore, the learning outcomes for the same teaching contents in both countries are essentially the same.

Upon analyzing teaching topics, it has been discovered that the sequence of study varies between North Macedonia and other countries. In North Macedonia, pupils are initially taught general, physical, and partly regional geography during their sixth grade. The following year, during the seventh grade, they begin to delve into the geography of their homeland. Given that

North Macedonia is situated in Europe, this continent is thoroughly studied throughout the eighth grade. The other continents, which may be completely unfamiliar to the students, are only explored during the final year of primary education. The teaching curriculum was thoughtfully designed to follow a logical sequence, with a focus on learning from the familiar to the unfamiliar. This means that students began with topics related to their local environment and gradually progressed towards more obscure and foreign regions of the world. Conversely, in Serbia, a different approach is taken, with topics being arranged from distant to closer regions. For example, in the 6th grade, students learn about Europe, followed by its various regions and other continents in the 7th grade. Finally, in the 8th grade, which marks the end of primary education, the focus shifts to the homeland of Serbia.

Although there are some differences in the order of teaching topics between the two countries, the study content provided is quite similar. However, it is worth noting that Macedonian geography programs delve deeper into the study of Europe and dedicate a greater number of lessons to it than Serbia. In Macedonian programs, nearly all European countries are examined, and during the first year of studying geography, the subject of Geography of the Mediterranean countries is covered, which is not taught in Serbian geography programs. Conversely, Serbian programs place more emphasis on the teaching of physical, social, and regional geography during the first and second years of study, and this is covered in much greater detail than in primary schools in North Macedonia.

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