

The Cultural Imprint of the Gothic Cathedral. Gothic cathedrals were built at great expense and effort all over Europe during the Middle Ages. Today they still dominate the cultural landscapes of many cities, towns, and villages.

POPULAR AND FOLK CULTURE

Culture may be categorized according to spatial distribution into two basic types: folk culture and popular culture. **Folk culture** is traditionally practiced by small, homogeneous groups living in isolated rural areas. **Popular culture** is found in large heterogeneous societies that are bonded by a common culture despite the many differences among the people that share it.

Folk Culture

Folk culture is controlled by tradition, and resistance to change is strong. Most groups are self-sufficient, and their tools, food, and music tend to be homemade. Buildings are constructed with local materials without architects or blueprints, but with clear purposes and plans in mind. **Folk life** is the composite culture, both material and non-material, that shapes the lives of folk societies, such as those in rural areas in the early settlement of the United States. Today true folk societies no longer exist in the U.S., although the Amish, with their rejection of electricity, cars, and modern dress, are one of the least altered folk groups in the country. When many people who live in a land space share at least some of the same folk customs, a **folk culture region** may be recognized. For example, in the area around Lancaster, Pennsylvania, the Amish have settled into farmhouses that are readily identifiable by the lack of electrical lines, buggies and horses outside, and people who dress in traditional styles. Although other people live in the area, the unique cultural landscape created by the Amish make the area a distinct folk culture region. Although only about 70,000 Amish people live in the U.S. today, their folk culture remains visible on the landscape in at least 17 states, with the largest concentrations today in Pennsylvania, Ohio, and Indiana.

Cultural Diversity

Folk cultures usually contribute to cultural diversity because they are relatively isolated. They may diffuse to other locations, but generally the diffusion is slow because people often don't leave the areas where they grow up. A group's unique folk customs develop through centuries of relative isolation

from customs practiced by other cultural groups. Geographers P. Karan and Cotton Mather found good examples of cultural diversity among isolated folk societies that live in the Himalayan Mountains in Central Asia. Despite the fact that spatial distances are small, the groups' cultures are very different from one another. For example, only Tibetan Buddhists in the northern regions paint divine figures, such as monks and saints. In contrast, Hindus in the south prefer to paint scenes from everyday life. Some groups concentrate their art on plants and flowers, while others paint symbols and designs that reflect their religious animism.

The Physical Environment

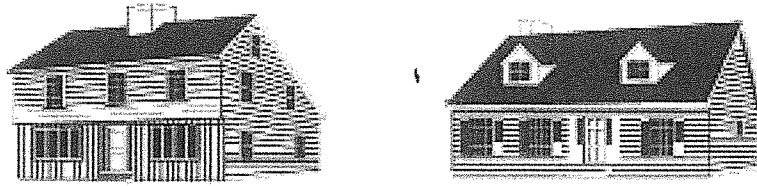
Environmental conditions limit the variety of human life anywhere, but since folk societies are usually agricultural with limited technology, they are particularly responsive to the environment. However, their methods for dealing with the environment differ greatly. For example, the custom of wearing wooden shoes in the Netherlands comes from an adaptation to working in fields that are very wet because much of the land is below sea level. Other folk cultures that work in wet fields have adapted to the environment in other ways, making the Dutch custom unique.

Food habits derive from the environment according to the climate and growing season. Rice will not grow in the cold, drier climates that wheat prefers, so the environment limits food production. However, folk societies prepare and cook foods in various ways, and they even differ in what they consider to be edible. For example, Hindu taboos against eating cows deprive some of a readily available food source. However, the taboo makes environmental sense because oxen (castrated male cows) are necessary for pulling plows that must prepare the fields when the monsoon rains arrive every year. Other food taboos have no environmental basis, such as American avoidance of eating insects, which are a readily available source of nutrition.

Housing Styles

Housing structures reflect both cultural and environmental influences. Folk societies are limited in their building materials by the resources available in the environment. So if trees are available, wooden houses will be built, but if not, they will be constructed of stone, grass, sod, skins, or whatever else is available. Similarly, construction techniques also reflect the environment, such as building a steep roof in cold climates to reduce the accumulation of snow. Variations, though, are not always explained by environment. Cultural influences are reflected in housing styles, such as sacred walls or corners built in houses in China, Fiji, the Middle East, India, and Africa. In parts of Java, the front door always faces south, the direction of the all-important South Sea Goddess. People in similar climates choose different styles for their buildings. Some may organize everything around a central courtyard, others may build balconies on the front of their houses, and still others may build decks or patios on the back. Cultures define zones of privacy differently within a home's property, with many in East Asia building doors and walls for entrance into a garden area, a zone of privacy not usually found in homes in the West.

Housing styles may diffuse to other areas, particularly as folk cultures break up and are replaced by larger popular cultures. Traditional styles come from folk culture centers, and diffuse wherever the houses are practical or appealing to build. An example is the New England saltbox house, a practical adaptation to cold weather climate that is now widely found throughout the Great Lakes area, New York, and Pennsylvania. A Middle Atlantic style originated as a one-room log cabin with a stone chimney and



New England Houses. On the left is the saltbox house style originating in New England around 1650 and commonly built by the early 18th century. On the right is the “Cape Cod” style, also a New England style, that originated in the late 17th century. Both styles diffused west and south through New York, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Ohio, and Michigan by the early 19th century.



Traditional House in Peru. The thatched-roof house in the modern-day photo above provides evidence that housing styles still may reflect folk cultures. Thatched roofs appear in other cultures, but this style is particular to the Andes Mountain valleys in South America.

fireplace at one end. The houses were built on to with time, often with additional rooms, a porch, and a second floor. The style spread westward throughout the mid-section of the country to the Mississippi River. In the South, houses were often built on raised platforms or stilts to allow for cool air to circulate under the floors. A similar style of house diffused from its source in the Lower Chesapeake Bay area southward along the coast as far as Georgia.

Folk Music

North American folk music began as immigrants carried their songs to the New World, but the imported songs became Americanized, and new songs were added by American experiences. The songs developed from several folk culture regions:

- The Northern song area – This region includes the Maritime Provinces of Canada, New England, and the Middle Atlantic states. Its ballads are close to English originals, a characteristic reinforced by new immigrants. The fiddle is featured at dances, and fife-and-drum bands were popular in the early years of the Republic.

- The Southern and Appalachian song area – This region extends westward to Texas, and the music is characterized by unaccompanied, high-pitched, nasal solo singing. The words speak of hard lives, and the backwoods style that emerged forms the roots of “country” music.
- The Western song area – West of the Mississippi River this regional music reflects the experiences of cowboys, plains farmers, river people, and gold seekers. Some are reworked lumberjack ballads of the North.
- The Black Song Style Family – This style grew out of the slave experience in the rural South, and features both choral and instrumental music, a strong beat, and deep-pitched mellow voices.

Popular Culture

In the United States folk cultures broke down during the 20th century as automobiles, radios, motion pictures, and a national press began to homogenize America. Mechanization, mass production, and mass distribution through stores and mail order diminished self-sufficiency and household crafts. Popular culture began to replace traditional culture in everyday life throughout the United States, Canada, and most other industrialized countries. **Popular culture** is primarily but not exclusively urban-based, with a general mass of people conforming to and then abandoning ever-changing cultural trends. Popular culture is pervasive, and involves the vast majority of a population, exposing them to similar consumer and recreational choices, and leads them to behave in similar ways. Folk culture encourages cultural diversity among groups; popular culture breeds homogeneity.

In reality, folk cultures don’t go away entirely, but they blend with popular culture, and differences between local and universal become less apparent.

National Uniformities and Globalization

Landscapes of uniformity through popular culture tend to take on a national character, so that the American or Canadian way of life is different from the English or the Japanese way of life. National chain stores, gas stations, restaurants, and motels appear, all with identical outside and inside architecture and style. In recent years many of these chain stores have globalized, so that they may be seen in many countries. In particular, American popular culture has diffused to many areas of the world through global communication and transportation networks. The globalization of popular culture is seen in clothing styles, television shows, movies, and acceptance of western business conduct and institutions. Of course, standardization is not complete, and national and regional cultural contrasts still remain.

Many people resent the globalization of popular culture, and some governments officially oppose or control it. Iran restricts Western radio and television programs and enforces traditional dress for women, including head coverings. China, Saudi Arabia, and many other countries impose internet surveillance and censorship and demand that U.S.-based search engines filter offensive content. In recent years the globalization of popular culture has come to be seen as a type of dominance by the West, and resisting it is thought to preserve non-Western ways of life.

Environmental Impact of Popular Culture

Popular culture is less likely than folk culture to be distributed with consideration for physical features, partly because it often significantly modifies or controls the environment. Technologies can reproduce natural features, yet place them in unnatural settings. For example, the “strip” in Las Vegas is lined with hotels and casinos that reproduce the cultures of ancient Egypt, New York City, Venice, Paris, the Middle East, and ancient Rome – all set within the natural desert landscape.

Some environmental consequences of popular culture include:

- **Uniform landscapes** – Not only do buildings look alike, but they are arranged on streets that look the same no matter where they are. Fast food restaurants are next door to chain motels, which in turn border gas stations and convenience stores. These structures are designed so that both local residents and visitors immediately recognize the purpose of the building, or perhaps even the name of the company.
- **Increased demand for natural resources** – Fads may increase demands for animal skins, such as mink, jaguar, leopard, or kangaroo for fashionable clothing. Eating habits may demand consumption of food that is not efficient to produce. For example, to produce 1 pound of beef, the animal needs to consume about 10 pounds of grain. For chicken, the ratio is 1 to 3. This grain could be fed to people directly, bypassing the inefficiency of producing the meat.
- **Pollution** – One of the most significant problems of modern mass society is the pollution created by a high volume of wastes – solids, liquids, and gases – that must be absorbed into the environment. Solid products – cans, bottles, old cars, paper, and plastics – are discarded rather than recycled. Folk cultures have sometimes been hard on the environment, too. For example, during the Middle Ages, many of the forests of Europe were cut down to provide fuel for warmth and cooking. However, the level of waste that folk cultures generate is usually far less than that created by people in the era of popular culture.

CULTURAL LANDSCAPES AND CULTURAL IDENTITY

Each culture region develops a distinctive cultural landscape as people modify the environment to their specific needs, technologies, and lifestyles. For example, terraced fields of crops up the mountainsides represent a distinctive feature of the cultural landscape of the Andes Mountain region in South America. The cultural landscape of the Rocky Mountain region in North America looks very different because the U.S. and Canadian cultures formed at different times, with a different mix of population, money, diets, technology, and trade patterns.

Landscapes and Values

The value systems of cultures affect the ways people use the natural environment, and so, the appearance of the cultural landscape. Native Americans of the Central Plains were basically hunters and gatherers who viewed the land space not as property but as the source of their sustenance, whereas Europeans coming into the area looked for areas to grow their crops and animals to trade back east. In many ways

the buffalo symbolized the contrasting value systems. Native Americans used every part of animals that they killed because they were necessary for survival. Europeans saw buffalo as a source of hides to sell or trade, and left the carcasses to rot, leaving Native Americans without the necessities of life. Farmers who moved into the area valued soil, and so changed the cultural landscape from one that characterized hunting and gathering to one dotted with farmhouses, fences, roads, and rows of crops. In areas where industry has displaced agriculture, energy is more valuable than soil, and so the cultural landscape changes to one marked with factories, cities, and centers of distribution. Today unaltered wilderness has again become valued as an end in itself, as a place that inspires and comforts the human spirit. Those with this value want factories disassembled, mines reclaimed, and deforested areas reseeded.

Landscapes and Identity

Culture is evident everywhere throughout the landscape in adaptations of the natural landscape as well as in toponyms, types of architecture, and designs of towns and cities. People express cultural beliefs through transforming elements of the world into **symbols** that carry a particular meaning recognized by people who share a culture. Examples are monuments, flags, slogans, or religious icons, and through landscaping and house types. Symbols express personal identity in many different ways. A national flag represents an affiliation with a country, and a cross is a religious symbol to many Christians. Landscaping a piece of property may express a need for order, beauty, and creativity. Geographers who study the cultural landscape recognize that the concept of **regional identity** can be problematic as symbols clash with values of people in other regions. For example, the Muslim practice of never depicting Allah or Muhammad in paintings or drawings clashed with the western value of freedom of the press when a Danish cartoonist broke the ban in 2005. Religious structures and figures, languages, political leaders, and sports teams may all serve as sources of regional identity.



Cultural Identity through Mascots. The above drawings of a bear, a blue jay, and a bobcat represent some common mascots for sports teams. The symbol represents more than the team, but the cultural identity of a school that often draws from a culture region. The cultural landscape around the school often makes common use of the symbols, and students even wear them on their clothing and book bags.



Symbols. The three symbols above represent various cultural landscapes and help to form cultural identities. The Buddha statue on the left is a complex symbol central to many Buddhist beliefs; in many western countries, the hand gesture in the middle symbolizes victory; and the hand gesture on the right symbolizes prayer.

Symbolic Landscapes

All landscapes can be seen as symbolic, since they have accumulated various meanings over time. The signs and images found in the landscape convey to us messages that demand interpretation. At the simplest level, traffic signs tell us to “stop,” “slow down,” or travel at a certain speed. Public monuments and statues are symbols deliberately inserted into the landscape as messages to be read. They often commemorate bravery, feats performed in battle, or political allegiance. Although many symbols today are international, others reflect regional cultures that give people a sense of place.



Universal Symbols. This photo taken in Xi'an, China, of three Americans and three Muslim Chinese illustrates the point that symbols may cross cultures and have international meaning.