Unit I – Nature & Perspectives

Key Issue 1.2 – Why is each point on earth unique?
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- The concepts of **place** and **region** refer to the uniqueness of an individual location or area.
- They are more or less the same though at different scales.
- What factors go into a location’s “sense of place” (i.e. its uniqueness)?
A. Place: Unique Feature of a Location

- Geographers describe a location in four ways

1. Place Names (toponyms)
   - Names can tell us about a place’s founders and its current residents
     - Louisiana
     - San Diego
     - Philadelphia
   - Name changes are also significant
     - St. Petersburg to Leningrad (and back again)

"El Pueblo de Nuestra Señora la Reina de los Ángeles del Río de Porciúncula"
Louisiana – founded by the French (French culture, language, religion, etc...?)
San Diego – founded by the Spanish
Philadelphia – Greek origin, reference to Ancient Greece for its underlying philosophy, brotherly love & tolerance (philos “loving” + adelphos “brother”)

2. Site

- The physical character of the place
  - Climate
  - Water sources
  - Topography
  - Soil
  - Vegetation
  - Latitude
  - Elevation
- Site is important for defense, sustenance & communication
- The site can be altered by humans (e.g. polders)
  - Manhattan Island
  - The Netherlands
3. Situation (relative location)
   - Situation can help us find a place, but also help explain its significance
   - Singapore is the classic example of a place that benefits from its situation
     - It’s the center of trading & distribution of goods for Southeast Asia
   - How can situation make a location undesirable?
   - Absolute v. relative distance
- Time can help us know the longitude. If you have the GMT, then you can compare it to when the sun is at high noon. If the GMT is 2pm, then you know that you are 30° West.
- A clock that did not use a pendulum was the first piece of equipment that allowed sailors to know longitude (discovery was sponsored by London’s Act of 1714
- If traveling from Asia to America, you must turn the clock back 24 hours (and vice versa)

4. Mathematical Location (absolute location)
   - Longitude (meridians)
     - Prime Meridian in Greenwich England = 0°
     - 0° - 180° E & W
     - Meridians are used for time zones
       - Greenwich Mean Time (GMT) is the Universal Time (UT)
       - 15° = 1 hour (360°/24 = 15)
       - International Date Line (180°)
Sailors knew latitude by looking at the angle of the sun (degrees north or south).

Arctic Circle = 66° N

Antarctic = 66° S
• Land Ordinance of 1785
• The US created the **Township & Range system** to facilitate the sale of land to westward settlers
  - **Township**: 6X6 miles
    - North-south lines are called principle meridians
    - East-west lines are called base lines
  - Townships are divided into **sections** (1X1 mile)
  - Each section is divided into 4 **quarter-sections** (.5mX.5m or 160 acres)
Why aren’t there principle meridians & base lines in this area?

Which map has the largest scale?
B. Region: Areas of Unique Characteristics

- Cultural Landscape
  - Combination of built landscape (language, religion, agricultural practices, etc.) and physical features (climate, vegetation, etc)
  - Carl Sauer
    - “Culture is the agent, the natural area the medium, the cultural landscape is the result”
    - Culture is the driving force
  - Regionalization – proximal places are interconnected
    - Each region is unique with its own social relationships and physical processes

- Regionalization may mean unique places start to share uniqueness with each other or proximal places separate from global uniformity (differentness) depending on context.
- Perhaps there is a global, regional and national spectrum (though region could be below or above the national level depending on context).
C. Types of Regions

- Formal Region
  - AKA uniform or homogenous region
  - An area united under a common cultural or physical characteristic
    - A state can be an example of a formal region (the laws are equally applied throughout the state)
    - The wheat belt
    - “Red America” (voting bloc)
  - The common characteristic is rarely universal (but predominant)
• Functional Region
  • AKA a nodal region
  • An area organized around one node or focal point
  • The characteristic diminishes as you move farther from the node (distance decay)
  • They are often tied to the node by transportation, communication or business associations
    • Newspaper circulation
    • TV reception area
    • Department store base
- Vernacular Region
  - AKA perceptual region
  - This region is a result of people’s informal sense of place
    - Unscientific
    - Not formally recognized
    - Still can be quite “real”
  - Drawing a mental map of your neighborhood would produce a vernacular region
  - Other example: “The South”
    - What factors are used?
    - Environmental? Former slave states? Cotton producing?
DISCUSSION:
* What type of region do each of these represent? Think about how the region is delimited before you answer,
  don't just assume a certain category based on how the graphic looks.
**DISCUSSION:**
* Think of examples of each type of region for the three scales indicated in the table above.
DISCUSSION
* Why does the reality of a culture region rarely follow the simplified model presented here?
* Does the Mormon culture region here pre-empt or overlap with the U.S. "Mountain West" culture region?
D. Cultural Ecology: Integrating Culture and Environment

- The study of human-environment relationships
  - **Environmental determinism** is the belief that the physical environment *causes* social development
    - Carl Ritter & the organic state
    - Jared Diamond (*Guns, Germs & Steel*) has been accused of Environmental Determinism
  - **Possibilism**: argues that nature determines what is possible, but people have the ability to adjust

- Geographers look at 4 physical processes to better understand the distribution of human activities
1. Physical Processes: Climate

- Long-term average weather condition
- Temperature and precipitation determine climate
- Köppen System
  - A. Tropical
  - B. Dry
  - C. Warm Mid-Latitude
  - D. Cold Mid-Latitude
  - E. Polar
- Humans avoid extreme climates (too dry/wet or cold/hot)
2. Physical Processes: Vegetation

- The earth has 4 major plant communities (biomes)
  - **Forest Biome**: continuous canopy
  - **Savanna Biome**: mix of trees and grasses
  - **Grassland Biome**: covered in grass with few trees
  - **Desert Biome**: dispersed patches of vegetation (cacti, etc.)
Why tropical soil is poor:
1. The soil is highly acidic. The roots of plants rely on an acidity difference between the roots and the soil in order to absorb nutrients. When the soil is acidic, there is little difference, and therefore little absorption of nutrients from the soil.
2. The type of clay particles present in tropical rainforest soil has a poor ability to trap nutrients and stop them from washing away. Even if humans artificially add nutrients to the soil, the nutrients mostly wash away and are not absorbed by the plants.
3. The high temperature and moisture of tropical rainforests cause dead organic matter in the soil to decompose more quickly than in other climates, thus releasing and losing its nutrients rapidly.
4. The high volume of rain in tropical rainforests washes nutrients out of the soil more quickly than in other climates.

[According to the textbook "Tropical Rainforests: Latin American Nature and Society in Transition" edited by Susan E. Place]
4. Physical Processes: Landforms

- Humans prefer to live on flatter land because it is more suitable for agriculture.
- Maps that show relief (difference in elevation between two points) are called topographic maps.
  - *Topo* - of or relating to places or forms (OED)