

Human Geography is the field of geography that deals with human presence, activities, and impacts on the natural environment. This includes the study of populations, their migration, and their distribution; economic activities such as resource extraction, industry, and agriculture; settlement patterns and political geography and the modification of the natural environment. In short, human geography involves the study of all human activities and their impact on the natural environment.

The impact of early human societies on the natural environment was minimal because small nomadic populations existed primarily through hunting, fishing, and gathering. Tools and dwellings were fashioned from natural materials such as wood, stone, animal skins, and bone. This was the type of existence of many First Nations groups at the time of European arrival in North America.

The domestication of plants and animals brought about greater changes in the physical environment. Land was used for extensive grazing and was cultivated to grow crops marking the beginnings of agriculture. The availability of more reliable food supplies allowed humans to live in permanent settlements and to develop a more complex society. These developments brought about greater changes to the natural environment through the clearing of forests, construction of permanent dwellings, and the eventual growth of settlements.

As early societies became more successful in meeting their needs within permanent settlements, they were able to live in larger concentrations and further develop their economic, social, and political systems. The rise of agricultural, resource extraction, and manufacturing activities led to more complex economic and political systems. Transportation and trade networks were established, political boundaries were created, and settlements grew into towns and cities. The physical environment was subjected to greater and more permanent changes as societies evolved into the modern urbanized and industrialized world that we know today.

The invention of the internal combustion engine, the rise of the automobile, and the discovery and extraction of vast amounts of fossil fuels resulted in dramatic changes to how people lived as well as a considerable impact on the natural environment. One of the greatest challenges faced by humans today is how to manage the use of energy resources in a sustainable fashion without inflicting permanent damage to the environment in the form of land, air, and water pollution and climate change.

Throughout human history, the physical environment has provided raw materials for human use and influenced human activities. In turn, human activities have altered the physical environment in dramatic ways in many parts of the world. Many believe that the nature of this interrelationship between the physical and human environments has reached a critical stage and will have to be addressed to ensure human survival on planet Earth in the 21st century.