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Barnett, C. (2009). Cultural Turn. In D. Gregory, R. J. Johnston, G. Pratt, M. Watts and S. Whatmore (eds.) *The Dictionary of Human Geography*, 5<sup>th</sup> Edition. Oxford, Wiley-Blackwell. ISBN: 978-1-4051-3287-9, pp. 134-135.  
<http://eu.wiley.com/WileyCDA/WileyTitle/productCd-1405132876.html>

## CULTURAL TURN

A set of intellectual developments that have led to issues of **culture** becoming central in human geography since the late 1980s. It refers to a number of related trends. Firstly, the emergence of a 'new' **cultural geography**. Secondly, the increasing attention to culture in sub-fields such as economic, environmental, historical and social geography. Thirdly, there are claims that culture has become a more important factor in the world itself, e.g. in economic processes, or in driving political conflict.

The cultural turn has undoubtedly promoted a greater degree of theoretical pluralism in human geography, drawing on concepts from other disciplines, and focussing attention on issues of gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity and other dimensions of difference. It has also encouraged the use of a range of interpretative and qualitative methodologies. Epistemologically, it is associated with a commitment to investigating the contingent and constructed qualities of phenomena. And it has gone hand in hand with a 'geographical turn' across the humanities and social sciences more generally (Gregory 1994, Cook *et al* 2000).

The cultural turn has been attacked for distracting geographers from doing research that is useful for policy-makers, and for retreating from the 'materialist' analysis of power under capitalism. It's clear that the cultural turn is embedded in wider disputes about the **relevance** of human geography research and teaching.

### Suggested Reading

Barnett, C. (2004). 'A critique of the cultural turn', in J. Duncan, N. Johnson, R. Schein (eds.) (2004). *A Companion to Cultural Geography*. Oxford: Blackwell.