What’s Inside?

Overview 2
Key Terms in this Guide 3
Environmental Impact of Humans 4
Cultural Regions 5
Diffusion 6
Human Migration 7
Involuntary Migration 9
Population Distribution of Africa 10
Activity: Regions & Cultural Landscapes: Using Landscape Elements to Determine Type of Region 11
Online Resources 12

AUTHORS:
Brock J. Brown, Ph.D., Associate Professor, Geography Department, Texas State University-San Marcos
Michal L. LeVasseur, Ph.D., Executive Director, National Council for Geographic Education, Jacksonville State University, Alabama
Overview

Culture is the highly integrated, total way of life for a group of people. It is learned, it forms an integrated whole, and it is unique to humans. Culture is composed of artifacts, sociofacts, and mentifacts. For geographers, the easiest part of culture to observe is the artifact. An artifact is any physical object that has been created by human activity. Clothing, food, tools, musical instruments, housing, and modes of transportation are all artifacts. Cultures are also characterized by sociofacts. These represent the social organization of a culture, such as family structure; for example, extended families, small nuclear families, or individual-person living units. Sociofacts are much harder to observe and understand, especially for cultural outsiders. Mentifacts are the ideologies and values of a culture. These are the most difficult to observe and understand. Spatial distributions of artifacts, sociofacts, and mentifacts are the basis of determining cultural regions. Regions are human constructs that help people understand spatial distributions. Spatial distributions are the result of spatial processes.

The cultural landscape of a place is composed of those features of Earth's surface that are the result of human activity. Some features of the cultural landscape are obvious: cities, houses, factories, fences, cars, barns, golf courses, amusement parks, and so on. Geography focuses on more than just an inventory of the cultural artifacts of Earth's surface, however. Geography also focuses on how these artifacts are distributed in Earth space and are assembled to create identifiable landscape types and regions. Geography focuses on the human populations that have created these landscapes and asks such questions as: Who are they? Where are they from? Why and how have they moved? How do they use the land? Where do they live and why? Over the past 10,000 years human activity has increasingly modified much of the physical landscape on Earth and has been increasingly converting it into a cultural landscape. Today there is little pure physical landscape on the planet, and in many places the distinction between the physical landscape and the cultural landscape is difficult to discern.
Key Terms in this Guide

**Arithmetic population density** – the average number of people per land area unit (for example, square mile or kilometer)

**Carrying Capacity** – the number of people the Earth can support as a whole, or can support in a specific region

**Diaspora** – used to refer to any people forced or induced to leave their traditional homeland, being dispersed throughout other parts of the world, and the ensuing developments in their dispersal and culture

**The Genographic Project** – a five-year effort to understand the human journey (where we came from and how we got to where we live today) launched in 2005 by National Geographic, IBM, The Waitt Family Foundation, and geneticist Spencer Wells

**Physiological population density** – the number of people per land area unit of arable land (for example, square mile or kilometer)

**Population** – people; the term implies human need, want, and economic demand for resources

**Region** – a human construct that attempts to generalize complex physical and cultural spatial distributions so that they can be understood (regions can be formal or functional; definitions for cultural regions only given here)
  - **Formal Cultural Region** – represents the spatial distribution of cultural traits
  - **Functional Cultural Region** – represents the deliberate organization of space to accomplish some function

**Resources** – something defined as valuable by a group of people; the value of a resource can be created by a culture, and the value of a resource can be destroyed, as well

**Spatial distribution** – the distribution in Earth space of anything that exists and can be observed and mapped; not random but due to spatial processes
  - Can be natural/physical, such as precipitation, temperature, or soil
  - Can be cultural, such as language, religion, or gender equality
  - Can also be the result of humans interacting with the environment, for example, soil erosion, deforestation, or habitat loss due to urban sprawl

**Spatial process** – an underlying process responsible for the way something is distributed over Earth space
  - Spatial distributions in the natural/physical environment are due to spatial processes; energy and matter working in the Earth’s physical system
  - Cultural patterns are not random, either, but due to spatial processes, primarily innovation/invention, or, more likely, spatial diffusion

**Technology** – the use of tools, energy, and human creativity to identify and extract resources from the environment that people need, want, and can generate demand for in the global economy; the ability of a group of people to use energy and technology to extract resources from the environment is closely tied to standard of living
Environmental Impact of Humans

Humans use energy and technology to reach into the environment to create and extract resources. As humans interact with the environment to extract resources, they impact and modify existing spatial distributions and underlying spatial processes of the environment. The number of people and the length of time they are in an area influence the degree to which they will impact it. More recently, the level of technology a group of people possesses has become one of the most important variables in determining the degree and “spatial extent” that people impact the environment. Over the past few thousand years, human developments in technology have increased our ability to extract resources and, hence, have increased the number of humans the planet can support, or the carrying capacity.
Cultural Regions

Regions are created by humans to help them understand spatial distributions. There are regions to help us understand natural/physical distributions and cultural distributions.

Geographers observe the spatial distributions of culture and organize the data they collect into cultural regions.

Types of cultural regions:

- **Formal/Uniform Regions** — These represent the spatial distribution of cultural traits. (Examples: language, religion, food, clothing, music, values)

- **Functional/Nodal Regions** — These represent the deliberate organization of space to accomplish some function. (Example: McDonald's has organized space to accomplish the function of selling fast food in order to earn a profit.)

- **Vernacular/Perceptual Regions** — These represent perceived spatial distributions. (Examples: “the Bible Belt” and “the Southwest”)
Diffusion

Cultural regions are determined by the spatial distribution of culture, which is the result of either innovation and invention or spatial diffusion. Diffusion is the dispersal of a phenomenon (such as a cultural artifact, technology, language, or religion) from its point of origin to other locations.

Key geographic question:
How do the processes of migration and diffusion, past and present, affect cultural and demographic dimensions of African regions, countries, and/or communities?

Expansion Diffusion occurs when a phenomenon spreads outward to an increasing number of people. One type of expansion diffusion is Contagious Diffusion, which occurs when the phenomenon spreads by contact. For example, the decision to practice a particular religion by one person, a family, or a group may lead to the contagious diffusion of that religion.

Relocation Diffusion occurs when the phenomenon is moved to new areas. The dispersal of populations and/or cultural traits through human migration is an example of Relocation Diffusion. Examples of cultural traits that are dispersed through migration include architecture, art forms, folktales and literature, music, dance, and clothing.
Human Migration

Migration is the predominant process that contributed to the spread of human populations over Earth at the global scale and is evident in the population distribution of today. It contributes to cultural diffusion and influences demographics, ethnicity, economics, culture, and social characteristics.

Human migration across international boundaries is termed immigration and emigration, either of which may be voluntary or involuntary. Emigration is the process of leaving a country; the person is referred to as an emigrant. Immigration is the process of coming into a country; the person is referred to as an immigrant.

Internal migration refers to movements within the borders of a given country, which may be voluntary or involuntary. Often reflecting changes in economic opportunities, voluntary migration within a country or community redistributes population. The migration of people from rural to urban environments with the advent of industrialization has been a feature of most countries of the world.

People take their culture with them when they migrate to new locations. Material culture diffuses with human migration to new places, where it may be retained, abandoned, or adapted. Any cultural traits that are associated with people who migrate may be visible as part of the cultural landscape of areas into which they have moved. These are termed cultural markers.

Key geographic questions:

How do patterns of migration help explain current patterns of population distribution?

How has migration, past and present, affected cultural and demographic dimensions of African regions, countries, and/or communities?

How has migration, past and present, affected the physical environment of African regions, countries, and/or communities?
Key facts:

- Migration patterns are influenced by:
  a. **Push factors** that make the current place unsatisfactory
  b. **Pull factors** that are the positive lure of another place
  c. The means of migration, including the ability to leave and the resources to migrate
  d. People's knowledge and perception of places
  e. Distance, both in terms of cost and emotion
  f. Barriers to migration

PUSH FACTORS + PULL FACTORS + MEANS TO MIGRATE

- General categories that serve as push and/or pull factors:
  a. Economic – seeking better economic opportunities and/or leaving poor economic conditions; this category has been the most important throughout history
  b. Political – escaping war or persecution
  c. Environmental – seeking a more pleasant place to live; escaping an area of a natural disaster
  d. Cultural – seeking religious freedom or a better education

- Barriers to migration include:
  a. Quality of knowledge about another area and the opportunities available
  b. Economic barriers, such as the cost of travel and establishing a new residence
  c. The physical environment (Examples: The tsetse fly area of central Africa deterred migration, especially because of its impact on livestock-raising. The Sahara desert influenced patterns of trade and migration routes.)
  d. Political barriers, such as immigration policies and laws established by most countries to control migration.

- Only at the global scale is population change due to natural increase. At all other scales migration and natural increase influence population growth or decline and thus the distribution of population.

\[
\text{Population Change} = \text{Natural Change (Births - Deaths)} + \text{Net Migration}
\]

- Migration may change population numbers by unintended diseases brought into an area by migrants.
- Migration may change population structure, as emigrants are rarely a representative cross section of the group they leave. (Historically, most emigrants have been young, single males.)
- Migration may bring more people into an area than can be supported with current resources.
- As people migrate into new areas they bring their ideas of land use and settlement patterns, which alter the physical landscape.
- As people migrate they may bring flora and fauna from the point of origin to the new area, thus introducing exotic species, which may in turn become a threat to native species.
Involuntary Migration

An example of involuntary immigration is the migration of more than 12 million people from Africa to the Americas as part of the Atlantic Slave Trade of the 15th to the 19th centuries.

Key geographic question:

How has African migration influenced the distribution of population and the diffusion of cultural traits beyond the African continent?

Key facts:

- The trade in enslaved Africans was dominant along a coastal strip of tropical Africa between the Senegal and Congo Rivers. Most enslaved people were taken within 300 miles of the coast.

- The primary destinations for enslaved Africans were the Caribbean, Latin America, and the area that would become the United States.

- Africans quickly became the major portion of the population in specific countries, especially as the indigenous populations died of diseases brought by Europeans.

- The diffusion of cultural traits that accompanied the migration of enslaved Africans has been infused into contemporary cultural elements. Examples include musical forms such as jazz that have African rhythms at their core, elements of language and religion, folktales such as the Uncle Remus stories, and food types.
Population Distribution of Africa

As of mid-2006, about 924 million people lived in Africa. This represents about 14 percent of the world’s population. Africa has the fastest growing population in the world due to high birth rates; high fertility rates; mortality rates that have declined faster than fertility rates; and a relatively young population, with 42 percent under the age of 15. At the continental scale, Africa is relatively sparsely settled and population densities are relatively low, reflecting the dominance of rural settlement.

Key geographic questions:

How does the size of the population of Africa compare to other world regions?

Where are people located on the African continent?

What are the patterns of population density on the African continent?

What factors help explain the population and settlement patterns in Africa?

Key facts:

• Population concentrations are highest in the following regions:
  a. Along the Nile River, which provides a critical water resource
  b. The Maghreb region of the northwest coast, which lies in a wetter and milder climate zone
  c. West Africa, where the early population developed a system of agriculture based on some of Africa’s best soil
  d. Highland East Africa, where volcanic highlands associated with the Rift Valley development contain fertile volcanic soils used for subsistence and cash-crop agricultural systems
  e. The eastern half of South Africa, where population distribution is related to an urban economy based on mining activities

• Rapid population growth is stressing resources in some areas of Africa.

• The migration of refugees within countries and between countries is changing some population distribution patterns.

• Urbanization is increasing as a result of the rural-to-urban migration.
  a. Africa had urban traditions in the past even though most people did not live in cities.
  b. At the present trend, half the population of Africa may be urban by 2025.
  c. Tendency is toward urban primacy, whereby one major city is dominant and at least three times larger than the next largest city.
Activity: Regions & Cultural Landscapes—Using Landscape Elements to Determine Type of Region
Types of Cultural Regions: Formal, Functional, and Vernacular

Cultural landscape features are elements of the landscape that humans have created. **Formal** regions convey the spatial distribution of cultural traits, such as language, religion, food, music, clothing, values, etc. **Functional** regions represent space that is deliberately organized to accomplish a function. For example, the part of the world with a cultural preference for painting fingernails and toenails is a **formal** cultural region. The area where a cosmetics company sells nail polish in order to earn a profit is a **functional** cultural region. A **vernacular** region exists in the minds of people, and probably can’t be easily seen (for example, the “Bible Belt”).

**DO THIS:**
Think about cultural landscape elements common to your region or that you have seen in your travels.
List some of these in the left column.

**THEN DO THIS:**
List the type of cultural region (formal, functional, or vernacular) that best describes each landscape element in the column on the right.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LANDSCAPE ELEMENT</th>
<th>TYPE OF REGION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“golden arches”</td>
<td>functional</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>many swimming pools</td>
<td>formal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Online Resources

Human Geography of Africa Content Guide: Online Resources

RELATED LINKS:

National Geographic Guides for Educators: The Geographic Perspective
Written for educators, these National Geographic content guides offer background on and real-world examples of the geographic perspective, and how it can be applied across the curriculum. Three of the guides focus on Africa.

Geographic Perspective: Content Guide for Educators (PDF)
Examples of ways educators can apply the geographic perspective across the curriculum to enhance students' examination of complex issues that arise from human interaction with the environment

Africa: Physical Geography Content Guide for Educators (PDF)
Explores ways of teaching physical geography—specifically, of Africa—to students, including location, topography, climate, vegetation, and rivers. Developed for Geography Action! 2006: Africa

Africa: Human Geography Content Guide for Educators (PDF) (this guide)
By exploring the cultural landscape of a place, educators can help students understand how people learn and integrate culture—something unique to humans. Developed for Geography Action! 2006: Africa.

Africa: Contemporary Issues Content Guide for Educators (PDF)
How educators can use the geographic perspective to infuse numerous kinds of contemporary issues—in this instance, issues in Africa—into their curricula. Developed for Geography Action! 2006: Africa.
Africa Multidisciplinary Educator Guide (PDF)
This guide offers K–12 educators dozens of resources for teaching about Africa across the curriculum when something new and interesting is needed. Grouped into four grade bands, the guide lists lesson plans, interactive features, and more that can be used to teach science, social studies, Language Arts, art, and more. Developed for Geography Action! 2006: Africa.

Brock Brown's Geographical Summary of Earth as a Natural/Physical Environmental System and Humans Interacting with the System (PDF)
This thought-provoking essay explores the Earth's dynamic energy/matter system and how humans impact that system through the use of technology. Dr. Brown is an Associate Professor of Geography at Texas State University—San Marcos.

The Genographic Project
https://www3.nationalgeographic.com/genographic/
The fossil record fixes human origins in Africa, but little is known about the great journey that took Homo sapiens to the far reaches of the Earth. The Genographic Project is a five-year effort to understand the human journey—where we came from and how we got to where we live today.

My Wonderful World
http://www.mywonderfulworld.org
Give kids the power of global knowledge with resources from this National Geographic-led campaign—backed by a coalition of major partners—to expand geographic learning in school, in the home, and in the community.

National Geographic on Africa
http://www.nationalgeographic.com/africa
Explore Africa with classroom resources, interactive features, photographs, Web sites for kids, and more.

National Geographic EdNet
http://ngsednet.org
The National Geographic free online site for educators—a one-stop shop for education news, resources, discussion, and more

National Geographic EdNet: Classroom Companion Africa Resources
Comprehensive list of National Geographic resources on Africa
National Geographic: Geography Action! 2005: Migration: The Human Journey
http://www.nationalgeographic.com/geographyaction
National Geographic’s annual K-12 conservation and awareness program focused on human migration in 2005.

National Geographic: Geography Action! 2006: Africa in 3–D
http://www.nationalgeographic.com/geographyaction
National Geographic’s annual K-12 conservation and awareness program focused on Africa in 3-D in 2006, the first of a five-year, round-the-world curriculum series.

National Geographic Online
http://www.nationalgeographic.com
Photos, videos, daily news, interactive features, maps, world music, and more, as well as resources for educators and kids

University of Pennsylvania: African Studies Center
http://www.africa.upenn.edu
Up-to-date resources for K–12 teachers include lessons, country pages, images, maps and flags, and links to sites about African anthropology, population, women’s studies, and more.

HUMAN GEOGRAPHY OF AFRICA RELATED LESSON PLANS AND ACTIVITIES:

EDSITEment: The Royal Art of Benin (Grades 3–5)
http://edsitement.neh.gov/view_lesson_plan.asp?id=412
Students learn how royal power was communicated in a society without written records through brass plaques created by Benin artists.

EDSITEment: Trekking to Timbuktu (Grades 6–8)
http://edsitement.neh.gov/view_lesson_plan.asp?id=499
In the eight lessons of this unit, students learn about the geography of Mali and the cultures and economies along the Niger River. They explore the three kingdoms that evolved in ancient and medieval West Africa.
National Geographic: Xpeditions Activity—African Artifact Scavenger Hunt
http://www.nationalgeographic.com/xpeditions/activities/10/index.html
In this activity, kids are selected by the National Geographic Society to take part in an artifact scavenger hunt on the continent of Africa. Their mission is to identify artifacts used by various peoples in Africa.

National Geographic: Xpeditions Lesson—Take Off on the MegaFlyover Project! (Grades K–2)
Students are introduced to the MegaFlyover project and imagine they are going to travel along with National Geographic conservation fellow Michael Fay.

National Geographic: Xpeditions Lesson—How’s the Weather—in Africa?! (Grades K–2)
Students describe and compare how weather affects human activity in two places on opposite sides of the world. Students first identify the seasons and weather in their community and compare how the weather of northern Africa impacts human activities there. Students conclude that the impact of weather on human activities is a common thread in human communities all over the world.

National Geographic: Xpeditions Lesson—Ancient Worlds Workshop: Egypt (Grades 3–5)
http://www.nationalgeographic.com/xpeditions/lessons/10/g35/tgancient.html
Students explore the ancient civilization of Egypt. They learn about the geography of Egypt and daily life in ancient Egypt.

National Geographic: Xpeditions Lesson—Is ‘African’ a Language? (Grades 6–8)
http://www.nationalgeographic.com/xpeditions/lessons/18/g68/afrolanguage.html
Students are introduced to the study of languages (known as linguistics), the linguistic categorization of African languages, and several perceived effects of Africa’s linguistic diversity.

National Geographic: Xpeditions Lesson—Seeing the Human Impact on Africa: What Can You Learn From a Plane? (Grades 6–8)
http://www.nationalgeographic.com/xpeditions/lessons/01/g68/africaplane.html
Students analyze several maps of Africa to see where the greatest levels of human impact can be observed. They look at photographs from different parts of Africa showing both its human and natural landscapes, and consider what these images might look like from the air.
National Geographic: Xpeditions Lesson—African Language Diversity (Grades 9–12)
http://www.nationalgeographic.com/xpeditions/lessons/18/g912/afrolanguage.html
Students are introduced to the study of languages (known as linguistics) and explore the linguistic categorization of Africa’s languages. Students examine the possible causes of linguistic diversity and think about the relationship between language and the environment.

ReadWriteThink: Exploring World Cultures Through Folk Tales (Grades 3–5)
http://www.readwritethink.org/lessons/lesson_view.asp?id=91
Students read folktales from Japan, Wales, and Africa and depict the stories visually for the purposes of retelling.

Authors:
Brock J. Brown, Ph.D., Associate Professor, Geography Department, Texas State University-San Marcos
Michal L. LeVasseur, Ph.D., Executive Director, National Council for Geographic Education, Jacksonville State University, Alabama

Photograph (page 2): Sarah Leen

Diagram page 4: © Brock Brown
Diagrams page 6: Michal LeVasseur