

“Geographic Regions in Human Cognition”

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Daniel R. Montello

Professor, Department of Geography
Affiliated Professor, Department of Psychology
University of California, Santa Barbara
USA

Geographic regions are (approximately) 2-D pieces of the Earth’s surface. No two places on the Earth’s surface are identical, but by generalizing over unique characteristics, people identify (mostly) contiguous sets of places that are similar to each other but dissimilar from places in other regions. Thus, regionalization is spatial categorization. Regions play an important role in the way geographers and other earth and environmental scientists organize their thinking and communication about the Earth. They also play a central role in the way laypersons think and communicate, probably including people from all times and cultures. That is, regionalization is very likely to be universal, cognitively and culturally. In this talk, I discuss the fundamental concept of regions and regionalization, identifying various types of regions and their properties, one of their most interesting being boundary vagueness. I then focus specifically on *cognitive* regions—regions in the mind that reflect how individuals or cultures informally organize the Earth’s surface. I present several studies conducted by my colleagues and me on the role of regions in spatial cognition, including their influence on distance, direction, and similarity judgments.

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