# Chapter 2

# Social and Cultural Trends

## Chapter Overview

People have a tendency to think that the past was the way it is now, just without the high-level technology they accept as normal. The truth is that the past was very different simply because they didn’t have the technology modern society takes for granted. The distances they could cover in a day greatly limited how far they could live from work. The limits of technology also restricted how much could be manufactured and shipped. How people lived was also different. The need to live more locally meant that people relied on each other more, thereby creating more of a community of trust and cooperation. Living independently and being self-reliant is a very modern idea. As technology changed how people lived their lives, it also started to change how they thought about many things. Today’s society is becoming more prone to memes, and many of these memes are no longer good for people or the environment in which they live. One such meme is how people thought about possessions and how they came to value privacy and material goods more as society gained more monetary wealth. The advent of a consumer society created greater strains on natural resources that they now fail to notice. The scale of environmental consequences and problems seems to be growing exponentially along with technological and human population growth. This chapter concludes with some ways to rethink what is valuable in your life that you can now explore more in chapters to come.

## Vocabulary Terms

bedroom communities

biodiversity

carrying capacity

civic disengagement

cognitive dissonance

community norms

commuting

conditioning

Consumer Era

consumer society

consumptive waste

ecological footprint

ecological infrastructure

ecosystem services

entrepreneurship

gatekeepers

global village

maladaptations

megacities

meme

neurolinguistic programming

operant conditioning

self-actualization

sustainable yields

sweatshops

## Terms With Definitions

**bedroom communities**—Housing that is affordable but is distant from places of employment and urban centers. They often have only minimal services associated within them, requiring extensive commuting.

**biodiversity—**The sum of an area’s organisms, considering the diversity of species, their genes, their populations, and their communities that interact dynamically to secure the health of a given ecosystem.

**carrying capacity—**The maximum number of members of a specific species that can be supported sustainably within a defined ecosystem.

**civic disengagement—**To disregard one’s civic responsibility and duty for active participation in the public life of a community. To remain uninformed, uncommitted, and with disregard for the common good.

**cognitive dissonance—**The psychological discomfort from holding two conflicting thoughts in the mind at the same time. It increases with the importance of the subject, the strength of the conflict, and a person’s inability to rationalize the conflict.

**community norms—**Acceptable behaviors and beliefs espoused by a community and all who live within it.

**commuting—**Regular travel between home and a place of work or study.

**conditioning—**A process of behavior modification by which a subject comes to associate a desired behavior with a previously unrelated stimulus.

**Consumer Era—**The beginning of the creation of products to fulfill needs not yet recognized.

**consumer society—**A society in which the increasing consumption of mass-produced goods is encouraged through advertising and creation of unrecognized needs.

**consumptive waste—**The generation of excessive waste produced as a consequence of mass production and the economic impetus to continually create new purchasing needs.

**ecological footprint—**The amount of biologically productive land and sea area needed to regenerate the resources a human [population](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Population) consumes and to absorb and render harmless the corresponding waste produced.

**ecological infrastructure—**The dynamic interaction of abiotic processes, biotic processes, and human cultural processes in maintaining ecosystem services.

**ecosystem services—**The processes by which the environment produces resources that people often take for granted. These resources include food, fuel, fiber, shelter, building materials, air and water purification, waste decomposition, climate stabilization and moderation, nutrient cycling, soil fertility, pollination, pest control, and genetic resources for biodiversity stabilization.

**entrepreneurship—**The process of change in organizing, managing, and assuming the risks of a business or enterprise, while discovering new ways of combining resources.

**gatekeepers—**A metaphorical term for individuals, such as newspaper and magazine editors, who decide whether specific information is valid for release or that a given message will be distributed through a [mass medium](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mass_medium).

**global village—**A metaphorical term to describe how global electronic networking mirrored the way communications used to work in smaller villages.

**maladaptation—**A trait or behavior that is (or has become) more harmful than beneficial.

**megacities—**Large urban centers that hold more than 10 million people. Many adjacent towns and cities are growing together to create new megacities where the boundaries are defined politically and not by any separation of rural areas between them.

**meme—**A unit of information that, when lodged in a person’s mind and retained, influences events and perpetuates more copies of itself in other minds that are exposed to it.

**neurolinguistic programming—**A psychological connection of the ways people think, coupled with communication patterns that relate to specific behavior adaptations.

**operant conditioning—**The effects of the consequences of a particular behavior on the future occurrence of that behavior using feedback from the immediate environment.

**self-actualization—**The desire for self-fulfillment, and to work toward one’s full potential.

**sustainable yields—**Obtaining resources from the environment without depleting the ability of the environment to regenerate those resources at least at the same rate as usage.

**sweatshops**—Common in the United States prior to union organization in the early 1900s and prevalent today in developing countries. These manufacturing places are characterized by a lack of basic workers’ rights, such as bare wages, long working hours, little or no health and safety regulations or workers’ compensation for injuries on the job, and frequent use of child labor.

## Extended Learning Activities

1. **Individual research project.** Interview people within your community. Find out the following information:

* What aspects of their lives do they find stressful?
* In what aspects of their lives do they find the most happiness?
* How has technology impacted their lives from a positive and negative perspective?
* What would they change about their lives to make it better?

Determine from the interview how modern living in the United States is contributing to happiness or disappointment. Present your findings to the class. Participate in a class discussion to determine the overall themes.

1. **Product or advertisement evaluation.** Analyze several different advertisements and determine how the services or products in the advertisement are meant to increase quality of life for those that purchase them. How are the services or products meant to make people feel if they do not have them? Find an advertisement for a product that you desire but cannot afford and describe how you feel about not being able to attain that product. Present your findings to the class. Participate in a class discussion regarding the feelings associated with consumerism in the United States.
2. **Civic engagement.** Find a group, such as a retirement community, day care, or food pantry, in your area, and find out if there are some activities needed that you can volunteer to do for a short time in any week. Write a paper on how being a part of the community makes you feel in terms of sense of community. Did the experience enrich your life? Why or why not? Relate the experience to the problems of modern communities and people’s lack of civic engagement.

## Research and Response Questions

1. Research the average ecological footprints of a developed nation and a developing nation and determine why the size of the ecological footprint differs between the two. What are the factors that determine the size of each country’s ecological footprint? Determine how the developed country might lower its ecological footprint and what would happen if the developing nation increased its ecological footprint. What do the sizes of the footprints mean in terms of carbon emissions, goods and services, housing, transportation, and food consumption? Make a connection to sustainability.
2. Research the demise of Easter Island and how this civilization might represent a microcosm for today’s civilizations.
3. Research the benefits and necessities of biodiversity for human survival.

## Web Links

[Ecological Footprint Quiz by Center for Sustainable Economy](http://www.myfootprint.org/)

[International Union for Conservation of Nature](http://www.iucn.org/)

[Memes.org: Mind Viruses](http://www.memes.org/)

[Sustainable Footprint](http://www.sustainablefootprint.org/)