

Geography Courses in the University Studies of Economics in the Context of Globalization

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The research explores the need of introducing geography courses into the university studies of economics, particularly into management studies, and proposes a model for the implementation of geography courses into the undergraduate and graduate study programs of management in the Department of Economics at the University of Zadar, Croatia. The paper presents a detailed description of the two proposed courses—Economic Geography and Political Geography—including the course goals and learning outcomes, as well as factual insights, theoretical knowledge, social and cognitive skills, independence, responsibility, and other competences that the students will acquire in both courses. The syllabi containing these data are in line with the Bologna process and Croatian qualifications framework whose implementation into the educational system was accepted by Croatia when signing the Bologna declaration principles. The paper deals with a number of essential research issues: How to carry out the modelled implementation and introduce a necessary level of multi-disciplinary quality to the economics study programs? What are the obstacles and constraints that may arise in the process? In what way are the post-transition countries specific in this regard? How may these changes affect the learning outcomes and competencies that management students have to acquire in the field of geography? Is the significance of the described implementation even greater—and to what extent—with regard to the forthcoming accession of Croatia to the European Union? The methodology that was used in the research is related to successful cases of similar implementation of geography courses into economics study programs in the world, but also to the observation during teaching in the Department of Economics at the University of Zadar. The information collected by the observation revealed that the students' knowledge and competencies in this area were insufficient. The results gathered over the first two years of the implementation of the two geography courses—Economic Geography and Political Geography—proved that the students entirely satisfied the criteria set by the syllabi of the respective courses and that they successfully met the course requirements, thereby acquiring the desired competencies. This leads to the conclusion that the thesis set forth in this paper proved to be correct, and that this paper's model for the implementation of geography courses in the area of management studies produced first good and promising results.

Keywords: geography, geopolitics, economic studies, study of management, learning outcomes, geography courses

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Introduction

Contemporary economic and social development of the Republic of Croatia is impossible without an increasingly active participation of the country in the global exchange of labour and trade. Therefore it is of utmost importance that the management students become familiar with the international geostrategic, geopolitical, natural-geographic, and socio-cultural environment in which Croatia acts, as well as its economic, social, and political standing in Europe and worldwide. However, the Department of Economics at the University of Zadar has detected an insufficient level of knowledge and competences provided to undergraduate and graduate students of management in the areas of international management, international marketing, foreign trade, international tourism, and global exchange in general. Unlike general theoretical courses in economics—economy, management, marketing, and alike—which have been “remarkably” present and integrated into the study programme, there has been the lack of courses offering insights into the international environment in which the economic entities operate. This paper presents the authors’ own conceptual model for introducing geography courses into university studies of economics within the context of transition and European integrations.

The paper presents a detailed description of the two proposed courses—Economic geography and Political geography—including the course goals and learning outcomes, as well as factual insights, theoretical knowledge, social and cognitive skills, independence, responsibility, and other competences that the students will acquire in both courses. The syllabi containing these data are in line with the Bologna process and Croatian qualifications framework whose implementation into the educational system was accepted by Croatia when signing the Bologna declaration principles.

Authors believe that it is particularly important to educate students about the great geostrategic powers, regional distributions, and modern threats within the global environment, and about the geostrategic position of the European Union and the future status of Croatia as a member of the Union. For future managers, failing to recognise these international circumstances and environments increases the risk in making business decisions and thus decreases the efficiency of business decision-making in the international business context, which eventually leads to reduced efficiency of economic operators in the international market and modern globalised social and economic conditions.

This issue is particularly relevant with regard to the forthcoming accession of Croatia to the European Union. The students of economics at the University of Zadar still lack knowledge and competences related to the functioning of the European Union system, its regions, geostrategic, geopolitical, and resource standings. Functioning within complex global conditions is almost impossible without thorough understanding of the modern international circumstances.

In the 1990s, Europe experienced a number of considerable historical, economic, political, socio-geographic, and other structural changes. In addition to these dramatic changes and events, Croatia went through a painful process of socio-economic transition. Still, unlike other countries, Croatia experienced heavy material and non-material devastation during the War of Independence, which made its alignment with global economic processes and international labour exchange even harder and more complicated.

Therefore the authors of this paper believe that it is utterly important to offer their students two elective courses that would enable them to acquire knowledge and competences necessary for making decisions in the

international management environment, i.e., under global economic conditions, because they are to become the actuators of the future social and economic progress. Quality integration into the international economic exchange represents, for a small and developing country such as Croatia, the essential prerequisite of its political and economic development.

Research Questions

The paper deals with a number of essential research issues: How to carry out the modelled implementation and introduce a necessary level of multi-disciplinary quality to the economics study programs? What are the obstacles and constraints that may arise in the process? In what way are the post-transition countries specific in this regard? How may these changes affect the learning outcomes and competencies that management students have to acquire in the field of geography? Is the significance of the described implementation even greater—and to what extent—with regard to the forthcoming accession of Croatia to the European Union?

Research Method

The methodology that was used in the research is related to successful cases of similar implementation of geography courses into economics study programs in the world, also to the observation during teaching in the Department of Economics at the University of Zadar. The information collected by the observation revealed that the students' knowledge and competencies in this area were insufficient.

The Bologna Process and the Croatian Qualifications Framework

The Bologna process, aiming at the creation of the unique European Higher Education Area (EHEA), has been continuously implemented throughout Europe, gradually reaching the basic objectives of the Bologna declaration principles: adoption of systems featuring easily recognisable and comparable degrees, implementation of higher education systems divided in three cycles, introduction of ECTS credits system, promotion of mobility of students and teachers, enhancement of quality of the higher education and promotion of the European dimension within the higher education.

For almost a decade, the reform of the Croatian system of education has been founded on the above objectives, aligning the Croatian higher education with the European educational standards. Yet, the creation of the unique EHEA is a process which is constantly resulting in new requirements so that, in the course of time, new objectives have been set. These objectives attract great attention of the Croatian academic (and wider) community; they include the introduction of national qualifications frameworks comparable with the EHEA framework, definition of the learning outcomes for all three cycles in accordance with the so-called Dublin Descriptors, and ensuring the quality in line with the European standards (Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education).

These three objectives have a common feature—the so-called learning outcomes, through which they are defined, implemented, and checked. Learning outcomes have become part of the Bologna process after the Berlin Conference that took place in 2003. One of the reached agreements referred to the requirement that the countries—members of the Bologna process design frameworks of comparable and compatible qualifications in their higher education systems, describing the qualifications in terms of learning workload, level, outcome, competence, and profile. Ministers required establishing an overarching framework of qualifications for the EHEA (Čikeš, 2005).

The authors believe that the courses discussed in this paper are exceptionally important for the education of economists as they represent an indispensable supplement to the competences acquired in other courses, mainly dealing with theoretical and business economy, where the competences are “directly” harmonised with the market demands. Accordance of the competences with the market demands is particularly pointed out here, due to the fact that higher education institutions are bound to design their programs in accordance with potential employers and to follow up the employment abilities of their graduates.

Globalisation, its Impact on International Economy, and the Role of Geography in This Process

Defined as “the crystallisation of the entire world as a single place”, globalisation is an ongoing phenomenon which essentially assumes “the compression of the world and the intensification of the consciousness of the world as a whole” (Chu & Huang, 2010). In addition to enabling successful performance of multinational companies and creating multicultural communities, globalisation provides both threats and opportunities to modern managers.

Globalisation of the market, i.e., its conversion into the global market, implies a high level of availability of products, services, technologies, financial, and human resources across the world, owing to the development of traffic, telecommunications, and information technologies. The very process has been studied from a variety of perspectives—cultural, economic, political, and sociological, etc.. Many authors underline that political development in various corners of the world affects the globalisation of economy, which results in market and social changes (L. A. Manrai & A. K. Manrai, 2011). Open markets and globalisation have increased the rate, frequency, and scope of the approach to the markets across the world, including all tangible and intangible aspects of the world trade.

Castells presents an interesting analysis of such “global information capitalism” (Castells, 1996, 1997, 1998). Castells underlines the role of computerisation and telecommunication leading towards the territorialisation of economy and society, and develops a new form of space logic, the so-called space of flows. These flows are structured into networks governed by multinational companies and elite management. In the global economy, information is the key input for creating capitalist agglomerations.

Globalisation, as an economic and geographic phenomenon, has been increasingly attracting the attention of geographers. Their interest was first initiated by earlier studies in the area of geography, which involved researches into global and regional distribution of the labour force and activities of multinational corporations. It is especially important to point out that, regions as sources of comparative advantages in the globalised economy, have been particularly extensively studied (Porter, 1990; Saxenian, 1994; Scott, 1998).

Another feature of globalisation is the dual society structure consisting of a high income social elite and underprivileged workforce. In such a society, large urban centres—global cities—are the centres accumulating values, decision makers, and researchers; they are also financial centres. At the same time, the rapid growth of global cities has been followed by decreasing activities in some economic sectors, degradation of densely populated urban areas, structural poverty, and chronic feeling of social insecurity.

At the international level, one may notice certain consolidation of socio-economic geography, which involves economy and social component of space. Studies performed in the area of post-Fordism, innovations, innovation environment, industrial districts, government, local production systems, and regional economy, become the increasingly important issues.

Globalisation, which has fostered the emergence of “markets without frontiers”, mobility of the capital, transnational companies and information economy, marks the “end of geography” (O’Brien, 1992) and “the death of distance” (Cairncross, 1997). According to some theoreticians, globalisation makes the very location of economic activities less relevant. On the other hand, some experts believe that globalisation increases the importance of locations, given the value of regional economic specific features. “Spatial clustering”, a concept situated in the very core of the economic geography, has been developed to explain the advantages of a geographic location of an economic entity in relation to other operators also with regard to the existing natural, socio-cultural and other resources connected with the location. This helps to recognise the importance of understanding economic geography and, consequently, better familiarisation with the economy and modern economic processes.

Political geography is an area of social geography dealing with researches on spatial distribution of the outcomes of political processes, and with the ways the political processes are affected by spatial structures. The conventional political geography has a triple structure, with a state in the central position, international relationships (or geopolitics) at higher levels, whereas smaller geographic entities (sites) are observed at lower levels. Research is particularly focused on interrelations among people (population), state, and territory.

Geography is a specific field that, in this modern age of globalised social and economic community, represents an “ideal bridge” linking natural and social sciences, thus filling a gap that divided them for a long time, using the categories such as: sustainability, development, globalisation, management, and change management. Economists and economic geographers see the economic issues in different ways. Generally speaking, an economic geographer will use an integral approach to studying economic phenomena, i.e., he/she will perform their conceptualisation in space and time, and through measurements, detecting economic issues in the process.

On the other hand, the major drawback of a “stricter economic approach”, from the standpoint of economic geographers, is that it appears to be an “orthodox approach to economy, tending to make the world of economy homogeneous, in a way the economic geographers want to avoid” (Coe, Kelly, & Yeung, 2007). Insights into economic geography are basically descriptive and focused on the region and its economic, demographic, and social features.

Model for Introducing Geography Courses in the Management Study Programs

After all that has been said in the previous chapter, the authors of this paper consider it justified to introduce two elective courses from the field of geography into the management study program in the Department of Economics at the University of Zadar. The first course unit is Economic Geography, to be introduced in the sixth semester of the undergraduate study of management, having the workload of 6 ECTS credits at the sixth level of learning outcomes complexity, performed over 30 hours of lecture and 15 hours of exercise. The second course unit is Political Geography, to be introduced in the third semester of the graduate study of management, having the workload of 6 ECTS credits at the sixth level of learning outcome complexity, performed over 30 hours of lecture and 15 hours of exercise. Table 1 presents the complexity of competences at the sixth level of learning outcomes according to Croatian qualifications framework. The model implies drawing up the syllabi for both courses, entirely in line with the requirements of the Croatian qualifications framework, with special focus on defining the acquired learning outcomes, with the purpose of justifying the

introduction of these courses into the management study programs, i.e., into education and training of the future decision makers operating in complex economic and political environment. The following lines describe the courses by providing an overview of teaching units and by defining the learning outcomes in accordance with the guidelines provided by the Croatian qualifications framework.

Table 1

Complexity of Competences at the Sixth Level of Learning Outcomes

Type of competences (learning outcomes)	The sixth level
Factual knowledge	Evaluation of facts within the working or learning area, where some of the facts are at the edges of the known.
Theoretical knowledge	Evaluation of theoretical knowledge within the working or learning area, where part of it is at the edges of the known.
Cognitive skills	Abstract logical thinking (necessary for solving abstract problems) under unpredictable conditions.
Social skills	Ability of management and complex communication and cooperation in a variety of social communities under unpredictable conditions.
Independence	Managing professional projects under unpredictable conditions.
Responsibility	Taking ethical and social responsibility for managing and evaluating the professional development of individuals and groups under unpredictable conditions.

Here are the contents of the economic geography course through teaching units:

(1) Introduction: methodological approach to the course; notion, importance, role, and position of economic geography in the context of geographic sciences;

(2) Basic socio-economic processes in the geo-area and the level of economic-social development in the world: littoralisation, industrialisation, tertiarisation, deagrarisation, as essential processes generating relationships and determining the level of development in the world, migrations, protectionism, and banana states;

(3) Modern spatial distribution and organisation of the world: planned economy countries; advantages and shortcomings of the economic systems; transition countries and their issues; spatial focuses of economic activities; G7 nations as largest economies contributing to the progress of the world; economic development of the new world powerful economies (China, India etc.); developing countries; process of globalisation and importance of sustainable development; notion of globalisation; Micro-Nano Technologies (MNT) and development of communications as agents of globalisation; positive and negative aspects of political and economic layering of the world;

(4) Most important economic-political integrations of today's world: three economic poles (EU, NAFTA, ASEAN); growing discrepancies between the developed and the developing; UN, NATO, WTO, CEFTA; Tiger economies; basic economic-geographic features of the international trade; share of multinational companies in the world trade; world trade's present state and processes; spatial aspects in the world trade;

(5) Natural-geographic and socio-cultural factors as a prerequisite for development of economic systems: relief, structure, and substance of the earth; climate; waters and their importance; soils and their types; distribution of global resources; population; other socio-cultural factors as economic resources; world market of industry, agriculture and transport; world market of energy-generating products; ecology and natural resources preservation issues;

(6) Natural and social factors of tourism-economic attractiveness: natural factors of attractiveness (relief,

climate, preserved natural sights etc.) and social factors of attractiveness (cultural heritage, events, museums etc.); tourist markets in the world: the most important tourism countries (by income and number of tourists); top tourist destinations (Rivieras, archipelagos, towns etc.); most attractive world natural and cultural heritage (UNESCO); tourism geography of Croatia as part of geographic science; Croatia's tourism resources; tourism regionalisation of Croatia; tourism regions in Croatia; most attractive and visited tourist destinations in the Republic of Croatia; most important natural and cultural sights in Croatia; impact of tourism on space and ecology; adverse effects of tourism activities on geo-area; most relevant environmental issues; possibilities and ways of preventing and addressing ecological incidents; eco-tourism; development of ecological awareness.

Here are the contents of the political geography course through teaching units:

(1) Introduction: methodological approach to the course; notion, importance, and basic features of political geography in the context of geographic sciences;

(2) Political geography and geopolitics: modern political geography and geopolitics; geopolitics and geo-strategy in the science system; role of territories in politics; notion and distribution of space; geo-strategy and geostrategic views;

(3) Development of political geography and geopolitical image of the world; critical geopolitics; formal geopolitics, structural and practical; state borders and criteria for defining borders, distributions and natural factors;

(4) Types of borders, genetic development: sea borders, European Union borders, buffer zones (Afghanistan, Turkey etc.);

(5) Geopolitics of the 21st century: EU borders according to their level of stability; BRIC countries (Brazil, Russia, India, and China); rapid development of Brazil, Russia, India, and China (BRIC) countries and possible changes of economic and political relationships worldwide;

(6) Geopolitics of global threats and European political regions: Islam, oil, and "new game" in Central Asia; turbulent area of Middle East; Middle East and North Africa region (MENA), with particular focus on Gulf Cooperation Council countries (GCC). Political geography of contemporary terrorism and war against terrorism; Portugal, Italy, Greece, and Spain (PIGS) countries and crisis of the European monetary union; European political regions; political-geographic and geopolitical characteristics of the Republic of Croatia; new geopolitical standing of the Republic of Croatia; geopolitical standing of the Republic of Croatia within the European Union.

According to the Croatian qualifications framework (Hrvatski kvalifikacijski okvir—HKO) requirements, it is the first necessary to define, for each course, the key competences that students acquire attending the courses. These competences can be classified into theoretical and factual knowledge, cognitive and social skills, and associated independence and responsibility. It is important to point out that the HKO mentions psychometric skills as well; however, the authors of this paper think that these skills do not represent essential competences in the observed courses and the students do not acquire them during these courses. Table 2 as designed by the Croatian qualifications framework (HKO), presents the complexity for each type of competence according to the corresponding levels of learning outcomes. From Table 2, it is possible to sort out the competences of the sixth level which are acquired by attending the courses of Economic geography and Political geography.

The competences become the learning outcomes after the implementation of the evaluation procedure, i.e.,

one could say that a student acquires the competences by attending the course and performing ongoing tasks, but it is only after each element—defined by the syllabus—has been evaluated, that the student acquires the learning outcomes. This implies that it is necessary, through the evaluation elements and criteria defined in advance, to check whether a student has acquired the desired knowledge, skills, independence, and responsibility, and to confirm the acquisition of these elements by crediting the student with a positive grade. It is by this act that the student acquires the learning outcomes. The following tools of evaluating the acquired learning outcomes have been defined in the observed courses in the Department of Economics.

Table 2

Tools for Evaluating the Acquired Learning Outcomes

Learning outcomes	Evaluation tools
Factual knowledge	Midterm exam, oral examination.
Theoretical knowledge	Midterm exam, oral examination.
Cognitive skills	Preparing for lectures, homework, essay, group project, and midterm exam.
Social skills	Group project.
Independence	Preparing for lectures, homework, essay, and group project.
Responsibility	Preparing for lectures, homework, essay, and group project.

It is required to evaluate factual and theoretical knowledge under controlled conditions, i.e., through direct interaction between the student and the examiner, because all other ways of evaluation imply the student's home activities where the student is able to use the recommended and available literature and other sources to a lesser or greater extent. Likewise, cognitive skills require to be evaluated through midterm exams so that the examiner can be assured that the students have acquired the skills of abstract logical thinking under unpredictable conditions, i.e., that they have become capable of solving problem tasks without the aid of literature and other sources. It is obvious that social skills can be assessed only by assigning group tasks (projects) where the student is expected to handle a segment of the task and thereby prove the acquisition of an adequate level of social skills. During the above described activities the student shows his or her independence and responsibility for the final results. Here the focus is on the ethic approach to solving the assigned tasks, i.e., on respecting the academic values and the achievements of others. According to the HKO, the complexity level of the learning outcomes is described by indicating the requirements and choosing precise and active verbs (HKO, 2009). At the sixth level, which was called evaluation (vrjednovanje, assessment of the value of something/someone), the following verbs are used when describing learning outcomes: provide arguments for an opinion, choose an option, measure, critically envisage, defend the view, assess, justify, select, support, encourage, confirm, foresee, review, recommend, estimate, argue, rank, self-estimate, self-evaluate, compare, establish, determine, and conclude. On this basis, the desired learning outcomes in the courses Economic Geography and Political Geography have been determined and shown in Tables 3 and 4.

According to the authors of this paper, the described models for two elective geography courses, designed for the education of future economists, reveal the need of developing trans-disciplinary and multi-disciplinary study programs which would enable the future economists, and future managers in the first place, to acquire competences and learning outcomes that are necessary for dealing with the exceptionally complex and dynamic global business environment. It is exactly under these conditions that the close bonds between economy and geopolitics are particularly emphasised.

Table 3

Learning Outcomes in the Economic Geography Course

Factual knowledge	Review basic socio-economic processes in the geo-area and the level of the economic-social development of the world; critically evaluate the contemporary spatial distribution and organisation of the world, as well as the most relevant economic-political integrations of the today's world; assess natural-geographic and socio-cultural factors as the prerequisites of the development of economic systems, as well as natural and social factors of the tourism-economic attractiveness; critically evaluate the international distribution of labour force and economic resources, regional natural-geographic distribution of resources in the regions of the EU and the world, and the standing and comparative resources of the Republic of Croatia within that context.
Theoretical knowledge	Assess and provide arguments for the possibilities of the Republic of Croatia for its better integration into the international labour distribution, world trade, and economic exchange, which is particularly important with regard to the forthcoming accession of Croatia to the European Union.
Cognitive skills	Re-examine and evaluate the standing of the Republic of Croatia in the international trade and exchange, and its unexploited possibilities and potentials in these areas, with the purpose of making better business decisions in the international management and marketing.
Social skills	Assess, accept or reject the proposals and conclusions made by the partners in the process of business negotiation and social communication within the international environment, which cannot be done efficiently unless the students are familiar with the international natural-geographic and socio-cultural environment of European and world regions and nations.
Independence	Propose, test, and assess, in an independent way, possible alternative ways of addressing business issues in the area of international management and international marketing, i.e., in the areas of foreign trade, tourism, and global exchange.
Responsibility	Establish and critically evaluate the business and ethical responsibility of all participants in the process of decision-making in the area of international management and marketing. Insufficient familiarisation with the international environment in which an economic entity operates may result in the situation of increased uncertainty and risk in business decision-making, which is particularly relevant for the manager's responsibility when making business decisions in modern globalised market conditions.

Table 4

Learning Outcomes in the Political Geography Course

Factual knowledge	Select and use appropriate methodological approaches in geopolitical and geostrategic analyses, and make critical considerations in political analyses. Evaluate international spheres of interest and contemporary geopolitical distributions, as well as geo-strategies in the regions and worldwide. Assess modern political threats in the international environment.
Theoretical knowledge	Review political institutions, political processes, and political issues from the point of view of political geography and geopolitics, as well as current geostrategic and geopolitical situation in the EU and the world, and the standing of the Republic of Croatia within this context.
Cognitive skills	Evaluate the decisions made in the area of the international management. Provide arguments for a political analysis and justify the activities in non-governmental organisations and/or international organisations. Critically assess political processes and decision-making in the areas associated to geopolitical and geostrategic studies, such as foreign affairs and national security.
Social skills	Recommend adequate social and business communication and ways of dealing with modern geopolitical and geostrategic conditions with the purpose of integration into the international exchange and making business decisions, which is not possible without being well familiar with the geostrategic and geopolitical distribution, and with the spheres of interest of the modern world.
Independence	Propose, test, and assess, in an independent way, possible alternative solutions in the processes of decision-making, in terms of the impact of the geographic factors on the international political and economic relationships between countries, with the purpose of qualifying for work in the state administration, local administration and the like, and better dealing with the international economic processes, in the context of the international management, under globalised market conditions.
Responsibility	Determine and critically assess the business and ethical responsibility of all participants in the process of making business decisions, regardless of whether the responsibility occurs in the economic or non-economic area of decision-making. Making high quality business decisions is not possible without being well familiar with the international environment, particularly in the context of contemporary geostrategic and geopolitical events in Europe and worldwide.

Conclusions

Although globalisation has been regarded, since its emergence, as a positive process, today it is perceived as the most important trend, driving the individuals, companies, technologies, and markets towards progress, and in so doing, bringing both positive and negative consequences. It is certain that one of the positive consequences is the opening of one country's market to the companies from the whole world and the increased availability of goods to all potential consumers outside the mother country. Globalisation thereby allows the enterprises to expand the area of their operation onto a number of nations and cultures at the same time, so that practically every economic operator may become "global". The fact that the economic activities naturally become increasingly global, instead of remaining at just local or national levels, has served as the basis for designing the course models that are presented in this paper. Yet, the impact of globalisation on the world economy and, in particular, the adjustment of economy study programs to the globalised economic environment and, accordingly, the provision of knowledge and competences aimed at training, educating, and qualifying students for the global markets, have not been sufficiently explored. Therefore, this paper's goal is to serve as the basis for further research into this area.

It is expected that globalisation, as the leading actuator of changes, will increasingly attract attention of the scientists and economic practitioners in the area of economic movements and economic and management practice, as well as in the area of higher education of the future economists and managers who have to be trained, educated, and qualified for dealing with the global "market without frontiers". In this context, this paper discusses the necessity of integrating new trans-disciplinary and multi-disciplinary knowledge, particularly the knowledge related to geography, into the university studies of economics and management.

The results gathered over the first two years of the implementation of the two Geography courses—Economic Geography and Political Geography—proved that the students entirely satisfied the criteria set by the syllabi of the respective courses and that they successfully met the course requirements, thereby acquiring the desired competencies. This leads to the conclusion that the thesis set forth in this paper proved to be correct, and that this paper's model for the implementation of geography courses in the area of management studies produced first good and promising results.

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