

## ESPECIFICIDADES CIENTÍFICO-NORMATIVAS DO AGRUPAMENTO DE PAÍSES NO ENSINO DE GEOGRAFIA E ECONOMIA - INTERPRETAÇÃO DIDÁTICO-SINÉRGICA DETERMINÍSTICA E MODELOS DIGITAIS ATRAVÉS DO MAPCHART

### SCIENTIFIC-NORMATIVE SPECIFICS OF GROUPING COUNTRIES IN GEOGRAPHY AND ECONOMICS TRAINING - DETERMINISTIC DIDACTIC-SYNERGISTIC INTERPRETATION AND DIGITAL MODELS THROUGH MAPCHART

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#### **Abstract**

Studying the continents, regions and countries of the world is the most enduring course of study in school geography along with the home country course. In the history of the development of geographical science and the methodology of training geography, the problems of classifying, grouping and typologizing countries in the world have been studied in depth by many scientists and methodologists. In the noosphere and times of digital transformations, the diversity of criteria and indicators for the division of continents, regions and countries is increasing.

Every country in the world has specific features and characteristics that predetermine the similarities and the differences between individual countries at the continent and regional level, which makes it possible to classify and group them. Appropriate indicators are needed to characterize the countries according to a given criterion, but with the clear distinction that countries are classified by the criteria and grouped by the indicators.

State educational standards and curricula for junior high school stage, first and second high school stage were studied, and the indicators and signs in the grouping of the countries were normatively followed. The place and role, the content and the requirements for the activity of the action - grouping in the normative framework, which is also present in the activities for the acquisition of the key competences related to the 9 groups of key competences, have been studied.

In the curricula of geography and economics for general education and profiled preparation, the overall conceptual framework of regionalization and the geography of society has been transformed with clearly perceptible normative requirements for grouping countries according to clearly defined indicators - geographical location, area, number of population and form of government.

In the overall didactic cycle for grouping the countries in the school geography in Bulgaria, specific competencies are required on the part of the teachers to realize the expected results through a different form and manner, modern training methods and techniques, various didactic means and resources. An electronic resource that has a universal and simplified interface and a large number of operational possibilities, through which geographical maps can be created for the didactic purposes of school geography, is MapChart.

MapChart is an electronic platform for online work that has unlimited possibilities for implementing countries grouped by various indicators. Each teacher can create an unlimited number of author's geographical maps, as well as save them and create their own gallery, and also import the maps in presentations, posters, text, etc. With MapChart, every teacher and student can create their own personalized geographic map.

The research thesis encompasses the competence to group countries according to normatively defined indicators. The research proves the existence of a synergistic-normative unity between the educational stages and a model is proposed for realizing the expected results through an electronic platform.

For the study of the normative framework, the indicators and the required competences, the following objectives were fulfilled: the state educational standards and curricula in geography for the study of continents, regions and countries were analyzed; the features of the procedural requirements for the characterization of a country and specific grouping of countries are identified and presented; the place and the role, the content and the requirements for the action have been studied - grouping in the normative framework; presentation of the situational vision of the competence for grouping the countries in relation to the 9 groups of key competences; software programs have been studied and MapChart has

been proposed to achieve the expected result of grouping countries by indicator as an opportunity to create an author's geographical map.

Content analysis, situational analysis, comparative analysis, synthesizing, summarizing, and other techniques have all been used in the current study of the competence for classifying the countries according to the state educational standards and curricula in geography and economics.

**Keywords:** geography and economy, countries, grouping of countries, digital competence, *MapChart*

## Resumo

Estudar os continentes, regiões e países do mundo, assim como o país de origem são os temas mais estudados ao longo dos tempos na geografia escolar. Na história do desenvolvimento da ciência geográfica e da metodologia de ensino da geografia, os problemas de classificação, agrupamento e tipo de países do mundo foram estudados em profundidade por muitos cientistas e metodologistas. Na noosfera e em tempos de transformações digitais, aumenta a diversidade de critérios e indicadores de divisão de continentes, regiões e países. Cada país do mundo possui atributos e características específicas que predeterminam as semelhanças e as diferenças entre os países a nível continental e regional, o que permite classificá-los e agrupá-los. São necessários indicadores apropriados para caracterizar os países de acordo com um determinado critério, mas com a distinção clara de que os países são classificados pelos critérios e agrupados pelos indicadores.

Foram estudados os currículos educacionais e os programas de países para o ensino básico, primeiro, segundo e terceiro ciclo, com os respetivos indicadores e sinalizações do agrupamento dos países, que foram seguidos normativamente. Foram estudados o local e o papel, os conteúdos e os requisitos para a atividade do agrupamento de ações no quadro normativo, que também estão presentes nas atividades de aquisição das competências essenciais, relacionadas com os 9 grupos de competências-chave.

Na Bulgária, nos currículos de geografia e economia para o ensino básico, o quadro conceptual global da regionalização e da geografia da sociedade foi transformado com requisitos normativos claramente perceptíveis para agrupar países de acordo com indicadores claramente definidos - localização geográfica, área, número de população e forma de governo.

No ciclo didático global para agrupar os países na geografia escolar na Bulgária, são necessárias competências específicas por parte dos professores para alcançar os resultados esperados através de uma forma e maneira diferentes, métodos e técnicas de formação modernas, vários meios e recursos didáticos. Um recurso eletrónico que possui uma interface universal e simplificada e um grande número de possibilidades operacionais, por meio das quais podem ser criados mapas geográficos para fins didáticos de geografia escolar, é o MapChart. MapChart é uma plataforma eletrónica de trabalho online que possui possibilidades ilimitadas de implementação de países agrupados por diversos indicadores. Cada professor pode criar um número ilimitado de mapas geográficos de autor, bem como salvá-los e criar sua própria galeria, e também importar os mapas em apresentações, posters, textos, etc. Com o MapChart, cada professor e aluno pode criar seus próprios mapas geográficos personalizados. A tese de pesquisa abrange a competência de agrupar países de acordo com indicadores normativamente definidos. A pesquisa comprova a existência de uma unidade sinérgica-normativa entre as etapas educacionais e é proposto um modelo para concretização dos resultados esperados por meio de uma plataforma eletrónica. Para o estudo do quadro normativo, dos indicadores e das competências exigidas, foram cumpridos os seguintes passos: foram analisados os padrões educacionais estaduais e os currículos de geografia para o estudo de continentes, regiões e países; são identificadas e apresentadas as características dos requisitos processuais para a caracterização de um país e agrupamento específico de países; foram estudados o local e o papel, o conteúdo e os requisitos da ação - agrupamento no quadro normativo; apresentação da visão situacional da competência para agrupamento dos países em relação aos 9 grupos de competências-chave; foram estudados programas de software e o MapChart foi proposto para alcançar o resultado esperado de agrupar países por indicador como uma oportunidade para criar um mapa geográfico do autor. Análise de conteúdo, análise situacional, análise comparativa, síntese, resumo e outras técnicas têm sido utilizadas no estudo atual da competência para classificar os países de acordo com os padrões educacionais estaduais e os currículos de geografia e economia.

## 1- Introduction

One of the most sustainable courses in the development of school geography is the study of the continents, regions and countries of the world, including the course on the home country. In the digital era

and digital transformations, there is an increasing variety of criteria and indicators for the division of continents, regions and countries, as well as the possibilities of applying information and communication technologies (ICT) in the grouping and presentation of territorial units. The digital generation or the „generation of seven screens” and the dynamics of social life in the XXIst century require the educational system reformed in 2016 to rethink the educational changes, didactic goals and models in order to adapt to the digital generation. To teach regional geography to the digital generation through the means and tools of ICT is a challenge and an opportunity to teach in transition „from teaching, memorizing and reproducing information to using interactive methods, active interaction between participants in the educational process, personalization of educational content and results orientation”. (Strategic framework, 2021, 11)

The most dynamic of the three territorial units remain the regions, which are shaped by strategic and political, socio-economic and cultural events, conflicts and spatial changes. Regional organizations and unions determine the polar specificities and peculiarities, being the bearers of regional integration and regionalization as an objective and legitimate result of the development of the world economy and international economic relations.

In the present study of the competence for grouping the countries according to the state educational standard and curricula in geography and economics, content analysis, situational analysis, comparative analysis, synthesizing, summarizing, etc. have been applied.

## **2 – A selected theoretical-normative review of the grouping of countries by indicators and program specifics**

In the normative framework of the state educational standard (DOS) and curricula, there is an explicit presence of the grouping of countries when studying international organizations. In the DOS, the following expected results are determined for the area of competence *Geography of society and the economy*:

- *basic educational level: knows the political map of the world and its changes, names some international organizations;*
- *secondary education level: explains the changes in the modern political map, the reasons for them and the main forms of political organization of society.* (Ordinance No. 5, 2015, 73, 76)

The competence to group the countries is tied at the level of the state educational standard to the political map of the world and its changes, the forms of political organization of the society and the international organizations. The DOS does not procedurally set the norm for grouping the countries of the world according to given indicators.

Regional geography in the school geography education is present in a total of 4 classes, with the object of study being the country and not only because „they are distinguished by a different territorial scope

- continents, naturally separated or historical-geographical (civilizational) regions, interstate associations, countries, intrastate autonomous territories or separate administrative units, settlements or even only parts of them". (Rusev, 2017, 13.) Countries, as part of the regionalization and the main driving force for associations in a given continent and region, are carriers of the essence of regional geography, which „explores the spatial diversity of forms of interaction between nature and society". (Rusev, 2017, 13-14)

The regionalization of the space has historical roots, and the study of individual regions and countries within them is undoubtedly a current and sustainable topic of development of modern geographical science. The study of *the geography of countries* covers in its complex-geographical synthesis many geographical directions, many of them clearly recognizable in the normative school documents, positioned by areas of competence - *Geography of nature, Geography of society and the economy, Geography of continents/regions and countries*. It is not by chance that the countries are placed as a taxonomic unit to the continents, as well as to public geography and geopolitics, because „in the subject essence of the geography of the countries, significant accents are laid, gravitating to the political-geographical subject". (Rusev, 2017, 20)

According to A. Dermendzhiev and M. Doykov, appropriate indicators are needed to characterize the countries according to a given criterion, but with the clear distinction that **the countries are classified by the criteria and grouped by the indicators**. (Dermendzhiev, Doykov, 2020, 24). The authors present criteria and indicators for the division of the countries: geographical (spatial), political, cultural, demographic, social and economic.

According to P. Stoyanov, when analyzing and presenting a country or region, it is necessary to look at the historical features of the formation of the territory and how the nation was formed, and what are the territorial changes. He comments on the grouping of countries according to historical indicators, linking them to the „*concepts of cultural geography - cultural core, cultural diffusion, etc.: evolutionarily formed states; countries that emerged as a result of a historical „turn”; and countries that emerged as a result of global movements*". (Stoyanov, 2017, 32)

School geography is a reflection of the changes in geographical science, in which the ideas and concepts of regionalization are tangibly present. Competencies as expected training results according to the state educational standard for the secondary degree of education require describing the regional division of the world, naming signs of division, knowing and evaluating the activities of international organizations, as well as characterizing countries according to an algorithm in a complex order (natural, the demographic and economic profile of countries), as typical representatives of a region in the world. (Ordinance No. 5, 2015, 76)

In geography curricula, the overall conceptual framework of regionalization and the geography of society has been transformed with clearly discernible normative requirements for grouping countries according to clearly defined indicators, as well as for knowing, explaining and mapping island groups of countries:

- **V grade:** *groups countries* according to: geographical location, area, population and form of government (republic, monarchy);
- **VI grade** (from the academic year 2022/2023): *groups countries* in Asia by geographical location, area, population, form of government; defines the range and explains the formation of the island groups of *Oceania*; fills in and highlights differently on a contour map the island groups of *Melanesia*, *Micronesia*, *Polynesia* and the island of *New Zealand*;
- **VII grade:** *groups countries* in Europe by geographical location, area, population and form of government; *groups countries* by territory: countries in Northern, Western, Central, Southern and Eastern Europe;
- **IX grade:** *groups countries* according to various characteristics (geographic location, form of government, state device and degree of economic development). (Curricula V grade, 2020, 5; Curricula VI grade, 2020, 5; Curricula VII grade, 2017, 3; Curricula IX grade, 2017, 2)

In the curricula, the indicators and signs for the grouping of the countries are normatively stated:

- *for junior high school stage of education:* geographical location, area, number of population and form of government (republic, monarchy);
- *for the first high school stage of education:* geographical location, form of government, state device and degree of economic development

The content model is didactically justified and adapted to the age characteristics of the students. The structural-didactic model for grouping countries in the world by indicators is as follows: **3K (V-VI-VII)[4 P]+1K (IX)[4 P]**. For each class, 4 indicators for grouping the countries are determined, and for the junior high school stage they are the same, and for the first high school stage there are two new indicators - *state device* and *degree of economic development*. Common to both educational degrees and stages are two signs of grouping: *geographical location* and *form of government*.

The applied frequency of repetition of indicators for grouping countries in the three grades of the junior high school stage is a function of vertical integration and intradisciplinary synthesis. For the three junior high school classes, the same indicators were applied in the same sequence when grouping the countries.

The indicators listed in the normative framework for the grouping of countries are presented in sequence, on the example of the characterization of a continent or a country: 1). Geographical location; 2). Area; 3). Number of population; 4). Form of government; 5). State device; 6). Economic development.

We find a peculiarity of the competence for grouping the countries in VII grade for the continent of Europe, where the requirement is to group by territorial basis, respectively for countries in Northern, Western, Central, Southern and Eastern Europe. The sequence of European regions does not follow the geographical-territorial principle, but the economic one for grouping countries according to the degree of economic development.

We note another conceptual specificity that refers to **the object of grouping** - *country/state*. In V grade, it is spelled out in the curricula to group independent countries, and in grades VI, VII and IX, countries (regardless its type) are grouped. In the amended and supplemented curricula of geography and economics for the V and VI grades of 2020, the subject of the learning content is fixed to be *Geography of continents and countries* and it coincides with the area of competence under DOS, but in the methodological guidelines for the characterization of geographical objects, as a rule, the concept - *country or characteristic of a country as a rule* has been introduced. With regard to the competence for the grouping of countries, only in V grade has the concept of countries been replaced by *the grouping of countries*. The conceptual correctness is for the application of the concept of *state* and is localized only in one of the classes of the junior high school stage - V grade. On the other hand, in the case of the other three classes, the peculiarly applied concept - *country* is established in the normative, methodical literature and geography textbooks „educational tradition, inherited educational model, general and complex natural-social system, model of subject-logical subordination, structural-content image and strategy, educational technology, borrowed foreign experience, causality and established practice in geography didactics”. (Draganova, 2019, 520; Dermendzhieva, Draganova, 2022, 59)

The activity of the **grouping** action also present in the activities for the acquisition of the key competences, related to the 9 groups of key competences - table 1.

Table 1 - Systematized vision of the presence in the curricula of the active action grouping

GRADE	GROUPS OF KEY COMPETENCES	ACTIVITIES
V	Mathematical competences and basic competences in the natural sciences and technologies	<b>grouping</b>
VI	Mathematical competences and basic competences in the natural sciences and technologies	<b>grouping</b>
VII	Competences in the field of the Bulgarian language	<b>groups</b> , characterizes (describes and explains essential signs and features) geographical objects, processes and phenomena
	Mathematical competences and basic competences in the natural sciences and technologies	<b>groups</b> , determines the meaning, characterizes (including as a rule) geographical objects, processes and phenomena
VIII	Competences in the field of the Bulgarian language	<b>groups</b> , characterizes, analyses geographical objects, processes and phenomena
	Mathematical competences and basic competences in the natural sciences and technologies	<b>groups</b> , characterizes geographical objects, processes and phenomena
IX	Competences in the field of the Bulgarian language	<b>groups</b> , characterizes (describes and explains essential signs and features)



	Mathematical competences and basic competences in the natural sciences and technologies	<b>groups</b> , classifies, characterizes geographical objects, processes and phenomena
<b>X</b>	---	---

Source: (Curricula - V grade, 2020, 8-9; Curricula - VI grade, 2020, 8; Curricula - VII grade, 2017, 8; Curricula - VIII grade, 2016, 8; Curricula - IX grade, 2017, 8)

The situational analysis of the presence of the active verb for grouping geographical objects, processes and phenomena reveals a relationship mainly in two groups of key competences: first and third group - 1) *Competences in the field of the Bulgarian language* and 3) *Mathematical competences and basic competences in the natural sciences and the technologies*. (Law, 2015, 23) We note the absence of the active verb grouping only in the curricula for X grade of general educational preparation. The active verb grouping is part of a level of mastery - to *synthesize* to a level of *metacognitive knowledge* that determines the required productivity of training.

In the formation and development of the competence for grouping countries, other connections and interactions with groups of key competences are necessary, such as communication skills in foreign languages, cultural competence and skills for expression through creativity, digital competence, etc. In the process of digital transformations in the education system and training of the digital generation, many functions are required for the position of „teacher”. The DOS for the status and professional development of the teachers and their functions clearly states the functional need for digital competence. For the position of „teacher” in the system of preschool and school education, specific functions are defined normatively and out of a total of 18, the third in order is „**3. effective use of digital technologies**”. Mandatory pedagogical competence for every pedagogical position is digital. (Ordinance No. 15, 2019, 2; Draganova, 2023, 137)

The competence of grouping countries is directly related to digital technologies and the possibility to teach through ICT. When grouping the countries according to indicators as an expected result, teachers can apply different forms and ways, modern teaching methods and techniques, various didactic tools and electronic resources. An effective electronic resource for forming and developing the competence for grouping the countries with a universal and simplified interface for creating geographical maps with didactic purpose is **MapChart**.

### **3 – Application of the MapChart electronic platform in the competence for grouping the countries**

Geographical maps can be created without time-consuming preliminary preparation and additional qualifications for working with *MapChart*, because it is easy and accessible, with a facilitated and simplified interface, easy to understand and no burdensome toolbars and additional menus, with a good vision and is easy to use.

MapChart offers an official mobile app available for iOS and Android for free. MapChart features a sample map gallery as well as a large number of templates for creating geographic maps. In MapChart there is also the possibility to integrate excel tables with data. Geographical maps are stored with high image quality. (mapchart.net)

With MapChart, every teacher and student can create their own personalized geographic map. The services and access to *MapChart* are free and do not require registration or login through social networks. It is necessary to initially research, select and verify country grouping indicators.

MapChart can be used to prepare geographical maps of: member countries of international and regional organizations; countries grouped by geographical location, by area, by population, by form of government, by state device; geographical maps of countries by economic, demographic and other indicators.

In *MapChart* there are offered map bases for the world, for individual continents (Europe, Asia, America, Africa) and countries (for the USA there is a separate category in the menu), as well as additional country maps (of provinces, states, departments, administrative units, regions, counties - the name is different for individual countries), and the access is from the menu bar at the top of the screen. (mapchart.net) An interesting option for training geography and economics is the compilation of „fantasy maps”, but they are not the subject of the present study. *MapChart* enables users to make a selection of a region represented in three spatial variants – by international organizations and unions, by UN geoschemes and by geographical groups.

The place of application of *MapChart* in the training of the geography of countries has several didactic perspectives

- application by teachers and intern-teachers of *MapChart* capabilities in their preliminary preparation for geography and economics lessons and in the course of the lesson;
- application and embedding of geographic maps prepared in *MapChart* in presentations and other multimedia products;
- use of *MapChart* directly by trainers in geography and economics school lessons in lesson types during which students make geographical maps according to tasks set by the teacher: for practical activities/activities/exercises, summary lessons, discussion lessons, as well as for control and assessment lessons; to a lesser extent in lessons for new knowledge;
- application of ready-made geographical maps of countries grouped by indicator/indicators can also be applied in lessons for new knowledge by the teacher and intern-teacher throughout the whole lesson;
- assigning students homework to prepare geographical maps according to predefined indicators using *MapChart*;
- making geographical maps through *MapChart* for participation in contests and competitions, student conferences, project and research activities, etc.;



- making maps in MapChart when researching the homeland, for a specific country and its administrative units;
- making geographical maps of countries studied in geography and economics classes, as representative countries for the continent or region;
- applying the comparative approach in studying the geography of countries to make geographical maps of two or more countries (for example: *Egypt* and *South Africa*; *Brazil* and *Argentina*; *USA* and *Canada*; *Japan* and *Republic of Korea*; *China* and *Turkey*; *Australian Union* and *New Zealand* and etc.; as well as for more countries from one continent/region or for countries from different continents and regions) and comparing by given indicators;
- making geographic maps in *MapChart* when studying international organizations in grades V and IX - EU, NATO, UN, as well as for international organizations and unions in the profiled preparation in geography and economics, selecting different indicators depending on the didactic goal;
- making geographic maps when studying the world economy, grouping countries according to economic indicators, etc.

Before starting work in *MapChart*, it is necessary to specify what kind of geographical map will be needed for making, to systematize the countries and statistical data (integration of statistical data from Excel tables), to make a choice of indicators for grouping the countries, as well as that the map basis necessary for the grouping of countries for the world or by continents has been determined. After the preliminary clarifications for the normatively determined indicators and preparation for the content and/or statistical data, the teacher can proceed to work in the *MapChart* electronic environment.

*MapChart* suggests a three-step sequence for making a map: 1). Map Coloring/Editing; 2). Choice of legend; 3). Download/save the intern-map (fig. 1). In the first step, there is an option to choose colors for marking the countries, for colors of the state borders, showing the names of the countries, background for the World Ocean, showing the main cities, etc. Additional settings reveal great possibilities for the design of the author card.

To support the geographic mapping activities in MapChart, we suggest the following sequence of steps:

- map-based selection;
- selection of colour or shading to indicate country groups and introduction of their names;
- background color selection;
- simultaneously filling data in the legend for each group of countries by color;
- writing a title on the map;
- overview of the geographical map;

- download the geographic map in png and save to your devices.

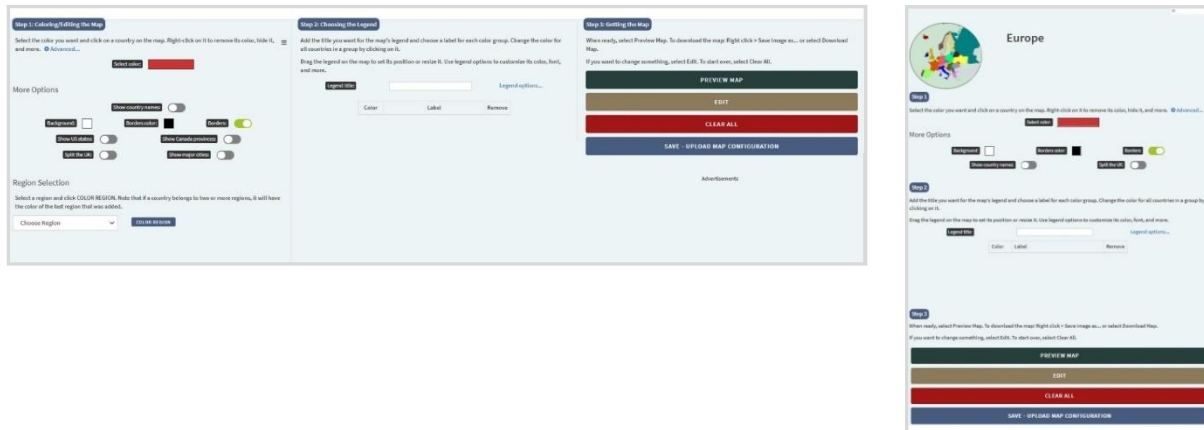


Figure 1. Sequence of steps to create a geographic map in MapChart. Sources: <https://mapchart.net/>

The use of the possibilities of information technologies in geography and economics training is undoubtedly a necessity and requirement of the information society and the demands of the digital generation. Competence for grouping countries in the training of geography and economics in V, VI, VII and IX grades can be carried out through the *MapChart* electronic platform (Fig. 2 - an example of geographical map of the countries in Asia, grouped by area indicator).

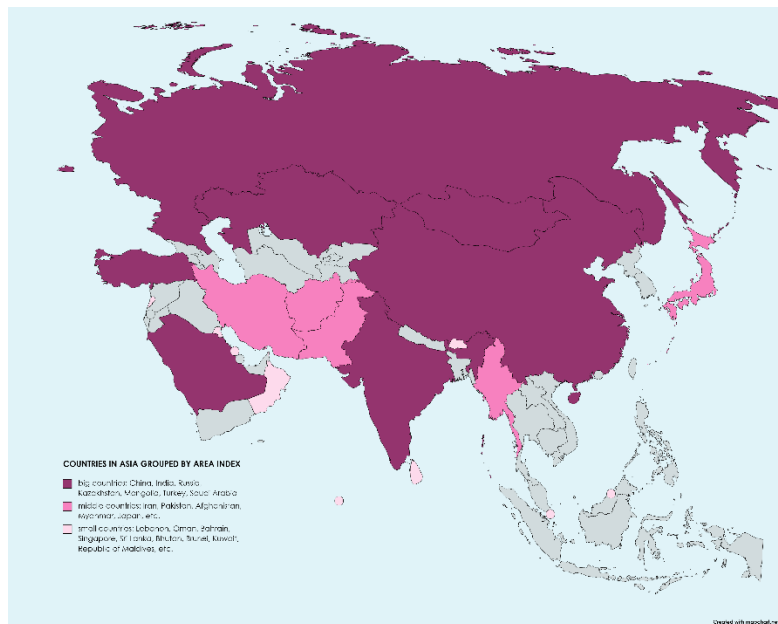


Figure 2. Exemplary geographic map of countries in Asia grouped by area. Sources: <https://mapchart.net/>

## 4 – Conclusion

The application of the *MapChart* electronic platform in training geography and economics has been tested in basic schools of „St. Cyril and St. Methodius” University of Veliko Tarnovo and in schools throughout the whole country by intern-teachers who are teachers at the time of their training in different types of Bulgarian schools.

Through the application of *MapChart* in competence for grouping countries by indicator, a movement is made from visuality to reflection, from logical to sensory knowledge, from the concrete to the visual, from theory to practice by developing digital competences and digital intelligence.

The choice for the application of the *Mapchart* electronic platform in the training of geography and economics in the formation of competence - grouping of countries was provoked by the free access, the easy interface, the possibilities of creating author's maps with your own design - content, graphics, colors, modular, as well as to apply ready-made geographical maps from the gallery.

The application of the *Mapchart* electronic platform can be implemented in all types of lessons in geography and economics, as well as in the course of the entire lesson unit.

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