

The Global-Local Continuum

Identity is a powerful concept. How we make sense of ourselves is influenced by the political, social, and cultural contexts in which we work and live. Group identities such as gender, ethnicity, and race are constructed both by self-realization and by identifying against others, as well as across scales. The **global-local continuum** is the notion that what happens at the global scale has a direct effect on what happens at the local scale, and vice versa. These events also affect all scales in between – national and regional. The globalized world is comprised of a series of interconnected relationships that extend across space.

How Are Identities Constructed?

Identity is how we make sense of ourselves. We construct our identities through experiences, emotions, connections, and rejections. An identity is a snapshot, an image of who we are at that moment. Place, space, and time are all integral to our perceptions of identity, since the concept is fluid and shifting.

One of the most powerful ways to construct an identity is by **identifying against** other people. Europeans constructed images and concepts of “others” throughout their contacts with foreign people starting around the Age of Exploration in the 1500s. And especially through their political configurations stemming from the Peace of Westphalia in 1648, one of the most powerful foci of identity in the modern world is the state. However, nationalist identities coexist with other identities, such as language, religion, ethnicity, race, gender, and socioeconomic status to name a few.

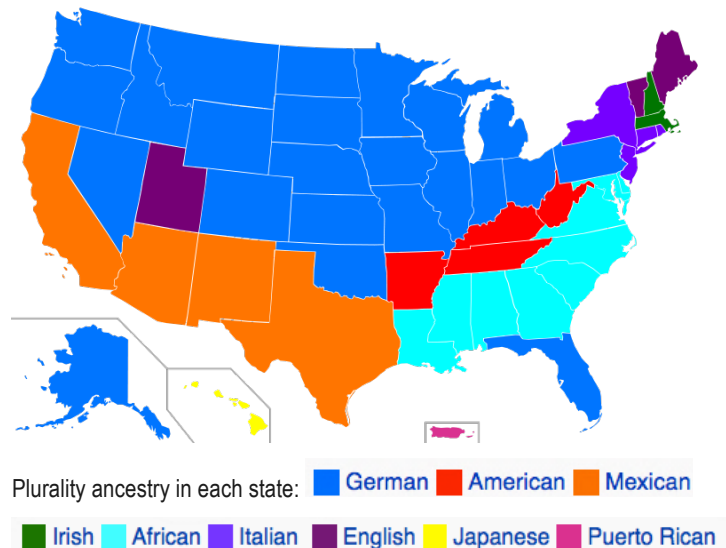
Race provides an excellent example of the ways in which geographic context shapes identity. In reality, there is only one race – the human race. However, throughout history, societies have drawn distinctions among people based on physical characteristics. A person’s *genotype* is based on his or her genetic makeup, whereas the *phenotype* is the outward appearance of that genetic makeup. Racial categories are social and political constructs because they are based on the notion that some biological features are more important than others. **Racism** arises out of the concept that ascribes negative significance toward certain phenotypical features, such as skin color. Systems can be put in place, whether intentional or not, that affect different races culturally, socially, and politically.

Differences in skin color, eye color, and hair color result from a long adaptation to different environments. Sunlight stimulates the production of melanin, protecting the skin from damaging ultraviolet rays; more melanin means darker skin. This explains why, over millennia, people living in the low latitudes (near the equator) had darker skin. Additionally, vitamin D, which is necessary for health, is stimulated by the penetration of ultraviolet rays into the skin. Over millennia, through natural selection, people at the high latitudes (closer to the poles) had lighter skins. Additionally, skin color is not a reliable indicator of genetic closeness. The indigenous people of

Africa, India, New Guinea, and Australia have similar skin complexions, but are not closely related in genetic terms.

Race and Ethnicity

Unlike a local culture or ethnicity to which we may *choose* to belong, race is an identity that is often *assigned*. The word ethnic comes from the ancient Greek word *ethnos*, meaning “people” or “nation”. An **ethnicity** is often identified as a group of people bound by common ancestry and culture, usually tied to a specific place of origin. Race and ethnicity, therefore are not necessarily the same thing.



Definitions of races in the United States historically focused on dividing the country into “white” and “nonwhite”. As a result of immigration and a difference in fertility rates, the United States is becoming increasingly “nonwhite”. Additionally, how Americans define race has changed as well. Before 2000, the US Census categorized “Hispanic” (coming from a country where Spanish is the predominant language) as a race. Since 2000, the US Census has categorized “Hispanic” as an ethnicity. Some prefer different terminology, so in 2010 the census used “Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin”.

Power and Gender Relationships

Power relationships do more than shape the cultural landscape; they can also subjugate entire groups of people. Jim Crow laws in the American South once separated “black” spaces from “white” spaces. There may also be gendered spaces – seen as being appropriate for women or for men. **Gender** refers to the social differences between men and women, rather than the biological differences between the sexes. Throughout the world today, the work of women is often undervalued and undercounted.

The most commonly used statistic for productivity is gross national income (the monetary worth of production within a country plus income from investments outside the country). The GNI includes neither the unpaid labor of women in the household, nor, usually, the work done by rural women in peripheral states. Some economists if

women's work of this sort was given a dollar amount, the world's total GNI would increase by as much as one-third. Nonetheless, the number of women in the "official" labor force is rising while the proportion of men in the labor force globally declined between 1990 and 2010. However, women continue to be paid less and have less access to food and education than men. For instance, in 2004, women counted toward two-thirds of all illiterate adults, and almost three-fourths if all impoverished citizens.

Migration flows, birth rates, and child mortality rates affect the gender composition of cities, states, and regions. Much of Sub-Saharan Africa, especially the rural areas, is dominated numerically by women. In this region, most rural to urban migrants are men, who often seek employment in factories and mines. Women here produce an estimated 70 percent of the region's food. As men leave for the towns and cities, sometimes to marry other wives, the women left in the village often struggle for survival.



Even though a woman in this position becomes the head of a household, if she goes to a bank for a loan she may be refused. If the husband doesn't return for years, she may want to apply for title to the land, but in many places land rights are not awarded to women. Young girls often become trapped in the cycle of female poverty and overwork. However, some gains have been achieved, albeit through hard political work of thousands of individuals. For instance, Rwanda is the first country in the world where women hold more legislative seats than men. While this is a great sign of rising equality, it also has to do with history. In 1994, more than 800,000 people – mostly men – were killed in a civil war and genocide. At that time women accounted for around 70% of the total population, today they make up around 55% and have made significant gains in terms of equality.

In India, thousands of girls are still betrothed through arranged marriages. In some extreme cases, disputes over the dowry, which is the price to be paid by the bride's family to the groom's father, have led to the death of the bride. While **dowry deaths** only involve a small fraction of India's girls, the practice is not declining. In 2009, it was reported that 8383 women died this way, at the hands of vengeful husbands or in-laws. These figures only count confirmed dowry deaths; many more are reported as suicides, kitchen accidents, or other fatal domestic incidents. Power relationships in India still place women below men in many cases, especially in the rural areas, and this is difficult to legislate away.

India's booming economy is having some positive effect on gender relations, as more women are becoming educated and holding better-paying jobs. Especially in urban areas, the number of arranged marriages has declined, while love marriages are on the rise. However, India still has a preference for males overall. India's 2011 census reported a sex ratio of 940 girls for every 1,000 boys. Many pregnant women in India undergo gender-determining tests (e.g., ultrasounds) and elect to have abortions when the fetus is a girl. Additionally, infanticide occurs in some cases, as many parents fear the cost of dowries and extend little social values to girls.

Local Cultures and Preservation

A **culture** is a group of belief systems, norms, and values practiced by a people. The **material culture** of a group includes things they construct, such as art, houses, clothing, sports, dance, and foods. **Nonmaterial culture** includes beliefs, practices, values, and aesthetics (what they see as attractive).

Traditionally, academics have labeled **folk culture** as small, involving a homogenous population, typically rural, and cohesive in terms of cultural traits. By contrast, **popular culture** is large, incorporates heterogeneous populations, is typically urban, and experiences quickly changing cultural traits. Today, many geographers view folk and popular cultures as ends of a continuum as opposed to vastly separate poles, and as such, most cultures fit somewhere in between folk and popular. Regardless, it's not how academics define a culture that matters; it's how the people define *themselves* that counts.

In many cases, the term local culture is used rather than folk culture. A **local culture** is a group of people in a particular place who see themselves as a community, who share experiences, customs, and traits, and work to preserve those traits and customs in order to claim uniqueness and to distinguish themselves from others. Local cultures are constantly redefining or refining themselves based on interactions with other cultures (local and popular) and diffusion of cultural practices (local and popular).

Local cultures are sustained through **customs**, which are practices that a group of people routinely follows. Local cultural groups purposefully define themselves as unique, creating boundaries around their culture, and distinguish themselves from other local cultures. They usually have two goals: keeping other cultures out, and keeping their own culture in.

Local cultures can also work to avoid **cultural appropriation**, the process by which other cultures adopt customs and knowledge, using them for their own benefit. Sports organizations, such as the NCAA and NFL have investigated "hostile and abusive" mascots and names, such as the Washington Redskins, which has been seen as offensive to some. However, the case of the Florida State Seminoles has been different. The tribe helped university boosters create the costume for the Chief Osceola mascot,

approving the face paint, flaming spear and Appaloosa horse that have no connection to Seminole history. Of course, the Seminole tribe also receives ample amounts of money for allowing the university to use these cultural symbols.



Members of local cultures in rural areas often have an easier time maintaining their cultures due to geographic isolation. For centuries, Anabaptist groups, the Amish, Hutterites, and Mennonites, have migrated to rural areas beyond their hearth in Switzerland, and Europe. In 2014, the **Amish** numbered around 250,000 in the United States. They are a group of traditionalist Christians who wear plain clothing, and either prohibit or limit the use of power-line electricity, telephones, and automobiles. They value rural life, manual labor and humility. Although similar, **Hutterites** live communally in colonies of around 100 people, and readily accept technologies that help them in their agricultural pursuits. They were generally slow to accept technologies that would encourage individualistic behavior, such as cameras and smart phones. However, it is common for young adult Hutterites to use the Internet for communication, and for dating sites designed for their local cultures. Taken as a whole, both cultures have maintained their ways, however, the Amish have more fervently held onto the customs of their distant past.

Commodification is the process through which something (a name, a good, an idea, or even a person) that previously was not regarded as an object to be bought or sold becomes tradable. Local cultures can become commodified, for example, with tourist buses “observing” Amish cultures, or trekking with “traditional” Nepalese guides on spiritual journeys through the Himalayas. When commodification occurs, the question of **authenticity** follows. Usually one image or experience is typecast as “authentic,” however cultures are dynamic, and people and places change over time – even traditional ones. Many

communities pursue **neolocalism** by seeking out the regional culture and reinvigorating it in response to the uncertainty of the modern world. For the Hutterites, the goal is to maintain their way of life, adopting only those technologies that advance their agricultural pursuits, and ban those that challenge their religion.

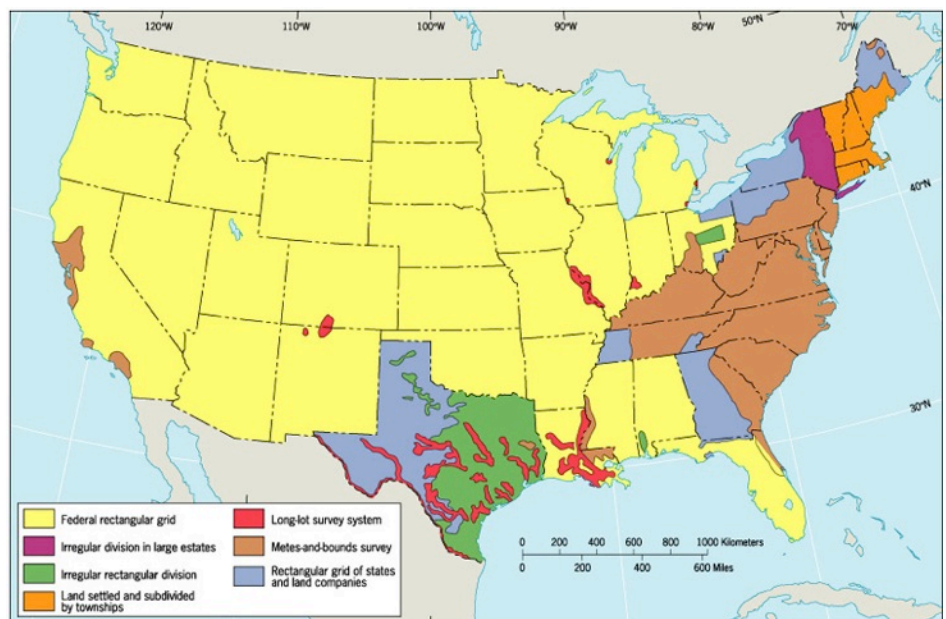


Amish engaged in a barn raising in Lancaster, PA

Traditional Settlement Patterns

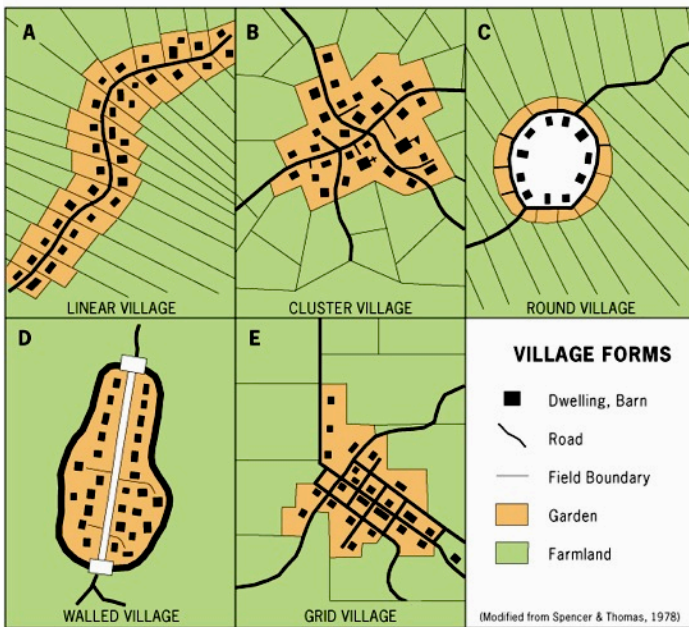
While the United States is one of the most modern countries in the world, the traditional layout of settlement patterns can still be seen on the cultural landscape. These patterns reflect the **cadastral system** – the method of land survey through which land ownership and property lines are defined. Looking out of a window on an airplane, one can see the distinct imprints of settlement patterns across the terrain.

The US government adopted a rectangular survey system after the American Revolution known as the **township-and-range-system**. This was designed to facilitate the movement of non-Indians evenly across the frontier, imposing a rigid grid like pattern on the land. The basic unit was 1 square mile section – and land was bought and



sold in whole, half, or quarter sections. Most of the US, especially west of the Mississippi River was laid out in this fashion.

The **metes and bounds survey** approach was adopted along the eastern seaboard, in which natural features were used to demarcate irregular parcels of land. Another distinct approach occurred primarily in French America in the Canadian Maritimes, and in parts of Quebec, Louisiana, and Texas where a **long-lot survey** system was implemented. This system divided land into narrow parcels stretching back from rivers, roads, or canals to fit as many people as possible.



While most US rural settlement patterns are more *dispersed*, lying quite far apart, most rural residential patterns across the globe are *nucleated*, with houses grouped closely together in order to use as much land as possible for growing crops. In many low-lying areas of Western Europe, villages are located in a **linear** fashion along dikes and levees. In other cases, a village may have grown into a **cluster**, having started as a hamlet and then developed by accretion. **Round** villages also formed, originally with a central cattle corral (in East Africa as well). Many settlements were protected, primarily before the advent of gunpowder. However, more modern settlements may be arranged along a **grid** pattern. Nonetheless, some ancient Greek cities laid their settlements in this way, as did Spanish colonists.

Buildings within villages vary with respect to the wealth and education of the people in the local and national community. Peripheral villages possess far fewer specialists or resources, so the **functional differentiation** of buildings within their settlements are far less elaborate than in more core states. In Western cultures, a single farmstead is likely to have a farmhouse, stable, barn, garage, shed, and at least one silo. Entire hamlets in poorer regions may not possess as many buildings as a single farmer in richer regions.

Popular Cultures and Diffusion

Unlike local cultures, which are found in relatively small areas, popular culture is ubiquitous and can change in a matter of days - or even hours. The main paths of diffusion of popular culture are the transportation, marketing, and communication networks that interlink vast parts of the world. Popular culture diffuses *hierarchically* in the context of **time-space compression**, with diffusion happening most rapidly across the most compressed spaces.

All aspects of popular culture - music, sports, television, dance - have a hearth, a place of origin. Typically a hearth begins to spread *contagiously*, then spreads hierarchically to those who are most connected, or most likely to adopt the trend. Country music, for example, originated in the rural Appalachian south of the US in States like Tennessee and Kentucky, originating from folk music and blues styles. Today, it is one of the most popular genres in the US, and maintains huge followings internationally. Music groups such as the Dave Matthews Band, Grateful Dead, and Jimmy Buffet have spread along these lines, but also *relocationally*, as fans follow them along their concert routes.

In the modern era of globalization, certain corporations, such as Viacom, the parent company of MTV, generate and produce popular culture through the communications infrastructure that links them with the rest of the world. Not only corporations, but also individuals can create and promote popular culture. The big three traditional sports in the US have been baseball, football, and basketball. However, the debut of ESPN's X Games in 1995, along with the proliferation of video games involving extreme sports, propelled alternative sports into the mainstream. Tony Hawk, a famous skateboarder worked with Activision to create one of the most successful video game franchises in history. By 2001, video game sales rivaled the total movie industries' box office receipts.

Industrial capitalism demands that corporations continue to produce goods that become socially *desirable*. In today's interconnected world, the pace of change has been accelerated. Nonetheless, predicting what will become desirable is truly unpredictable. Few would have known that trends such as Silly Bandz, or Kooky Pens would have garnered so much attention in the early 2010s with young children. Additionally, as quickly as these goods gain popularity, they also fall away from popularity as people find new trends to obsess over.



Popular culture rarely acts like a blanket, evenly covering the globe. Rather, one aspect of popular culture will take on new forms when it encounters a new locality. This process is **reterritorialization**, in which people produce an aspect of popular culture themselves in the context of their local culture and place, making it their own. Hip Hop, for

example, grew out of the inner cities of New York (Bronx and Harlem) and Los Angeles (Compton) in the 1980s and 1990s. Neighborhood venues were the authentic spaces for these performances, however, this genre quickly spread globally. Artists around the world wrote about social issues, violence, crime, or even about fun and partying. This music style has been duplicated and transformed across virtually all regions and countries. As of 2014, the most watched YouTube video was *Gangnam Style* - with around 2 billion hits - by PSY, a South Korean Hip Hop artist. It debuted in 2012, and became an international sensation.

Popular Culture on the Landscape

The tension between globalized popular culture and local culture can be seen in the **cultural landscape**, the *built environment* that displays the visible imprint of human activity on the landscape. Cultural landscapes reflect the values, norms, and aesthetics of a culture.

On major roadways what often emerges is **placelessness**, or the loss of uniqueness in the cultural landscape to the point that one place looks like the next. Conglomerations of stores may be very similar from one town or city to the next. **Big box stores** (e.g., Wal-Mart), supermarkets (e.g., Publix), and food chains (e.g., McDonalds) tend to be ubiquitous across the landscape.



The global diffusion of skyscrapers illustrates placelessness. The CBDs of cities across the globe are dominated by tall buildings, many of which have been designed by the same architects and engineering firms. These skyscrapers became a fixture of the industrial landscape. However, many modern cities have worked to create a *postindustrial* look, one that is more aesthetically pleasing and expressive of the local culture. Taipei 101 is a landmark skyscraper in Taiwan, comprising of 101 floors above ground (and was the tallest building until 2010). Its structure reflects the traditional Chinese pagoda, with eight tiers of eight stories (considered a number for prosperity in Chinese culture).

Its narrow pinnacle tower and spire are aligned along the cardinal directions.

Another occurrence that works against placelessness is **invasion and succession**, where new immigrants arrive to an urban area usually via chain migration, and then occupy areas dominated by “older” immigrants. Demographically in the late 20th century, Borough Park, in Brooklyn, New York City transformed from a largely

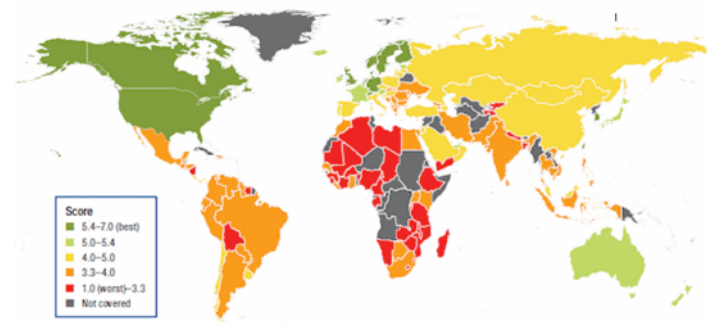
Italian and Irish neighborhood, to one dominated by Hasidic Jewish families.

The **global-local continuum** concept emphasize that what happens at one scale is not independent of what happens at other scales. Human geography is not simply about documenting the differences between places; it is also about understanding the processes unfolding at different scales that produce those differences. People in a local place alter regional, national, and global developments, in a process known as **glocalization**. The Japanese were pioneers of this tactic in the 1980s, in which corporations would “think globally, but act locally”. To increase sales today, McDonalds is a massively globalized company, however, their menus change from one location to another in an attempt to appeal local palates. In a way, glocalization contributes to **cultural heterogenization**, working against uniformity and placelessness.

The Geography of Networks

A **network** is a set of interconnected nodes without a center. A network defines any number of linkages across the globe, whether transportation, educational, financial, social, or informational. Since 1995, when the Internet became fully commercialized, the access of information technology has grown meteorically.

Also in 1995, Microsoft released Windows 95, in which many people waited in long lines to purchase. It was highly anticipated because it was a significant progression from its predecessors, with an improved graphic user interface (GUI) closer to that of Apple computers. At that time, most people in core countries were increasingly using computer-centered technologies, with software and information specifically in the hard drives of their hardware (their computers). Today, we are shifting toward more network-diffused technologies, for instance, with **cloud computing** - storing data and running applications on many connected computers at the same time. In simple terms “the cloud” is a metaphor for the Internet.



The Networked Readiness Index (source: World Economic Forum)

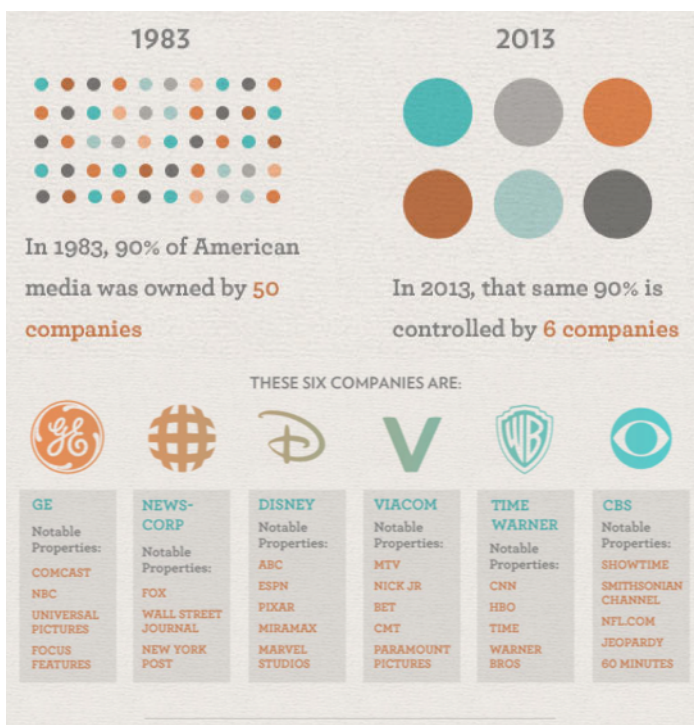
The **Digital Divide** in access to information technology is both a hallmark of the current world and an example of the uneven outcomes of globalization. While people in core states are connected more than ever before, millions

of people in the peripheral states are mostly left behind due to minimal access to modern technology.

Despite limited network connectedness, during the Arab Spring of 2011, Tunisians, Egyptians, and other North Africans utilized **social networks** to organize protests and revolutions. This movement was instigated by widespread dissatisfaction with the rule of local governments, as well as wide gaps in income levels. People across this region used Facebook and Twitter to protest through rap music, which then escalated into local and regional demonstrations, sometimes leading to violence.

Networks in the Modern World

The global diffusion of products and ideas associated with popular culture depends largely on globalized media and retail networks. Through a series of mergers and consolidations occurring mostly in the post-Cold War era, global media are controlled by six globe-spanning corporations that encompass print, radio, television, movies, websites, and computer programs. These corporations engage in **vertical integration**, having ownership in all or most of the points along the production and consumption of a commodity chain.



Vertical integration also helps media giants attract and maintain customers through **synergy**, or the interaction of multiple entities to produce an effect greater than the sum of the individual effects. Through synergy, these corporations engage in the cross promotion of vertically integrated goods. For example, in Walt Disney's Magic Kingdom has different attractions and locations sponsored by other companies such as Kodak, Minute Maid, and Coca-Cola.

Vertical integration of media changes the geography of the flow of ideas around the globe by limiting the number of **gatekeepers**, that is, people or corporations with control over access to information. A gatekeeper can choose to tell a story or not tell a story, and can present only partial information. With the extraordinary growth of **blogs** ("web logs") on the Internet, tight gatekeeping has become more difficult. Blogs are local, regional, national, or global networks that respond to and stand separate from global media networks. While blogs vary significantly from each other, anyone with access to the Internet can read or post comments on these sites.

Unlike major media corporations that are vertically integrated, major retail corporations typically engage in **horizontal integration**, by acquiring other corporations engaged in similar activities. Stores such as Banana Republic, the Gap, and Old Navy are owned by the same parent company. Restaurants such as Taco Bell, KFC, and Pizza Hut are all part of YUM!, which is owned by PepsiCo. Even large automobile companies such as General Motors own other brands, such as Chevrolet, GMC, Cadillac, and Buick.

In the globalized world, there also those who wish to disconnect from the core-controlled economy and distribution systems. These anti-globalizationists often make their stand based on philosophical principles of sustainability, environmental friendliness, as well as supporting their local communities. However, many people choose to focus on more locally produced goods for economic reasons as well. For instance, the United States has seen an increase in **community-supported agriculture** groups, known as CSAs. This **organic** movement had its roots in Japan in the 1960s, with women who opposed the imported, processed, and pesticide-laden foods they were serving their families.

From its hearth in Japan, CSAs diffused to Europe and then to the United States, first in the Berkshires region of Massachusetts. Today there are 4,000 CSAs in the US alone. Many in the Berkshires also use a **local currency** called BerkShares that are not backed by the US government, but intended to be traded in the local area. Residents purchase BerkShares at 95 cents per BerkShare from participating banks. Businesses then accept BerkShares at full dollar value, creating a five percent discount incentive. By using a **local exchange trading system** (LETS), people are encouraged to keep more their money in the local community. Thousands of these types of local currencies exist throughout the world. On a smaller scale, most American children have gone to parties at Chuck E. Cheese's, and have bought tokens with actual money, that are only usable in those establishments.

Globalization is a series of processes, not all of which are headed in the same direction. Many of the most important processes happen at different scales, from global, to national, to regional, and even local. Just as globalization influences people and places, those same people and places influence globalization's trajectory and future.