

FRQ 1.3: Unique Locations

KEY ISSUE **2****Why Is Each Point on Earth Unique?**

- **Place: A Unique Location**
- **Region: A Unique Area**
- **Culture Regions**

LEARNING OUTCOME 1.2.1

Identify the distinctive features of a place, including toponym, site, and situation.

Place was defined at the beginning of the chapter as a specific point on Earth distinguished by a particular characteristic. Every place occupies a unique location, or position, on Earth's surface. Although each place on Earth is in some respects unique, in other respects it is similar to other places. The interplay between the uniqueness of each place and the similarities among places lies at the heart of geographic inquiry into why things are found where they are.

Place: A Unique Location

Humans possess a strong sense of place—that is, a feeling for the features that contribute to the distinctiveness of a particular spot on Earth—perhaps a hometown, vacation destination, or part of a country. Describing the features of a place is an essential building block for geographers to explain similarities, differences, and changes across Earth. Geographers think about where particular places are located and the combination of features that make each place on Earth distinct.

Geographers describe a feature's place on Earth by identifying its **location**, the position that something occupies on Earth's surface. In doing so, they consider three ways to identify location: place name, site, and situation.

PLACE NAMES

Because all inhabited places on Earth's surface—and many uninhabited places—have been named, the most straightforward way to describe a particular location is often by referring to its place name. A **toponym** is the name given to a place on Earth.

A place may be named for a person, perhaps its founder or a famous person with no connection to the community, such as George Washington. Some settlers select place names associated with religion, such as St. Louis and St. Paul, whereas other names derive from ancient history, such as Athens, Attica, and Rome, or from earlier occupants of the place.

A place name may also indicate the origin of its settlers. Place names commonly have British origins in North America and Australia, Portuguese origins in Brazil, Spanish origins elsewhere in Latin America, and Dutch origins in South Africa. Some place names derive from features of the physical environment. Trees, valleys, bodies of water, and other natural features appear in the place names of most languages (Figure 1-16).

The Board of Geographical Names, operated by the U.S. Geological Survey, was established in the late nineteenth century to be the final arbiter of names on U.S. maps. In recent years the board has been especially concerned with removing offensive place names, such as those with racial or ethnic connotations.

SITE

The second way that geographers describe the location of a place is by **site**, which is the physical character of a place. Important site characteristics include climate, water sources, topography, soil, vegetation, latitude, and elevation. The combination of physical features gives each place a distinctive character.

Site factors have always been essential in selecting locations for settlements, although people have disagreed on the attributes of a good site, depending on cultural values. Some have preferred a hilltop site for easy defense from attack. Others have located settlements near convenient river-crossing points to facilitate communication with people in other places.

Humans have the ability to modify the characteristics of a site. Central Boston is more than twice as large today as it was during colonial times (Figure 1-17). Colonial Boston was a peninsula connected to the mainland by a very narrow neck. During the nineteenth century, a dozen major projects filled in most of the bays, coves, and marshes. A major twentieth-century landfill project created Logan Airport. Several landfill projects continue into the twenty-first century. The central areas of New York and Tokyo have also been expanded through centuries of landfilling in nearby bodies of water, substantially changing these sites.

SITUATION

Situation is the location of a place relative to other places. Situation is a valuable way to indicate location, for two reasons:

- **Finding an unfamiliar place.** Situation helps us find an unfamiliar place by comparing its location with a familiar one. We give directions to people by referring to the situation of a place: "It's down past the courthouse, on Locust Street, after the third traffic light, beside the yellow-brick bank." We identify important buildings, streets, and other landmarks to direct people to the desired location.
- **Understanding the importance of a place.** Situation helps us understand the importance of a location. Many locations are important because they are accessible to other places. For example, because of its situation, Istanbul is a center for the trading and distribution of goods between Europe and Asia (Figure 1-18). Istanbul is situated along the Bosphorus strait, which connects the Mediterranean and Black seas. The Bosphorus is especially important route for ships traveling to and from Russia.

Region: A Unique Area

LEARNING OUTCOME 1.2.2

Identify the three types of regions.

The “sense of place” that humans possess may apply to a larger area of Earth rather than to a specific point. *Region* was defined at the beginning of the chapter as an area of Earth defined by one or more distinctive characteristics. Geographers identify three types of regions: formal, functional, and vernacular.

A particular place can be included in more than one region, depending on how the region is defined. The designation “region” can be applied to any area larger than a point and smaller than the entire planet. Geographers most often apply the concept at one of two scales:

- Several neighboring countries that share important features, such as those in Latin America.
- Many localities within a country, such as those in southern California.

A region derives its unified character through the **cultural landscape**—a combination of cultural features such as language and religion, economic features such as agriculture and industry, and physical features such as climate and vegetation. The southern California region can be distinguished from the northern California region, for example.

The contemporary cultural landscape approach in geography—sometimes called the regional studies approach—was initiated in France by Paul Vidal de la Blache (1845–1918) and Jean Brunhes (1869–1930). It was later adopted by several American geographers, including Carl Sauer (1889–1975) and Robert Platt (1880–1950). Sauer defined cultural landscape as an area fashioned from nature by a cultural group. “Culture is the agent, the natural area the medium, the cultural landscape is the result.”

People, activities, and environment display similarities and regularities within a region and differ in some way from those of other regions. A region gains uniqueness from possessing not a single human or environmental characteristic but a combination of them. Not content to merely identify these characteristics, geographers seek relationships among them. Geographers recognize that in the real world, characteristics are integrated.

FORMAL REGION

A **formal region**, also called a **uniform region**, is an area within which everyone shares in common one or more distinctive characteristics. The shared feature could be a cultural value such as a common language, an economic activity such as production of a particular crop, or an environmental property such as climate. In a formal region, the selected characteristic is present throughout.

Some formal regions are easy to identify, such as countries or local government units. Montana is an example of a

formal region, characterized with equal intensity throughout the state by a government that passes laws, collects taxes, and issues license plates. The formal region of Montana has clearly drawn and legally recognized boundaries, and everyone living within them shares the status of being subject to a common set of laws.

In other kinds of formal regions, a characteristic may be predominant rather than universal. For example, we can distinguish formal regions within the United States characterized by a predominant voting for Republican candidates, although Republicans do not get 100 percent of the votes in these regions—nor in fact do they always win (Figure 1-19).

A cautionary step in identifying formal regions is the need to recognize the diversity of cultural, economic, and environmental factors, even while making a generalization. Problems may arise because a minority of people in a region speak a language, practice a religion, or possess resources different from those of the majority. People in a region may play distinctive roles in the economy and hold different positions in society based on their gender or ethnicity.

FUNCTIONAL REGION

A **functional region**, also called a **nodal region**, is an area organized around a node or focal point. The characteristic chosen to define a functional region dominates at a central focus or node and diminishes in importance outward. The region is tied to the central point by transportation or communications systems or by economic or functional associations.

Geographers often use functional regions to display information about economic areas. A region's node may be a shop or service, with the boundaries of the region marking the limits of the trading area of the activity. People and activities may be attracted to the node, and information may flow from the node to the surrounding area.

An example of a functional region is the reception area of a TV station. A TV station's signal is strongest at the center of its service area (Figure 1-20). At some distance from the center, more people are watching a station originating in another city. That place is the boundary between the nodal regions of the two TV market areas. Similarly, a department store attracts fewer customers from the edge of a trading area, and beyond that edge, customers will most likely choose to shop elsewhere.

New technology is breaking down traditional functional regions. TV stations are broadcast to distant places by cable, satellite, or Internet. Through the Internet, customers can shop at distant stores.

VERNACULAR REGION

A **vernacular region**, or **perceptual region**, is an area that people believe exists as part of their cultural identity. Such regions emerge from people's informal sense of place rather than from scientific models developed through geographic thought.

As an example of a vernacular region, Americans frequently refer to the South as a place with environmental and cultural features perceived to be quite distinct from those of the rest of the United States (Figure 1-21). Many of these features can be measured. Environmentally, the South is a region where the last winter frost occurs in March and rainfall is more plentiful in winter than in summer. Cultural features include relatively high adherence to the Baptist religion and preference for Republican presidential candidates, relatively low rates of high school graduation, and joining the Confederacy during the Civil War.

Culture Regions

LEARNING OUTCOME 1.2.3

Describe two geographic definitions of culture.

In thinking about why each region on Earth is distinctive, geographers refer to **culture**, which is the body of customary beliefs, material traits, and social forms that together constitute the distinct tradition of a group of people. Geographers distinguish groups of people according to important cultural characteristics, describe where particular cultural groups are distributed, and offer reasons to explain the observed distribution.

In everyday language, we think of *culture* as a collection of novels, paintings, symphonies, and other works produced by talented individuals. A person with a taste for these intellectual outputs is said to be “cultured.” Intellectually challenging culture is often distinguished from popular culture, such as TV. *Culture* also refers to small living organisms, such as those found under a microscope or in yogurt. *Agriculture* is a term for the growing of living material at a much larger scale than in a test tube.

The origin of the word culture is the Latin *cultus*, which means “to care for.” Culture is a complex concept because “to care for” something has two very different meanings:

- To care about—to adore or worship something, as in the modern word cult.
- To take care of—to nurse or look after something, as in the modern word cultivate.

Geography looks at both of these facets of the concept of culture to see why each region in the world is unique.

CULTURE: WHAT PEOPLE CARE ABOUT

Geographers study why the customary ideas, beliefs, and values of a people produce a distinctive culture in a particular place. Especially important cultural values derive from a group’s language, religion, and ethnicity. These three cultural traits are both an excellent way of identifying the location of a culture and the principal means by which cultural values become distributed around the world.

Language is a system of signs, sounds, gestures, and marks that have meanings understood within a cultural group. People communicate the cultural values they care about through language, and the words themselves tell something about where different cultural groups are located (Figure 1-22). The distribution of speakers of different languages and reasons for the distinctive distribution are discussed in Chapter 5.

Religion is an important cultural value because it is the principal system of attitudes, beliefs, and practices through which people worship in a formal, organized way. As discussed in Chapter 6, geographers look at the distribution of religious groups around the world and the different ways that the various groups interact with their environment.

Ethnicity encompasses a group’s language, religion, and other cultural values, as well as its physical traits. A group



▲ FIGURE 1-22 CULTURAL DIVERSITY Languages, religions, and cultures mix in a Jerusalem street market.

possesses these cultural and physical characteristics as a product of its common traditions and heredity. As addressed in Chapter 7, geographers find that problems of conflict and inequality tend to occur in places where more than one ethnic group inhabits and seeks to organize the same territory.

CULTURE: WHAT PEOPLE TAKE CARE OF

The second element of culture of interest to geographers is production of material wealth—the food, clothing, and shelter that humans need in order to survive and thrive. All people consume food, wear clothing, build shelter (Figure 1-23), and create art, but different cultural groups obtain their wealth in different ways.

Geographers divide the world into regions of developed countries and regions of developing countries. Various shared characteristics—such as per capita income, level of education, and life expectancy—distinguish developed regions and developing regions. These differences are reviewed in Chapter 9.

Possession of wealth and material goods is higher in developed countries than in developing countries because of the different types of economic activities carried out in the two types of countries. Most people in developing countries are engaged in agriculture, whereas most people in developed countries earn their living through performing services in exchange for wages. This fundamental economic difference between developed and developing regions is discussed in more detail in Chapters 10 through 13.

PAUSE & REFLECT 1.2.3

Describe differences that you see between U.S. and South Africa suburbs in Figure 1-23.

SPATIAL ASSOCIATION

A region gains meaning through its unique combination of features. The presence of some of these features may be coincidental, but others are related to each other. **Spatial association** occurs within a region if the distribution of one feature is related to the distribution of another feature. Spatial association is strong if two features have very similar distributions, and spatial association is weak if two features have very different distributions.

Name: _____

Date: _____

Period: _____

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AP® HUMAN GEOGRAPHY -- SECTION II -- Time—25 minutes --- Percent of total score—100

Directions: You have 25 minutes to answer the free response portion. It is suggested that you take 5 minutes of this time to plan and outline each answer. While a formal essay is not required, it is not enough to answer a question by merely listing facts. Illustrate your answers with substantive geographic examples where appropriate. Be sure to number each of your answers, including individual parts, in this booklet as the questions are numbered below

1. Geography is considered a science in large part because of the use of tools in order to prepare and interpret maps.
 - A. **Define** a *Place*.
 - B. **Explain** the difference between *Site* and *Situation*.
 - C. **Identify** the 3 (three) types of regions.
 - D. **Explain** the difference between a Formal region and a Functional region.
 - E. **Discuss** the origins of culture and its meaning.
 - F. **Define** *Spatial Association*.