

mental determinist position. In *Climate and the Energy of Nations* (1947), Sidney Markham thought that by tracing the migration of the center of power in the Mediterranean (from Egypt to Greece to Rome and onward) he could detect the changing climates of that part of Europe during several thousand years of glacial retreat. Markham saw the northward movement of **isotherms**—lines connecting points of equal temperature values—as a key factor in the shifting centers of power in the Ancient World.

Geographers grew increasingly cautious about such speculative notions, however, and they began asking new questions about human–environment relationships. If generalizations were to be made, they felt they ought to arise from detailed, carefully designed research. Everyone agrees that the natural environment affects human activity in some ways, but people are the decision makers and the modifiers—not just the slaves of environmental forces. People and their cultures shape environments, constantly altering the landscape and affecting environmental systems.

Possibilism

Reactions to environmental determinism produced counterarguments. An approach known as **possibilism** emerged—espoused by geographers who argued that the natural environment merely serves to limit the range of choices available to a culture. The choices that a society makes depend on its members' requirements and the technology available to them. The doctrine of possibilism became increasingly accepted, and environmental determinism became increasingly discredited—at least within geography. For those who have thought less carefully about the human–environment dynamic, environmental determinism continues to hold an allure, leading to some highly questionable generalizations about the impact of the environment on humans and a multitude of popular books that use it to explain history.

Even possibilism has its limitations, for it encourages a line of inquiry that starts with the physical environment and asks what it allows. Yet human cultures have frequently pushed the boundaries of what was once thought to be environmentally possible by virtue of their own ideas and ingenuity. Moreover, in the interconnected, technologically dependent world we live in today, it is possible to do many things that are at odds with the local environment. Hence, research today tends to focus on how and why humans have altered the environment, and on the sustainability of their practices. In the process, the perspectives of **cultural ecology** (an area of inquiry concerned with culture as a system of adaptation to environment) have been supplemented by those of **political ecology**—an area of inquiry fundamentally concerned with the environmental conse-

quences of dominant political-economic arrangements and understandings.

The fundamental point is that human societies are sufficiently diverse and the human will is too powerful to be the mere objects of nature's designs. We cannot escape the environmental contexts in which we are situated—nor should we try if the environmental degradation that has followed such efforts is any guide. Indeed, the effort to avoid any semblance of determinism has perhaps overly discouraged consideration of the impact of the environment on humans. What is clear, however, is that any inquiry that does not give credence to the extraordinary power of the intertwined domains of culture, politics, and economy in human–environment relations embarks on a path that has consistently been shown to be simplistic, if not fundamentally wrong.

Today's Human Geography

The concept of culture is so broad-ranging that cultural geography is sometimes considered to be synonymous with human geography. More often, however, it is considered to be a subset of human geography because many questions about population, economy, and politics can be posed without emphasizing their cultural dimensions.

Does this mean that cultural geography is limited to the study of particular elements of culture (language, religion)? Few contemporary cultural geographers would see it that way. Instead, they would argue that cultural geography looks at the ways culture is implicated in the full spectrum of topics addressed in human geography. As such, cultural geography can be seen as a perspective on human geography as much as a component thereof.

To more fully appreciate the vast topics researched by human geographers, we can examine the multitude of careers human geographers pursue. Human geographers have titles such as 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. All of these careers and more are open to geographers because each of these fields is grounded in place and is advanced through spatial analysis.



THINKING



GEOGRAPHICALLY

Create a strong (false) statement about a people and their environment using either environmental determinism or possibilism. Determine how the statement you wrote is false, taking into consideration the roles of culture, politics, and economy in human–environment relations.

Summary

Like cultural geography, human geography is not limited to geographical studies of culture. This book does not contain a list of places or cultures for you to memorize. Instead, it serves as a study of people and places and explains how they interact across space and time. Chapters 2 and 3 lay the basis for our study of human geography by looking at where people live. Chapters 4–7 focus on aspects of culture and how people use culture and identity to make sense of themselves in their world. The remaining chapters examine how people have created a world in which they function economically, politically, and socially, and how their activities in those realms recreate themselves and their world.

Geographic Concepts

fieldwork
human geography
globalization
physical geography
spatial
spatial distribution
pattern
medical geography
pandemic
epidemic
spatial perspective
five themes
location
location theory
human–environment
region
place
sense of place
perception of place
movement
spatial interaction
distance

accessibility
connectivity
landscape
cultural landscape
sequent occupance
cartography
reference maps
thematic maps
absolute location
global positioning system
geocaching
relative location
mental map
activity space
generalized map
remote sensing
geographic information
systems
rescale
formal region
functional region

perceptual region
culture
culture trait
culture complex
cultural hearth
independent invention
cultural diffusion
time-distance decay
cultural barrier
expansion diffusion
contagious diffusion
hierarchical diffusion
stimulus diffusion
relocation diffusion
geographic concept
environmental
determinism
isotherm
possibilism
cultural ecology
political ecology

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