Course Learning Outcomes for Unit IV

Upon completion of this unit, students should be able to:

1. Discuss key concepts in human geography including place, region, movement, and landscape.
   1.1 Identify types of landscapes.

2. Evaluate the role and impact globalization has on environmental, cultural, spatial, and geopolitical issues within the three tiers of the world system.
   2.1 Discuss the impact of globalization on landscapes.

5. Determine how place and space shape culture, and conversely how culture shapes place and space.
   5.1 Investigate how landscapes impact and reinforce cultural values in society.
   5.2 Identify examples of the cultural impact of symbolism and codes embedded in landscapes.

Reading Assignment

Chapter 7: Interpreting Places and Landscapes

Chapter 6: Language, Communication, and Belief, pp. 219-225

Note: Please read Chapter 7 before reading Chapter 6.

Unit Lesson

Interpreting Places & Landscapes

In Unit III, we looked at how culture, population, and diversity relate to geography and each other. In this unit, we will investigate the meaning and symbolism of places and landscapes. Different groups perceive and respond differently to the landscapes in their lives. People can form strong attachments to places, and it can become woven into their identity. This is described as place-making in the textbook (Knox & Marston, 2016). As noted in the textbook, there are many different definitions of landscape, and it is more than just a piece of land, such as a park (Knox & Marston, 2016). Landscape shapes the interactions of people, and people influence the landscape. Knox and Marston (2016) described several types of landscapes in Chapter 7. They included vernacular (ordinary), derelict, and symbolic. Power landscapes, art as a landscape, and funerary landscapes are also discussed. The textbook defines and provides examples of all of these kinds of landscapes. An example of an ordinary landscape and an example of a symbolic landscape are presented in this lesson. This lesson will also briefly discuss religious landscapes, which is covered in our Chapter 6 reading for this unit.

Ordinary Landscapes

Vernacular or ordinary landscapes are landscapes of everyday life, such as main street, a highway, or suburbia. Even though these landscapes are just everyday places, they possess symbolism and inform social behavior and attitudes (Knox & Marston, 2016). There is a virtual ethnographic museum maintained by Colgate University that showcases the everyday life of Russian people living in “kommunalka” (communal apartment housing) during the 90s and 00s. The Kommunalka Virtual Museum is an extensive collection of the research by Ilya Utekhin from the European University. It contains videos, essays, documents, pictures, tours, and interviews (Utekhin, Nakhimovsky, Paperno, & Ries, 2006). It is a fascinating, detailed look at an ordinary and somewhat derelict landscape of post-cold war Russia. Visit the Kommunalka Virtual Museum at...
http://kommunalka.colgate.edu/index.cfm. Browse through the virtual museum and try to decode the landscapes you see. Think about how the concept of place-making applies. Think about how the communal apartment landscape impacted the residents living there. Think about the bigger political and economic picture that surrounds the landscape and how that impacted the Russian people living there.

**Symbolic Landscapes**

“Ordinary landscapes, such as suburban neighborhoods, are ones that people experience in the course of their everyday lives. By contrast, symbolic landscapes represent particular values and aspirations that their developers and financiers want to impart to a larger public” (Knox & Marston, 2016, p. 255).

Our textbook discussed how monuments are examples of symbolic landscapes and that they can shape national identity. There are several American national monuments located in the National Mall in Washington DC that symbolize national pride. Knox and Marston (2016) state, “We must learn how to recognize the signs and symbols that go into the making of landscape. The practice of writing and reading signs is known as semiotics” (p. 247). It is important to discuss the meaning and semiotics of the newest addition to the National Mall, The National WWII Memorial. This example is fascinating because of the great importance of what the memorial represents and because of all the controversy that surrounded the building of this monument. The National WWII Memorial, which was first proposed in the late 80s, was completed in 2004. The memorial, which spans several acres designed by Friedrich Florian, would end up costing 175 million dollars. The monument holds a prominent location between the Lincoln Memorial and Washington Monument. The memorial itself consists of a pool with fountains in a sunken circular plaza surrounded by columns. There are 56 granite columns representing the states and territories connected by bronze rope symbolizing the unity of the states and territories during World War II (Rothfeld, 2006). A prominent feature of the memorial is two four-story high arches representing the Pacific and Atlantic theaters. The memorial also showcases four bronze eagles, scenes of American life during war time, quotes, and a wall of 4000 stars (Rothfeld, 2006). The 4000 stars represent the 400,000 plus lives lost in the war effort. Rothfeld (2006) noted that the stars were used to symbolize lives lost because, during the war, people would place a gold star in the window, signifying the sacrifice of a family member. The landscape was meant to elicit great pride and respect for those who sacrificed and served during WWII. The National WWII Memorial website states, "The World War II Memorial honors the 16 million who served in the armed forces of the U.S., the more than 400,000 who died, and all who supported the war effort at home. Symbolic of the defining event of the 20th Century, the memorial is a monument to the spirit, sacrifice, and commitment of the American people." (National WWII Memorial, n.d., para. 1)

When looking at signs and symbols in landscapes, Knox and Marston (2016) remind us that “These signs may have different meanings for those who produce them and those who read, or interpret, them” (p. 247). This difference was exemplified in the criticism and praise of the WWII memorial. There was a lot of criticism about its design and location choice. Some of the negative responses included it was ugly, too big, and too boring. One stinging criticism was it was something the Nazis would have built (Maria, n.d.). Maria (n.d.) discussed that while people have a right to be angry because it will be there a long time and represents the struggle and sacrifice during WWII, it also needs to be noted that many people, including veterans, love the memorial (Maria, n.d.). "It's beautiful. It fits in very nicely on the Mall; it's very well thought out," says Bill Richardson, 83, of Warrenton, Va., a cavalry veteran originally from Colorado who served in the Pacific” (Maria, n.d., para. 14). There is a lot of passion and emotion surrounding the interpretation of landscapes like the WWII Memorial because of its importance to national identity.

Have you ever seen the WWII Memorial in person? You can use Google Earth to view the monument or search for videos, virtual tours, or images of the monument online. What feelings does the WWII Monument elicit in you? How do you interpret it? What symbolism can you identify in the WWII Memorial?

**Religious Landscapes**

In this unit, besides reading Chapter 7: Interpreting Places and Landscapes, you will also be reading about religion and landscape in Chapter 6. “The long-standing power of organized religions and established churches, together with the importance of religion in many people’s lives, means that religion has been an important shaper of landscape in almost every part of the world” (Knox & Marston, 2016, p. 219). One fascinating example of the importance of faith in society pertaining to symbolism in landscapes is the high rate of nations that have religious symbols embedded in their national flag. “A third of the world’s 196 countries currently have national flags that include religious symbols, according to a new Pew Research analysis”
You can view the flags at http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2014/11/25/64-countries-have-religious-symbols-on-their-national-flags/.

So take some time to think about places and landscapes that have spiritual meaning to you or others in your community, the nation, and the world. How is the sacred space coded through design elements and use of space?

References


Learning Activities (Non-Graded)

According to p. 247 in the textbook, "Called by some 'palaces of consumption,' malls are complex semiotic sites, directing important signals not only about what to buy but also about who should shop there and who should not."

Re-read the section on Commercial Spaces on p. 247 of your textbook regarding how commercial landscapes, such as shopping malls, are arranged and designed to promote certain behaviors and feelings in people. Take a trip to a local mall or strip mall. Think about the following questions while visiting the mall. How is the mall designed or arranged to attract customers? Are there any places or activities at your local mall meant to create an illusion that more than shopping or consumerism is the focus of being there? What message is being sent by the mall in terms of who should shop there?

This is an alternative assignment to get you thinking more critically. This is not a written assignment that you turn in. You can write a one page essay discussing your responses to the above questions.

Non-graded Learning Activities are provided to aid students in their course of study. You do not have to submit them. If you have questions, contact your instructor for further guidance and information.