

# [What was shaped by the natural environment geographical](https://assignbuster.com/what-was-shaped-by-the-natural-environmentgeographical/)

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What is culturalgeography and how has it evolvedThe discipline of cultural geography has been around sincethe 16th century where geography was rooted in exploration anddiscovery. It went through three phases: Geography fabulous, Geography militantand Geography triumphant (Anderson, 2009, p. p. 14-15). The focus of this essay, however, will be on the explosion of cultural geography that occurred in theearly 20th century and afterwards due to Carl Sauer’s retaliation toEllen Churchill Semple and her idea of environmental determinism (Peet, 1998).

Sincethen cultural geography has developed into three notable schools: Traditional culturalgeography; Representational cultural geography and Non-representational culturalgeography. The following essay will detail a brief history of culturalgeography, discussing each school and how they define cultural geography aswell as illustrating cultural geography’s evolution through history.  Before Sauerand traditional cultural geography was the geographical practice of environmentaldeterminism. Ellen Churchill Semple developed the theory of environmentaldeterminism after interpreting the works of Friedrich Ratzel and his ideas onthe nature-culture relationship (Frenkel, 1992, p. 2) Semple popularised theview that society and culture was shaped by the naturalenvironment/geographical location. She suggested that progress is the “ increasingexploitation of natural advantages” (Adams, 2011, p. 5) and that more developedcivilisations were better at using their natural resources/landscape and weretherefore more ‘ evolved’, justifying the imperialistic nature of America and Europeat the time.

Her views led to geography being legitimised as a subject as theysupported commercial expansion and allowed the state to expand and exploitother nations as they believed they were more socially developed, thereforethey could use the landscape more efficiently. Her views were problematic andare rarely used in modern cultural geography due to their connections withsocial Darwinism and imperialism, but she was a huge hand in getting geographyrecognised academically and led to the ‘ explosion’ of cultural geography  that was kick started by Sauer. Traditional culturalgeography developed from the work of Carl Sauer and the Berkley school ofGeography during the 1920’s in direct contrast to Semple and Ratzel’s work onenvironmental determinism. Sauer developed the view that landscape is shaped byhuman activity (culture); human ecological dominance affects the course oforganic evolution (Peet, 1985, p. 328) opposed to the landscape leading tohuman evolution. Sauer sought to bring cultural geography back into the field ashe believed that observation/empirical research was key to studying therelationship between the physical, material landscape and culture (Anderson, 2009, p.

19). This brought about the study of artefacts in the culturallandscape, studying the history of an environment by looking at the ‘ scars’left on the landscape by each cultural group. Sauer called the layering of culturalscars in the landscape ‘ palimpsests’ as like a palimpsest landscapes aresurfaces with multiple ‘ inscriptions’ that build up over time (Anderson, 2009, p. 20). Sauer’s approach to cultural geography is still widely practiced today suchas in Rancho Santa Margarita, Orange County, California where land use andpresentation is the main focus for community life, with the city councillegislating on appropriate behaviour/appearance (Ryecroft, 2017). Overalltraditional cultural geography focuses on how humans shape the landscape bothin a historical and modern context.

Itcan be argued that this approach to cultural geography is too focused on ruralareas and cultural products rather than the processes that create the products(keough, 2016). Traditional cultural geography is too critical of modernsociety and fails to see the value of urban culture. Representationalcultural geography was established in the 1960s in opposition to Sauer’s work, it “ emerged in an era wheresign, symbol, and meaning in the landscape and the processes of culturallandscape creation became important considerations” (keough, 2016). For representational cultural Geographers humans were nolonger the ‘ agents’ creating landscapes but were the active producers ofculture and its processes (Anderson, 2009, p. 27)  Culture was no longer this invisible beingcontrolling what people make, culture is people and what people do. The wayRepresentational cultural geographers see landscape is as a combination of bothmaterial (place) and mental (ideas), like a book people can interpret places asthey please and often in different ways (Cresswell, 1996, p. 13) this explainsthe variation in culture across the globe as different groups of people have differentviews and ideologies.

The study of ‘ cultural place’ led to the expansion of culturalgeography as there were more objects of study, place could be urban, rural, metaphorical or film it didn’t have to be a material landscape like before asthey places are formed by human ideas, symbols and meanings. They see cultureas more fluid and dynamic; it can shift depending on social values andinterpretation. This focus, however, on theory and the abstract could be arguedto distract geographers from the importance of everyday actions in people’slives.

People do not go through life looking at the deeper meaning of landscapeall the time, not all actions are thought through, not all aspects of cultureare seen as ‘ symbolic’. Non-representationalcultural geography looks at ‘ everyday geographies’