

Vazha Neidze-Geographer, Chess Composer and International Referee (1937-2020)

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Dr Vazha Neidze (Fig. 1, 2) belongs to that rare kind of people who have been doing what they like most their whole lives, all the more so because he had two passions equally dear to his heart: geography and chess.

Having graduated from the Tbilisi State University in 1960, he started his career at the Vakhushti Bagrationi Institute of Geography, Tbilisi, Georgia, to which he had devoted most of his scientific life. Starting as a lab assistant, he worked up to become the head of the Human Geography department. He remained devoted to the Institute for his whole life, having enriched the science of geography by more than two hundred scholarly works that include twenty-three monographs and six textbooks, some of them intended for schoolchildren and some - for university students.

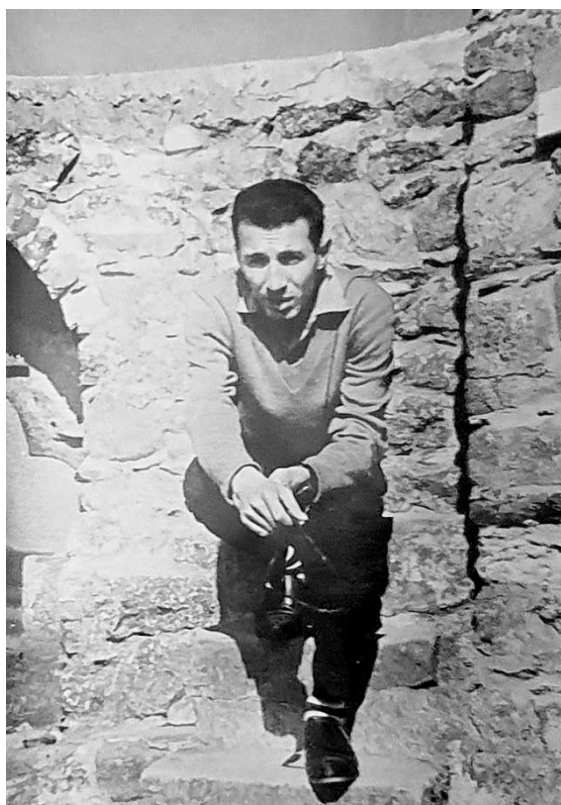


Figure 1. Vazha Neidze on an expedition, the 1960s

After successfully defending in 1970 a Ph. D. dissertation, "Economic-geographical problems of the new industrial cities of Georgia", he continued research on Georgia's urban and rural settlement systems. He was the first to develop the structural-functional analysis of the factors that defined the foundation of new cities and rural settlements. He also studied issues of political geography, in particular, the problem of administrative-territorial arrangement of Georgia and military conflicts on the Georgian territory. Later, his interests engulfed other fields of geography such as geographical aspects of tourism, protected natural areas' maintenance, economical and ecological development of regions. He published in 1986 an article "Geography of sport: subject and objectives", thus laying the foundation for a new direction in social geography - geography of sport.

Among his works (published in Georgian in collaboration with his colleagues) are *Tbilisi (economic-geographical research)* (1989), *Khevi* (1998), *National parks and tourism* (1990); *Samegrelo: nature, population, economy (geographical aspects)*; *Borjomi-Kharagauli National Park* (2001); *Geography*

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(*Support Guide*) (2002); *Geography of Georgia, vol. 2, Socio-Economic Geography* (2003); *Socio-economic geography of the world* (a handbook for higher education students) (2004); *Geography of Georgia* (2013); School textbooks in Geography (for V, VI, VII, VIII, IX grades), numerous articles in the multi-volume encyclopedia of Georgia, etc.

His cartographic works deserve separate mentioning, as he compiled up to twenty maps for the National Atlas of Georgia (2012) and its renovated edition in English (published in Germany, 2018). In this Atlas, a map of the geography of sports compiled by Dr Neidze had been published for the first time. The Atlas as a whole was highly praised in Georgia and abroad, and Dr Neidze was justly proud of that. Unfortunately, he has not seen the publication of his last work in the collective monograph "Physical Geography of Georgia" published in English (Springer, in print).

Vazha Neidze's works are remarkable for their deep content and refined literary style, characterized by laconism and simplicity. His perfect knowledge of the Georgian language was why he was asked to carry out editorial work on the National Atlas and all the essential papers published by the Department of Human Geography during the last four decades. The most meticulous among the professional editors would gladly accept his corrections and recommendations concerning the linguistic aspects of the presented text.

Together with his colleagues, Vazha Neidze received in 1993 the Vakhushti Bagrationi Prize for the collective monograph "Tbilisi: An Economic-Geographical Research".

Under the leadership and active participation of Dr Neidze, the Department of Human Geography worked on current economic-geographic issues of Georgia: geographical problems of the development of its regions, touristic potential, demographic problems, etc. The members of the Department actively participated in several grant projects under his guidance.



Figure 2. Vazha Neidze, 2017

Vazha Neidze remained loyal to the Institute of Geography and did not seek a permanent job elsewhere. However, he was a part-time associate professor at the Department of Human Geography and a part-time professor at the Department of Environmental Management Tbilisi State University (2002-2006). His courses included Introduction to Economic Geography, Methods of Research in Economic Geography, History of Geographical Science, Geography of Population and Cities,

Geography of Tourism, Local Studies and Excursion, General Social Geography. Despite his overloaded schedule, he took a keen interest in his students' work. He was ready to give a helping hand or a good piece of advice to put them on the right path. Concerned with the younger generation's education, he devoted significant time to school textbooks.

Vazha Neidze was an active science organizer. He was a member of the Scientific Council of the Institute of Geography, one of the founders of the Alexandre Javakhishvili Geographical Society of Georgia, and a member of its Scientific Council, its Commission of Geographical Place-names. He was a member of the Scientific Advisory Board of different standing committees of the Parliament of Georgia (Sectoral Economic, Environment and Natural Resources). He was a member of the Union of Georgian Journalists.

Dr Neidze actively participated in the local and international seminars and conferences. His highly professional, exciting presentations always drew audiences. However, he loved fieldwork with endless after-work conversations with younger colleagues. These precious hours are unforgettable for us.

Highly principled and demanding of himself, Dr Neidze never shied away from expressing his critical opinion about a student's work or an authoritative scholar.



Figure 3. Vazha Neidze with the family

Vazha Neidze never lost sight of his beloved chess despite his intensive involvement in scientific work. "Chess is a kind of indicator of a nation's intellectual and cultural level. This creation of humankind's genius is very beneficial for humans," he used to say. More than 60 years in the chess world have earned him great recognition as a chess composer and an international referee. The first great success of the author of many engaging, beautiful chess etudes was the Champion of the USSR in 1984 and the International Master in Chess Composition in 1989. David Gurgendidze, an international Grand Master in Chess Composition, two-time World Champion in Composition of Chess Studies, wrote: "Vazha Neidze was the first referee who had elaborated and brought into practice the system of assessing chess etudes composition, the system which allowed to assess many different aspects of composition". Vazha Neidze was invited to judge on the "FIDE album" and the director of the Etudes section of the same Album.

In 1980, the permanent Commission of Chess Composition FIDE awarded Vazha Neidze with International Arbitrator in Chess Composition. Until 2006 he refereed many international competitions. Simultaneously, he kept working in chess composition and continued popularizing the field by publishing an article in national and international chess magazines.

Vazha Neidze - a geographer, a high-ranking scientist, international master and international arbiter in chess composition was also a great lover of classical music, an excellent connoisseur of the geography

and history of his hometown bibliophile. Dr Neidze was always supported by his wife (Fig. 3), Dr Zhanna Zonenashvili, who was by his side at home and work.

Dr Neidze had far-sighted, well-argued views on the future of the Institute of Geography, the development of geography as a science, and the fundamental spatial problems of the country.

His friends and colleagues will greatly miss his kindness, support, humorous appraisals, and optimism. Many of his ideas and scientific discoveries remain unpublished. He readily shared them with his peers and colleagues who consider implementing his ideas their moral obligation and honour of his memory.