

Chapter One: Introduction to Human Geography

While only 4% of Norway's land is arable, there is no malnutrition problem. Conversely, whereas 70% of Bangladesh's land is arable, it struggles with malnutrition. Meanwhile, in Kenya where malnutrition is also a problem, the best land of the country is used to grow coffee for Western consumers. Even if the land were used for food, without the currency gained by coffee exports, many Kenyans would not be able to afford the food that was grown there. Overall, 1/6 of the world's population is seriously malnourished.

Geographers use **fieldwork**, or going out in the field to observe how peoples' actions and reactions differ across different areas.

Goals of the class:

- 1) See multitude interconnections in our world;
- 2) Recognize the patterns of human geographic phenomena;
- 3) Understand the uniqueness of place;
- 4) Ask and answer geographic questions.

What is Human Geography?

Human Geography: Study of how people make places, how we organize space and society, how we interact with each other in places and across space, and how we make sense of others and ourselves in our locality, region, and world.

Even though we as a world are more interconnected than ever, we are still a diverse hodgepodge of different cultures. We are interconnected thanks to **globalization**, or the increasing interaction and interdependence regardless of borders. This interaction leads to an uneven distribution of outcomes and benefits. It also has impacts locally, regionally, nationally, and internationally.

What are Geographic Questions?

Human Geography and **physical geography**, or the study of physical phenomena on Earth, combine to create the central question of geography, which is often described as the 'why of where': Why do certain things happen in certain places and how do those occurrences affect the people living there?

In thinking of these questions, one must think in a **spatial** way, or considering how places and phenomena are laid out, organized, and arranged on the Earth. Mapping the **spatial distribution** of a phenomena is the first step to understanding it. The mapping allows for **patterns** to be seen.

An example of this is the mapping of the cholera outbreak in London. **Medical geography** is the mapping of disease distribution. When the cholera **pandemic**, or worldwide outbreak took place in 1854, Dr. Snow used mapping to analyze the distribution of cases. He was able to use that data to create a solution. Pandemics are different from **epidemics**, or a regional outbreak of a disease.

Five Themes of Geography:

- 1) **Location**, or how the geographical position of people and things affects what happens and why. An example: San Francisco arose where it did because the bay it sits on is an excellent place for ships engaged in Asian trade to dock safely.
- 2) **Human-environment interaction**, or the relationship between humans and the physical world. An example would be the effects of the Army Corps of Engineers altering rivers; farmers might be hurt but more land would be available for real estate developers.
- 3) **Region**, or how certain phenomena are concentrated in particular areas.
- 4) **Place, or sense of place**, are the history and experiences that are unique to a particular area and affect how people perceive a particular area. This **perception of place**, or how people perceive a particular area, can have an effect as well whether this perceptions are grounded in reality or not. For example, businesses might not want to move to Appalachia because of the perception that it is inhabited by backward, poor, people.
5. **Movement**, or the mobility of people, goods, and ideas across the surface of the Earth. **Spatial interaction** between places depends on **distance** between places, **accessibility** of places, and communication **connectivity** among places.

Landscape, or the material character of a place, including the natural features, human structures, and anything else giving a place a particular form. This can also include **cultural landscape**, the visible imprint of human activity on the landscape. This cultural landscape can be further influenced by **sequent occupance**, or the effect that successive groups occupying an area can leave a permanent imprint. For example, New Orleans was founded by the French, then occupied by African slaves, then controlled by European Americans. Thus, the culture of New Orleans contains a mixture of these influences.

Why do Geographers Use Maps and What do Maps Tell Us?

Cartography is the art/science of making maps. **Reference maps** show locations of places and geographic features. **Thematic maps** tell stories such as the movement of a geographic phenomenon.

Absolute location is the location of a place based on a reference point such as latitude or longitude.

Relative location is a more general description, describing location in relation to human or physical location. For example, Nashville might be described as being located in the 'Bible Belt'. **Absolute locations do not change but relative locations do.** For example, Nashville will remain in the same absolute location. But as religion plays less of a role in American society than in the past, the description of Bible Belt might vanish.

Maps are generated using **geographic information systems**, which are various technological methods used to compile and compare data. These systems help the geographer see patterns and relationships.

Why are Geographers Concerned with Scale and Connectedness?

Scale can have two meanings in geography. First is the distance on a map compared to the distance on the Earth. Second is the territorial extent of something. The second one is the more important in geography. For example, a world map shows that the United States is a wealthy country. But a map created on a national scale shows that parts of the US are poor such as Mississippi. But then a state map of Mississippi might show that Oxford, Mississippi is really quite prosperous.

Re-scale is the taking of an issue on one scale, such as the problems of a local community, and appealing to the larger scale community. An example would be South Africans protesting apartheid in their country were able to appeal to the world community and get its leverage to force an end to apartheid. **Jumping scale** is a related term, in that it takes an idea from one area, usually America or Europe, and spreads it across the globe; however, due to intellectual property laws, the people in other areas are limited in their right to use the property.

Region is an area that shares similar characteristics. To identify any region, one must establish criteria for it.

A **formal region** is an area marked by visible uniformity. These uniformities can be physical in nature such as low rainfall, or a cultural trait such as language. For example, the area of Europe in which 90 percent of the people speak French could be seen as a formal region. This formal region can change if we rescale; for example, if we look worldwide, we would see that French speaking regions in Africa would create a larger formal French region.

A **functional region** is the product of interactions, or movement of various kinds. The mid-state region of Tennessee is a functional region. Even though it revolves around Davidson County, this region includes many surrounding counties as well. Workers and shoppers commute into town from those counties to provide services to Nashville businesses, and Nashville provides employment, healthcare, shopping and entertainment resources for those surrounding areas.

A **perceptual (or vernacular) region** is a region created in the minds of people based on impressions and images of that region. An example is the American South. There is no fixed boundary of the 'South', but people feel they are in the South when they start to see things they associate as being unique to the area, whether it be businesses unique to the South such as Krystal, snake-handling churches, styles of houses, etc. The perceptual region can change based on changing perceptions over time.

Culture refers to not only the music, literature, and arts of a society but also to modes of dress, food preferences, architecture, systems of government, religion, etc.

Cultural trait is a single attribute of a culture. For example, a yarmulke or skullcap would be a cultural trait of the Jewish faith.

Cultural complex is where different culture groups may have the same trait, but that trait has a different meaning or influence depending on the culture. For example, cattle are important to both Hindu and American

culture, but in Hindu culture the cattle are not to be eaten whereas in American culture they are central to American cooking.

Cultural hearth is the area in which a cultural trait develops and from which it spreads. For example, the culture of Islam originated in and around Mecca, but has since spread all over the world. **Independent invention** is when a trait has many hearths that developed independent of each other over hundreds or thousands of years. For example, American jazz music is a combination of English music, African music, and Jewish music.

Cultural Diffusion is the dissemination or spread of an idea or innovation from its hearth (source area) to other places. Whether diffusion of a cultural trait occurs depends, in part, on time and distance from the hearth. The longer it takes for a trait to travel to a new area, the less likely it is to be accepted by the people there. This is known as **time-distance decay**. **Cultural barriers** can interfere with diffusion as well. For example, the cultural trait of using contraceptives would have difficulty in a Catholic region, and the cultural trait of bacon and eggs would not fly in a Muslim region. There are two broad categories of diffusion:

Expansion diffusion is when an idea develops in a hearth and remains strong while it spreads outward. The creators of the idea stay where they are while the idea moves outward. Islam is a good example of this. There are three forms of expansion diffusion:

Contagious diffusion is where nearly all adjacent individuals are affected (like a contagious disease, hence the name). Again, Islam is an example of this.

Hierarchical diffusion occurs in a more diffused, hit or miss pattern. Trends such as vegetarianism might be like this, going from its hearth to larger cities, bypassing rural areas.

Stimulus diffusion occurs when an idea cannot be readily adopted by a population due to inconvenience or taboo. However, the idea influences a similar takeoff on the idea. An example would be fast food; hamburgers are taboo in India due to reverence of sacred cows, but India has since embraced McDonald's and its vegetarian/soy burgers.

Relocation diffusion occurs when the individuals that actually created the idea or innovation move and carry it with them. This occurs usually through migration. If enough people move, the customs may fade at the hearth while gaining strength in the new areas. The Puritan migration from Europe to New England in the early 17th century would be an example of this; Puritanism died out in Europe but thrived here for fifty more years.

What are Geographic Concepts, and How are they Used in Answering Geographic Questions?

Geographers use fieldwork, remote sensing, GIS, GPS, and other techniques to explore linkages among people and places. But what geographers don't use is...

Environmental determinism, which is the idea that human behavior, individually and collectively, is strongly affected by, or even controlled by, the physical environment. For example, one geographer believed that the northward movement of **isotherms**, or lines connecting points of equal temperature values, were the key factor in explaining why northern European nations were more powerful than southern European or African nations.

Possibilism has emerged as a counterargument to environmental determinism. It states that the natural environment merely serves to limit the range of choices available to a culture. Even this idea is suspect, because there are cultures who have thrived in spite of the restrictions of their surrounding environment.

What we have today is **cultural ecology** (an area of inquiry concerned with culture as a system of adaptation to environment) and **political ecology** (an area of inquiry fundamentally concerned with the environmental consequences of dominant political-economic arrangements and understandings). In other words, today we believe that human society is sufficiently diverse and human will too powerful to be a mere reflection of the whims of nature that are imposed on us. We must consider culture, politics, and economy—created by humans—if we want to correctly understand geographical ideas.

What fields constitute careers in Human Geography? location analyst, urban planner, diplomat, remote sensing analyst, geographic information scientist, area specialist, travel consultant, political analyst, intelligence officer, cartographer, educator, soil scientist, transportation planner, park ranger, or environmental consultant!

