

UNIT 3: Cultural Patterns and Processes

Chapter 6 Concepts of Culture and Diffusion

Chapter 7 Language and Culture

Chapter 8 Religious and Ethnic Landscapes

Unit Overview

While some human attributes, such as hair color, are heavily influenced by biological inheritance, most are not. In general, how people think and act is shaped, formally and informally, by what they learn from other people. All of the practices, technologies, attitudes, and behaviors that people learn from others are part of their culture.

Behaviors People Share

Areas where many people share an element of culture—such as speaking a particular language—form cultural regions. Geographers use maps, from small to large scale—to show the boundaries of these regions.

When people of different cultures meet, they sometimes have conflicts, but they always adjust to each other. For example, if they speak different languages, one group might learn the other's language. Or people might blend the two languages to create a new one. Improvements in transportation and communication have increased the interaction of cultures throughout history. Culture spreads as people move from one place to another and as people interact and learn from each other. In 1500, the region where most people spoke English was a small area on the northwest corner of Europe. Today, English is the dominant language in countries scattered around the world and widely spoken in many others.

Variations in Culture

Geographers use maps to show regions, and they use various types of charts and diagrams to show relationships among the elements of culture. For example, a tree diagram can show how several languages, including French and Spanish, are branches that diverge from a common ancestor, Latin.

Enduring Understandings

III. Cultural Patterns and Processes

- A. Concepts of culture frame the shared behaviors of a society.
- B. Culture varies by place and region.

Source: CollegeBoard AP[®]. Human Geography Course Description. 2015.

Concepts of Culture and Diffusion

The Buffalo was part of us, his flesh and blood being absorbed by us until it became our own flesh and blood. Our clothing, our tipis, everything we needed for life came from the buffalo's body. It was hard to say where the animals ended and the human began.

— John (Fire) Lame Deer, *Lame Deer, Seeker of Visions*, 1972

Essential Question: How do folk and popular cultures differ in the ways they help form a society's overall culture?

To the Lakota, and other indigenous people on North America's Great Plains, the bison was an essential part of their culture. The bison provided meat for nutrition, a hide for clothing and shelter, bones for tools, and fat for soap. The bison was also central to their religious beliefs. So, when European settlers hunted the bison nearly to extinction, Lakota culture suffered.

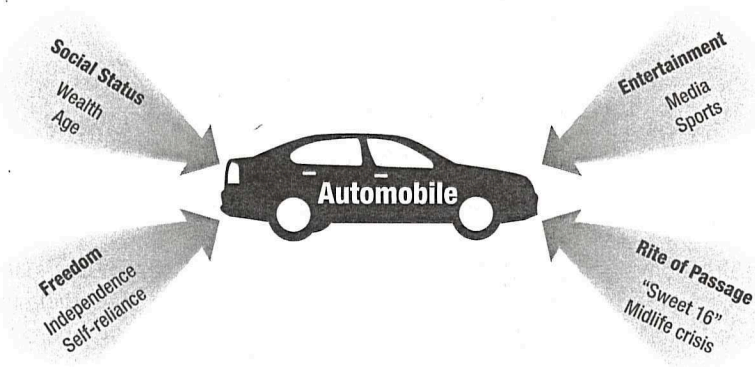
Culture is central to a society and to its continued existence. Geographers thus study culture as a way to understand similarities and differences among societies across the world, and in some cases, to help preserve these societies.

Analyzing Culture

All of a group's learned behaviors, actions, beliefs, and objects are a part of **culture**. It is a *visible* force seen in a group's actions, possessions, and influence on the landscape. For example, in a large city you can see people working in offices, factories, and stores, and living in high-rise apartments or suburban homes. You might observe them attending movies, concerts, or sports events.

Culture is also an *invisible* force guiding people through shared belief systems, customs, and traditions. All these elements, visible and invisible, make up the **cultural traits** that are the building blocks of a culture. A single cultural artifact, such as an automobile, may represent many different values, beliefs, and traditions. These interrelated traits make up a **cultural complex**.

CULTURAL COMPLEX OF THE AUTOMOBILE



The automobile provides much more than just transportation, as it reflects many values that are central to American culture.

One generation passes its culture to the next in many ways. Children learn in three basic ways:

- by imitation, as when a child learns a language by repeating sounds
- by informal instruction, as when a parent reminds a child to say “please”
- by formal instruction, as when a school teaches students history

Origins of Cultures

The area in which a unique culture or a specific trait develops is a **culture hearth**, also known as a cultural hearth. Classical Greece was a culture hearth for democracy more than 2,000 years ago. New York City was a culture hearth for rap music in the 1970s. Geographers study how cultures develop in hearths and diffuse to other places.

Geographers also study **taboos**, behaviors heavily discouraged by a culture. Many cultures have taboos against eating certain foods, such as pork or insects. What is taboo changes over time. In the United States, marriages between Protestants and Catholics were once taboo, but they are not widely opposed now.

Folk Cultures

The beliefs and practices of small, homogenous groups of people, often living in rural areas that are relatively isolated and slow to change, are known as **folk cultures**. Like all cultures, they demonstrate the diverse ways that people have adapted to a physical environment. For example, people learned to make shelters out of available resources, whether it was snow or mud bricks or wood. However, people used similar resources such as wood differently. In

Scandinavia, people used entire logs to build cabins. In the American Midwest, people processed trees into boards, built a frame, and attached the boards to it.

Sometimes, people independently developed similar responses to similar environments. Long ago, Mongols in Central Asia and Plains Indians in North America, both living in flat, open land with extreme weather, developed similar types of housing: portable, round shelters made of frames and animals skins.

Many traits of folk culture continue today. Corn was first grown in Mexico around 10,000 years ago, and it is still grown there today.

The Spread of Cultures

Folk cultures provide a unique **sense of place** and belonging. These long-established culture hearths are very important to the inhabitants. Their shared cultural traits bring homogeneity to the culture, which gives the people a sense of place. This, in turn, also gives the inhabitants a tie to the area where they live and gives them a sense of ownership.

However, because people, goods, and ideas move throughout the world, cultures spread spatially, well beyond their hearths. Prior to the mid-20th century, kiwi were part of the food culture of people only from China to New Zealand. Today, kiwi have diffused throughout the world.

The Spatial Dimensions of Culture

Cultural regions are broad areas where groups share similar but not identical cultural traits. For example, geographer Wilbur Zilensky divided the United States into 12 major culture regions, yet people in these regions still consider themselves part of a larger American culture that shares a common heritage. Cultural regions are one of three types:

- **Formal regions**, such as states, are clearly defined by government or experts.
- **Functional regions**, such as the city of Miami and the communities around it, are based on interaction and are usually centered on a node or focus point.
- **Perceptual** (or vernacular) **regions** are based on how people think about particular places. The boundaries are often blurred. Zilensky’s 12 regions are this type. People might agree that the Midwest stretches from somewhere in Nebraska to somewhere in Ohio. But they might not agree on where in Ohio the Midwest ends and other regions, such as the East and Appalachia, begin.

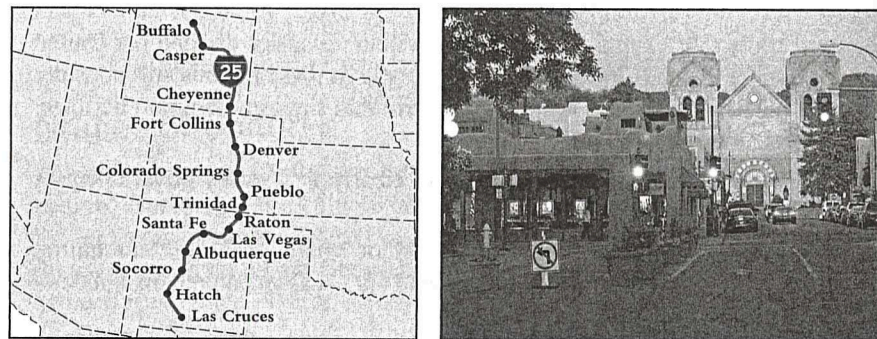
Cultural Landscapes

The boundaries of a region reflect the human imprint on the environment. This is called the **cultural landscape** or the visible reflection of a culture, or the built environment. Some are described in the following chart.

CULTURAL LANDSCAPES		
Element	Area	Significance
National Park	United States	Land set aside from development reflects the desire to preserve unique environments
Signage	Quebec	Bilingual signs in French and English reflect the desire of French Canadians to retain their heritage
Schools	Pakistan	Gender-segregated schools reflect attitudes toward male and female roles
Office Buildings	Shanghai	Massive skyscrapers reflect economic power and a desire to have businesses in a central, well-known location

An observant traveler can observe changes in the cultural landscape while driving along a highway. For example, travelers on Interstate 25 going from Wyoming to New Mexico see a definite change, both in toponyms (place names) and in the built environment. Names change from Anglo words to Spanish names. Wooden buildings are replaced by adobe buildings. Architectural styles shift from looking like ones in England to looking like ones in Spain.

CULTURAL CHANGE ALONG INTERSTATE 25



Buildings in Santa Fe, New Mexico, reflect a blend of the styles of Native American pueblos and Spanish missions.

Ethnic Enclaves

The neighborhood level of the cultural landscape might include **ethnic enclaves**, clusters of people of the same culture, but surrounded by people of a culture that is dominant in the region. Ethnic enclaves sometimes reflect the desire of people to remain apart from the larger society. Other times, they reflect a dominant culture's desire to segregate a minority culture. Inside these enclaves are often stores and religious institutions that are supported by the ethnic group, signs

in their traditional language, and architecture that reflects the group's place of origin. These enclaves can provide a buffer against discrimination by the dominant culture.

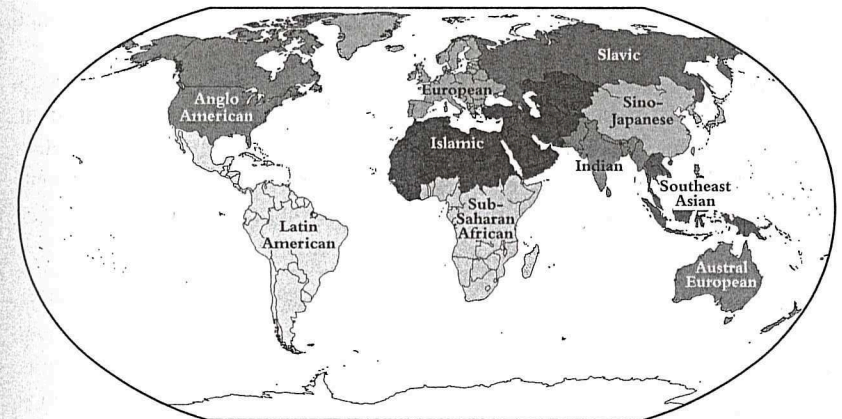
Borders and Barriers

Unless regions are defined by clear features, such as a mountain range, identifying cultural borders can be hard. Often a transition zone exists where cultures mix and people exhibit traits of both cultures. The border between the United States and Mexico clearly illustrates this pattern. People who live in border communities such as El Paso, Texas, are often fluent in both Spanish and English, and they have cultural ties to both Mexico and the United States.

Realms

Geographers also identify larger areas, **culture realms**, that include several regions. Cultures within a cultural realm have a few traits that they all share, such as language families, religious traditions, food preferences, architecture, or a shared history.

TEN MAJOR CULTURE REALMS



Globalization and Cultural Change

As a result of the Industrial Revolution, improvements in transportation and communication have shortened the time required for movement, trade, or other forms of interaction between two places. This development, known as **space-time compression**, has accelerated culture change around the world. In 1817, a freight shipment from Cincinnati needed 52 days to reach New York City. By 1850, because of canals and railroads, it took half that long. And by 1852, it took only seven days. Today, an airplane flight takes only a few hours, and digital information takes seconds or less.

Similar change has occurred on the global scale. People travel freely across the world in a matter of hours, and communication has advanced to a point where people share information instantaneously across the globe. The increased interaction has had a profound impact on cultures, spreading English across the world.

Globalization is the process of intensified interaction among peoples, governments, and companies of different countries around the globe. More specifically, globalization usually refers to the increased integration of the world economy since the 1970s.

Globalization and Popular Culture

When cultural traits such as clothing, music, movies, types of businesses, and the built landscape spread quickly over a large area and are adopted by various groups, they become part of **popular culture**. Elements of popular culture often begin in urban areas and diffuse quickly through the media, particularly the Internet. They can quickly be adopted globally. People around the world follow European soccer, Indian Bollywood movies, and Japanese animation known as *anime*. With people around the world wearing similar clothes, listening to similar music, and eating similar food, popular cultural traits often promote uniformity in beliefs, values, and the cultural landscape across many cultures.

The culture of the United States is intertwined with globalization. Through the influence of its corporations, Hollywood movies, and government, the United States exerts widespread influence in other countries. But other countries also shape American culture. For example, in 2014, the National Basketball Association included players from 30 countries or territories.

Popular Culture Versus Folk Culture

Popular culture emphasizes trying what is new rather than preserving what is traditional. Many people, especially those in the older generation or who follow a folk culture, openly resist the adoption of popular cultural traits. They do this by preserving traditional languages, religions, values, and foods. While they often slow down the adoption of popular culture, they seldom are successful in keeping their traditional cultures from changing, especially among the young people of their society.

One clash between popular and folk culture is occurring in Brazil. As the population expands to the interior of the rain forest, many indigenous folk cultures are having greater contact with outside groups. Remaining isolated by the forest is becoming increasingly difficult and many young people become exposed to popular culture and are beginning to integrate into the larger Brazilian society. As the young people leave their communities, they are more likely to accept popular culture at the expense of their indigenous cultural heritage, which threatens the very existence of their folk culture.

COMPARING FOLK AND POPULAR CULTURE

Trait	Folk Culture	Popular Culture
Society	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rural and isolated location Homogeneous and indigenous population Most people speak an indigenous or ethnic local language 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Urban and connected location Diverse and multiethnic population Many people speak a global language such as English or Arabic
Social Structure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Emphasis on community and conformity Families live close to each other Well-defined gender roles 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Emphasis on individualism and making choices Dispersed families Weakly defined gender roles
Diffusion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Relatively slow and limited Primarily through relocation Oral traditions and stories 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Relatively rapid and extensive Often hierarchical Social media and mass media
Buildings and Housing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Materials produced locally, such as stone or grass Built by community or owner Similar style for community Different between cultures 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Materials produced in distant factories, such as steel or glass Built by a business Variety of architectural styles Similar between cities
Food	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Locally produced Choices limited by tradition Prepared by the family or community 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Often imported Wide range of choice Purchased in restaurants
Spatial Focus	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Local and regional 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> National and global

Geography of Gender

The geography of gender has become an increasingly important topic for geographers in recent decades. In folk cultures, people often have clearly defined gender-specific roles. Often women take care of the household while men work outside the house to earn money and serve as leaders in religion and politics. In popular culture, gender-specific roles are diminishing. Women have more access to economic resources, more opportunity to work outside the home, and more chances to serve as leaders.

The concept of gendered spaces or gendered landscapes clarifies the importance of cultural values on the distribution of power in societies. Throughout history, in many cultures, certain behaviors have been acceptable for only one gender, and often only in certain spaces. Often, men have operated more freely than women in public spaces, while certain private spaces have been reserved for women. These differences might appear in the etiquette of visiting someone's home. The host might welcome men in the public areas on the main level, but feel comfortable only with women visiting the more private rooms on the upper level.

Resistance to Globalization

The spread of popular culture creates tensions around the world between globalization and local diversity. Followers of traditional cultures that define gender roles strictly resent the relatively greater gender equality often portrayed in Hollywood movies. Workers in the United States resist the transfer of their jobs to overseas locations. Speakers of endangered languages struggle to preserve their language in the face of the spread of English.

Diffusion of Culture

Culture hearths are the original sources of culture. Yet many cultures have spread far beyond their hearths. The spreading of information, ideas, behaviors, and other aspects of culture over wider areas is known as **diffusion**. The two major forms of cultural diffusion come through cultural exchanges both by migration and by more indirect means.

Relocation Diffusion

One main type of diffusion is **relocation diffusion**, the spread of a cultural trait by people who migrate and carry their cultural traits with them. A small-scale example is the spread of pizza, which Italian immigrants brought to the United States in the late 19th century. A larger-scale example is the spread of European culture around the world starting in the 1500s. At times, the areas where migrants settle continue a trait after it has lost its influence in its hearth. The people in the modern world who pronounce English most like Shakespeare live, not in England, but in Appalachia. Disco music evolved in the United States in the 1970s, but remained popular in Egypt long after it faded in the United States.

Expansion Diffusion

The spread of cultural traits through direct or indirect exchange without migration is called **expansion diffusion**. It occurs in many ways.

Contagious diffusion occurs when a cultural trait spreads continuously outward from its hearth through contact among people. For example, the hearth for blues music is the southern United States. As musicians outside the

hearth heard the music, they began to play it themselves. Blues slowly spread northward and eventually reached major cities such as Saint Louis, Chicago, and New York.

Hierarchical diffusion is the spread of culture outward from the most interconnected places or from centers of wealth and importance. Cultural traits spread first from one important person, city, or powerful class to another important person, city, or social class. Eventually the trait could be shared with other people, smaller cities, social classes, or less developed countries. Unlike contagious diffusion, hierarchical diffusion may skip some places while moving on to others. Most popular culture, such as music, fashion, and fads, follows the hierarchical diffusion path.

Cell phone technology demonstrates how hierarchical diffusion works. When cellular phones first appeared on the market in the 1980s, they were expensive and were most commonly owned by wealthy people in large cities in more developed countries. As cell phone networks grew and cell phones became mass-produced, they eventually spread to a wider market. Today, cell phones have diffused throughout the world.

At times, a trait diffuses from a lower class to a higher class, in a process called **reverse hierarchical diffusion**. For example, in the United States in the 1940s through the 1960s, people commonly considered tattoos to be a symbol of low social status. Tattoos were associated with three types of places: seaport towns (among dockworkers and sailors), military bases, and prisons. Since the 1970s, the custom of getting tattoos has diffused throughout many segments of society and geographic areas.

Some reverse hierarchical diffusion goes from small, rural communities to larger urban areas. Walmart stores diffused from rural Arkansas to nearly every city in the United States.

Stimulus diffusion occurs when people in a culture adopt an underlying idea or process from another culture, but modify it because they reject one trait of it. For example, Hindus in India adopted the practice of eating fast food, but they rejected eating beef because doing so would violate their Hindu beliefs. So, they adapted the custom by making vegetarian and other nonbeef types of burgers. Five centuries ago, Europeans adopted the use of lightweight, beautifully decorated porcelain dishes that they obtained from China, but they rejected the high cost of importing the dishes. So, when people in Germany found deposits of the right type of clay to make their own porcelain, they modified the process of obtaining porcelain by making it in Europe.

Contact Between Cultures

Diffusion describes the ways cultures spread. As they spread, they come into contact with other cultures. The interaction of cultures is one of the driving forces in human history, and it can have several types of results.

Acculturation

Often, an ethnic or immigrant group moving to a new area adopts the values and practices of the larger group that has received them, while still maintaining major elements of their own culture. This is called **acculturation**. For example, in the 1880s, the Syndergaard family migrated from Denmark to the United States, settling in a Danish enclave in Iowa. The mother and father gave most of their ten children common Danish names, such as Inger and Niels. They commonly ate Danish foods, including spherical pancakes called *abelskivver*. Within three generations, their descendants still ate abelskivver, but they had names common in U.S. culture, such as Susan, Jim, and Dave.

Assimilation

Unlike acculturation, **assimilation** happens when an ethnic group can no longer be distinguished from the receiving group. This often occurs as ethnic groups become more affluent and leave their ethnic areas. Complete assimilation rarely happens though. Often, the one trait that is retained the longest is religion. For example, the grandchildren of immigrants from India might no longer speak Hindi or other Indian languages or eat traditional Indian cuisine daily, but they might still practice their Hindu faith. Often, the third and fourth generations of an ethnic group display a resurgence in ethnic pride by organizing festivals, learning the ethnic language, and revitalizing ethnic neighborhoods.

Multiculturalism

Without full assimilation, most receiving societies such as the United States are characterized by **multiculturalism**, the coexistence of several cultures in one society, with the ideal of all cultures being valued and worthy of study. A major idea of multiculturalism is that the interaction of cultures enriches the lives of all.

However, coexistence of cultures can also bring conflicts, as people and groups with different values, beliefs, and customs often clash. Minority groups often face prejudice and discrimination. Refugees fleeing the civil war that began in Syria in 2011 who hoped to settle in the United States often faced opposition from Americans who feared that some refugees would be terrorists.

Nativism

In some cases, the conflict between two cultures becomes harsh. **Nativist**, or anti-immigrant, attitudes may form among the cultural majority, sometimes bringing violence or government actions against the immigrant or minority group. Often, nativist attitudes are directed toward one particular or minority group. Often, nativist attitudes are directed toward one particular group, such as opposition in the United States to Roman Catholic immigrants in the 1800s and early 1900s. Other times, nativism reflects a general dislike of people from other countries, or xenophobia.

GEOGRAPHIC PERSPECTIVES: THE DIFFUSION OF DEADLY DISEASES

Many people study deadly diseases. Doctors might focus on how to treat patients. Economists might focus on how a disease affects the demand for medicines. Geographers focus on spatial distribution, including how a disease diffuses across space, outward from its hearth.

The 1918 Influenza Epidemic

The influenza outbreak of 1918–1919, immediately after the end of World War I, was an example of contagious diffusion. The outbreak was devastating, killing three times as many people as World War I had. The source of the outbreak is not clear. It might have been located in Kansas, Great Britain, or France. Some scholars believe laborers from China who were traveling across Canada to Europe to work on the war front carried it with them.

In the United States, American cities on the East Coast quickly emerged as hubs of diffusion. Troops returning home after the war either carried the virus, or contracted it in the port. Then, as they traveled home by train, they spread the disease throughout the country.

Recent Epidemics

More recently, outbreaks of Ebola in West Africa in 2013 and the Zika virus in South America in 2015 threatened death and serious illness. Zika particularly attacked fetuses. But using information about how diseases diffuse, coordinated global public health efforts prevented devastation on the scale of the 1918–1919 flu outbreak.

KEY TERMS

culture	ethnic enclave	hierarchical diffusion
cultural trait	culture realm	reverse hierarchical diffusion
cultural complex	globalization	stimulus diffusion
folk culture	space-time compression	acculturation
culture hearth	popular culture	assimilation
cultural region	diffusion	multiculturalism
formal region	relocation diffusion	nativist
functional region	expansion diffusion	sense of place
perceptual region	contagious diffusion	taboos
cultural landscape		