

Babies DVD 1193



Painting by Helicopter Tjungurrayi depicting the Great Sandy Desert south of Balgo, Western Australia. (Wangkurtu Helicopter Tjungurrayi, copyright Warlayirti Artists.)

Cultural Geography: An Introduction

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Most of us are born geographers. We are curious about the distinctive character of places and peoples. We think in terms of territory and space. Take a look outside your window right now. The houses and commercial buildings, streets and highways, gardens and lawns all tell us something interesting and profound about who we are as a culture. If you travel down the road or on a jet to another region or country, the view outside your window will change, sometimes subtly, sometimes drastically. Our geographical imagination will push us to look and think and begin to make sense of what is going on in these different places, environments, and landscapes. It is this curiosity about the world—about how and why it is structured the way it is, what it means, and how we have changed it and continue to change it—that is at the heart of human geography. You are already geographers; we hope that our book will make you better ones.

If every place on Earth were identical, we would not have geography, but each is unique. Every place, however, shares characteristics with other places. Geographers use the concept of *region* as a grouping of similar places or places with similar characteristics. The existence of different regions endows the Earth's surface with a mosaiclike quality. Geography as an academic discipline is an outgrowth of both our curiosity about lands and peoples other than our own and our need to come to grips with the place-centered element within our soul. When professional academic geographers consider the differences and similarities among places, they want to understand what they see. They do not find out exactly what variations exist among regions and places by describing them as precisely as possible. Then they decide what forces made these areas different or alike. Geographers ask *what? where? why? and how?*

Our natural geographical curiosity and intrinsic need for certainty were long ago reinforced by pragmatism, the practical motives of traders and empire builders who wanted information about the world for the purposes of commerce and conquest. This concern for the practical aspects of geography first arose thousands of years ago among the ancient Greeks, Romans, Mesopotamians, and Phoenicians, the greatest traders and empire builders of their times. They cataloged factual information about locations, places, and products. Indeed, **geography** is a Greek word meaning literally "to describe the Earth." Not content merely to chart and describe the world, these ancient geographers also began to ask questions about why cultures and environments differ from place to place, initiating the study of what we call geography.

Geography The study of spatial variations and of differences and similarities from one place to another in human and culture.

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FIGURE 1.1 Two traditional houses of worship. Geographers seek to learn how and why cultures differ, or are similar, from one place to another. Often the differences and similarities have a visual expression. (a) Rob Crandall/Stock Connection/Alamy; (b) Frans Lemmens/Alamy.)

WHAT IS CULTURAL GEOGRAPHY?

As its name implies, *cultural geography* forms one part of the discipline of geography, complementing physical geography, the part of the discipline that deals with the natural environment. To understand the scope of cultural geography, we must first agree on the meaning of *culture*.

Many definitions of culture exist, some broad and some narrow. We might best define **culture** as learned collective human behavior, as opposed to instinctive, or inborn, behavior.

These learned traits form a way of life held in common by a group of people. Learned similarities in speech, behavior, ideology, livelihood, technology, value system, and society bind people together. Culture involves a communication system of acquired beliefs, memories, perceptions, traditions, and attitudes that serve to supplement and channel instinctive behavior. In short, as geographer Yi-Fu Tuan has said, culture is the "local, customary way of doing things; geographers write about ways of life."

A particular culture is not a static, fixed phenomenon, and it does not always govern its members. Rather, as geographers Kay Anderson and Fay Gale put it, "culture is a *process* in which people are actively engaged." Individual members can and do change a culture, which means that ways of life constantly change and that tensions between opposing views are usually present. Cultures are never internally homogeneous because individual humans never think or behave in exactly the same manner.

culture A total way of life held in common by a group of people, including such learned features as speech, ideology, behavior, livelihood, technology, and government; or the local, customary way of doing things—a way of life; an ever-changing process in which a group is actively engaged; a dynamic mix of symbols, beliefs, speech, and practices.



(b)

THINKING GEOGRAPHICALLY In what ways are these two structures—one a Catholic church in Honduras (a) and the other a Buddhist temple in Laos (b)—alike and different?

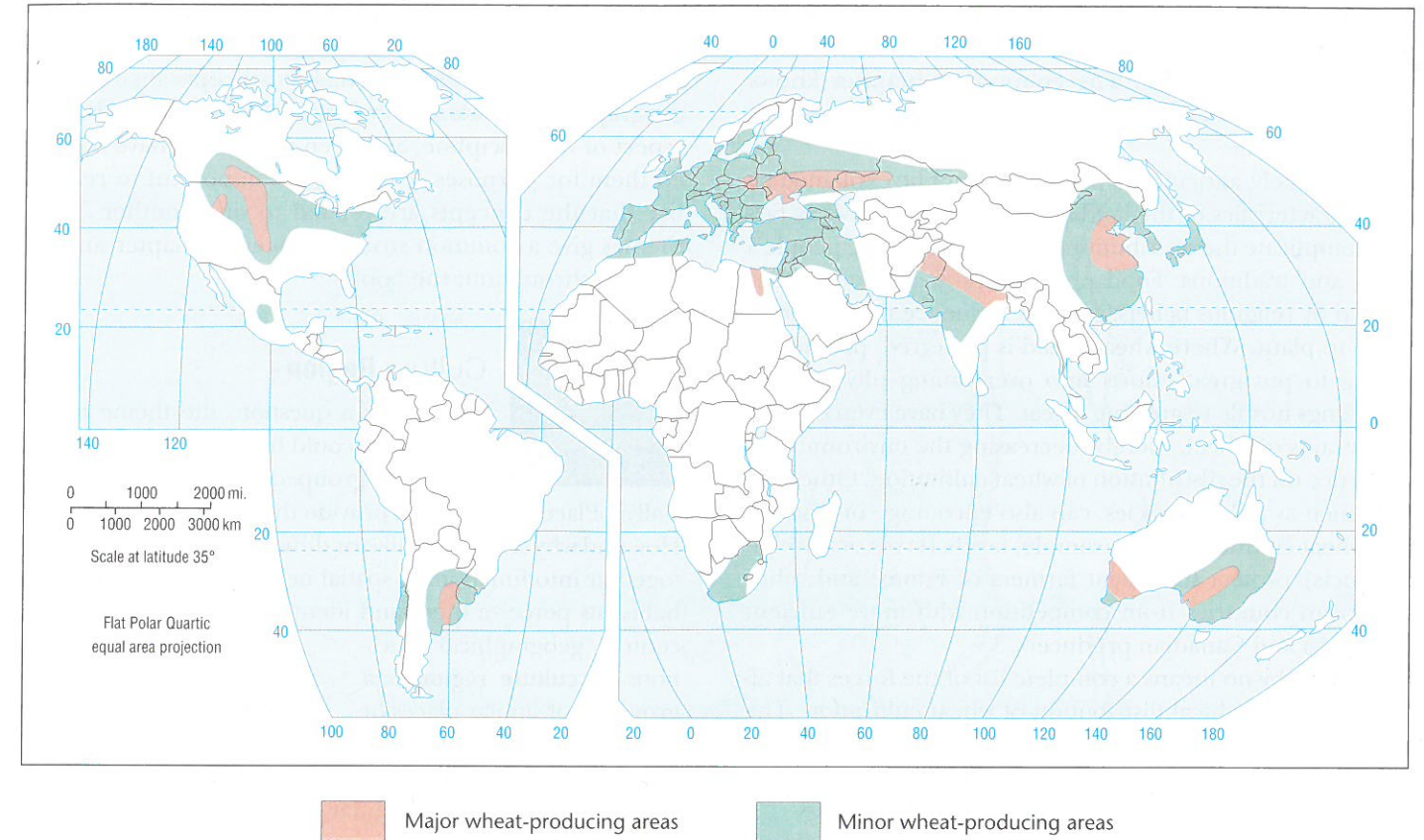


FIGURE 1.2 Areas of wheat production in the world today. These regions are based on a single trait: the importance of wheat in the agricultural system. This map tells us what and where. It raises the question of why.

THINKING GEOGRAPHICALLY What causal forces might be at work to produce this geographical distribution of wheat farming?

Cultural geography, then, is the study of spatial variations among cultural groups and the spatial functioning of society.

cultural geography The study of spatial variations among cultural groups and the spatial functioning of society.

phenomena vary or remain constant from one place to another and on explaining how humans function spatially (Figure 1.1). Cultural geography is, at heart, a celebration of human diversity, or as the Russian ethnographer Leo Gumilev wrote, "the study of differences among peoples."

In seeking explanations for cultural diversity and place identity, geographers consider a wide array of factors that

physical environment All aspects of the natural physical surroundings, such as climate, terrain, soils, vegetation, and wildlife.

cause this diversity. Some of these involve the **physical environment**: terrain, climate, natural vegetation, wildlife, variations in soil, and the pattern of land and water. Because we cannot understand a culture removed from its physical setting, human geography offers not only a spatial perspective but also an ecological one.

Many complex forces are at work on cultural phenomena, and all of them are interconnected in very

complicated ways. The complexity of the forces that affect culture can be illustrated by an example drawn from agricultural geography: the distribution of wheat cultivation in the world. If you look at Figure 1.2, you can see major areas of wheat cultivation in Australia but not in Africa, in the United States but not in Chile, in China but not in Southeast Asia. Why does this spatial pattern exist? Partly it results from environmental factors such as climate, terrain, and soils. Some regions have always been too dry for wheat cultivation. The land in others is too steep or infertile. Indeed, there is a strong correlation between wheat cultivation and midlatitude climates, level terrain, and good soil.

Still, we should not place exclusive importance on such physical factors. People can modify the effects of climate through irrigation; the use of hothouses; or the development of new, specialized strains of wheat. They can conquer slopes by terracing, and they can make poor soils productive with fertilization. For example, farmers in mountainous parts of Greece traditionally wrested an annual harvest of wheat from tiny terraced plots where soil had been trapped behind hand-built stone retaining walls. Even in the United States, environmental factors alone cannot explain the fact that major wheat cultivation is

concentrated in the semiarid Great Plains, some distance from states such as Ohio and Illinois, where the climate for growing wheat is better. The cultural geographer knows that wheat has to survive in a cultural environment as well as a physical one.

Ultimately, agricultural patterns cannot be explained by characteristics of the land and climate alone. Many factors complicate the distribution of wheat, including people's tastes and traditions. Food preferences and taboos, often linked by religious beliefs, strongly influence the choice of crops to plant. Where wheat bread is preferred, people are likely to put great efforts into overcoming physical surroundings hostile to growing wheat. They have even created new strains of wheat, thereby decreasing the environment's influence on the distribution of wheat cultivation. Other factors, such as public policies, can also encourage or discourage wheat cultivation. For example, tariffs (taxes on foreign goods) protect the wheat farmers of France and other European countries from competition with more efficient American and Canadian producers.

This is by no means a complete list of the forces that affect the geographical distribution of wheat cultivation. The distribution of all cultural elements is a result of the constant interplay of diverse factors. Cultural geography is the discipline that seeks such explanations and understandings.

THEMES IN CULTURAL GEOGRAPHY

The study of cultures is organized around five geographical concepts or themes:

- Culture region
- Cultural diffusion
- Cultural ecology
- Cultural interaction
- Cultural landscape

FIGURE 1.3 An Inuit hunter with his dogsled team. Various facets of a formal culture region can be seen here, including the clothing, the use of dogsleds as transportation, and hunting as a livelihood system. (Bryan & Alexander/Arctic Photo.)

THINKING GEOGRAPHICALLY What evidence suggests changes in this region?



We use these themes to organize the diversity of issues that confront cultural geography and have selected them because they represent the major concepts that cultural geographers discuss. Each of them stresses one particular aspect of the discipline, and even though we have separated them for purposes of clarity, it is important to remember that the concepts are related to one another. These themes give a common structure to each chapter and are stressed throughout the book.



Culture Region

Phrased as a question, the theme of culture region could be "How are people and their traits grouped or arranged geographically?" Places and regions provide the essence of geography. How and why are places alike or different? How do they mesh together into functioning spatial networks? How do their inhabitants perceive them and identify with them? These are central geographical questions. A **culture region** is a grouping of similar places or the functional union of places to form a spatial unit.

culture region A geographical unit based on characteristics and functions of culture.

Maps provide an essential tool for describing and revealing culture regions. If, as is often said, one picture is worth a thousand words, then a well-prepared map is worth at least 10,000 words to the geographer. No description in words can rival a map's revealing force. Maps are valuable tools particularly because they so concisely portray spatial patterns in culture.

Geographers recognize three types of regions: formal, functional, and vernacular.

Formal Culture Regions A **formal culture region** is an area inhabited by people who have one or more traits in common, such as language, religion, or a system of livelihood. It is an area, therefore, that is relatively homogeneous with regard to one or more cultural traits. Geographers use this concept to map spatial differences throughout the world. For example, an Arabic-language formal region can be drawn on a map of languages and would include the areas where Arabic is spoken, rather than, say, English or Hindi or Mandarin. Similarly, a wheat-farming formal region would include the parts of the world where wheat is a major crop (look again at Figure 1.2).

formal culture region A cultural region inhabited by people who have one or more cultural traits in common.

The examples of Arabic speech and of wheat cultivation represent the concept of formal culture region at its simplest level. Each is based on a single cultural trait. More commonly, formal culture regions depend on multiple related traits (**Figure 1.3**). Thus, an Inuit (Eskimo) culture

region might be based on language, religion, economy, social organization, and type of dwellings. The region would reflect the spatial distribution of these five Inuit cultural traits. Districts in which all five of these traits are present

would be part of the culture region. Similarly, Europe can be subdivided into several multitrail regions (**Figure 1.4**).

Formal culture regions are the geographer's somewhat arbitrary creations. No two cultural traits have the same

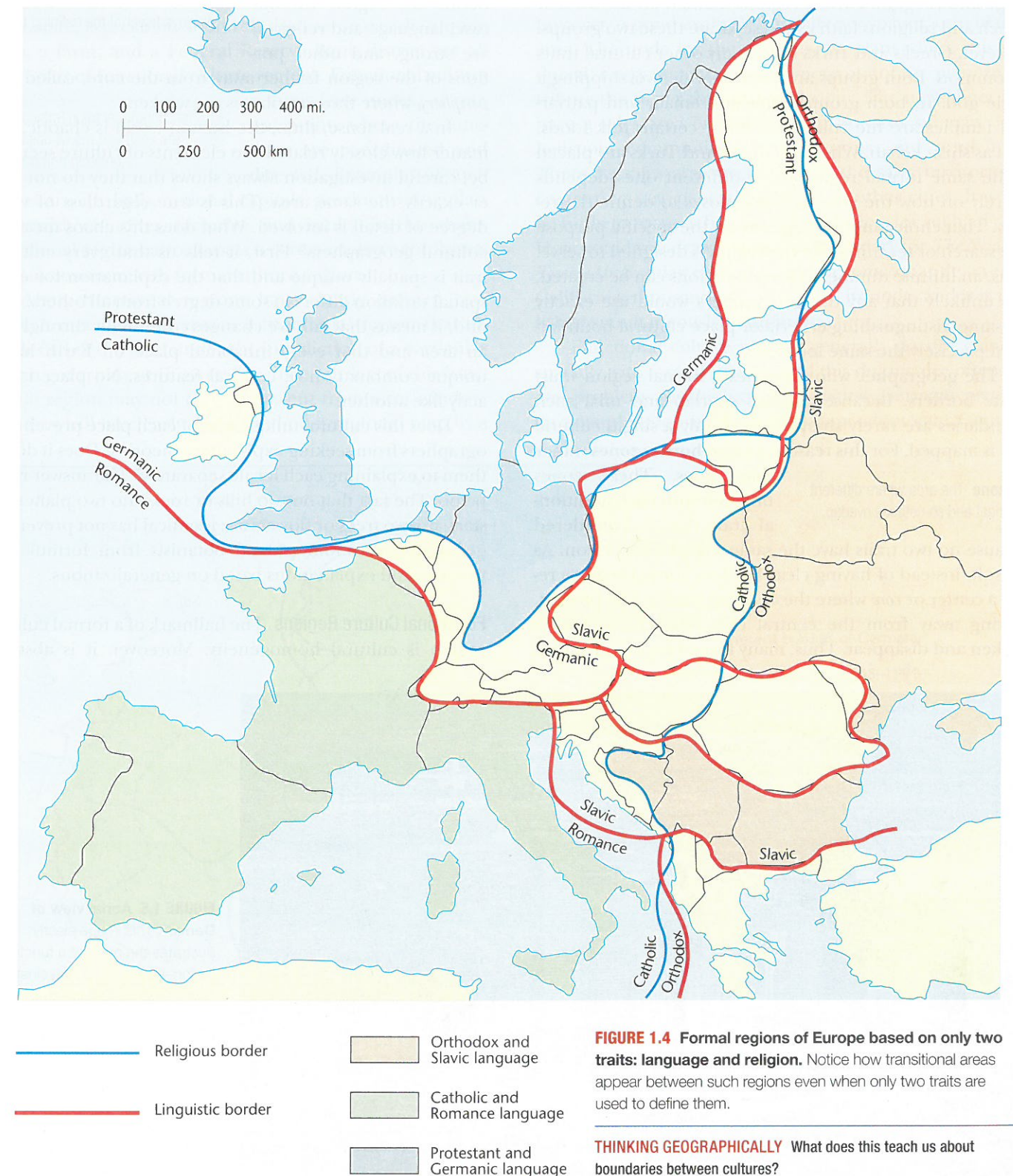


FIGURE 1.4 Formal regions of Europe based on only two traits: language and religion. Notice how transitional areas appear between such regions even when only two traits are used to define them.

THINKING GEOGRAPHICALLY What does this teach us about boundaries between cultures?

tribution, and the territorial extent of a culture region depends on what and how many defining traits are used (Figure 1.4). Why *five* Inuit traits, not four or six? Why *foods* instead of (or in addition to) dwelling types? Consider, for example, Greeks and Turks, who differ in language and religion. Formal regions defined on the basis of each and religious faith would separate these two groups. However, Greeks and Turks hold many other cultural traits in common. Both groups are monotheistic, worshipping a single god. In both groups, male supremacy and patriarchal families are the rule. Both enjoy certain folk foods, such as shish kebab. Whether Greeks and Turks are placed in the same formal region or in different ones depends entirely on how the geographer chooses to define the region. That choice in turn depends on the specific purpose of research or teaching that the region is designed to serve. In this sense, an infinite number of formal regions can be created. It is unlikely that any two geographers would use exactly the same distinguishing criteria or place cultural boundaries in precisely the same location.

The geographer who identifies a formal region must draw its borders. Because cultures overlap and mix, such boundaries are rarely sharp, even if only a single cultural trait is mapped. For this reason, we find **border zones** rather than lines. These zones broaden with each additional trait that is considered. Because no two traits have the same spatial distribution. As a result, instead of having clear borders, formal regions remain a center or *core* where the defining traits are all present. Moving away from the central core, the characteristics weaken and disappear. Thus, many formal regions display a

core-periphery pattern in which the region can be divided into two sections, one near the center, where the particular attributes that define the region (in this case, language and religion) are strong, and other portions of the region farther away from the core, called the *periphery*, where those attributes are weaker.

In a real sense, then, the human world is chaotic. No matter how closely related two elements of culture seem to be, careful investigation always shows that they do not cover exactly the same area. This is true regardless of what degree of detail is involved. What does this chaos mean to cultural geographers? First, it tells us that every cultural trait is spatially unique and that the explanation for each spatial variation differs in some degree from all others. Second, it means that culture changes continually throughout an area and that every inhabited place on Earth has a unique combination of cultural features. No place is exactly like another.

Does this cultural uniqueness of each place prevent geographers from seeking explanatory theories? Does it doom them to explaining each locale separately? The answer must be no. The fact that no two hills or rocks, no two planets or stars, no two trees or flowers are identical has not prevented geologists, astronomers, and botanists from formulating theories and explanations based on generalizations.

Functional Culture Regions The hallmark of a formal culture region is cultural homogeneity. Moreover, it is abstract

core-periphery A concept based on the tendency of both formal and functional culture regions to consist of a core, in which defining traits are purest or functions are headquartered, and a periphery that is tributary and displays fewer of the defining traits.

functional culture region A cultural area that functions as a unit politically, socially, or economically.

it is an area that has been organized to function politically, socially, or economically as one unit. A city, an independent state, a precinct, a church diocese or parish, a trade area, a farm, and a Federal Reserve Bank district are all examples of functional culture regions. Functional culture

node A central point in a functional culture region where functions are coordinated and directed.

regions have **nodes**, or central points where the functions are coordinated and directed. Examples of such nodes are city halls, national capitals, precinct voting places, parish churches, factories, and banks. In this sense, functional regions also possess a core-periphery configuration in common with formal culture regions.

Many functional regions have clearly defined borders. A metropolitan area is a functional region that includes all of the land under the jurisdiction of a particular urban government (Figure 1.5). The borders of this functional region may not be so apparent from a car window, but they will be clearly delineated on a regional map by a

rather than concrete. By contrast, a **functional culture region** need not be culturally homogeneous; instead,

regions have **nodes**, or central points where the functions are coordinated and directed. Examples of such

line distinguishing one jurisdiction from another. Similarly, each state in the United States and each Canadian province is a functional region, coordinated and directed from a capital, with government control extended over a fixed area with clearly defined borders.

Not all functional regions have fixed, precise borders, however. A good example is a daily newspaper's circulation area. The node for the paper is the plant where it is produced. Every morning, trucks move out of the plant to distribute the paper throughout the city. The newspaper may have a sales area extending into the city's suburbs, local bedroom communities, nearby towns, and rural areas. There its sales area overlaps with the sales territories of competing newspapers published in other cities. It would be futile to try to define exclusive borders for such an area. How would you draw a sales area boundary for *The New York Times*? Its Sunday edition is sold in some quantity even in California, thousands of miles from its node, and it is published simultaneously in different cities.

Functional culture regions generally do not coincide spatially with formal regions, and this disjuncture often creates problems for the functional region. Germany provides an example (Figure 1.6). As an independent state, Germany



FIGURE 1.5 Aerial view of Denver. This image clearly illustrates the node of a functional region—here, the dense cluster of commercial buildings—that coordinates activities throughout the area that surrounds it. (Jim Wark/Airphoto.)

THINKING GEOGRAPHICALLY Can you identify the border of this functional region? Why or why not?

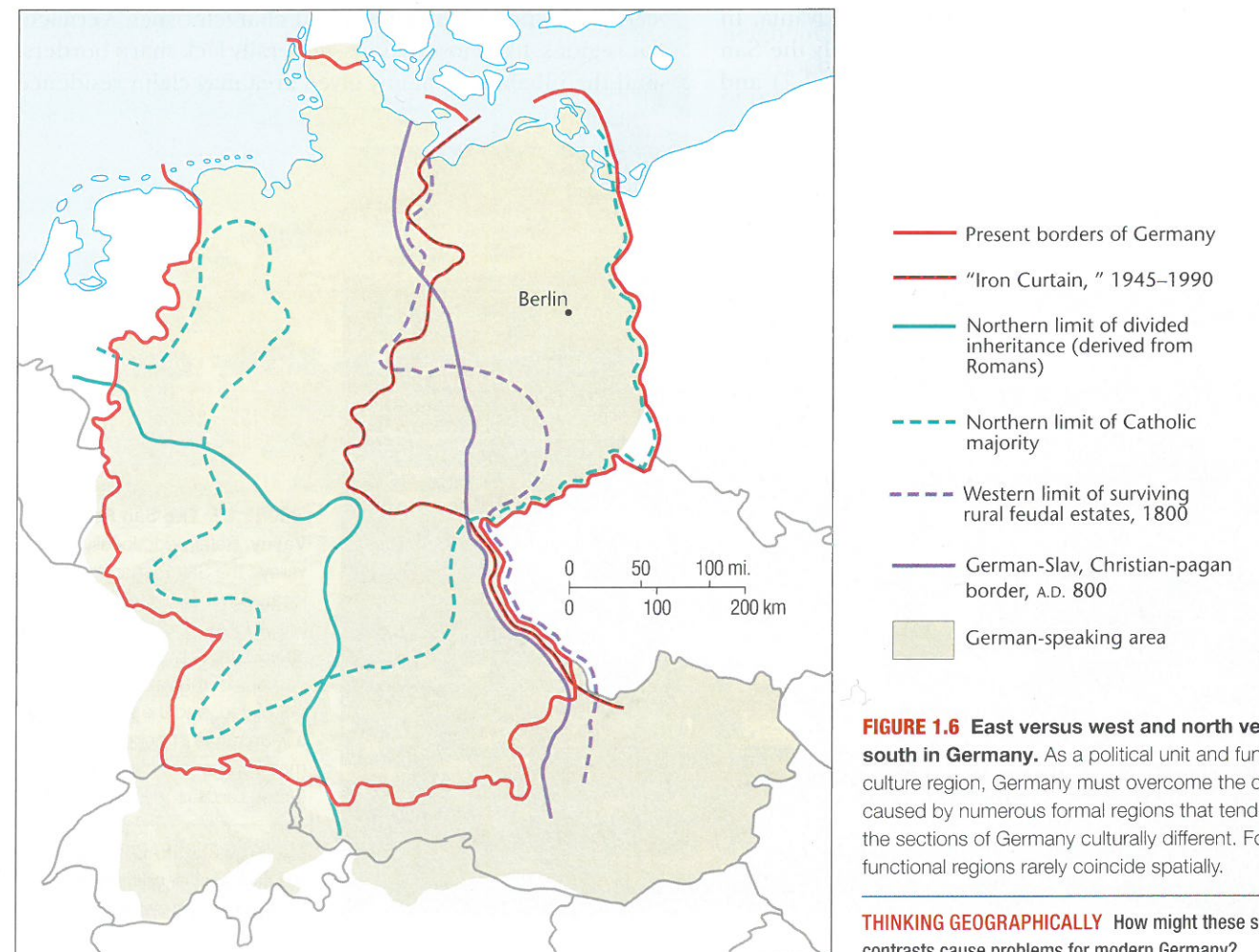


FIGURE 1.6 East versus west and north versus south in Germany. As a political unit and functional culture region, Germany must overcome the disruptions caused by numerous formal regions that tend to make the sections of Germany culturally different. Formal and functional regions rarely coincide spatially.

THINKING GEOGRAPHICALLY How might these sectional contrasts cause problems for modern Germany?

ns a functional region. Language provides a substantial s for political unity. However, the formal region of the man language extends beyond the political borders of many and includes part or all of eight other indepen- t states. More important, numerous formal regions have lers cutting through German territory. Some of these e endured for millennia, causing differences among hern, southern, eastern, and western Germans. These trasts make the functioning of the German state more cult and help explain why Germany has been politically mented more often than unified.

Vernacular Culture Regions A **vernacular culture region** is that is *perceived* to exist by its inhabitants, as evidenced by the widespread accep- tance and use of a special regional name. Some ver- nacular culture regions are based on physical environ- mental features. For exam- ple, there are many regions d simply “the valley.” Wikipedia lists more than 30 dif- it regions within the United States and Canada that eferred to as such, places as varied as the Sudbury Ba- n Ontario and the Lehigh Valley in Pennsylvania. In 1980s, “the valley” became synonymous with the San ando Valley in Southern California (**Figure 1.7**) and



FIGURE 1.7 The San Fernando Valley. Referred to locally as “the valley,” the San Fernando Valley is located in the northwestern area of Los Angeles. Despite its reputation as a white, suburban area, portions of the valley are densely populated, and the area is home to a wide range of peoples from many different backgrounds. (Robert Landau.)

THINKING GEOGRAPHICALLY Can you think of other examples of regions that are locally known as “the valley”?

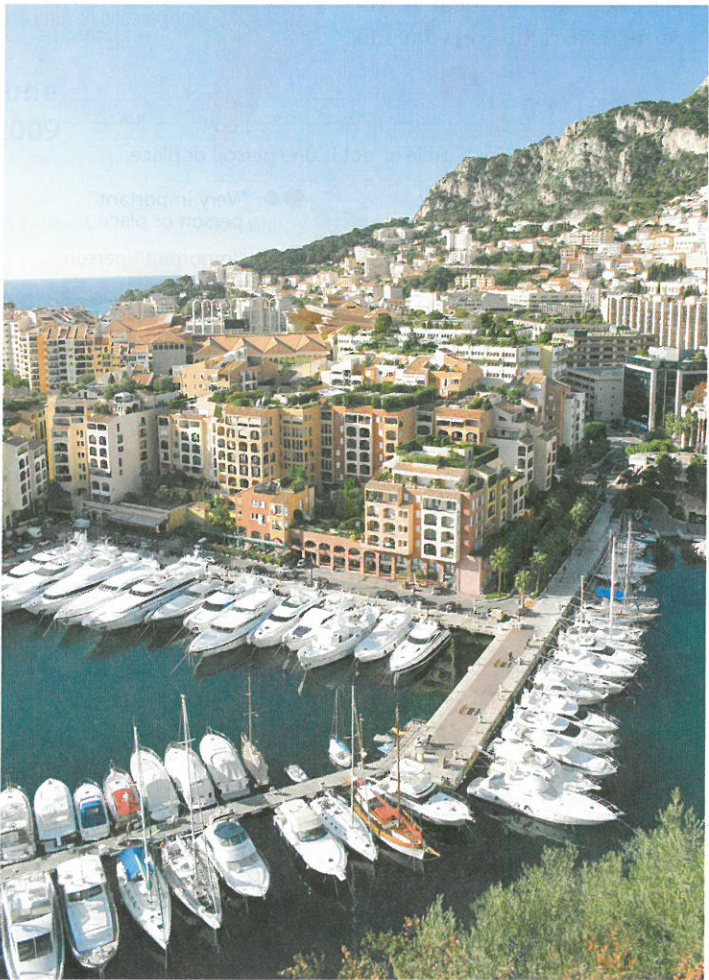
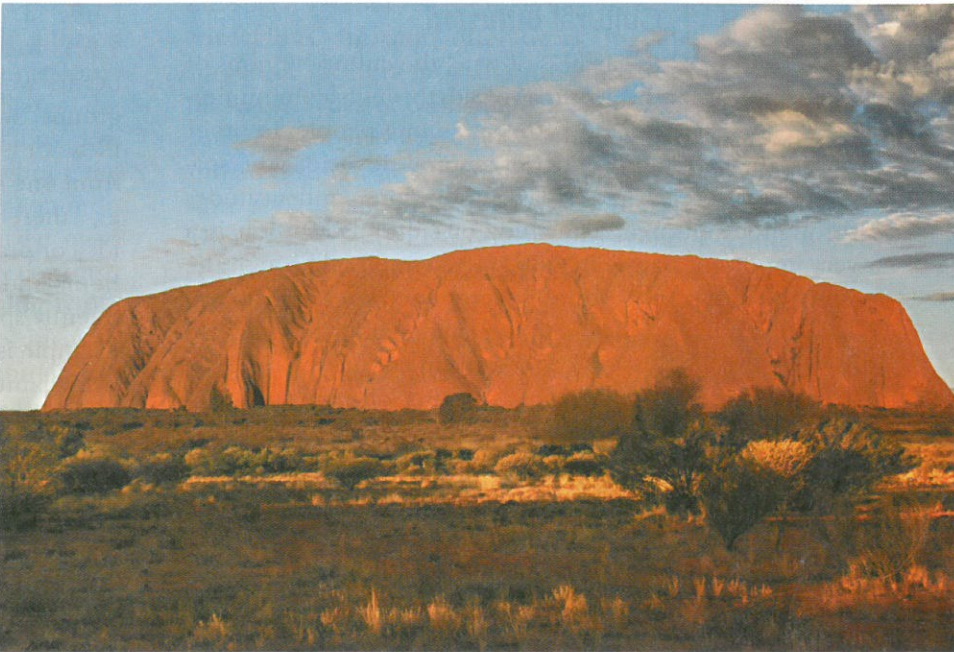
became associated with a type of landscape (suburban), a person (a white, teenage girl, called the “valley girl”), and a way of speaking (“Valspeak”).

Examples of vernacular regions based on physical environmental features can be found outside of the United States and Canada as well. One such example is the Outback in Australia. For most people, “the Outback” conjures images of a wild and rugged place dominated by rocky red soil, exotic wildlife, and the majestic *Uluru* (or Ayers Rock) (**Figure 1.8**). This vernacular region loosely corresponds to certain climate zones, soil types, and terrain features. However, like other vernacular regions, the Outback is based more on popular perception than on these physical characteristics. Images of the Outback as a frontier, created in fiction and films like *Crocodile Dundee*, have generated a host of pop culture phenomena including foods (for example, “shrimp on the barbie”), clothing styles, and even well-known phrases like “G’day, mate!” Another global example of a vernacular region is the Riviera on the sunny northwest coast of the Mediterranean Sea (**Figure 1.9**). Although this region corresponds loosely to a particular climatic zone, it is *imagined* by most people as a region of affluence featuring yachts, casinos, and royalty.

Other vernacular culture regions find their basis in economic, political, or historical characteristics. Vernacular regions, like most regions, generally lack sharp borders, and the inhabitants of any given area may claim residence

FIGURE 1.8 Uluru, or Ayers Rock, in Australia’s Northern Territory. This monolith was first named Ayers Rock in 1873 in honor of Sir Henry Ayers, the (then) Chief Secretary of South Australia. In 1993, it was renamed Uluru/Ayers Rock, incorporating a word from a local Aboriginal language, under a new dual-language naming policy adopted in Australia. (Neale Cousland/Dreamstime.com.)

THINKING GEOGRAPHICALLY Can you think of other vernacular regions based on physical environmental characteristics that are similar to the Outback in terms of their reputation for being a “rugged frontier”?



in more than one such region. They vary in scale from city neighborhoods to sizable parts of continents.

At a basic level, the vernacular culture region grows out of people’s sense of belonging and identification with a particular region. By contrast, many formal or functional culture regions lack this attribute and, as a result, are often far less meaningful for people. You’re more likely to hear people say, “we’re fighting to preserve ‘the valley’ from further urban development,” than to see people rally under the banner of “wheat-growing areas of the world!” Self-conscious regional identity can have major political and social ramifications.

Vernacular culture regions often lack the organization necessary for functional regions, although they may be centered on a single urban node, and they frequently do not display the cultural homogeneity that characterizes formal regions.

FIGURE 1.9 The principality of Monaco on the Mediterranean Riviera. Monaco is perceived by most people as a playground for Europe’s elite. Luxury yachts and opulent casinos dot the coastline, providing evidence of the “rich and famous” lifestyle defining this vernacular region. (Vladimir Melnik/Shutterstock.)

THINKING GEOGRAPHICALLY How do you think perceptions of the Riviera might differ between people who live or vacation there and people in the rest of the world?



Cultural Diffusion

Regardless of type, the culture regions of the world evolved through communication and contact among people. In other words, they are the product of **cultural diffusion**, the spatial spread of learned ideas, innovations, and attitudes throughout an area. The study of cultural diffusion is a very important theme in cultural geography. Through the study of diffusion, cultural geographers can begin to understand how spatial patterns in culture evolved.

Diffusion The spread of culture from the point of origin to other areas.

Independent invention A cultural innovation that is developed in two or more places by individuals or groups independently.

After all, any culture is the product of almost countless innovations that spread from their points of origin to cover a wider area. Some innovations occur only once, and geographers can sometimes trace a cultural element back to a single place of origin. In other cases, **independent invention** occurs: the same or a very similar innovation is separately developed at different places by different people.

Types of Diffusion Geographers, drawing heavily on the research of Torsten Hägerstrand, recognize several different

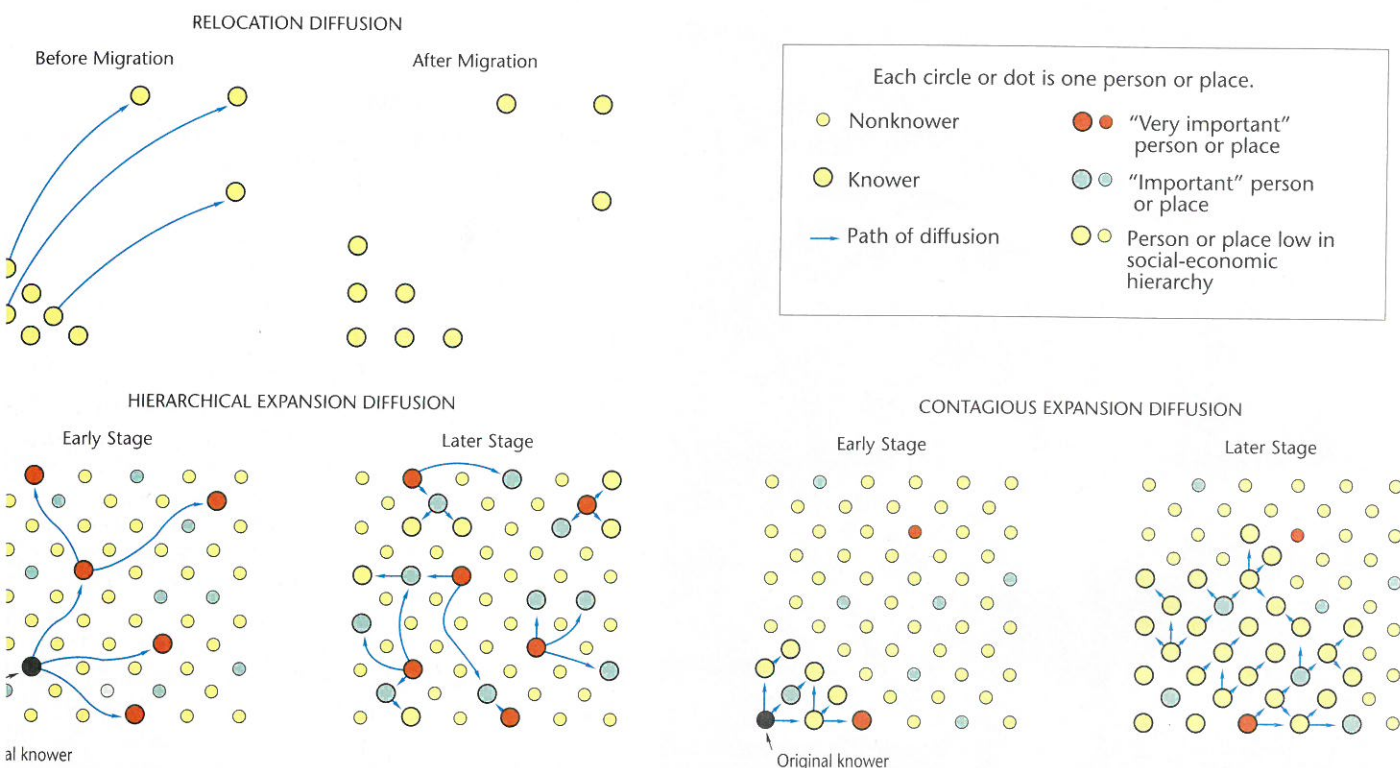
kinds of diffusion (**Figure 1.10**). **Relocation diffusion** occurs when individuals or groups with a particular idea or practice migrate from one location to another, thereby bringing the idea or practice to their new homeland. Religions frequently spread this way. An example is the migration of Christianity with European settlers who came to America. In **expansion diffusion**, ideas or practices spread throughout a population, from area to area, in a snowballing process, so that the total number of knowers or users and the areas of occurrence increase.

Expansion diffusion can be further divided into three subtypes. In **hierarchical diffusion**, ideas leapfrog from one important person to another or from one urban center to another, temporarily bypassing other persons or rural territories. We can see hierarchical diffusion at work in everyday life

relocation diffusion The spread of an innovation or other element of culture that occurs with the bodily relocation (migration) of the individual or group responsible for the innovation.

expansion diffusion The spread of innovations within an area in a snowballing process so that the total number of knowers or users becomes greater and the area of occurrence grows.

hierarchical diffusion A type of expansion diffusion in which innovations spread from one important person to another or from one urban center to another, temporarily bypassing other persons or rural areas.



E 1.10 Types of cultural diffusion. These diagrams are merely illustrative; in reality, spatial diffusion is far more complex. In hierarchical diffusion, different scales can be used so that, for example, the category "important person" could be replaced by "large city."

THINKING GEOGRAPHICALLY Why would the starting point for hierarchical diffusion frequently be a very important person and a large city at the same time?

by observing the acceptance of new modes of dress or foods. For example, sushi restaurants originally diffused from Japan in the 1970s very slowly because many people were reluctant to eat raw fish. In the United States, the first sushi restaurants appeared in the major cities Los Angeles and New York. Only gradually throughout the 1980s and 1990s did sushi eating become more common

contagious diffusion A type of expansion diffusion in which cultural innovation spreads by person-to-person contact, moving wavelike through an area and population without regard to social status.

in the less urbanized parts of the country. By contrast, **contagious diffusion** is the wavelike spread of ideas in the manner of a contagious disease, moving through-

out space without regard to hierarchies. Hierarchical and contagious diffusion often work together. The global spread of social networking provides an example of how these two types of diffusion can reinforce each other. As you can see in **Figure 1.11**, the use of Facebook had spread throughout much of the world by 2009. This diffusion took place first through a hierarchical process wherein the student inventors of Facebook granted access only to fellow students at Harvard University and to other universities in the Boston area. Access was then granted to other Ivy League universities that were hierarchically linked to Harvard. Soon, however, open access was granted and contagious diffusion processes took over. Interest in the site then spread through word of mouth to the rest of the United States and throughout the world.

Sometimes a specific trait is rejected but the underlying idea is accepted, resulting in **stimulus diffusion**.

stimulus diffusion A type of expansion diffusion in which a specific trait fails to spread but the underlying idea or concept is accepted.

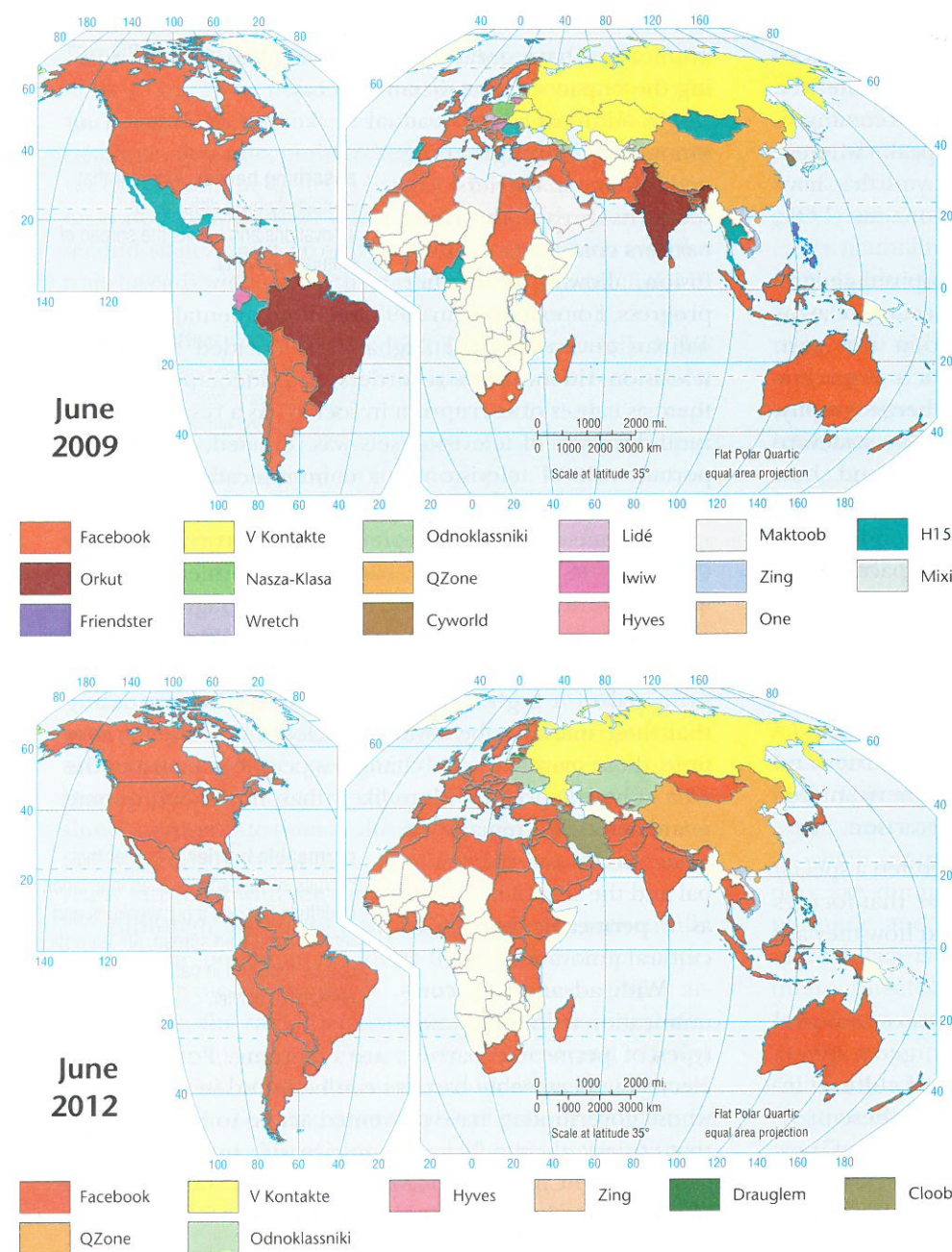


FIGURE 1.11 Dominant social networking site in countries with significant Internet penetration, June 2009 and 2011. By 2009, Facebook was the world's predominant social networking site. However, there were some populous countries whose Internet users still preferred other social networks. Between 2009 and 2011, Facebook use continued to diffuse, coming to dominate social networking in several countries that had previously been loyal to other social networking sites (including India, Mexico, Poland, Libya, and Portugal). (Source: Vincenzo Cosenza.)

THINKING GEOGRAPHICALLY Do you think that Facebook use will continue to diffuse and dominate globally in the future? Why or why not?

For example, early Siberian peoples domesticated reindeer only after exposure to the domesticated cattle raised by cultures to their south. The Siberians had no use for cattle, but the idea of domesticated herds appealed to them, and they began domesticating reindeer, an animal they had long hunted.

In recent decades, all types of cultural diffusion have been affected by advances in communication technology, especially the Internet. The Internet has dramatically changed the rate at which cultural information and ideas can be exchanged between people all over the world without in-person contact. For example, in an instant, a musician or band can share a video on YouTube; clothing and other trendy items can be purchased from far-off locations where new styles are emerging; and political ideas can be exchanged and debated on blogs read by people living under different forms of government. In addition to the Internet, an increase in cellular phone usage has expanded communication, resulting in the development of “text speak,” wherein people converse in a new language of acronyms that have even begun to be published in texting dictionaries (LOL, laughing out loud; TTYL, talk to you later).

These new electronic exchanges have inspired geographers to consider how cultural diffusion occurs today as compared to in the past.

cybergeography A branch of geography that studies the Internet as virtual place. Cybergeographers examine locations in cyberspace as sites of human interaction with structures that can be mapped.

In a new branch of geography called **cybergeography**, scholars study the structure of the Internet and how people interact on it. They examine how technology is changing cultural diffusion and map online spaces. Here are some examples of recent cybergeographic research:

- Steve Jones has examined how music is increasingly reaching people via the Internet.
- Sarah Holloway and Gill Valentine have conducted a study of British children’s use of the Internet and how these young people adopt “Americanized” trends and ideas as a result of this interaction.
- Eric Gordon in the United States has edited a special edition of the journal *Space and Culture* that focuses on virtual worlds, like Second Life, and how they aid cultural diffusion.

While cybergeographic research focuses on cultural diffusion since the advent of the Internet, geographers have long been concerned with the spread of cultural innovation and have devised theories to explain these processes. Geographers have described the spread of new ideas as being similar to throwing a rock into a pond and watching the spread of ripples. You can see the ripples

become gradually weaker as they move away from the point of impact. In the same way, diffusion was thought to become weaker as a cultural innovation moves away from its point of origin. Therefore, diffusion was thought to decrease with distance, with innovations usually being accepted most thoroughly in areas closest to their origin. Time was also considered a factor, because in the past innovations often took more time to diffuse the farther they spread from the origin. This general decrease of acceptance of cultural innovation with both increasing distance and time produced what geographers call **time-distance decay**. However, the Internet and other contemporary forms of mass communication have greatly accelerated diffusion, diminishing the impact of time-distance decay.

In addition to the gradual weakening or decay of an innovation through time and distance, barriers can retard its spread. **Absorbing barriers** completely halt diffusion, allowing no further progress. For example, in 1998, the fundamentalist Islamic Taliban government of Afghanistan decided to abolish television, videocassette recorders, and videotapes, viewing them as causes of corruption in society. As a result, the cultural diffusion of television sets was reversed, and the important role of television as a communication device to facilitate the spread of ideas was eliminated.

Extreme examples aside, few absorbing barriers exist in the world. More commonly, barriers are permeable, allowing part of the innovation wave to diffuse through but acting to weaken or retard the continued spread. When a school board objects to students with tattoos or body piercings, the principal of a high school may set limits by mandating that these markings be covered by clothing. However, over time, those mandates may change as people get used to the idea of body markings. More likely than not, though, some mandates will remain in place. In this way, the principal and the school board act as a **permeable barrier** to cultural innovations.

With advances in communication technology, new types of permeable barriers are emerging. For example, electronic permeable barriers can be found in some states whose governments have prevented access to Internet sites that criticize their policies. Countries with Internet censorship include China, Saudi Arabia, and Iran. In these (and other) countries, individuals’ Internet use is sometimes

time-distance decay The decrease in acceptance of a cultural innovation with increasing time and distance from its origin.

absorbing barrier A barrier that completely halts diffusion of innovations and blocks the spread of cultural elements.

permeable barrier A barrier that permits some aspects of an innovation to diffuse through it but weakens and retards continued spread. An innovation can be modified in passing through a permeable barrier.

monitored to prevent communications that the government believes may lead to social unrest or organized protest movements. Censorship and monitoring can be considered permeable barriers that restrict the spread of certain ideas while allowing other types of information to diffuse.

REFLECTING ON GEOGRAPHY

The Internet has made the diffusion of many forms of cultural change much more rapid and has diminished the effect of time-distance decay. Can you think of examples of time-distance decay continuing to operate in the Internet age?

Three Stages of Innovation Acceptance Acceptance of innovations at any given point in space passes through three distinct stages. In the first stage, acceptance takes place at a steady yet slow rate, perhaps because the innovation has not yet caught on, the benefits have not been adequately demonstrated, or a product is not readily available. During the second stage, rapid growth in acceptance occurs, and the trait spreads widely, as with a fashion style or dance fad. Of-

neighborhood effect Microscale diffusion in which acceptance of an innovation is most rapid in small clusters around an initial adopter.

ten diffusion on a microscale exhibits what is called the **neighborhood effect**, which means simply that acceptance is usually most rapid in small clusters around an initial adopter. Due to increasing Internet use, the neighborhood effect is now also being observed in cyberspace. Online neighborhoods function, in many ways, like those in physical space. In other words, people who participate in certain online groups or sites may also demonstrate a neighborhood effect wherein new ideas and cultural innovations are accepted first by a person administering a site, writing a blog, or acting in some other prominent role. From that point, the new ideas or practices are accepted by other people in these online communities. During the third stage of innovation, acceptance, growth shows a slower rate than in the second, perhaps because the fad is passing or because an area (physical or virtual) is already saturated with the innovation.

Although all places and communities hypothetically have equal potential to adopt a new idea or practice, diffusion typically produces a core-periphery spatial arrangement, the same pattern observed earlier in our discussion of regions (see Figure 1.4). Hägerstrand offered an explanation of how diffusion produces such a regional configuration. The distribution of innovations can be random, but the overlap of new ideas and traits as they diffuse through space and time is greatest toward the center of the region and least at the peripheries. As a result of this

overlap, more innovations are adopted in the center, or core, of the region.

In addition to the almost instant communication of ideas through the Internet and other digital media, we see many other examples of diffusion in today’s world. These include the rapid movement of goods from the place of production to the place of consumption and the seemingly nonstop movement of money around the globe through digital financial networks. These types of movements through space do not necessarily follow the pattern of core-periphery but instead create new and different types of patterns that are not yet fully studied or defined. Other types of diffusion, such as large-scale movements of people between different regions, can be best thought of as **migration** from one region or country

to another through particular routes. In today’s globalizing world, with better and faster communication and transportation technologies, many migrants more easily maintain ties to their homelands even after they have migrated, and some may move back and forth between their home countries and those to which they have migrated. These movements and maintenance of ties lead to a phenomenon known as **transnationalism**.

A Special Case of Diffusion: Globalization How and why are different cultures, economies, and societies linked around the world? Given all these new linkages, why are there so many differences between different groups of people in the world? The modern technological age, in which improved worldwide transportation and communications allow the instantaneous diffusion of ideas and innovations, has accelerated the phenomenon called **globalization**. This term refers to a world increasingly linked, in which international borders are diminished in importance and a worldwide marketplace is created. This interconnected world has been created from a set of factors: faster, cheaper, and more reliable transportation; the almost instantaneous communication that the Internet, cellular phones, and other media have allowed; and the creation of digital sources of information and media.

Thus, globalization in this sense is a rather recent phenomenon, dating from the late twentieth century. Yet we know that long before modern times, different countries

migration The large-scale movement of people between different regions of the world.

transnationalism A phenomenon in which immigrants maintain social and/or economic ties to their place of origin. Often, these relationships include visits “home” and the circular exchange of money and goods.

globalization The binding together of all the lands and peoples of the world into an integrated system driven by capitalistic free markets, in which cultural diffusion is rapid, independent states are weakened, and cultural homogenization is encouraged.

d different parts of the world were linked. For example, early medieval times overland trade routes connected Asia with other parts of Asia; the British East India Company maintained maritime trading routes between England and large portions of South Asia as early as the nineteenth century; and religious and political wars in Europe and the Middle East brought different peoples into direct contact with one another. Some geographers refer to such moments as *early global encounters* and suggest they are the background for contemporary globalization.

The increasingly linked economic, political, and cultural works around the world might lead many to believe that

different groups of people around the globe are becoming more and more alike. In some ways this is true, but actually these new global encounters have enabled an increasing recognition of the differences between groups of people, and some of those differences have been caused by globalization itself. Some groups of people have access to advanced technologies, more thorough health care, and education, whereas others do not. If we mapped certain indicators of human well-being on a global scale, such as life expectancy, literacy, and standard of living, we would find quite an uneven distribution. **Figure 1.12** shows us that different cultures around the world have different access to these types of resources.

uneven development The tendency for industry to develop in a core-periphery pattern, enriching the industrialized countries of the core and impoverishing the less-industrialized periphery. The term is also used to describe urban patterns in which suburban areas are enriched while the inner city is impoverished.

These differences are what geographers mean when they refer to *stages of development*. In Figure 1.12, you can see that some regions of the world have a fairly high Human Development Index (HDI) and some have a relatively low HDI. Scholars often

refer to these two types of regions as *developed* (relatively high HDI) and *developing* (relatively low HDI). This inequitable distribution of resources is referred to as **uneven development**.

ment. We will discuss development in much more detail in Chapters 3 and 9.

Culture, of course, is a key variable in global interactions and interconnections. In fact, as we have suggested, globalization is occurring through cultural media such as film, television, and the Internet (and particularly through social networking sites like Facebook and Twitter). These media provide channels that allow people to exchange information regarding trends in pop culture, product information, and changing lifestyles. In the case of the Internet, this exchange is virtually instantaneous. As a result, people's choices to follow trends or to adopt technology and

HUMAN DEVELOPMENT INDEX

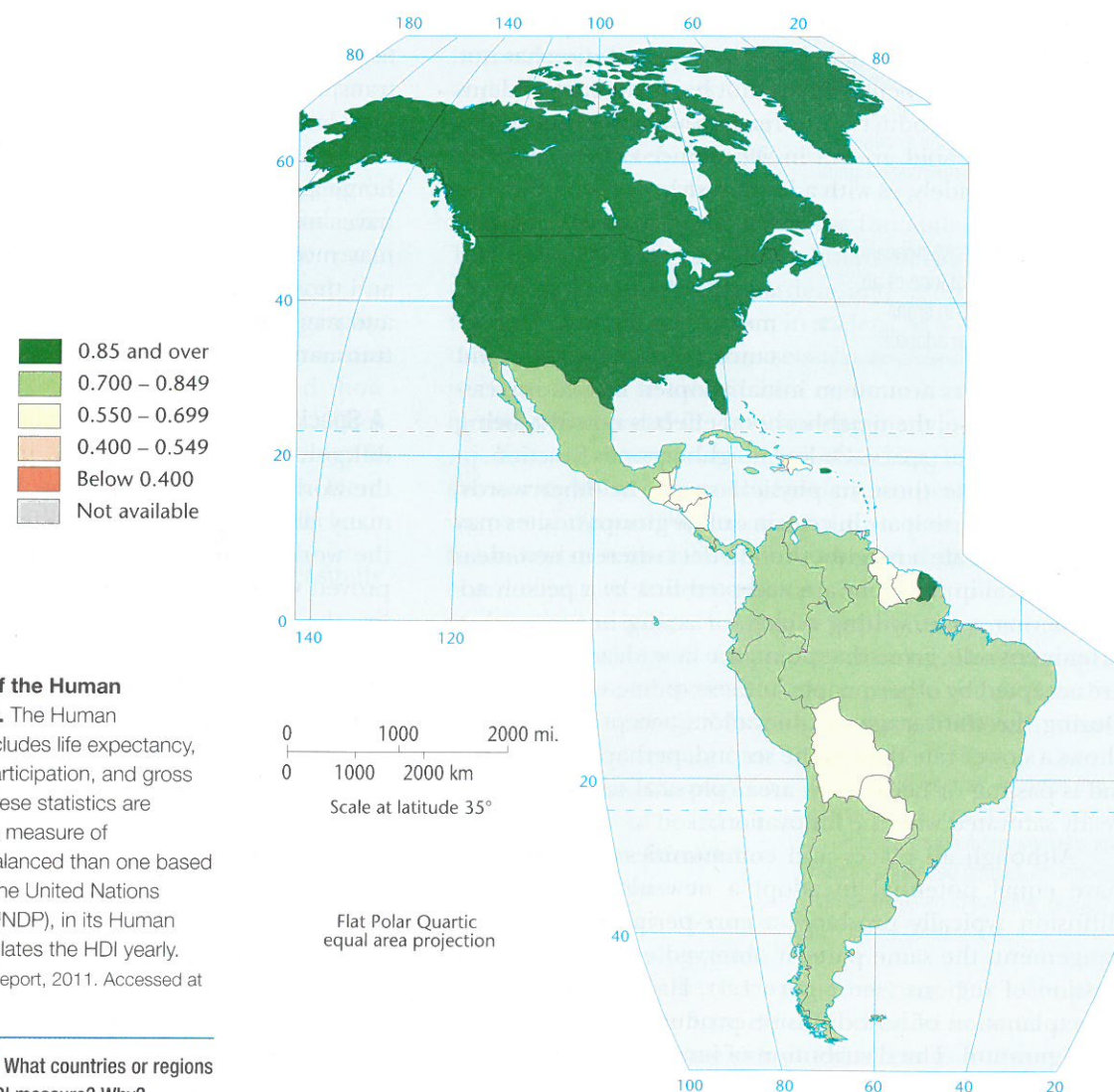
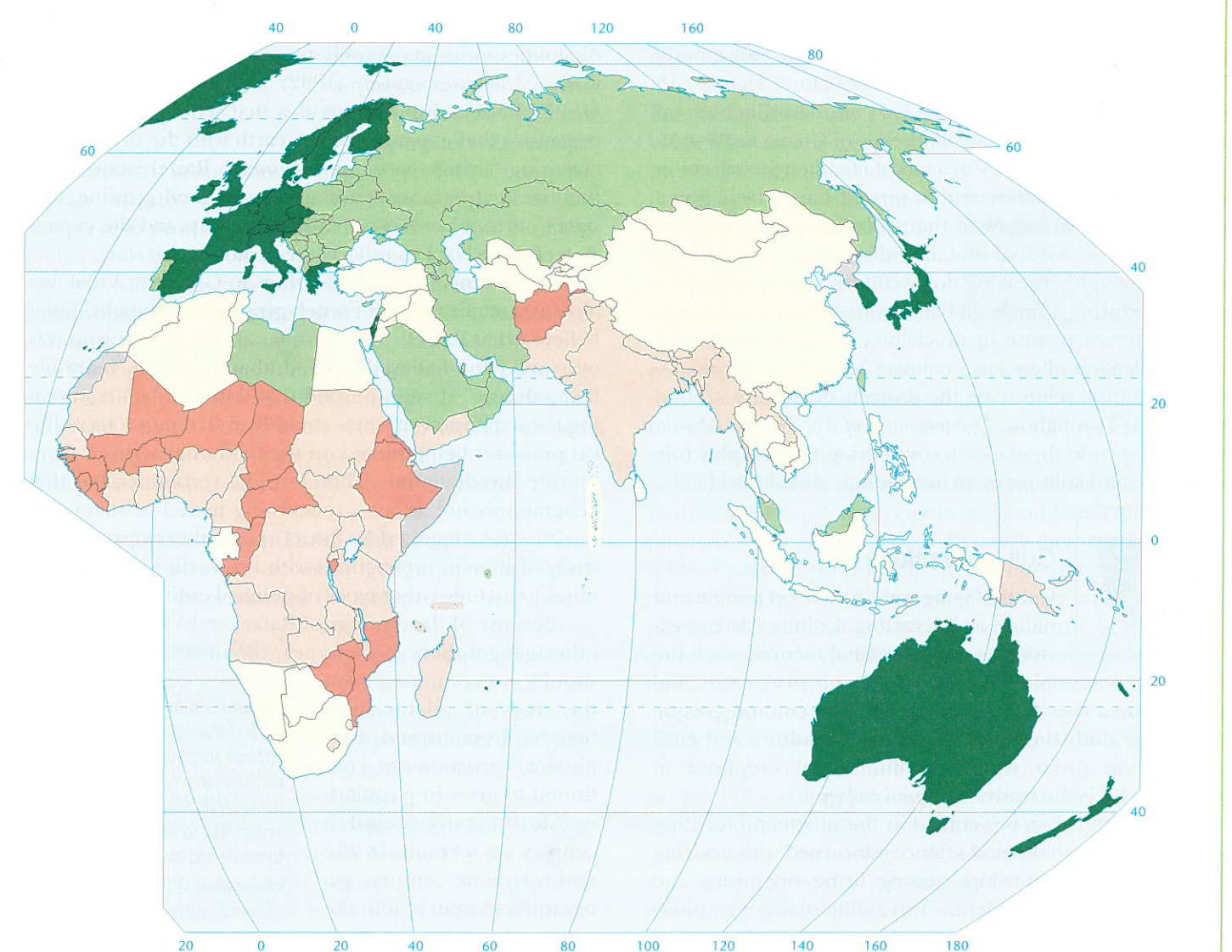


FIGURE 1.12 World Map of the Human Development Index, 2011. The Human Development Index (HDI) includes life expectancy, adult literacy, educational participation, and gross domestic product (GDP). These statistics are brought together to create a measure of development that is more balanced than one based only on economic growth. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), in its Human Development Reports, calculates the HDI yearly. Source: Human Development Report, 2011. Accessed at [p://hdr.undp.org](http://hdr.undp.org).

LINKING GEOGRAPHICALLY What countries or regions surprise you in terms of their HDI measure? Why?



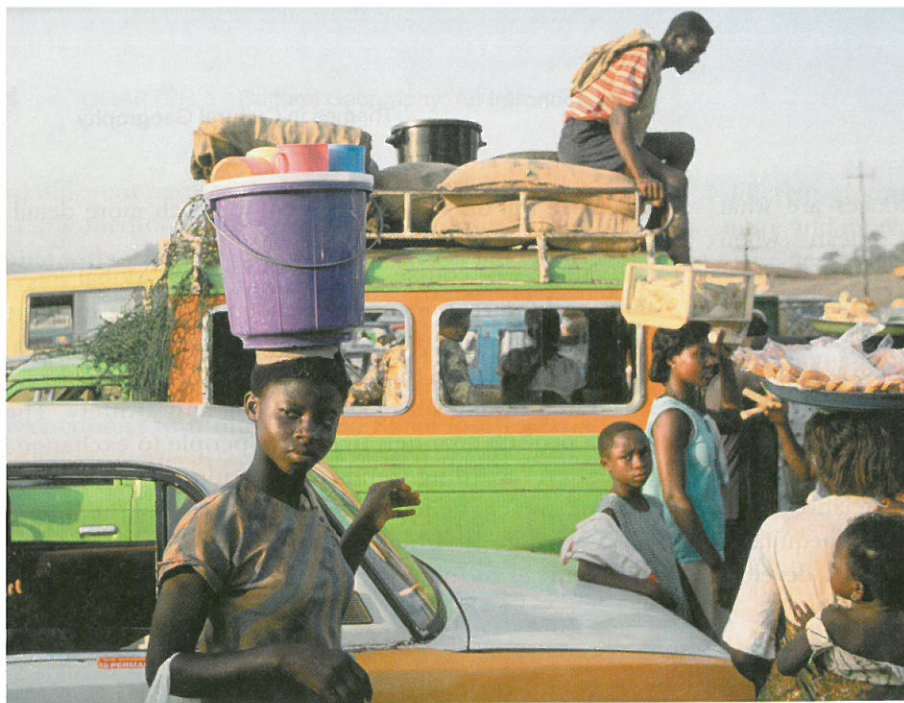


FIGURE 1.13 A globalized urban street scene in Ghana, West Africa. A woman uses a traditional mode of transporting goods, while others use gasoline-powered vehicles. (Garoline Penn/Impact/HIP/The Image Works Ghana.)

THINKING GEOGRAPHICALLY Do you think that an urban street scene in the United States or Europe would display a similar number of influences from Africa? Why or why not?

products from other cultures are more easily and quickly influenced by global changes than ever before. **Figure 1.13** illustrates a diverse blend of global cultural influences on the once traditional cultural landscape of Ghana in West Africa. If we consider culture as a way of life, then globalization is a key shaper of culture and in turn is shaped by it. Some geographers have suggested that globalizing processes and an increase in personal mobility will work to homogenize different peoples, breaking down culture regions and eventually producing a single global culture. Other geographers see a different picture in which new forms of media and communication allow local cultures to maintain their distinct identities, reinforcing the diversity of cultures around the world. Throughout *Fundamentals of The Human Mosaic*, we will return to these issues, considering the complex role of culture and cultures in an increasingly global world.



Cultural Ecology

Cultural geographers look on people and nature as interacting. Cultures do not exist in an environmental vacuum; each human group occupies a piece of the physical earth and develops in a specific natural habitat. The cultural geographer must study the interaction between culture and environment in order to understand spatial variations in culture. This is the study of *cultural ecology*.

The term *ecology* was coined in the nineteenth century to refer to a new biological science concerned with studying the complex relationships among living organisms and their physical environments. Two influential geographers who applied the study of these relationships to the field of geography were Friedrich Ratzel (1844–1904) of Germany and Paul Vidal de La Blache (1845–1918) of France. Ratzel trained in the natural sciences and applied ideas from those

disciplines to his geographic theories. In his most notable works, *Anthropogeographie* (1882) and *Politische Geographie* (1897), Ratzel advanced the idea that states are like living organisms that expand over the earth with the objective of acquiring “living space” or *lebensraum*. Ratzel went on to theorize that because states are organic and growing, any state’s current borders are only temporary, and the expansion of these borders reflects the health of that state.

At the time of Ratzel’s writings in Germany, Vidal was already a major force in French geographic thought. Vidal believed that Ratzel’s view of states as living organisms was overstated and believed, instead, that they only “resemble living things.” He also warned that Ratzel’s ideas concerning the expansion of states could lead to dangerous political pressures being placed on the field of geography from outside the discipline. Therefore, he recommended that geographers not adopt a preexisting model of states and territory (as suggested by Ratzel) but rather approach the study of human interactions with the earth with an open mind to include other types of political entities.

Because of the writings of Ratzel and Vidal (as well as other geographers of the time), the idea that geography should concern itself with the study of relationships between humans and their physical environment continued to grow in popularity into the early twentieth century. As a result, by the mid-twentieth century, geographers began to join the term *ecology* with the term *culture* in order to delineate a new field of study, **cultural ecology**. Later, another concept, the **ecosystem**, was introduced to describe a

cultural ecology Broadly defined, the study of the relationships between the physical environment and culture; narrowly (and more commonly) defined, the study of culture as an adaptive system that facilitates human adaptation to nature and environmental change.

ecosystem A territorially bounded system consisting of interaction between organic and inorganic components.

territorially bounded system consisting of interacting organic and inorganic components. Plant and animal species were said to be adapted to specific conditions in the ecosystem and functioned to help keep the system stable over time. Thus cultural ecology today is the study of (1) environmental influences on culture and (2) the impact of people, acting through their culture, on an ecosystem.

Cultural ecology implies a two-way street, with people and the environment/ecosystem exerting influence on one another. Put differently, cultural ecology is based on the premise that culture is the human method of meeting physical environmental challenges—that culture is an adaptive

cultural adaptation The adaptation of humans and cultures to the challenges posed by the physical environment.

adaptive strategy The unique way in which each culture uses its particular physical environment; those aspects of culture that serve to provide the necessities of life—food, clothing, shelter, and defense.

system. The term **cultural adaptation** is used in this context. This outlook borrows heavily from the biological sciences, with the assumption that plant and animal adaptations are relevant to the study of humans. Culture serves to facilitate long-term successful nongenetic human adaptation to nature and environmental change. **Adaptive strategy** involves those aspects of culture that serve to provide the necessities of life—food, clothing, shelter, and defense. No two cultures employ the same strategy, even within the same physical environment. Such strategies involve culturally transmitted, or learned, behavior that permits a population to survive in its natural environment.

Through the years, human geographers have developed various perspectives on the interaction between humans and the land. Four schools of thought have developed: environmental determinism, possibilism, environmental perception, and humans as modifiers of the Earth.

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Environmental Determinism During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, many geographers accepted **environmental determinism**, the belief that the physical environment is the dominant force shaping cultures and that humankind is essentially a passive product of its physical surroundings.

environmental determinism The belief that cultures are directly or indirectly shaped by the physical environment.

Humans are clay to be molded by nature. Similar physical environments produce similar cultures.

For example, environmental determinists believed that peoples of the mountains were predestined by the rugged terrain to be simple, backward, conservative, unimaginative, and freedom loving. Dwellers in the desert were likely to believe in one God but to live under the rule of tyrants. Temperate climates produced inventiveness, industriousness, and democracy. Coastlands pitted with fjords produced great navigators and fishers. Environmental determinism

had serious consequences, particularly during the time of European colonization in the late nineteenth century. For example, many Europeans saw Latin American native inhabitants as lazy, childlike, and prone to vices such as alcoholism because of the tropical climates that cover much of this region. Living in a tropical climate supposedly ensured that people didn’t have to work very hard for their food. Europeans were able to rationalize their colonization of large portions of the world in part along climatic lines. Because the natives were “naturally” lazy and slow, the European reasoning went, the natives would benefit from the presence of the “naturally” stronger, smarter, and more industrious Europeans who came from more temperate lands.

Determinists overemphasize the role of environment in human affairs. This does not mean that environmental influences are inconsequential or that geographers should not study such influences. Rather, the physical environment is only one of many forces affecting human culture and is never the sole determinant of behavior and beliefs.

Possibilism Since the 1920s, **possibilism** has been the favored view among geographers. Possibilists claim that any physical environment offers

a number of possible ways for a culture to develop. In this way, the local environment helps shape its resident culture. However, a culture’s way of life ultimately depends on the choices people make among the possibilities

that are offered by the environment. These choices are guided by cultural heritage and are shaped by a particular political and economic system. Possibilists see the physical environment as offering opportunities and limitations; people make choices among these to satisfy their needs. **Figure 1.14** on page 18 provides an interesting example: the cities of San Francisco and Chongqing both were built on similar physical terrains that dictated an overall form, but differing cultures led to very different street patterns, architecture, and land use. In short, local traits of culture and economy are the products of culturally based decisions made within the limits of possibilities offered by the environment.

possibilism A school of thought based on the belief that humans, rather than the physical environment, are the primary active force; that any environment offers a number of possible ways for a culture to develop; and that the choices among these possibilities are guided by cultural heritage.

Most possibilists think that the higher the technological level of a culture, the greater the number of possibilities and the weaker the influences of the physical environment. Technologically advanced cultures, in this view, have achieved some mastery over their physical surroundings. Geographers Jim Norwine and Thomas Anderson, however, warn that even in these advanced societies “the quantity and quality of human life are still strongly influenced by the natural environment,” especially climate. They argue that humankind’s control of nature is anything



FIGURE 1.14 Chongqing (Chungking) and San Francisco. Both of these cities are among the largest in their respective countries. Both developed on elongated, hilly sites flanked on all but one side by water, and both were connected in the twentieth century by bridges to adjacent land across the water. In certain other respects, too—such as the use of tunnels for arterial roads—the cities are similar. Note, however, the contrast in street patterns. In Chongqing, the streets were laid out to accommodate the rugged terrain, but in San Francisco, relatively little deviation from a gridiron pattern was permitted. Note, too, that although San Francisco has a much smaller population than Chongqing, it covers a far larger area.

THINKING GEOGRAPHICALLY What do these contrasts suggest about the relative merits of environmental determinism and possibilism? About the role of culture?

but supreme and perhaps even illusory. One only has to think of the devastation caused by the 2010 earthquake in Haiti and the 2011 Japanese earthquake and tsunami to underscore the often-illusory character of the control humans think they have over their physical surroundings.

Environmental Perception Another approach to cultural ecology focuses on how humans perceive nature. Each person and cultural group has mental images of the physical environment, shaped by knowledge, ignorance, experience, values, and emotions.

environmental perception The belief that culture depends more on what people perceive the environment to be than on the actual character of the environment; perception, in turn, is colored by the teachings of culture.

To describe such mental images, cultural geographers use the term **environmental perception**. Whereas the possibilist sees humankind as having a choice of possibilities in a given physical setting, the environmental perceptionist declares that the choices people make will depend more on what they perceive the environment to be than on the actual character of the land. Perception, in turn, is colored by the teachings of culture.

Some of the most productive research done by environmental perceptionists has been on the topic of **natural hazards**, such as flooding, hurricanes, volcanic eruptions, insect infestations, and droughts. All cultures react to such hazards and catastrophes, but the reactions vary greatly from one group to another. Some people reason that natural disasters and risks are unavoidable acts of the gods, perhaps even divine retribution. Often they seek to cope with the hazards by placating their gods. Others hold government responsible for taking care of them when hazards yield disasters. Many cultural groups living in industrialized states view natural hazards as problems that can be solved by technological means. A common manifestation of this belief has been the

spread of dams, levees, and sea walls to prevent flooding. However, history shows that these measures do not always ensure protection. For example, during Hurricane Katrina in 2005, numerous dams and levees in the New Orleans area failed and more than 1800 people lost their lives. Tens of thousands of people were left homeless, and the city has still not fully recovered.

natural hazard Inherent danger present in a given habitat, such as flooding, hurricanes, volcanic eruptions, or earthquakes; often perceived differently by different peoples.

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FIGURE 1.15 The remains of Otsuchi after the 2011 Japanese earthquake and tsunami. The total destruction of most of the homes, businesses, and roads in this small town left survivors without shelter, food, water, heat, electricity, or medicine. Roads into the area became impassable, complicating rescue and relief efforts. (Athit Perawongmetha/Getty Images.)

THINKING GEOGRAPHICALLY How do you think the experiences of people surviving the 2011 Japanese disaster will affect their perceptions of the physical environment?

widespread construction of dams, levees, and sea walls to prevent flooding. However, history shows that these measures do not always ensure protection. For example, during Hurricane Katrina in 2005, numerous dams and levees in the New Orleans area failed and more than 1800 people lost their lives. Tens of thousands of people were left homeless, and the city has still not fully recovered.

In 2011, another natural disaster demonstrated that human attempts to provide technological safeguards against environmental forces do not always succeed. A magnitude 9.0 earthquake hit Japan, causing a devastating tsunami with up to 49-foot waves. The tsunami crushed sea walls and other built defenses, flooding thousands of roadways and destroying countless homes, schools, and commercial buildings. **Figure 1.15** shows an example of this devastation in Otsuchi, a small coastal town. Immediately following the tsunami, 12,000 of the town's 15,000 inhabitants were either dead or reported missing. Despite early warning systems in place, these (and other) Japanese residents had only 8 to 10 minutes to attempt escape before the wave hit. Region-wide, over 20,000 people died or were reported missing and presumed dead after the disaster. The earthquake and tsunami also did unprecedented damage to infrastructure, including airports, rail lines, and shipping ports. At the Fukushima nuclear facility, two reactors exploded and radiation leaked out, necessitating the evacuation of thousands of residents living near the facility. The massive loss of life, staggering damage to the built environment, and serious nuclear accident resulting from the Japanese earthquake and tsunami caused many other states to question their technological capabilities in the face of natural disasters.

