

Human geographies  
is a branch of  
geography  
"concerned



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Human geographies is a branch of geography “ concerned with how human lives, and our relations to nature vary across the surface of the Earth” (Cloke et al. 2014: xvii). It investigates this relationship of spatiality between humans and nature in order to gain understanding of how location can influence multiple factors of human life. In order for something to be distinctive it needs to be easy to recognise as a result of being ‘ different from other things’ (Cambridge dictionary, 2017) <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/distinctive>.

Human geography is unavoidably a distinctive subject due to its literal meaning. Unlike other subjects it writes about the earth and its processes, such as climate change, as well as society and the many ways in which they interconnect. As well as this it strongly focuses on the importance of geographical context and its impact on human lives, e.

g. the North South divide, understanding how society is affected differently depending on location. This can clearly be seen through the study of Urban and Rural geographies and how they are socially constructed by society. Furthermore, it uses a wide range of concepts, themes and theories allowing an extensive interpretation of how humans and nature interact unlike other subjects. However despite its wide range of theories, themes and concepts it does not accept them with confidence as it understands how geographical context influences society’s reaction as shown through the study of development geographies. Finally, the study of human geography is distinctively both inter and cross disciplinary meaning that it branches into many subjects considering, for example, the historical, political and social/ cultural impacts on human life. This makes human geography an extremely <https://assignbuster.com/human-geographies-is-a-branch-of-geography-concerned/>

unique subject as it can be used widely despite being distinctive in many areas. Geography is a term that can be traced back to ancient Greece around 2,200 years ago being translated as 'earth writing'.

It therefore is a subject that distinctively seeks to understand the world we live in, including its formation and ongoing processes, as well as exploring human dependence and exploitation of the planet for day to day life. This writing of the earth can be divided into two branches. One of these branches explores the 'earthiness' of the world, investigating society-nature relations (Cloke et al. 2014: xvii). This includes the formation of the physical, non-human world as well as the various environments it supports. It therefore aims to gain understanding of the complex relationship humans have with the world, including the damage they cause to the environment, e.g. climate change.

On the other hand, the second branch is concerned with society-space relations (Cloke et al. 2014: xvii). This focuses mostly on the social constructionism of places including how areas and people interact. For example how these relationships with the earth vary depending on location. Despite their differences, endless links exist between the natural world and human world, both good and bad. Various problems arise as a result of these interactions and contested use of the planet, illustrated in nature geographies. These include Deforestation, Genetically modified crops, Climate Change, Water pollution, Air pollution, Waste disposal and recycling.

Merchant compares 'nature' to Eve explaining how humans have contributed to creating the 'fallen' Eve, a chaotic world (Merchant, 2004).

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Political Ecology is a concept which analyses environmental events whilst considering the context of society-environment relationships, linking the branches together. Therefore it is distinctive as a result of its complex meaning. Secondly, human geography is distinctive as the importance of geographical context is shown as a major factor to consider when looking through a geographical lense.

' The empirical significance of place' (Entrikin, 1991) needs to be considered when investigating the social construction of places and the variations between locations. This is illustrated through looking at the social construction of both the ' local' and ' global'. The local emphasises the distinctive characters of particular places, focussing on their individuality and culture. In contrast the Global has a desire to show the many similarities between places, broadening horizons through a series of networks and increasing world awareness. This extensive global vision helps to put small scale local issues into context, together creating a deeper understanding of the world.

Both physical and social differences are explored between places, for example, the many differences between rural and urban living. Nick Entrikens views further support the importance of geographical context when investigating social factors. He believes that location has a great influence on many factors including life chances and life expectancy within a population, clearly shown through the North South divide. This is as a result of the social construction of these locations, including culture and the nationalities attitudes, however the physical environment and climate also has a huge influence, as explained by the concept of environmental

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determinism. Furthermore, Entriken also views spatial variations within an area as being helpful.

These variations can be economic, social and political. Various relationships exist between the local and global, creating a complex web of mutual reliance. The local is seen as being sustainable with a strong emphasis on its community whereas the global is viewed as being more fast paced, politically aware and economically focussed. Thirdly he understands that as a result of the various differences between the local and global, theories cannot be accepted everywhere as location has a big impact on how a place responds.

Human geography therefore takes a very specific approach to the world. Thirdly, unlike other subjects, human geography engages with a diverse range of theories, concepts and themes. Although some may view this as a weakness, suggesting that the study of human geography lacks direction and focus, however it is in fact a strength contributing to its distinctive quality. This extremely diverse range covers a broad spectrum, helping to create a greater understanding of the worlds processes and the relationships between humans and nature. The subject engages with concepts such as urban geographies, rural geographies, political geographies, cultural geographies and leisure geographies, as well as many others. It also considers theories such as environmental determinism, feminist theories, theories of development, colonialism, post colonialism, liberalism and neoliberalism amongst many more. Human geography observes the world looking for patterns and using them to explain and contextualise differences within society and how it changes over time, for example theories of development.

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It also helps explain why depending on location, society is affected differently by events. The 2010 Christchurch New Zealand and Haiti earthquake is a clear example of how society is affected differently depending on location. Both quakes had a magnitude of 7.0, however, in Christchurch NZ nobody died whereas in Haiti a quarter of a million people were killed. This is as a result of New Zealand being a High income country in comparison to Haiti being a Low income country, meaning better infrastructure and rescue services. As well as this New Zealand's population was highly educated on what to do in the event of a quake, reducing loss of life and injuries.

Therefore, through its diverse range of theories, concepts and themes it is fully able to understand these events, allowing a detailed approach when they 'write the earth'. However, despite human geographies wide range of themes, theories and concepts, it approaches grand and meta theories with caution. This is as a result of human geographies thorough understanding of how location greatly influences society. Everywhere is affected differently by events because of how it is socially constructed therefore meaning that meta theories cannot be applied accurately. This is clearly demonstrated through the study of development geographies. Many theories exist trying to explain how and why places develop, for example the modernization theory. In this, Rostow compares development to becoming 'modern' like western countries including the UK and USA. It focusses on economic growth post second world war and illustrates various stages countries go through on the path to development (Cloke et al.

2014: xvii). Structuralism and dependency is another theory seeking to understand development, focussing on both economic and political factors. This believes that the North's strong economy is limiting development in the global South. Protected trading environments within the south are seen as a way to solve the problem, for example in latin america, as well as withdrawing from the global capitalist system (Cloke et al.

2014: xvii). Neo liberalism also takes an economic approach to development, focussing on the global market. It believes that if the government's involvement is reduced and free trade allowed, development will be made easier. Success of this can be seen through East asian development as a result of adopting neoliberal policies (Cloke et al. 2014: xvii). Finally, Grassroots development believes that international aid and the help of NGOs is what aids development, taking a political approach. However NGO involvement is limited, due to both political and economic factors, making it impossible for them alone to help a country to develop (Cloke et al.

2014: xvii). Through looking at these theories it is evident that all countries take different paths to development as they all have a different geographical and social context, meaning that meta theories are inaccurate and widely generalise. Finally, unlike other subjects, the study of human geography it is both Inter and cross disciplinary branching into various topics, giving a detailed understanding of the world we live in. Geography is a broad subject that, unlike others, refuses to support the ' disciplining of knowledge' (Cloke et al. 2014: xvii), avoiding being confined within a single category. This links to the diverse meaning of ' geography' as the study of the world is so broad it is unable to fit into a single academic focus. Geography could be classified <https://assignbuster.com/human-geographies-is-a-branch-of-geography-concerned/>

into the natural sciences, covering issues such as climate change and nutrient cycles in nature geographies.

Furthermore, it overlaps with social sciences, sociology for example, exploring how the rural and urban are socially constructed as different and how society is impacted as a result. The arts and the humanities are other possible categories, human geography drawing from history and politics when trying to further their understanding of events and aiding their theorising. It also links in many ways with the study of the economy, clearly seen through looking at the theories of economic development in development geographies. This distinctive quality is appreciated by geographers and is useful in gaining understanding of events as well as a deep understanding of how these various elements of geography will be affected. To conclude, human geography is arguably the most distinctive subject despite covering such a diverse range of information. It provides a greater context to help interpret events through its wide range of theories, concepts and themes. Furthermore its failure to be confined in one category, being both inter and cross disciplinary, branching into the sciences, arts, humanities and economics, contributes to the larger context. However it also provides in depth evaluations within this larger context understanding the importance of geographical context when interpreting events.

Because of this it is also suspicious of meta theories and doesn't readily accept them as an explanation for something. The contested nature of this subject covering such a wide spectrum of ideas leads to people believing it to be non distinctive. However the contrast of human geography's large



scale and small scale approach to investigating events is an extremely distinctive quality.