

## **Economic Geography: Definition, Scope and Importance**

Read this article to learn about Economic Geography. After reading this article you will learn about: **1. Definition of Economic Geography**

**2. Aims and Scope of Economic Geography**

**3. Importance of the Study.**

### **Definition of Economic Geography:**

Economic Geography is the study of man and his economic activities under varying sets of conditions. Geographers are of different opinions as regarding the definition of the subject.

In fact, different authorities have defined Economic Geography in a variety of ways but their opinions converge at a common point of accord, where it means the study of the spatial distribution of man's economic activities in relation to its environment, be it physical or non-physical.

According to Dudley Stamp, Economic Geography **“involves consideration of the geographical and other factors which influence man's productivity, but only in limited depths, so far as they are connected with production and trade.”**

Professor E. W. Zimmermann pointed out that, Economic Geography deals with the economic life of man with relation to environment.

R. S. Thoman in his book 'The Geography of Economic Activity' has remarked, **“Economic Geography may be defined as an enquiry into the production, exchange and consumption of goods by people in different areas of the world. Particular emphasis is placed on the location of economic activity — upon asking just why economic functions are situated where they are in this world.”**

J. MacFarlane describes Economic Geography as the study of “influence exerted on the economic activity of man by his physical environment,

and more specifically by the form and structure of the surface of the land, the climatic conditions which prevail upon it and the spatial relations in which its different regions stand to one another.”

In the words of Hartshorn and Alexander: “Economic Geography is the study of the spatial variation on the earth’s surface of activities related to producing, exchanging and consuming goods and services. Whenever possible the goal is to develop generalizations and theories to account for these spatial variations.”

Surpassing all, Chisholmes says that Economic Geography is presumed to “form some reasonable estimate of the future course of commercial development,” as determined by geographical factors.

### **Aims and Scope of Economic Geography:**

We may consider the Earth as the abode of Man and its resources are his legacy. Being most dynamic, man is never satisfied with mere living. He has always tried to refine his living conditions and environment. He is; never satisfied with the simple food, nature has provided him; he has devised ways for preparing food.

His shelters are not merely designed for simple protection, but should also be comfortable in every aspect and must match with the modern style. In fact, man satisfies not only his physical needs but also his cultural needs.

These inclinations or intentions of human mind have led to the exploitation of the earth’s resources in a number of ways down from days of Paleolithic society till the present time, but always within certain limits imposed by Nature. One unique feature of man is that, he understands the laws that govern the functioning of Nature and makes use of them in his own way of life.

The study of the manner of exploitation of the earth's resources and the limits set by physical environment is the proper scope of Economic Geography. It 'deals with the productive occupations and attempts to explain why certain regions are outstanding in the production and exportation of various articles and why others are significant in the importation and utilization of these things'.

In this study of interdependence of production, emphasis should be given upon the degree of human initiative and the nature of physical forces enacting to shape certain life-patterns. They should be studied not in isolation but as a comprehensive system of interaction between man and Nature.

However, it is not content only with the analysis of the present pattern of productive occupations, it also studies their dynamics, for global resources change not only in response to increasing knowledge, improved skills and techniques, but also, perhaps more importantly, in relation to changing socio-political objectives. Thus, Economic Geography is a much-embracing subject.

It not only aims at the understanding of different natural phenomena but also takes cognizance of racial traits and customs, advantages of an early start, availability of capital and labour, accumulated technical knowledge and skilled management, stability of governments, government aids or hindrances in the form of tariffs, subsidies or urbanization schemes and so on.

The fundamental differences in the life-styles of various societies in different parts of the world largely stem from the diversity in the physical environment, especially climate. Climatic condition differs quite distinctly from one region to another with the resultant differences in

human needs. People living in cold countries, thus, require warm clothes; those in hot countries require scanty and light clothing.

People of monsoonal countries of South-East Asia take rice and fish as their staple food, those in temperate regions prefer wheat. The inhabitants of the temperate regions are more energetic and industrious than those of the warm tropical countries. Such differences in man's basic life patterns can be explained only in terms of their varying natural conditions.

Initially, at the dawn of human civilization, man's needs were certainly very limited and so easily supplied by his habitat. Even at present, a primitive man's needs remain few. He satisfies his needs by the articles which are easily obtainable from his immediate surroundings. In contrast, a 'civilized' man's needs are great and complex. They cannot be satisfied near-at-hand; they need to be supplemented from far and wide.

In fact, none of the modern countries of the world are self-sufficient. The civilized man, therefore, depends a lot on the supplies of far-away regions. This gives rise to commerce. So, we may comment that the function of Economic Geography is to study the manner in which trade and commerce are related to the earth on which they are transacted.

'Thus, Economic Geography investigates the diversity in basic resources of the different parts of the world. It tries to evaluate the effects that differences of physical environment have upon the utilization of these resources. It studies differences in economic development in different regions or countries of the world. It studies transportation, trade routes and trade resulting from this development and as affected by the physical environment.

The problem of economic resources has become more complex today with millions starving and unemployed. Such problems are more acute

in the countries and among people who believe in material rather than spiritual progress. A man born and brought up under western civilization believes in creature comforts. He tries, by all means, to improve his life-style which is based on competition.

This competitive attitude gives rise to socio-economic problems. Economic Geography, therefore, also aims at resolving such problems by better and efficient utilization of limited resources through rational, systematic, scientific and long-term planning.

Humboldt, a famous 19th century German geographer, remarked that, 'the diversified riches of the earth are a vast source of human enjoyment, and, therefore, man's highest development requires that we put these riches into a common world stream of understanding and use.' This can only be achieved through the study of Economic Geography.

**H. H. McCarty has aptly remarked:**

Economic Geography concerns with the solution of economic problems.

**Hence, the student of Economic Geography must be trained along four principal lines:**

1. Recognize problems and state them in a manner.
2. Develop hypotheses that promise solutions to those problems.
3. Test the adequacy of these hypotheses in providing solutions for these problems.
4. Relate tested hypotheses to other generalizations in the body of theory.

In this way Economic Geography contributes to international understanding. It, undoubtedly, broadens our knowledge and outlook to a great extent and enables us to acquire a humanistic view-point. It is

essential for the liberalization of our education system for the future citizens of the modern world, so that, with its help and under its influence, he might work for true global understanding between different nations.

### **Importance of the Study of Economic Geography:**

The main objective of Economic Geography is, as expounded, to examine man's economic achievement in terms of production and consumption in the light of his environment. To assess the relative importance of the study of this branch of geography, we have to evaluate the purposes that it serves.

Economic Geography, fundamentally, maintains a very close relation with man's economic welfare as other social sciences do; but the approach is radically different. Through various stages of interpretation and analysis it, in the final stage, attempts to point out the potential for development of a region, occupied by a certain group of people.

Disparity in the state of economic well-being and level of production is a common phenomenon. In order to eliminate such disparity, mobilization of resources is imperative. A careful study of the situation has to be undertaken before any move is initiated to mobilize resources to resolve problems. Economic Geography accomplishes this job.

The above condition may further be elaborated. The idea of the Damodar Valley Corporation was inherited from the Tennessee Valley Authority of USA. But the DVC failed to maximize the relative benefits as the TVA did.

At the time of installation of the multipurpose river valley project in the Damodar Valley area only the aspects of physical setting were compared, ignoring totally the cultural elements like the level of technology, industrialization, capital availability etc.

Thus, due to lack of proper cultural setting, the DVC failed to reap the same degree of benefit as the TVA. Because of latitudinal locations, climatic conditions in parts of Canada are almost similar to those of the CIS. The level of technological development also bears identity.

Under this identical framework, introduction of a more cold-resisting variety of wheat, developed in either of these countries can also meet with a similar degree of success. On the other hand, the early British colonial settlers in Ceylon (presently Sri Lanka) committed a great mistake in their attempt to introduce oat, barley, and wheat cultivation in the country while both the climatic as well as the pedogenic conditions were, by no means, conducive to those crops.

Drastic transformation of the existing pattern of culture by another is not scientifically justified. A pattern of culture evolves out of the dynamic interaction between man and nature. Despite the physical identity between two countries, culture of one country may not fit that of another.

Stages of past growth or heritage plays a very decisive role in shaping the present destiny of man. It is, therefore, important to note that the factor of heritage, be it natural or cultural or human, should not be overlooked since any enforced evolution or imposition of culture may bring disastrous results.

Economic Geography makes a comparatively humble and integrated approach to such problems. It describes a country or region in terms of its natural, human and cultural environments with relation to man's economic way of life. A certain set of geo-economic conditions led to the development of the Japanese method of cultivation.

Prior to the introduction of such productive system of agriculture in India a careful examination of India's agrarian infrastructure is

necessary; otherwise, mere adoption of such system may not produce fruitful results.

Economic Geography serves the purpose of identifying the influence that the environment exerts on man through the preservation of the multiple geo-economic conditions of different parts of the world. Any attempt that aims at the balanced development of economy could not succeed without the complete understanding of the man-environment inter-relationship.

Without any such knowledge economic relationship is bound to end up in a fiasco. It is a fait accompli. Economic Geography, therefore, serves as an essential tool for reducing and finally eliminating world societies' disparity gaps by scientific study of their economic resources, modern needs and cultural heritages.