1 What Is Human Geography?

CHAPTER OVERVIEW

- Human geography is defined as the study of patterns and processes of human activity on the earth's surface, or in other words, it is the study of people and places, and the interactions between the two.
- American geographer, Charles Gritzner, coined a useful definition of human geography in the form of three closely related questions: "What is where, why there, why care?"
- Human geographers are concerned with how the spatial distribution of phenomena develops, and changes over time.
- Human geography is a social science, and like all other social sciences, it makes use of a variety of tools, however, geographers also use two tools not commonly used in other fields: the map and geomatics technology.
- To enhance your understanding of the interaction of people and places, it helps to be geographically aware.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After reading this chapter, you should be able to

- understand the differences between human and physical geography;
- define key concepts relating to human geography;
- understand how the "First Law of Geography" works, such that "everything is related to everything else, but near things are more related than distant things";
- explain the importance of maps to the study of human geography;
- understand how maps are made, and how cartographers must make a series of decisions about how to represent their spatial data;
- identify some map projections and their strengths and weaknesses; and
- understand what it means to be geographically "aware."

KEY TERMS

Accessibility A variable quality of location, expressing the opportunity for interaction with other locations. (p. 21)

Cartogram A thematic map where the size and shape of spatial areas are intentionally distorted and replaced by the relative magnitude of the geographic phenomena (e.g. a country's wealth as measured by gross domestic product). (p. 31)

Cartography The art and science of making maps. (p. 22)

Choropleth map A thematic map using colour or shading to indicate intensity of geographic phenomena (e.g. population density) in a given area. (p. 30)

Clustered (agglomerated) One of two common forms of concentration; occurs when the distance between geographic phenomena (e.g. people) is small; clustering (agglomerating) occurs when geographic phenomena (e.g. businesses) move closer together, sometimes around a nucleus (nucleated). (p. 18)

Concentration The spread of geographic phenomena (e.g. people) over a given area. (p. 18)

Connectivity The direct and indirect linkages (e.g. transportation routes and communication pathways) between two or more locations. (p. 21)

Contagious diffusion One of two forms of expansion diffusion in which geographic phenomena spread rapidly and throughout and area. (p. 20)

Cultural diffusion The process of cultural phenomena (e.g. ideas, innovations, trends, languages) spreading over space and through time. (p. 18)

Cultural landscape The characteristics or overall appearance of a particular area or location, resulting from human modification of the natural environment. (p. 15)

Density A measure of the relationship between the number of geographic phenomena (e.g. people) and a unit of area; typically expressed as a ration. (p. 17)

Diffusion The process of geographic phenomena spreading over space through time. (p. 18)

Dispersed (deglomerated) One of two common forms of concentration; occurs when the distance between geographic phenomena (e.g. people) is large; dispersion (deglomerating) occurs when geographic (e.g. businesses) move apart from one another. (p. 18)

Distance A measure of the amount of space between two or more locations; can be measured in both absolute terms (physical distance) and relative terms (time distance, economic distance, or psychological distance). (p. 16)

Distance decay The effects of distance on spatial interaction; generally, intensity of interaction declines with increasing distance. (p. 20)

Distribution The spatial arrangement of geographic phenomena (e.g. people) within an area; includes density, concentration, and pattern. (p. 17)

Dot map A thematic map where dots or scale-adjusted symbols represent geographic phenomena (e.g. population). (p. 30)

Expansion diffusion One of two basic forms of diffusion in which geographic phenomena spread from one area to another through an additive process. (p. 19)

Fieldwork A means of collecting data and insight into geographic issues; involves the collection of information outside a laboratory, library, or workplace setting; one of the key traditions of geographic inquiry. (p. 34)

Formal (or uniform) region An area (region) that possesses a certain degree of uniformity with respect to one or more physical or cultural traits. (p. 14)

Friction of distance A measure of the restraining effect of distance on human interaction and movement; generally, greater time and cost are incurred with increasing distance. (p. 20)

Functional (or nodal) region An area (region) organized around a node or focal point, and unified by specific economic, political, or social activity. (p. 14)

Geographic information system (GIS) A system of computer hardware and software that facilitates the collection, storage, analysis, and display of spatially referenced data through layered maps. (p. 33)

Geographic scale The territorial extent of level of analysis, such as local, regional, and global. (p. 9)

Geographical (spatial) perspective The approach that geographers utilize in their study of the human and physical environments of the earth; a view of observing variations in geographic phenomena on the earth's surface. (p. 7)

Global positioning system (GPS) A satellite-based system for determining the absolute location of geographic phenomena (e.g. an address). (p. 33)

Hearth The area where a particular cultural trait originates. (p. 19)

Hierarchical diffusion One of two forms of expansion diffusion in which geographic phenomena spread first to key people or places and then gradually throughout the rest of a population or an area. (p. 20)

Human geography One of two branches of geography; the study of patterns and processes of the earth's human or social environments, including population change, economies, cultures, politics, settlements, and human interactions with the natural environment. (p. 6)

Isopleth map A thematic map using lines to connect locations of equal value with respect to a geographic phenomenon (e.g. daily temperature). (p. 31)

Landscape The characteristics, or overall appearance, of a particular area or location, comprising a combination of natural and human influences. (p. 15)

Latitude The angular distance of a point on the surface of the earth, measured in degrees, minutes, and seconds, north and south of the equator (which is assigned a value of 0°); lines of constant latitude are called parallels. (p. 22)

Location A particular position in space; a specific part of the earth's surface; used in absolute, relative, and nominal forms. (p. 9)

Longitude The angular distance of a point on the surface of the earth, measured in degrees, minutes, and seconds, east and west of the prime meridian (assigned a value of 0°) which runs through Greenwich, UK; lines of constant longitude are called meridians. (p. 23)

Map scale The relationship between the size of a geographic feature on a map and the corresponding actual size of the feature on the earth's surface. (p. 23)

Map Typically, a flat (two dimensional) representation of the earth's surface, or a portion of it, and its geographic features including people, places, and geographic phenomena. (p. 21)

Mental (perceptual) map An image or spatial representation (map) of the way space is organized, as influenced by an individual's knowledge or lived experience in that space. (p. 9)

Pattern The geometric, regular, or other (i.e. random) spatial arrangement of geographic phenomena (e.g. people) in a given area. (p. 18)

Perception The process by which humans acquire information about physical and social environments; a way of interpreting one's lived experience. (p. 8)

Physical geography One of two branches of geography; the study of patterns and processes of the earth's natural or physical environments, including climate, topography, geology, soils, and ecosystems. (p. 6)

Place A location that has acquired particular meaning or significance. (p. 12)

Placelessness The nature of locations that lack uniqueness or individual character; used of homogeneous and standardized landscapes. (p. 13)

Projection A process to transform the spherical earth's surface onto a two-dimensional map; a process to transfer locations from the earth's surface onto a flat map. (p. 27)

Reference map A map portraying the absolute locations of places and geographic phenomena (e.g. buildings) using a standard frame of reference, such as the global grid (latitude and longitude). (p. 29)

Region A part of the earth's surface that displays internal homogeneity and is relatively distinct from surrounding areas according to certain criteria; a contiguous spatial unit. (p. 14)

Regionalization The process of classifying locations or areas of the earth's surface into various regions. (p. 14)

Relocation diffusion One of two basic forms of diffusion, in which the geographic phenomena are physically moved from one area to another, such as through immigration or trade. (p. 19)

Remote sensing A series of techniques used for collecting spatial data through instruments (e.g. sensors and cameras in satellites, airplanes, and drones) that are physically distant from the object of study. (p. 32)

Sacred place A location with particular significance to an individual or group, usually (but not necessarily) for religious reasons. (p. 13)

Sense of place The feelings evoked by, or deep attachments to, specific locations (places) such as home, that result from the experiences individuals associate with the location. (p. 13)

Site The physical attributes or characteristics of a location, including its topography, climate, water resources, vegetation, and so on. (p. 12)

Situation The geographic context of a location, relative to other locations, including its economic, political, and social characteristics. (p. 12)

Space The areal extent of something; used in both absolute (objective) and relative (perceptual) forms. (p. 8)

Spatial interaction The nature and extent of spatial interaction is related to the distances between locations and the physical and intangible connections between them. (p. 20)

Spatial Refers to space on the earth's surface; synonymous with *geographic*. (p. 8)

Thematic map An analytical tool to illustrate and emphasize the spatial variation of a particular theme or attribute. (p. 29)

Time zone A region of the earth that observes a uniform standard time. (p. 23)

Toponym The common name given to a location; a place name. (p. 9)

Vernacular (or perceptual) region An area (region) identified on the basis of the perceptions held by people inside or outside the region, or both. (p. 14)

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. Choose a topic related to demographic change, economic activity, political interactions, or cultural practices, and discuss how it relates to Gritzner's definition of geography.

2. How can spaces be sacred to more than one cultural group?

3. What is the history of Daylight Savings Time (DST), who uses it, why, and is it necessary today?

4. There are hundreds of map projections and they all distort the image of the Earth. Which map projection would be the most effective to display a political map of the world and why?

5. How has the use of geographic information systems (GIS) enhanced our ability to assess spatial inequalities?

LINKS OF INTEREST

- The Canadian Association of Geographers
  http://www.cag-acg.ca

- The Association of American Geographers
  http://www.aag.org/

- American Society for Photogrammetry & Remote Sensing (ASPRS)
  http://www.asprs.org/

- GIS Geography
  http://gisgeography.com/

- The International Cartographic Association
  http://www.icahistcarto.org/

- National Council for Geographic Education
  http://www.ncge.org/

SUGGESTED READINGS

Ellard, C. 2009. *Where am I?: Why We Can Find Our Way to the Moon But Get Lost in the Mall*. Toronto: HarperCollins Canada.

We are constantly navigating ourselves from place-to-place. In this book, Ellard explores our fundamental relationships with space.

Jacobs, F. 2009. *Strange Maps: An Atlas of Cartographic Curiosities*. New York; Toronto: Viking Studio.

Maps are not strictly political; they are created for a variety of purposes to display different types of information. *Strange Maps* is full of interesting maps both real and fictional.

Johnston, R. J., D. Gregory, and D. M. Smith, eds. 2000. *The Dictionary of Human Geography*, 4th edn. Oxford: Blackwell.

A comprehensive and detailed dictionary with essay-like entries of all key human geographic concepts, terms and theories that are often treated in an almost encyclopedic fashion.

Monmonier, M. 2018. *How to Lie with Maps*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Just like all pieces of information we are presented with, it is important that we critically read maps and think about who the author is, and what information they are trying to present. In Monmonier's book, he explains how to do this and promotes a healthy-skepticism of these spatial information tools.

YOUTUBE VIDEOS

GeographyHub. 2016. "A Brief History of Cartography and Maps." YouTube video, 7:03. Posted January 2016. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fLdvInDrQ2c

1. What is cartography responsible for?
   - Cartography shapes how we think about the globe. It allows us to understand our environment.
2. What did the age of discovery result in?
   - After a 1500 sketch of Caribbean islands, the interest in the "new world" spurred investment in cartography, sciences, and new advances to discover the world.

TEDx Talks. 2013. "Geographic Information Systems (GIS): Dan Scollon at TEDxRedding." YouTube video, 16:00. Posted October 2013. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9V_Mz7NDy3o

1. According to the talk, how are today's maps altering the way we perceive our world and interact with it?
   - The video begins by showing a global map. On this illustration, populations can be identified; energy consumption rates can be noted as can distribution of populations, density and patterns of cultures. Maps provide us with more information than ever before. Using modern technological advances, people from all corners of the globe are able to access information and make the assumptions based on that information.
2. What is the historical significance of maps?
   - There is a very long history of maps. Maps have evolved from showing us opportunities and risk of place to evolve into very complex multi-use tools. European conquest was driven by at the time, modern maps. Today maps have evolved into computer-delivered and digital devices that we use on a daily basis.