

THE PROGRESSION OF HUMAN SOCIETY SINCE THE BEGINNING OF MAN

All people have the same basic needs: food, water, and shelter. To live, people must gather these resources from their environment. All of the resources we need cannot be found in one place, however. People must travel and trade to obtain resources from the other regions. How people have used the land to acquire their resources has greatly affected Earth's human geography. Throughout history, new discoveries and their diffusion have altered places dramatically.

HUNTING/GATHERING SOCIETIES (movement)

Hunting and gathering was the main way of life for most of human history. Hunter-gatherers live by foraging, or collecting foods from the surrounding land. To be successful, hunter-gatherers must know their environment well. In early times, they often roamed across large areas. They moved their camps with the seasons in search of different plants and animals throughout the year. There are few hunter-gatherers left today. They survive only in isolated areas where farming is difficult because of harsh climates or poor soils. Among these survivors are the Bushman of the Kalahari Desert in Africa and the Aborigines of the Australian deserts. Small groups of hunter-gatherers also live in the rainforests of South America. The Inuit Eskimos who hunt and fish live along the Arctic shores of North America.

Even though hunter-gatherers often have simple tools and limited technology, they all have complex social customs and religious beliefs. Most of them live without the modern products other cultures have come to rely on. This was the main way of life for most of human history. Often they moved their camps with the seasons. They searched for different plants and animals throughout the year. Today few such societies are left. They remain mostly in environments that are too difficult for farming.

AGRICULTURAL SOCIETIES (human-environmental interaction)

Agriculture began about 10,000 years ago.

Discovering how to use animals and how to plant crops was perhaps the most important innovation in human history. The development of agriculture changed how people interacted with their environments. Agriculture appeared when hunter-gatherers studied a plant or animal so closely that they found out how to grow or tame it. This innovation is called domestication. Geographers believe agriculture first appeared about 10,000 years ago in several areas of southwestern Asia.

Farming is a more reliable source of food than hunting/gathering. To grow food the earth's natural vegetation has to be altered. As agriculture spread, forests were cleared and water was diverted to irrigate dry lands. Food now came from fields and pastures, and people did not have to move with the seasons. Agriculture permitted people to grow more food year after year.

Farming also encouraged village life because people moved less often, they could live in larger groups. They shared innovations easily and social life became more formally organized. People began to form governments to create social order and religions became more structured. Large areas of land were then devoted to farming and more food led to increased population. In subsistence farming, people grow food on small farms mostly for their own families. Some surplus food may be traded or sold. Perhaps one or two crops are raised to sell for cash at a nearby market. In subsistence farming the tools are basic. Humans and large animals provide the power.

Subsistence agriculture is common today in the world's poorer countries, where it may be a town or village's main economic activity. It is found in many parts of Africa, Asia and Central/South America. In difficult environments, such as tropical forests, slash and burn or crop rotation farming is common. Here, farmers clear trees for planting, then burn the debris. The field is farmed for a few years, but becomes less and less fertile so eventually the field is abandoned and the process starts on another piece of land or they figure out how to rotate the crops to replenish the soil's nutrients.

Subsistence farming using animals is called pastoralism or ranching. Cattle, goats, horses, sheep and other animals provide milk and meat for pastoralists. In addition, animal skins or hair are used for shelter and clothing. In the beginning animals were used for their byproducts, but eventually people also used them as power sources. In many societies, animals represent wealth or social prestige.

URBAN, INDUSTRIAL LIFE (regions and human-environmental interaction)

Hunter-gatherers lived in small camps and the first farmers lived in villages surrounded by fields. Once food was easier to grow, people had more time to work at other things. Some workers specialized in making tools or clothing. Others worked in government or became traders and merchants. These types of work are key characteristics of cities - job specialization. Cities first appeared more than 5,000 years ago. Growth in the proportion of people living in cities rather than in rural areas is called urbanization.

The first cities appeared in Southwest Asia more than 5,000 years ago. City life became possible when there was enough food so that some people did not have to farm. Instead, some of them worked as potters or weavers. Others became merchants and traders. Still others carried out governmental or religious tasks. With the development of cities, populations increased and communication became easier. As traded connected early cities, cultural diffusion increased.

In the early cities, workers used simple tools to make clothing and other goods by hand. Such goods were custom-made and carefully crafted, but they were scarce and costly. Industrialization allowed large amounts of standardized goods to be made at a lower cost. It also dramatically altered the earth's physical and human geography. Industrialization spread rapidly in western Europe during the 18th and 19th centuries. This period is known as the Industrial Revolution. Factories were clustered near large rivers where running water provided power. Later, coal and petroleum provided even more efficient sources of power and prevented industrial sites from having to be located near water. As a result, more factories spring up in areas with large pools of labor.

Industrialization continues to spread around the world. New factories are being built in countries where only a few years ago subsistence farming was the main economic activity. These countries hope that industrialization will improve their economies. Changing to an industrial economy can be expensive and requires resources such as water, fuel and low cost labor. It can also create problems such as pollution, global warming and resource depletion.

Commercial agriculture is necessary for this type of society. The growing of crops for sale using modern technology like high-yield seeds, fertilizers and machinery is typical. Commercial farming requires less people who can grow more food, so job specialization happens. Only 3% of people in the U.S. are farmers, but they can feed the entire population. A large amount remains to sell to other countries.