

NATURE OF HUMAN GEOGRAPHY

Human geography is the study of the inter-relationships between people, place, and environment, and how these vary spatially and temporally across and between locations. Whereas physical geography concentrates on spatial and environmental processes that shape the natural world and tends to draw on the natural and physical sciences for its scientific underpinnings (to give support, strength or a basic structure to something) and methods of investigation, human geography concentrates on the spatial organization and processes shaping the lives and activities of people, and their interactions with places and nature. Human geography is more allied with the social sciences and humanities, sharing their philosophical approaches and methods.

Human geography consists of a number of sub-disciplinary fields that focus on different elements of human activity and organization, for example, cultural geography, economic geography, health geography, historical geography, political geography, population geography, rural geography, social geography, transport geography, and urban geography. What distinguishes human geography from other related disciplines, such as development, economics, politics, and sociology, are the application of a set of core geographical concepts to the phenomena under investigation, including space, place, scale, landscape, mobility, and nature. These concepts foreground the notion that the world operates spatially and temporally, and that social relations do not operate independently of place and environment, but are thoroughly grounded in and through them.

With respect to methods, human geography uses the full sweep of quantitative and qualitative methods from across the social sciences and humanities, mindful of using them to provide a thorough geographic analysis. It also places emphasis on fieldwork and mapping (see cartography), and has made a number of contributions to developing new methods and techniques, notably in the areas of spatial analysis, spatial statistics, and GIScience.

The long-term development of human geography has progressed after the Quantitative Revolution in the 1950s and 1960s, the philosophy underpinning/foundation human geography research has diversified enormously. The 1970s saw the introduction of behavioural geography, radical geography, and humanistic geography. These were followed in the 1980s by a turn to political economy, the development of feminist geography,

and the introduction of critical social theory underpinning the cultural turn. Together these approaches formed the basis for the growth of critical geography, and the introduction of postmodern and post-structural thinking into the discipline in the 1990s. These various developments did not fully replace the theoretical approaches developed in earlier periods, but rather led to further diversification of geographic thought. For example, quantitative geography continues to be a vibrant area of geographical scholarship, especially through the growth of GIScience.