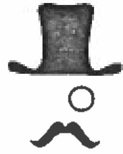

Human Geography:

People, Place, and Culture

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HOW CAN LOCAL AND POPULAR CULTURES BE SEEN IN THE CULTURAL LANDSCAPE?

The tension between globalized popular culture and local culture can be seen in the cultural landscape, the visible imprint of human activity on the landscape. Human imprint includes everything from how people have changed and shaped the environment to the buildings, signs, fences, and statues people erect. Cultural landscapes reflect the values, norms, and aesthetics of a culture. On major roadways in North American towns and suburbs, the landscape is a series of big box stores, gas stations, and restaurants that reflect popular culture (Fig. 4.22). As you drive down one of these roadways, one place looks like the next. You drive past TGIFridays, Applebees, Wal-Mart, Target, and McDonald's. Then, several miles down the road, you pass another conglomeration (clustering) of the same stores. Geographer Edward Relph coined the word **placelessness** to describe the loss of uniqueness of place in the cultural landscape to the point that one place looks like the next.

Cultural landscapes begin to blend together, converging cultural landscapes in three dimensions: (1) particular architectural forms and planning ideas have diffused around the world; (2) individual businesses and products have become so widespread that they now leave a distinctive landscape stamp on far-flung places; and (3) the wholesale borrowing of idealized landscape images, though not necessarily fostering convergence, promotes a blurring of place distinctiveness.

The global diffusion of the skyscraper provides a clear illustration of the first point—particular architectural

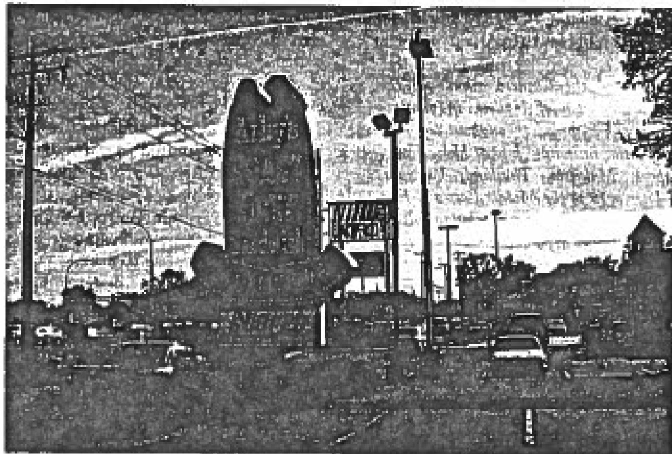

Figure 4.22
Roseville, Minnesota. A series of signs advertising national chains creates a nondescript landscape on Snelling Avenue in this St. Paul suburb. Across the street from where this photo was taken is the site of T-1, the first Target store ever built, which was recently torn down and replaced with the largest Target store in the world. © Bridget Hogan Hoye.

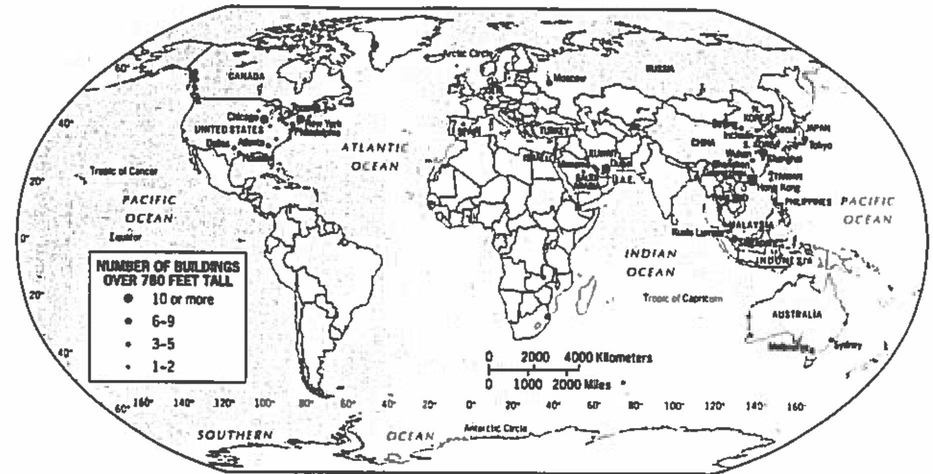

Figure 4.23
World Distribution of Skyscrapers. Number of skyscrapers that are taller than 700 feet. *Data from:* Emporis, Inc., 2005.

forms and planning ideas have diffused around the world (Fig. 4.23). In the second half of the 1800s, with advancements in steel production and improved costs and efficiencies of steel use, architects and engineers created the first skyscrapers. The Home Insurance Building of Chicago is typically pointed to as the first skyscraper. The fundamental difference between a skyscraper and another building is that the outside walls of the skyscraper do not bear the major load or weight of the building; rather, the internal steel structure or skeleton of the building bears most of the load.

From Singapore to Johannesburg and from Caracas to Toronto, the commercial centers of major cities are dominated by tall buildings, many of which have been designed by the same architects and engineering firms. With the diffusion of the skyscraper around the world, the cultural landscape of cities has been profoundly impacted. Skyscrapers require substantial land clearing in the vicinity of individual buildings, the construction of wide, straight streets to promote access, and the reworking of transportation systems around a highly centralized model. Skyscrapers are only one example of the globalization of a particular landscape form. The proliferation of skyscrapers in Taiwan, Malaysia, and China in the 1990s marked the integration of these economies into the major players in the world economy (Fig. 4.24). Today, the growth of skyscrapers in Dubai, United Arab Emirates, signals the world city status of the place.

Reading signs is an easy way to see the second dimension of cultural landscape convergence: the far-flung stamp of global businesses on the landscape. Walking down the streets of Rome, you will see signs for Blockbuster and Pizza Hut. The main tourist shopping street in Prague hosts Dunkin' Donuts and McDonald's. A tourist in Munich, Germany, will wind through streets looking for the city's famed beer garden since 1589, the Hofbräuhaus, and will happen upon the Hard Rock Café, right next door (Fig. 4.25). If the tourist had recently traveled to Las Vegas, he may have déjà vu. The Hofbräuhaus Las Vegas, built in 2003, stands across the street from the Hard Rock Hotel and Casino. The storefronts in Seoul, South Korea, are filled with Starbucks, Dunkin Donuts, and Outback Steakhouses. China is home to more than 3200 KFC restaurants, and its parent company Yum! controls 40 percent of the fast-food market in China.

Marked landscape similarities such as these can be found everywhere from international airports to shopping centers. The global corporations that develop spaces of commerce have wide-reaching impacts on the cultural landscape. Architectural firms often specialize in building one kind of space—performing arts centers, medical laboratories, or international airports. Property management companies have worldwide holdings and encourage the Gap, the Cheesecake Factory, Barnes and Noble, and other companies to lease space in all of their holdings. Facilities, such as airports and college food

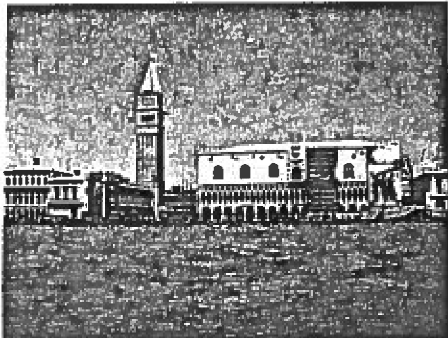

Figure 4.26a
UNESCO World Heritage site, Venice, Italy. © Alexander B. Murphy.

Figure 4.26b
The Venetian Hotel Casino in Las vegas, Nevada. © David Noble Photography/Alamy.

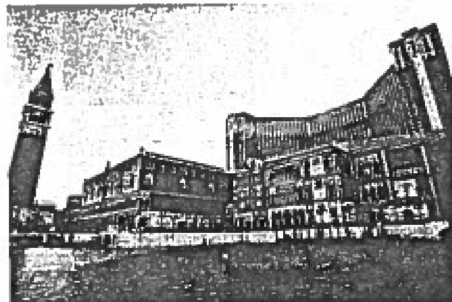

Figure 4.26c
The Venetian Hotel and casino in Macau, China. © Paul Yeung/ Reuters/Landov

Disney World, or if you have visited the centers of any number of "quaint" historic towns on the eastern seaboard. Each town center is designed to make you think of all things American and to feel immediately "home" in the place.

In less obvious ways, cultural borrowing and mixing is happening all around the world. This idea is behind the **global-local continuum** concept. This notion emphasizes that what happens at one scale is not independent of what happens at other scales. Human geography is not simply about documenting the differences between places; it is also about understanding the processes unfolding at different scales that produce those differences. What happens in an individual place is the product of interaction across scales. People in a local place mediate and alter regional, national, and global processes, in a process called **glocalization**. The character of place ultimately comes out of a multitude of dynamic interactions among local distinctiveness and wider-scaled events and influences.

Cultural Landscapes of Local Cultures

What makes travel interesting for most people is the presence of variety in the cultural landscape. Travel beyond the tourist sites and the main roads, and one will easily find landscapes of local cultures, even in wealthy countries including the United States and Canada. By studying local cultural landcapes, you can gain insight into the social structures of local cultures. In everything from the houses to the schools to the churches to the cemeteries, a local cultural landscape reveals its foundation.

Founders and early followers of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints created the Mormon landscape of the American West as they migrated westward under persecution and in search of a place where they could practice their religion freely. The Mormon Church began in New York, and then Joseph Smith and his followers moved westward to Independence, Missouri. From there, Mormons migrated westward to present-day Salt Lake City, Utah. The easiest place to see the foundations of the Mormon cultural landscape are in the small towns established by Mormons throughout Utah and stretching into Arizona, Nevada, and Idaho (Fig. 4.27).

Geographers, including Donald Meinig, Richard Francaviglia, and Allen Noble, have studied the Mormon landscape and discerned the roots of the Mormon culture in the local landscape. If you drove from Chicago west to Las Vegas and traveled through the rural areas of Nebraska and Utah on your path, you would immediately notice one fundamental difference in the landscape: farmsteads in the plains replaced by farming villages in

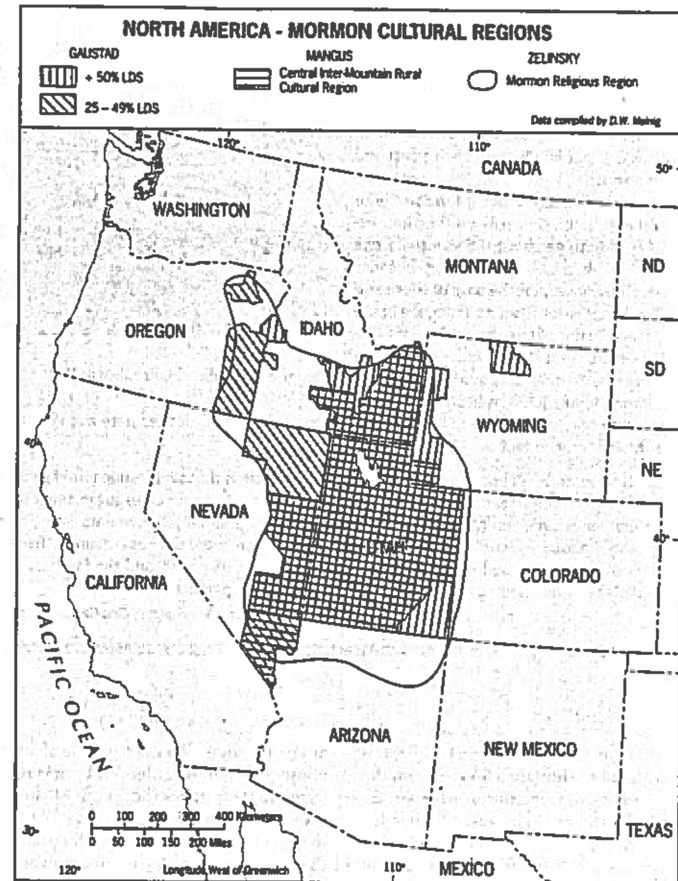

Figure 4.27
The Mormon Cultural Region. *Adapted with permission from*: D.W. Meinig, "The Mormon Culture Region: Strategies and Patterns in the Geography of the American west, 1847–1964," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, 55, 2 (1965), p. 196.

In the Great Plains, the Homestead Act encourmers to establish single farmsteads where a farm ived alone on their 160 acres and the nearest r was down the dirt road. In the rural Mormon e, early settlers established farming villages houses clustered together and croplands surl the outskirts of the village (Fig. 4.28). Clustering ogether in a farming village allowed Mormons to protect each other because the religious followers were experiencing persecution in the East and because the settlers' fears were raised by stories of Indians attacking villages in the West. Equally importantly, through clustering they sought to join together for services in each village's chapel.

Geographer Richard Francaviglia offers several factors that delimit the Mormon landscape in western

Guest Field Note

Paragonah, Utah

I took this photograph in the village of Paragonah, Utah, in 1969, and it still reminds me that fieldwork is both an art and a science. People who know the American West well may immediately recognize this as a scene from "Mormon Country," but their recognition is based primarily on their impressions of the place. "It is something about the way the scene looks," they may say, or "It feels like a Mormon village because of the way the barn and the house sit at the base of those arid bluffs." These are general impressions, but how can one prove that it is a Mormon scene? That is where the science of fieldwork comes into play. Much like a detective investigating a crime scene, or a journalist writing an accurate story, the geographer looks for proof. In this scene, we can spot several of the ten elements that comprise the Mormon landscape. First, this farmstead is not separate from the village, but part of it—just a block off of Main Street, in fact.

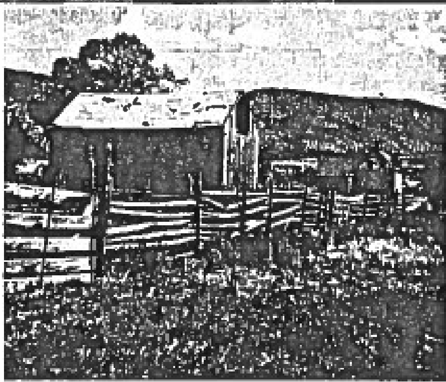

Figure 4.28 Paragonah, Utah. Photo taken in 1969.

Next we can spot that central-hall home made out of brick; then there is that simple, unpainted gabled-roof barn; and lastly the weedy edge of a very wide street says Mormon Country. Those are just four clues suggesting that pragmatic Mormons created this cultural landscape, and other fieldwork soon confirmed that all ten elements were present here in Paragonah. Like this 40-year old photo, which shows some signs of age, the scene here did not remain unchanged. In Paragonah and other Mormon villages, many old buildings have been torn down, streets paved, and the landscape "cleaned up"—a reminder that time and place (which is to say history and geography) are inseparable.

Credit: Richard Francaviglia, Geo.Graphic Designs, Salem, Oregon

United States and Canada, including symmetrical brick houses that look more similar to houses from the East Coast than to other pioneer houses, wide streets that run due north–south and east–west, ditches for irrigation, poplar trees for shade, bishops storehouses for storing food and necessities for the poor, and unpainted fences. Because the early Mormons were farmers and were clustered together in villages, each block in the town was quite large, allowing for one-acre city lots where a farmer could keep livestock and other farming supplies in town. The streets were wide so that farmers could easily turn a cart and horses on the town's streets.

The morphology (that is, the size and shape of a place's buildings, streets, and infrastructure) of a Mormon village tells us a lot, and so too, can the shape and size of a local culture's housing. In Malaysia, the Iban, an indigenous people, live along the Sarawak River in the Borneo region of Malaysia. Each long house is home to an extended family of up to 200 people. The family and the long house function as a community, sharing the rice farmed by the family, supporting each other through frequent flooding of the river (the houses are built on stilts), and working together on the porch that stretches the length of the house. The rice paddies surrounding each long house are a familiar shape and form throughout Southeast Asia, but the Iban long house tells you that you are experiencing a different kind of place-one that reflects a unique local culture.

Focus on the cultural landscape of your college campus. Think about the concept of placelessness. Determine whether your campus is a "placeless place" or whether the cultural landscape of your college reflects the unique identity of the place. Imagine you are hired to build a new student union on your campus. How could you design the building to reflect the uniqueness of your college?

HOW CAN LOCAL AND POPULAR CULTURES BE SEEN IN THE CULTURAL LANDSCAPE?

28. ______________ describes the loss of uniqueness of place in the cultural landscape as places look more alike. Places can begin to blend together and have similar __________ styles, __________ can leave a distinctive landscape stamp on faraway places, and idealized __________ __________ are often borrowed. __________ in places such as Chicago, Singapore, and Johannesburg are examples of this concept.
29. Reading signs is an easy way to see cultural landscape convergence. Seeing signs for businesses in Rome such as ______________ are an example. The strip in __________ has various structures to evoke different parts of the planet.
30. The idea that what happens at one scale is not independent of what happens at other scales is known as the __________ __________. When people at a local scale alter regional, national, or global processes, it is called ____________.
31. Founders and early followers of the Church of Jesus Christ of ____________ Saints created the ___________ landscape of the American West. They migrated to the West because of ____________ to freely practice their ________. They eventually migrated to present-day ____________.

Human Geography: People, Place, and Culture by Harm de Blij, Erin Fouberg, and Alexander Murphy

DUE: FRIDAY

10/30/2015

Based on the previous readings answer the following questions.

1.) What are some evidence of Popular Culture on the cultural landscape of League City/Seabrook/Kemah/Clear Lake? (give examples)

2.) What are some evidence of Local/Folk Culture on the cultural landscape of League City/Seabrook/Kemah/Clear Lake? (give examples)

3.) How can "placelessness" be a problem for elements of culture? How does "placelessness" affect art, literature, music, etc.?

4.) What does de Blij mean when he says, "Human geography is not simply about documenting he differences between places; it is also about understanding the processes unfolding at different scales that produce those differences"?

5.) What is "globalization"? What is "glocalization"? How is McDonalds an example of both of those concepts?