The Cultural Landscape

CASE STUDY REVISITED / The Geography of a Big Mac Attack

Each chapter in this book concludes by reviewing the opening case study in light of the issues raised in the chapter. This chapter presents five basic concepts—place, region, scale, space, and connections. The opening case study offers a typical everyday geographic concern—a search for a restaurant—to which these five concepts can be applied.

Geography is fundamentally concerned with the organization of space. McDonald's restaurants are not distributed randomly across the landscape; rather, each restaurant has a unique location that can be depicted on a map (Figure 1-33).

Geographers use maps to describe where these establishments are found and explain why they are so arranged. Because “where” and “why” are the questions most fundamental to geographic inquiry, they are used to organize the material presented within all of the other chapters in this book.

Geographers observe from a map that McDonald's restaurants cluster in some regions, whereas other regions have few. A world map of McDonald's restaurants helps us to understand global-scale patterns of investment by a major international corporation. Most McDonald's are located in countries where average incomes are high enough to buy the products.

A world map of McDonald's doesn't help a hungry American driving on an interstate highway. The motorist needs a local-scale map showing the location of McDonald's in relation to specific highway exit ramps. As McDonald's have diffused from the United States to other regions of the world, each McDonald's is connected to all other McDonald's by a communications network through which uniform standards and practices are set.

In subsequent chapters, these five basic concepts will be applied to elements of human geography:

• Chapters 2 and 3 where humans are clustered in the world, why the number of people has increased in some places, and why people have moved to certain places

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- Chapters 4 through 8 where important cultural traits, including popular and folk customs, language, religion, ethnicity, and political institutions, are distributed and why these cultural features are so distributed and why these distributions can lead to conflict
- Chapters 9 through 14 where different economic activities are found around the world, why people earn a living in different ways in different regions of the world, and why people increasingly earn a living by residing in urban areas.

KEY TERMS

Agricultural density (p. 33) The ratio of the number of farmers to the total amount of land suitable for agriculture.
Arithmetic density (p. 32) The total number of people divided by the total land area.
Base line (p. 9) An east–west line designated under the Land Ordinance of 1785 to facilitate the surveying and numbering of townships in the United States.
Cartography (p. 5) The science of making maps.
Concentration (p. 33) The spread of something over a given area.
Connections (p. 5) Relationships among people and objects across the barrier of space.
Contagious diffusion (p. 39) The rapid, widespread diffusion of a feature or trend throughout a population.
Cultural ecology (p. 24) Geographic approach that emphasizes human–environment relationships.
Cultural landscape (p. 17) Fashioning of a natural landscape by a cultural group.
Culture (p. 21) The body of customary beliefs, social forms, and material traits that together constitute a group’s distinct tradition.
Density (p. 32) The frequency with which something exists within a given unit of area.
Diffusion (p. 36) The process of spread of a feature or trend from one place to another over time.
Distance decay (p. 36) The diminishing in importance and eventual disappearance of a phenomenon with increasing distance from its origin.
Distribution (p. 32) The arrangement of something across Earth’s surface.
Environmental determinism (p. 24) A nineteenth- and early twentieth-century approach to the study of geography which argued that the general laws sought by human geographers could be found in the physical sciences. Geography was therefore the study of how the physical environment caused human activities.
Expansion diffusion (p. 38) The spread of a feature or trend among people from one area to another in a snowballing process.
Formal region (or uniform or homogeneous region) (p. 17) An area in which everyone shares in one or more distinctive characteristics.
Functional region (or nodal region) (p. 19) An area organized around a node or focal point.
Geographic information system (GIS) (p. 12) A computer system that stores, organizes, analyzes, and displays geographic data.
Global Positioning System (GPS) (p. 9) A system that determines the precise position of something on Earth through a series of satellites, tracking stations, and receivers.
Globalization (p. 29) Actions or processes that involve the entire world and result in making something worldwide in scope.
Greenwich Mean Time (GMT) (p. 18) The time in that zone encompassing the prime meridian, or 0° longitude.
Hearth (p. 36) The region from which innovative ideas originate.
Hierarchical diffusion (p. 39) The spread of a feature or trend from one key person or node of authority or power to other persons or places.
International Date Line (p. 18) An arc that for the most part follows 180° longitude, although it deviates in several places to avoid dividing land areas. When you cross the International Date Line heading east (toward America), the clock moves back 24 hours, or one entire day. When you go west (toward Asia), the calendar moves ahead one day.
Land Ordinance of 1785 (p. 9) A law that divided much of the United States into townships to facilitate the sale of land to settlers.
Latitude (p. 15) The numbering system used to indicate the location of parallels drawn on a globe and measuring distance north and south of the equator (0°).
Location (p. 13) The position of anything on Earth’s surface.
Longitude (p. 15) The numbering system used to indicate the location of meridians drawn on a globe and measuring distance east and west of the prime meridian (0°).
Map (p. 4) A two-dimensional, or flat, representation of Earth’s surface or a portion of it.
Mental map (p. 20) A representation of a portion of Earth’s surface based on what an individual knows about a place, containing personal impressions of what is in a place and where places are located.
Meridian (p. 15) An arc drawn on a map between the North and South poles.
Parallel (p. 15) A circle drawn around the globe parallel to the equator and at right angles to the meridians.
Pattern (p. 33) The geometric or regular arrangement of something in a study area.
Physiological density (p. 33) The number of people per unit of area of arable land, which is land suitable for agriculture.
Place (p. 5) A specific point on Earth distinguished by a particular character.
Polder (p. 27) Land created by the Dutch by draining water from an area.
Possibilism (p. 24) The theory that the physical environment may set limits on human actions, but people have the ability to adjust to the physical environment and choose a course of action from many alternatives.

Prime meridian (p. 15) The meridian designated as 0° longitude, that passes through the Royal Observatory at Greenwich, England.

Principal meridian (p. 9) A north–south line designated in the Land Ordinance of 1785 to facilitate the surveying and numbering of townships in the United States.

Projection (p. 8) The system used to transfer locations from Earth’s surface to a flat map.

Region (p. 5) An area distinguished by a unique combination of trends or features.

Regional (or cultural landscape) studies (p. 17) An approach to geography that emphasizes the relationships among social and physical phenomena in a particular study area.

Relocation diffusion (p. 37) The spread of a feature or trend through bodily movement of people from one place to another.

Remote sensing (p. 9) The acquisition of data about Earth’s surface from a satellite orbiting the planet or from other long-distance methods.

Resource (p. 24) A substance in the environment that is useful to people, is economically and technologically feasible to access, and is socially acceptable to use.

Scale (p. 5) Generally, the relationship between the portion of Earth being studied and Earth as a whole; specifically, the relationship between the size of an object on a map and the size of the actual feature on Earth’s surface.

Section (p. 9) A square normally 1 mile on a side. The Land Ordinance of 1785 divided townships in the United States into 36 sections.

Site (p. 14) The physical character of a place.

Situation (p. 14) The location of a place relative to another place.

Space (p. 5) The physical gap or interval between two objects.

Space-time compression (p. 35) The reduction in the time it takes to diffuse something to a distant place as a result of improved communications and transportation systems.

Stimulus diffusion (p. 39) The spread of an underlying principle, even though a specific characteristic is rejected.

Toponym (p. 13) The name given to a portion of Earth’s surface.

Township (p. 9) A square normally 6 miles on a side. The Land Ordinance of 1785 divided much of the United States into a series of townships.

Transnational corporation (p. 30) A company that conducts research, operates factories, and sells products in many countries, not just where its headquarters or shareholders are located.

Uneven development (p. 39) The increasing gap in economic conditions between core and peripheral regions as a result of the globalization of the economy.

Vernacular region (or perceptual region) (p. 19) An area that people believe exists as part of their cultural identity.

THINKING GEOGRAPHICALLY

1. Cartography is not simply a technical exercise in penmanship and coloring, nor are decisions confined to scale and projection. Mapping is a politically sensitive undertaking. Look at how maps in this book distinguish between the territories of Israel and its neighbors and the locations of borders in South Asia, the Arabian Peninsula, and northwest Africa. Are there other logical ways to draw boundaries and distinguish among territories in these regions? What might they be?

2. Imagine that a transportation device (perhaps the one in Star Trek or Harry Potter) would enable all humans to travel instantaneously to any location on Earth’s surface. What would be the impact of that invention on the distribution of peoples and activities across Earth?

3. When earthquakes, hurricanes, or other environmental disasters strike, humans tend to “blame” nature and see themselves as the innocent victims of a harsh and cruel nature. To what extent do environmental hazards stem from unpredictable nature and to what extent do they originate from human actions? Should victims blame nature, other humans, or themselves for the disaster? Why?

4. The construction of dams is a particularly prominent example of human–environment interaction in regions throughout the world. Turkey built the Ataturk Dam on the Euphrates River, a move opposed by Syria and Iraq, the two downstream countries. Similarly, the Balbina Dam on the Uatruma River, a tributary of the Amazon, generated considerable opposition in Brazil. Some Russians oppose construction of the St. Petersburg Dam in the Gulf of Finland. Egypt, which operates the Aswan Dam on the Nile River, has blocked loans to Ethiopia that could be used to divert the source of the Nile. Why do governments push the construction of dams so forcefully, and why do others oppose their construction so passionately?

5. Geographic concepts are supposed to help explain contemporary issues. Are there any stories in your newspaper to which geographic concepts can be applied to help understand the issues? Discuss.
**RESOURCES**

Some recent and classic books and articles on human geography:


Journals featuring human geography:


Key Internet sites:

www.aag.org The Association of American Geographers web site includes information about careers in geography, as well as its publications.

www.ncge.org National Council for Geographic Education resources include national standards for geographic literacy.

www.amergeog.org The American Geographical Society provides access to its publications.

www.nationalgeographic.com The National Geographic Society offers access to material from its magazine and television programs, as well as on-line mapping.