Geography Matters

In today’s world, where places are increasingly interdependent, it is important to know something about human geography and to understand how places affect, and are affected by, one another. Consider, for example, some of the prominent news stories of the first half of 2005. At first glance they were a mixture of achievements, disputes, and disasters that might seem to have little to do with geography, apart from the international flavor of the coverage. The world’s richest countries—the G8 group—agreed to write off $40 billion in debts owed by 18 of the world’s poorest countries, most of them in Africa; Syria pulled its troops out of Lebanon, allowing the first free elections in Lebanon since 1976; a proposed Constitution for the European Union was stalled by referenda in France and the Netherlands; there was ongoing concern over the development of nuclear arms in Iran and North Korea; and, dominating headlines around the world, a continual stream of reports on the war in Iraq. Off the front pages we read of the startling economic growth of China, of concerns over the effects of global warming, controversies over genetically modified foods, and the continuing diffusion of the HIV/AIDS epidemic.

Most of these stories did have important geographical dimensions. The diffusion of HIV/AIDS, for example, is a geographical as well as social and cultural phenomenon. Thus, in the United States as in other countries, the HIV/AIDS epidemic has diffused through the country in a very distinctive geographical pattern. Behind some of the major news stories, geographical processes played a more central role. Stories about economic development, regional territorial disputes, ethnic conflict, and global warming, for example, all have strong geographical elements.

Human geography is about recognizing and understanding the interdependence among places and regions without losing sight of the uniqueness of specific places. Places are specific geographic settings with distinctive physical, social, and cultural attributes. Regions are territories that encompass many places, all or most of which share attributes different from the attributes of places elsewhere. Basic tools and fundamental concepts enable geographers to study the world in this way. Geographers learn about the world by finding out where things are and why they are there. Maps and mapping, of course, play a key role in how geographers analyze and portray the world. Maps are also important tools for introducing geographers’ ideas about the way that places and regions are made and altered.

MAIN POINTS

- Geography matters because it is specific places that provide the settings for people’s daily lives. In these settings important events happen, and from them significant changes diffuse.
- Places and regions are highly interdependent, each playing specialized roles in complex and ever-changing networks of interaction and change.
- Some of the most important aspects of the interdependence between geographic scales are provided by the relationships between the global and the local.
- Human geography provides ways of understanding places, regions, and spatial relationships as the products of a series of interrelated forces that stem from nature, culture, and individual human action.
- The first law of geography is that “everything is related to everything else, but near things are more related than are distant things.”
- Distance is one aspect of this law, but connectivity is also important, because contact and interaction are dependent on channels of communication and transportation.
WHY PLACES MATTER

An appreciation of the diversity and variety of peoples and places is a theme that runs through all of human geography, the study of the spatial organization of human activity and of people’s relationships with their environments. This theme is inherently interesting to nearly all of us. National Geographic magazine has become a national institution by drawing on the wonder and fascination of the seemingly endless variety of landscapes and communities around the world. Almost 8 million households, representing about 30 million regular readers, subscribe to this magazine for its intriguing descriptions and striking photographs. Millions more read it occasionally in offices, lobbies, or waiting rooms.

Yet many Americans often seem content to confine their interest in geography to the pages of glossy magazines, to television documentaries, or to vacations. It has become part of the conventional wisdom—both in the United States and around the world—that many Americans have little real appreciation or understanding of people and places beyond their own daily routines. This is perhaps putting it too mildly. Surveys have revealed widespread ignorance among a high proportion of Americans, not only of the fundamentals of the world’s geography but also of the diversity and variety within the United States itself. One Gallup poll found that 70 percent of young adults in the United States could not find their own country on a map of the world. In a survey of more than 3,000 young adults in Canada, France, Germany, Great Britain, Italy, Japan, Mexico, Sweden, and the United States in 2002, Americans came in next to last in terms of geographic literacy.¹ Top scorers were young adults in Sweden, Germany, and Italy. Despite the daily bombardment of news from the Middle East, Central Asia, and other world trouble spots, roughly 85 percent of young Americans could not find Afghanistan, Iraq, or Israel on a map. The survey found that nearly 30 percent of young Americans could not find the Pacific Ocean, the world’s largest body of water; more than half were unable to locate India; and only 19 percent could name four countries that officially acknowledge having nuclear weapons. This lack of geographical knowledge carries over to people’s perceptions of the United States and its role in the world. A poll in 2004 found, for example, that most Americans believe that the United States spends more than 20 percent of its budget on aid to poor countries; the actual figure in 2003 was just 0.14 percent of the country’s gross national income, putting it last in a table of rich industrial nations. So although most people in the United States are fascinated by different places, relatively few have a systematic knowledge of them. Fewer still understand how different places came to be the way they are, or why places matter in the broader scheme of things. This lack of understanding is important because geographic knowledge can take us far beyond simply glimpsing the inherently interesting variety of peoples and places.

The importance of geography as a subject of study is becoming more widely recognized, however, as people everywhere struggle to understand a world that is increasingly characterized by instant global communications, rapidly changing international relationships, unexpected local changes, and growing evidence of environmental degradation (Figure 1.1). Many more schools now require courses in geography than just a decade ago, and the College Board has added the subject to its Advanced Placement program. Meanwhile, many employers are coming to realize the value of employees with expert-


Figure 1.1 Geographic literacy
A passer-by looks at maps of the world, Mumbai (Bombay), India. Increasing international interdependence, along with increasing international news coverage, makes people everywhere more engaged in geographic awareness.
ise in geographical analysis and an understanding of the uniqueness, influence, and interdependence of places.

The Influence and Meaning of Places

Places are dynamic, with changing properties and fluid boundaries that are the product of the interplay of a wide variety of environmental and human factors. This dynamism and complexity are what make places so fascinating for readers of National Geographic. They are also what make places so important in shaping people’s lives and in influencing the pace and direction of change. Places provide the settings for people’s daily lives and their social relations (patterns of interaction among family members, at work, in social life, in leisure activities, and in political activity). It is in these settings that people learn who and what they are, how they should think and behave, and what life is likely to hold for them.

Places also exert a strong influence, for better or worse, on people’s physical well-being, opportunities, and lifestyle choices. Living in a small town dominated by petrochemical industries, for example, means a higher probability than elsewhere of being exposed to air and water pollution, having a limited range of job opportunities, and having a relatively narrow range of lifestyle options because of a lack of amenities such as theaters, specialized stores and restaurants, and recreational facilities. Living in a central neighborhood of a large metropolitan area, on the other hand, usually means having a wider range of job opportunities and a greater choice of lifestyle options because of the variety of amenities accessible within a short distance. But it also means, among other things, living with a relatively high exposure to crime.

Places also contribute to people’s collective memory and become powerful emotional and cultural symbols. Think of the evocative power for most Americans of places like Times Square and the site of the former World Trade Center in New York; the Mall in Washington, D.C.; Hollywood Boulevard in Los Angeles; and Graceland in Memphis. And for many people, ordinary places have special meaning: a childhood neighborhood, a college campus, a baseball stadium, or a family vacation spot. This layering of meanings reflects the way that places are socially constructed — given different meanings by different groups for different purposes. Places exist and are constructed by their inhabitants from a subjective point of view. The meanings given to a place may be so strong that they become a central part of the identity of the people experiencing them. People’s identity is the sense that they make of themselves through their subjective feelings based on their everyday experiences and wider social relations. At the same time, though, the same places will likely be constructed rather differently by outsiders. Your own neighborhood, for example, centered on yourself and your home, is probably heavily laden with personal meaning and sentiment. But your neighborhood may well be viewed very differently, perhaps unsympathetically, by outsiders. This distinction is useful in considering the importance of understanding spaces and places from the viewpoint of the insider—the person who normally lives in and uses a particular place—as well as from the viewpoint of outsiders (including geographers).

Finally, places are the sites of innovation and change, of resistance and conflict. The unique characteristics of specific places can provide the preconditions for new agricultural practices (such as the development of seed agriculture and the use of plow and draft animals that sparked the first agricultural revolution in the Middle East in prehistoric times—see Chapter 8); new modes of economic organization (such as the high-tech revolution that began in Silicon Valley in the late twentieth century); new cultural practices (the punk movement that began in disadvantaged British housing projects, for instance); and new lifestyles (for example, the “hippie” lifestyle that began in San Francisco in the late 1960s). It is in specific locales that important events happen, and it is from them that significant changes spread.

Nevertheless, the influence of places is by no means limited to the occasional innovative change. Because of their distinctive characteristics, places always modify and sometimes resist the imprint of even the broadest economic, cultural, and political trends. Consider, for example, the way that a global cultural trend—rock ’n’ roll—was modified in Jamaica to produce reggae, while in Iran and North Korea rock ’n’ roll has been resisted by the authorities, with the result that it has acquired an altogether different kind of value and meaning for the citizens of those countries. Similarly, Indian communities in London developed Bhangra—a “world beat” composite of traditional Punjabi music, Mumbai (Bombay) movie scores, and Western disco (Figure 1.2). Cross-fertilization with local music cultures in New York and Los Angeles has produced Bhangra rap.

To take a very different illustration, think of the ways some communities have declared themselves “nuclear free” zones: places where nuclear weapons and nuclear reactors are unwelcome or even banned by local laws. By establishing such zones, individual communities are seeking to challenge national trends toward using nuclear energy and maintaining nuclear arms. They are, to borrow a phrase, thinking globally and acting locally. Similarly, some communities have established “GM-free” zones, taking a stance against genetically modified crops and food (Figure 1.3). In adopting such strategies, they hope to influence thinking in other communities so that eventually their challenge could result in a reversal of established trends.

In summary, places are settings for social interaction that, among other things:

- structure the daily routines of people’s economic and social life;
- provide both opportunities and constraints in terms of people’s long-term social well-being;
provide a context in which everyday, commonsense knowledge and experience are gathered;
- provide a setting for processes of socialization; and
- provide an arena for contesting social norms.

The Interdependence of Places

Places, then, have an importance of their own. Yet at the same time most places are interdependent, filling specialized roles in complex and ever-changing geographies. The social and economic relations that lend distinctiveness to individual places also operate between places. Some of the social relations that help to shape a particular place stretch beyond it. It is this stretching of social and economic relations across space that connects places and the people who live in them with other places and people.

Consider, for example, the way that Manhattan, New York, operates as a specialized global center of corporate management, business, and financial services while relying on thousands of other places to satisfy its needs. For labor it draws on analysts and managers from the nation’s business schools, blue- and pink-collar workers from neighboring boroughs, and skilled professional immigrants from around the world. For food it draws on fruits and vegetables from Florida, dairy produce from upstate New York, and specialty foods from Europe, the Caribbean, and Asia. For energy it draws on coal from southwest Virginia to fuel its power stations. And for consumer goods it draws on specialized manufacturing settings all over the world.

This interdependence means that individual places are tied into wider processes of change that are reflected in

Figure 1.2 Salsa music spreads to Japan  Popular trends in music are easily spread around the world, and in the process they are often modified in innovative ways.

Figure 1.3 Acting locally  The town of Überlingen, Germany, has established itself as a “GM-free” zone. Shown here is Cornelia Wethaler, who initiated the movement to ban genetically-modified crops and food from the town.
broader geographical patterns. New York’s attraction for business-school graduates, for example, is reflected in the overall pattern of migration flows that cumulatively affect the size and composition of labor markets around the country: New York’s gain is somewhere else’s loss. An important goal for human geographers—and a central theme of this book—is to recognize these wider processes and broad geographical patterns without losing sight of the uniqueness of specific places. This means that we have to recognize another kind of interdependence: the interdependence that exists between different geographic scales.

The Interdependence of Geographic Scales

Different aspects of human geography are understood best, and analyzed most effectively, at different spatial scales. At the same time, these different aspects are interrelated and interdependent, so that geographers have to be able to relate things at one scale to things at another. The whole question can be problematic if we do not clarify what “scale” means.

It is useful to think of geographical scales as materializations of real-world processes, not simply different levels of abstraction or convenient devices for zooming in and out from the global context to the detail of local settings. In this sense, scale represents a tangible partitioning of space within which different processes (economic, social, political, etc.) are played out. This partitioning, in turn, often consolidates dominant patterns of geographical organization, at least until some major disruptive change occurs. The Industrial Revolution, for example, changed not only the character of economic development (from agrarian to manufacturing) but also the scales at which industrial production and consumption were organized (from local to national and international). At any particular moment we can identify a sequence of specific scales that represent significant confluences of geographical processes. In today’s world the large scale is represented by international, or world regions, large but relatively homogeneous territories with distinctive economic, cultural, and demographic characteristics (Figure 1.4). World regions are large-scale geographic divisions based on continental and physiographic settings that contain major groupings of peoples with broadly similar cultural attributes. Examples include Europe, Latin America, and South Asia. These regions are constantly evolving as natural resources and technologies create opportunities and constraints to which particular cultures and societies respond.

Superimposed on these regions, sometimes with only approximate fit, are the *de jure* territories of national states. States are independent political units with territorial boundaries that are recognized by other states (see the discussion of states, nations, and national states in Chapter 9). *De jure* simply means legally recognized. Territories delimited by formal, legally recognized bound-

![Figure 1.4 Spatial scales](image)

*There are many scales at which geographic phenomena may be identified, analyzed, and understood. This diagram shows some of the principal scales that are commonly the focus of geographic research. (After S. Marston, P. Knox, and D. Liverman, *World Regions in Global Context.* Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2002, p. 18.)*

aries—national states, provinces, states, counties, municipalities, special districts, and so on—are known as *de jure* spaces or regions. Because of the inherent power of national governments, especially in relation to the flows of goods, money, and information that underpin reality, national states represent a geographic scale that is often very important. National states tend to be established to fit economic reality as closely as possible at the time of their foundation. Once their boundaries are set, however, principles of national sovereignty mean that these boundaries tend to become regarded by their inhabitants as natural and immutable. However, when economic circumstances change, national states may feel the need to adjust their boundaries or seek other means of accommodating to economic reality, such as joining supranational organizations. Supranational organizations are collections of individual states with a common goal that may be economic and/or political in nature and that diminish, to some extent, individual state sovereignty in favor of the group interests of the membership. Examples of supranational organizations include the European Union (EU), the North American Free Trade Association (NAFTA), and the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN).

Within most national states and all international regions are smaller, functional regions. This geographical scale is constructed around specific resources and industries, with their networks of producers, suppliers, distributors, and ancillary activities, and their associated social, cultural and political identities. These are the classic functional regions of traditional regional geography:
the American Corn Belt, the Argentine pampas, the
Scottish coalfields, Japan’s Pacific Corridor, and the Urals manu-
facturing region in Russia.

For most people, however, the realm of experience is
encompassed by the scale of human settlements. This is the
scale that is constructed around the way people’s lives are
organized through their work, consumption, and recre-
ation. It is also roughly coincident with another important
scale of de jure territories: local municipalities that provide
the framework for public administration and the means for
“collective consumption” of certain goods and services
(public transport, education, public housing, recrea-
tional amenities, and so forth).

Within the realm of experience, there are other sig-
nificant scales (Figure 1.4). Of these, the scale of com-
munity is the most important but also the most difficult
to pin down. It is the scale of social interaction—of per-
sonal relationships and daily routine. It is a scale that de-
PENDS a great deal on the economic, social, and cultural
attributes of local populations. Much more sharply de-
FINed is the scale of the home, which is an important ge-
ographic site insofar as it constitutes the physical setting
for the structure and dynamics of family and household.
It also reflects, in its spatial organization, the differential
status accorded to men and women and to the young and
the elderly.

Finally, the body and the self represent the most de-
tailed scale that geographers deal with. The body is of in-
terest to geographers because it represents the scale at
which differences are ultimately defined—not only
through physical attributes (hair, skin, facial features) but
also through the socially constructed attributes of the
body, such as norms of personal space, preferred bodily
styles, and acceptable uses of bodies. Particularly impor-
tant is the way that, in many cultures, the bodily scale is
seen as less relevant to men. That is, men are regarded as
able to transcend their body, while women are regarded
as limited by bodily functions (for example, menstrua-
tion, pregnancy, and childbirth).

The result is that differential geographies are created
and experienced by men and women—women’s worlds
and men’s worlds. The self is of interest because it repre-
sents the operational scale for cognition, perception, imagi-
nation, free will, and behavior. The self has become an
important scale of analysis for geographers because of the
need to understand the interrelationships between nature,
culture, and individual human agency in shaping places
and regions.

Perhaps the most important conclusion that we can
draw from this examination of scale is that while certain
phenomena can be identified and understood best at spe-
cific spatial scales, the reality of geography is that social,
cultural, political, and economic phenomena are very fluid,
constantly being constructed, reinforced, undermined, and
rebuilt. Similarly, although certain scales represent mani-
festations of powerful real-world processes, the real world
has to be understood, ultimately, as the product of inter-
dependent phenomena at a variety of spatial scales.

In today’s world some of the most important aspects
of the interdependence between geographic scales are pro-
vided by the relationships between the global and the local
scales. The study of human geography shows not only
how global trends influence local outcomes but also how
events in particular localities can influence patterns and
trends elsewhere.

New York again can illustrate both sides of this rela-
tionship. In New York’s stock exchanges and financial
markets, brokers and clients must, in their own interest,
take a global view. Their collective decisions influence
stock prices, currency rates, and interest rates around the
world, but they also often have very direct outcomes at
the local level. Factories in certain localities may be closed
and workers laid off because changed currency rates make
their products too expensive to export successfully; else-
where, new jobs may be created because the same change
in currency rates puts a local economy at an advantage
within the global marketplace. On the other hand, local
events can reverberate through New York’s stock ex-
changes and financial markets with global effects. Politic-
ical instability or natural disasters in a region that
produces a key commodity, for instance, can result in
changes in global pricing and affect the stock prices of
many companies.

**Interdependence as a Two-Way Process**

One of the most important tenets of human geography is
that places are not just distinctive outcomes of geographi-
cal processes; they are part of the processes themselves.
Think of any city neighborhood, with its distinctive mix
of buildings and people. This mix is the product of a com-
bination of processes, including real estate development,
the dynamics of the city’s housing market, the successive
occupancy of residential and commercial buildings by par-
ticular groups who move in and then out of the neigh-
borhood, the services and upkeep provided by the city,
and so on. Over time these processes result in a distinctive
physical environment with an equally distinctive popula-
tion profile, social atmosphere, image, and reputation. Yet
these neighborhood characteristics exert a strong influ-
ence in turn on the continuing processes of real estate re-
development, housing market dynamics, and migration
in and out of the neighborhood.

Places, then, are dynamic phenomena. They are cre-
bated by people responding to the opportunities and con-
straints presented by their environments. As people live
and work in places, they gradually impose themselves on
their environment, modifying and adjusting it to suit their
needs and to express their values. At the same time, they
gradually accommodate both to their physical environ-
ment and to the people around them. There is thus a con-
tinuous two-way process in which people create and
modify places while at the same time being influenced by
them (Figure 1.5).

Place-making is always incomplete and ongoing, and
it occurs simultaneously at different scales. Processes of ge-
Figure 1.5  Place-making  People develop patterns of living that are attuned to the opportunities and constraints of the local physical environment. When this happens, distinctive regional landscapes are produced. These photographs and the map extract show part of the Chang Jiang (Yangtze) delta region of central China. In this watery region there has long been interplay between humans and the natural environment, and the result is a distinctive landscape with tens of thousands of kilometers of canals, irrigation ditches, and drainage channels, and thousands of ponds in rectilinear patterns. This “land of rice and fish” is extremely productive, the humid subtropical climate allowing for a triple-cropping system (two crops of rice, plus one of winter wheat or barley) in many locales.

It is man who reveals a country’s individuality by molding it to his own use. He establishes a connection between unrelated features, substituting for the random effects of local circumstances a systematic cooperation of forces. Only then does a country acquire a specific character, differentiating it from others, till at length it becomes, as it were, a medal struck in the likeness of a people.

Paul Vidal de la Blache, Tableau de la Geographie de la France, 1903, p. viii
oographic change are constantly modifying and reshaping places, and places are constantly coping with change. It is important for geographers to be sensitive to this kind of interdependence without falling into the trap of overgeneralization, or losing sight of the diversity and variety that constitute the heart of human geography. It is equally important not to fall into the trap of singularity, or treating places and regions as separate entities, the focus of study in and of themselves.

INTERDEPENDENCE
IN A GLOBALIZING WORLD

As a subject of scientific observation and study, geography has made important contributions both to the understanding of the world and to its development. As we move further into the Information Age, geography continues to contribute to the understanding of a world that is more complex and fast-changing than ever before. With such an understanding, it is possible not only to appreciate the diversity and variety of the world’s peoples and places but also to be aware of their relationships to one another and to be able to make positive contributions to local, national, and global development.

Today, in a world that is experiencing rapid changes in economic, cultural, and political life, geographic knowledge is especially important and useful. In a fast-changing world, when our fortunes and ideas are increasingly bound up with those of other peoples in other places, the study of geography provides an understanding of the crucial interdependencies that underpin everyone’s lives. One of the central themes throughout this book is the interdependence of people and places.

Another central theme of this book is globalization. Globalization is the increasing interconnectedness of different parts of the world through common processes of economic, environmental, political, and cultural change. A world economy has been in existence for several centuries, and with it there has developed a comprehensive framework of sovereign national states and an international system of production and exchange. This system has been reorganized several times. Each time it has been reorganized, however, major changes have resulted, not only in world geography but also in the character and fortunes of individual places.

Recently there has been a pronounced change in both the pace and the nature of globalization, leading to a highly interdependent world (see “Box 1.1: Interdependence Within and Between France and Vietnam”). New telecommunication technologies, corporate strategies, and institutional frameworks have combined to create a dynamic new framework for real-world geographies. New information technologies have helped create a frenetic international financial system, while transnational corporations are now able to transfer their production activities from one part of the world to another in response to changing market conditions and changing transportation and communications technologies (see Chapter 7). This location-flexibility has meant that a high degree of functional integration now exists between economic activities that are increasingly dispersed so that products, markets, and organizations are both spread and linked across the globe. Governments, in their attempts to adjust to this new situation, have sought new ways of dealing with the consequences of globalization, including new international political and economic alliances such as NAFTA and the European Union (see Chapter 9).

The interdependence associated with globalization operates in a multitude of ways. In many cases, interdependence seems very unequal in nature—as in the example of a transnational firm based in one country taking advantage of low-cost labor in another. In some cases, interdependence can be seen to be to mutual advantage—as in countries that share the costs and responsibilities of trans-border resource management. In almost every case, however, the outcomes of the increased geographic interdependence associated with globalization are very much open to interpretation. Who “wins” and who “loses” depends very much on one’s perspective and the geographic scale.

Perspectives on Globalization and Interdependence

An important aspect of globalization is the widespread perception that the world, through economic and technological forces, is increasingly becoming one shared political and economic space, with events in one region having repercussions for all others, whether near or far. Given that economic and technological forces are breaking down the barriers within and between near and distant places, will the most recent phase of globalization strengthen some regional connections and weaken others, or make regions altogether irrelevant? Alternatively, will globalization enable some regions—core regions, for instance—to create even greater differences of wealth and power than already exist in the world-system? Understanding what the experts believe about globalization will help us to get a better understanding of the complex interdependence between the global and the local.

The number of books published on globalization and its impact on the world’s regions has grown at a tremendous rate over the last 15 years. Check out the shelves in any good bookstore and you will find hundreds of them, with whole sections devoted to globalization within political science, sociology, geography, economics, media studies, and business management. It is possible to group the main participants in the contemporary debates about globalization into three general camps: the hyperglobalists, the skeptics, and the transformationalists. While these three viewpoints do not exhaust the range of the debates, they do provide a clear sense of the issues on which the experts on globalization agree and disagree.
Interdependence Within and Between France and Vietnam

In our increasingly interdependent world, the lives and livelihoods of people separated by vast distances are now linked in many ways. A study by the World Bank has shown how globalization has affected the lives of four very different people in very different places: a Vietnamese peasant, a Vietnamese city dweller, a Vietnamese immigrant to France, and a French garment worker.

Duong is a Vietnamese peasant farmer who struggles to feed his family. He earns the equivalent of $10 a week for 38 hours of work in the rice fields, but he works full-time only six months of the year—during the off-season he can earn very little. His wife and four children work with him in the fields, but the family can afford to send only the two youngest to school. Duong’s eleven-year-old daughter stays at home to help with housework, while his thirteen-year-old son works as a street trader in town. By any standard Duong’s family is living in poverty. Workers like Duong, laboring in family farms in low- and middle-income countries, account for about 40 percent of the world’s labor force.

Hoa is a young Vietnamese city dweller experiencing relative affluence for the first time. In Ho Chi Minh City she earns the equivalent of $30 a week working 48 hours in a garment factory—a joint venture with a French firm. She works hard for her living and spends many hours looking after her three children as well; her husband works as a janitor. But Hoa’s family has several times the standard of living of Duong’s and, by Vietnamese standards, is relatively well off. There is every expectation that both she and her children will continue to have a vastly better standard of living than their parents had. Wage employees like Hoa, working in the formal sector in low- and middle-income countries, make up about 20 percent of the global labor force.

Françoise is an immigrant in France of Vietnamese origin who works long hours as a waitress to make ends meet. She takes home the equivalent of $220 a week, after taxes and including tips, for 50 hours’ work. By French standards she is poor. Legally, Françoise is a casual worker and has no job security, but she is much better off in France than she would have been in Vietnam. Her wage is almost eight times that earned by Hoa in Ho Chi Minh City. Françoise and other service workers in high-income countries account for about 9 percent of the global workforce.

Jean-Paul is a 50-year-old Frenchman whose employment prospects look bleak. For 10 years he has worked in a garment factory in Toulouse, taking home the equivalent of $400 a week—twelve times the average in Vietnam’s garment industry. But next month he will lose his job when the factory closes. Unemployment benefits will partly shield him from the shock, but his chances of matching his old salary in a new job are slim. Frenchmen of Jean-Paul’s age who lose their jobs are likely to stay unemployed for more than a year, and Jean-Paul is encouraging his son to work hard in school so he can go to college and study computer programming. Workers in industry in high-income countries, like Jean-Paul, make up just 4 percent of the world’s labor force.

These four individuals—two living in Vietnam, two in France—have vastly different standards of living and expectations for the future. Employment and wage prospects in Toulouse and Ho Chi Minh City are worlds apart, even when incomes are adjusted for differences in the cost of living. Françoise’s poverty wage would clearly buy Hoa a vastly more affluent lifestyle. And many of the world’s workers, like Duong, work outside the wage sector, on family farms and in casual jobs, generally earning even lower incomes. The lives of all workers in different parts of the world, however, are increasingly intertwined. French consumers buy the product of Hoa’s labor, and Jean-Paul believes it is Hoa’s low wages that are taking his job, while immigrant workers like Françoise feel the brunt of Jean-Paul’s anger. Meanwhile, Duong struggles to save so that his children can be educated and leave the countryside for the city, where foreign companies advertise new jobs at better wages.

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The Hyperglobalist View

At one extreme is the view that open markets and free trade and investment across global markets allow more and more people to share in the prosperity of a growing world economy. Economic and political interdependence, meanwhile, creates shared interests that help prevent conflict and foster support for common values. Democracy and human rights, it is asserted, will spread to billions of people in the wake of neoliberal policies that promote open markets and free trade. Neoliberal policies are economic policies that are predicated on a minimalist role for the state, assuming the desirability of free markets as the ideal condition not only for economic organization but also for political and social life. Hyperglobalists believe that the current phase of globalization signals the beginning of the end for the nation-state and the “denationalization” of economies. By economic denationalization they mean that national boundaries will become irrelevant with respect to economic processes, and that national governments will not control their once geographically bounded economies but will instead facilitate connections among and between different parts of the world through supranational organizations such as NAFTA and the EU.

The wider implications of the hyperglobalist position is that the world will become borderless as national governments become increasingly meaningless or function merely as facilitators of global capital flows and investments. Hyperglobalizers believe that the nation-state, the primary political and economic unit of contemporary world society, will eventually be replaced by institutions of global governance in which individuals claim transnational allegiances that are founded upon a commitment to neoliberal principles of free trade and economic integration. Politically, the global spread of liberal democracy will reinforce the emergence of a global civilization with its own mechanisms of global governance, replacing the outmoded nation-state with global institutions like the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Trade Organization (WTO).

The Skeptical View

A second broad argument within the globalization literature belongs to the skeptics, those who believe that contemporary levels of global economic integration represent nothing particularly new and that much of the talk about globalization is exaggerated. The skeptics look to the nineteenth century and draw on statistical evidence of world flows of trade, labor, and investment to fortify their position. They argue that contemporary economic integration is actually much less significant than it was in the late nineteenth century, when nearly all countries shared a common monetary system known as the gold standard. The skeptics are also dismissive of the idea that the nation-state is in decline. They argue that national governments are essential to the regulation of international economic activity and that the continuing liberalization of the world economy can only be facilitated by the regulatory power of national governments.

The skeptics assert that their analysis of nineteenth-century economic patterns demonstrates that we are today witnessing not globalization but rather “regionalization,” as the world economy is increasingly dominated by three major regional financial and trading blocs: Europe, North America, and East Asia (effectively, Japan). The skeptics understand regionalization and globalization to be contradictory tendencies. They believe that because of the dominance of these three major regional blocs, the world is actually less integrated than it once was because Europe, North America, and Japan control the world economy and limit the participation of other regions in that economy.

The Transformationalist View

According to the transformationalist view, contemporary processes of globalization are historically unprecedented as governments and peoples across the globe confront the absence of any clear distinction between the global and the local, between domestic affairs and international affairs. Like the hyperglobalists, this group understands globalization as a profound transformative force that is changing societies, economies, institutions of government—in short, the world order. In contrast to the hyperglobalists and the skeptics, however, the transformationalists make no claims about the future trajectory of globalization, nor do they see present globalization as a pale version of a more “globalized” nineteenth century. Instead, they see globalization as a long-term historical process that is underlain by crises and contradictions that are likely to shape it in all sorts of unpredictable ways. Moreover, unlike the skeptics, the transformationalists believe that the historically unprecedented contemporary patterns of economic, military, technological, ecological, migratory, political, and cultural flows have functionally linked all parts of the world into a larger global system in which free trade agreements such as NAFTA help to draw regions into a global neoliberal economic framework.

In this book we adhere generally to the transformationalist position. We suggest that we are all heading toward a world where places and regions will experience a wide range of internal changes at the same time that the strength of their connections with other parts of the world will increase. What is perhaps most unsettling about the transformationalist view of globalization is the anticipated increase in disparities in wealth. Transformationalists believe that globalization is leading to increasing social stratification, in which some states and societies are more tightly connected to the global order while others are becoming increasingly marginalized. They contend that there is no evidence to sustain the hyperglobalist claim that the new global social structure is tending toward a global civilization where equality among individuals will eventually prevail. They argue the opposite: that the world will increasingly consist of a three-tiered system—comprising
the elites, the embattled, and the marginalized—that cuts across national, regional, and local boundaries (see Chapter 12). Within nations, disparities of wealth—already striking in many countries—will increase, just as they will between nations (see “Box 1.2: Worlds Apart”). Meanwhile, the increasing interdependence among places and regions raises some key issues in relation to the environment, health, and security.

Key Issues in a Globalizing World

Environmental Issues

The sheer scale and capacity of the world economy means that humans are now capable of altering the environment at the global scale. The “footprint” of humankind extends to more than four-fifths of Earth’s surface (Figure 1.6). Many of the important issues facing modern society are the consequences—intended and unintended—of human modifications of the physical environment. Humans have altered the balance of nature in ways that have brought economic prosperity to some areas and created environmental dilemmas and crises in others. For example, clearing land for settlement, mining, and agriculture provides livelihoods and homes for some but alters physical systems and transforms human populations, wildlife, and vegetation. The inevitable by-products—garbage, air and water pollution, hazardous wastes, and so forth—place enormous demands on the capacity of physical systems to absorb and accommodate them. In addition to the specter of global warming (a result of emissions of gaseous materials into the atmosphere), we also face the reality of serious global environmental degradation through deforestation, desertification, acid rain, loss of genetic diversity, smog, soil erosion, groundwater decline, and the pollution of rivers, lakes, and oceans.

Lake Baykal, in Russia (Figure 1.7), provides a salutary example. It is a place of incredible beauty—"the Pearl of Siberia"—that has long been emblematic of the pristine wilderness of the region. But the lake’s purity and unique ecosystem have been compromised by environmental mismanagement. The first evidence of this was in the 1950s, when the lake’s commercial fish populations nose-dived, partly as a result of overfishing and partly as a result of the construction of the Irkutsk dam (which raised the level of the lake and destroyed many of the shallow-water feeding grounds used by the fish). Then, in the 1960s, increasing levels of pollution were carried into the lake by the Selenga River, which supplies about half of the water that flows into the lake. The

![Human Footprint Map](image)

**Figure 1.6** The human “footprint” This map, prepared by a team of scientists from the New York–based Wildlife Conservation Society and Columbia University’s Center for International Science Information Network (CIESN), shows the extent and intensity of human influence on the land, reflecting population density, agricultural use, access from roads and waterways, electrical power infrastructure, and urbanization. The lower the number, the lesser the overall degree of human influence. ([Source: www.wcs.org/humanfootprint])