People and Culture of Europe

4.3.1 Population Distribution

Where do most people in Europe live?

Historically, Europe was a continent made up of many small agricultural communities and few urban centers. But between 1700 and today, most of Europe industrialized and urbanized. Industrialization is the process of changing from a mostly agricultural economy to one that produces goods in large factories. This often requires large numbers of workers. These workers move from the countryside to the city, which is a process called urbanization.

This period of industrialization and urbanization is called the Industrial Revolution. As Europe industrialized, more and more people began to move from the farms in the countryside to the cities, where factories were located. These cities grew very large over time. Today, most Europeans live in cities. In some industrialized countries, such as Belgium, more than 90 percent of the people live in urban areas.

The rise in the population of European cities did more than just make the cities larger. These cities in Europe became centers of power and culture. For example, European cities—including London, in the United Kingdom; Florence, in Italy; Amsterdam, in the Netherlands; and Madrid, in Spain—built museums, theaters, universities, and many other cultural offerings. Over time, the cultural power of European cities increased, along with their wealth.

As European cities became more powerful and influential, they attracted people from farther and farther away. Much of the migration to Europe from outside the continent has come from the former colonies of Europe. South Asians have migrated to London; Algerians and Moroccans have migrated to Paris and Madrid; Indonesians have migrated to Amsterdam.

Most immigrants to Europe come looking for economic opportunities. By the 2000s, about 5 percent of the people in the European Union were living in countries where they were not born.

Looking to the World

The large immigrant populations in European cities are symbols of the way European cities have taken a more global view of the market. European cities are no longer just trading with the surrounding countryside or neighboring nations. Rather, European cities trade with the rest of the world. They are constantly seeking markets and trade agreements in foreign countries in and out of Europe. However, the factories and heavy industry of the past has become less important over time. These days, Europe trades on highly developed service industries like finance and high technology.

This does not mean that Europe no longer has agricultural communities. There are still many farms and small villages throughout Europe. In fact, the continent still has a very productive system of farms. The farms of Europe produce large amounts of potatoes, oats, and wheat. But these small farming villages and rural communities are also cultural centers. While the cities have become multicultural, the small villages have held on to traditional ethnic cultures and languages.

4.3.2 Diversity in Europe

How do ethnicities, nationalities, and languages overlap in Europe?

Europe has a diverse population of different ethnicities. An ethnicity is a group that sees itself as culturally, socially, and linguistically similar. This is different from a nation. In Europe, some ethnicities have their own nations, while other ethnic groups are part of larger nations. For example, the Swedes are an ethnic group that established their own nation: Sweden. However, Catalans, or people from the Spanish province of Catalonia, are an ethnic group within the larger multinational country of Spain. Spain also includes the groups Castilians, Gallegos, Basques, and Andalusians. Each of these ethnic groups inside Spain speaks its own language or dialect, though most also speak Spanish.

Historically, most of Europe has been much more like Spain than like Sweden. The Austrian Empire, for example, included many ethnic groups: Croatians, Czechs, Germans, Hungarians, Italians, Poles, Romanians, Serbians, Slovaks, Slovenes, and Ukrainians. In the 1800s, however, these many groups began to separate from the kingdom and create their own nations. At the same time, other large ethnic groups—most significantly Germans—grouped together to form larger ethnic nations.
The political borders of Europe are largely a product of this process, and in many areas in Europe, this process continues. There are ethnically based national movements in the United Kingdom regions of Scotland and Wales. Spain has been resisting Basque and Catalan independence movements for decades. Also, the ethnic groups that made up the former country of Yugoslavia in Southeastern Europe recently formed their own countries.

4.3.3 Linguistic Diversity in Europe

How is Europe linguistically diverse?

Just as there are many ethnicities in Europe, there are also a number of different languages and language families. In Europe, people speak between 50 and 60 languages belonging to three language families. One of the three language families is the Romance/Latin family. French, Spanish, Portuguese, Romanian, and Italian are all part of this language family. The Germanic language family includes German, English, Norwegian, Swedish, and Dutch. The Slavic family includes Russian, Polish, Czech, and Ukrainian, among others.

But languages in Europe often cut across and through different nations. Some nations are home to several languages. Spain, for example, still has many different languages spoken within its national boundaries. Switzerland has four national languages: French, German, Italian, and Romansh. The nation of France now speaks a mostly uniform French language, but this was not always the case. Until the late 1800s, France was home to several different dialects that were so different that many people considered them languages.

Some languages are spoken in a number of different nations. French is spoken in both France and Belgium; German is spoken in Germany and Austria; English is now spoken in England, Scotland, Wales, and Ireland. Still other nations, either through war or migration, are now home to a unique national language that is the majority language only in that country. Most people speak Polish in Poland, Czech in the Czech Republic; and Slovak in Slovakia. These languages are not native to other countries.

The trend in Europe with languages and ethnicities has mostly been toward less diversity. Industrialization and urbanization have led to nationalism. In turn, the creation of new nations has encouraged the recognition of broader ethnic identities. Small ethnic groups within nations have adopted the language and culture of the larger group. The result has been a reduction in the number of minority groups and minority languages across the continent. Religion, however, has followed a different trend. Over the last 500 years, Europe has become more religiously diverse.

4.3.4 Religion in Europe

How has religious diversity developed over the past millennium?

Before the spread of Christianity in Europe, the continent was home to a number of different indigenous religions. These religions had complex folklore traditions and were mostly polytheistic, meaning their followers believed in many gods. However, as Christianity spread across Europe between 100 and 1000, many of these religions disappeared. For centuries afterward, most of Europe was unified under a single form of Christianity. This began to change in the early 1500s. Since then, many forms of Christianity have emerged in Europe: the Anglican church in England, Lutheranism in Germany, Presbyterians in Scotland, and Baptists in Sweden and Britain.

More than 75 percent of the people in Europe belong to one of the three main branches of Christianity. These branches are Roman Catholicism, Protestantism, and Eastern Orthodox—a form of Christianity practiced in Greece, parts of eastern and southeastern Europe, and Russia. These branches are found throughout the continent, but generally, large numbers of Roman Catholics live in southern Europe and large numbers of Protestants live in northern Europe.

Roman Catholicism is the most popular branch of Christianity in Europe, and around the world. The headquarters for the church is Vatican City, a tiny independent state entirely inside the city of Rome, Italy. The church is led by the pope, also known as the Bishop of Rome. To Roman Catholics, the pope is a symbol of Jesus Christ’s relationship with his followers because they believe that he personally selected the first pope, St. Peter, to govern and watch over the people of the church. Today, the pope is selected by a group of Cardinals from around the globe, who hold a secret vote called a conclave.

Because Roman Catholicism has over 1 billion followers worldwide, the pope has enormous influence even though his political power is very limited. In 2013, Pope Benedict XVI stepped down from the position, citing old age and poor health. He was the first pope to resign since 1415. The church held a conclave and eventually elected 76-year-old Jorge Mario Bergoglio, the archbishop of Buenos Aires, Argentina. Bergoglio took the name Francis and became the first Pope from outside of Europe in over 1,000 years. Since becoming pope, Francis has made several controversial statements about topics including climate change and income inequality.
Over the last few decades, Europe has seen a large increase in Muslim groups immigrating to Europe. Algerians and Moroccans have immigrated to France, Pakistanis have immigrated to Britain, and Turks have immigrated to Germany. Because of this immigration, Islam has become the second largest religious group in Europe.

There are also many other smaller religious groups. One of these is Judaism, which has existed in Europe since the Roman Empire in the first century. Before World War II, there were approximately 9 million Jewish people in Europe. Because of religious persecution, there are now just over 1.5 million Jews in modern Europe, with populations in Britain, Germany, France, the Netherlands, and Russia. Smaller groups include Buddhists, Hindus, and people of other faiths. More than 15 percent of Europeans do not identify with any religious affiliation.

4.3.5 Food and National Diversity in Europe

How do different foods in Europe indicate ethnic and national differences?

The climates of Europe's different regions have largely determined various nations' traditional dishes. In the north, heavy meats, heavy creams, butter, cheeses, and dense breads are common. In the south, the climate is warmer and dairy products such as cheese and milk could not be preserved for long. Traditionally, the cuisine in the south and along the Mediterranean included flat breads, dried meats, and olive oil.

These days, refrigeration and other preserving methods mean foods that were once hard to find are now readily available. Still, many regional differences remain. For example, Italy is now famous for pastas. Pierogi, a kind of dumpling, are a traditional Polish food. Quiche, a kind of egg and cheese pie, is traditionally served in France. Paella, a saffron rice dish, is common throughout Catalonia and Valencia in Spain. Stew is a traditional meal in Ireland, and haggis, a kind of sausage made from sheep, is a national dish from Scotland. Other well-known European foods are Greek salads, Swedish meatballs, and Turkish kebabs, which are pieces of meat cooked on skewers.

4.3.6 Sharing Culture and Knowledge

How do Europeans share knowledge and experience in the arts and sciences?

Classical Beginnings

For the past several centuries, northern Europe has been the economic and military heart of the continent. But the intellectual origins of Europe actually emerged on the shores of the Mediterranean, especially in the classical environments of Ancient Greece and Rome. Ancient Greece produced many of the things we think of now as "European." In fact, the word Europe itself has its origins in the Greek language, as do other common terms such as democracy and philosophy. These ideas flowered in the many city-states of Ancient Greece during its Golden Age.

As Greece declined after Alexander the Great's conquest of the Near East in the 300s BCE, Rome began to rise. One of the earliest founding myths of Rome borrows a page from Greek legend. According to the epic poem The Aeneid, the Trojan prince Aeneas arrived in Italy after the Trojan War, which is described in the Greek epic poem The Iliad. Aeneas and his family founded Rome, which was largely based on Greece and Greek culture. As Roman control spread across a vast territory from Spain to Palestine and from England to Egypt, Roman culture and writing spread throughout Europe. Many European languages today, including English, have adopted a form of the Roman alphabet.

Renaissance

When the western part of the Roman Empire fell apart in the 400s CE, Europe entered a period historians have traditionally called a Dark Age. While historians now know that this age wasn't actually "dark," it still pales in comparison to the bright lights of the Renaissance. Starting in the 1300, the ideas of the Renaissance in Italy began to spread around the continent. At this time, artists, scholars, and writers from all over Europe were influenced by the rediscovery of past traditions in Italy. The rediscovery of these old traditions became the foundation for new and important works that helped unite the scholarly and scientific worlds in Europe.

During the Renaissance, scientists shared their ideas across the continent. In the early 1500s, the Polish scientist Nicolaus Copernicus theorized that Earth rotated around the Sun. About 100 years later, the German scientist Johannes Kepler expanded on ideas in Copernicus's work. Soon after that, an Italian named Galileo Galilei developed a telescope that could see the surface of the moon and other planets. Galileo used his telescope to prove Copernicus's ideas. Kepler later improved on Galileo's telescope and made even more discoveries about space.
In the 1600s, a new movement called the Enlightenment brought scholars and scientists across Europe together. Many historians' interpretations of what exactly Enlightenment ideas were vary wildly from one to the next. In the most basic sense, the Enlightenment applied scientific principles and rational thinking to all aspects of life, including economics, politics, the arts, and culture. Economically, the Age of Enlightenment impacted the spread of liberalism, or free market ideas. The rise of liberalism marked the end of mercantilism, a system in which the government tightly controlled the flow of goods and money. Political philosophers in France and other countries began to reject the idea that the power of the monarch was absolute. They insisted that there were limits to the power of the king and that he should be removed if he overstepped those limits. This eventually happened during the French Revolution in the late 1700s, arguably a result of the rise of Enlightenment ideas.

The Age of Enlightenment can also be seen in the era's scientific discoveries, new medical procedures, art, and even transformations in music. Following the reforms instituted by the enlightened monarch Joseph II of Austria, the city of Vienna buzzed with philosophical and artistic activity. As a result, the most talented composers of the day flocked to Vienna in the 1700s and 1800s. Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, Joseph Hayden, and Franz Schubert came from areas in Austria. Ludwig van Beethoven and Johannes Brahms were drawn from areas in what is now modern Germany. This unique combination of enlightened policies stimulating artistic innovation produced music that was profoundly innovative. Beethoven, for example, bridged the classical and romantic styles by composing music that developed over the course of the song, much like the way a novel follows a person’s experiences. Other composers, especially Schubert, experimented with new contrapuntal styles, which altered the way later composers understood the independence of individual instruments playing together. The music of these composers is still played around the world today, where audiences from all cultures identify with the joy, sorrow, and other emotions expressed so vividly in the compositions.

At the same time, despite the revolutionary change, Paris, France, was the center of Enlightenment visual art. Over the course of the 1800s and 1900s in France, the neoclassicism of Jacques-Louis David and romanticism of Eugène Delacroix developed into the realism of Édouard Manet, the impressionism of Monet, and finally the abstract art of Matisse and Picasso. These impressionist and abstract artists worked diligently to borrow styles and innovations that allowed their art to move beyond national and territorial boundaries in their search for universal beauty. For example, Monet's style of impressionism was highly influenced by the Japanese style of presenting common daily scenes in elaborate and decorative ways. Matisse and Picasso, who strained the boundaries of representation in numerous ways, were also greatly influenced by the stylized human sculptures found in some African art. Picasso's most famous painting, Guernica, is recognized around the world for its unique depiction of the pain and confusion of war.

4.3.7 Working Together

How has European collaboration continued into the present?

The 1990s marked a turn for science and scientific discoveries in Europe. In 1905, an almost unknown Austrian physicist named Albert Einstein published a series of articles in a major German scientific journal that would transform how scientists understood the world around them. His theories on relativity brought fame to this scientist across Europe and the United States. His ideas also influenced other scientific work happening across Europe. For example, Max Planck, a German scientist, had been working for years on theories that would ultimately form the basis of quantum mechanics, a branch of physics that explores the tiniest parts of matter. Einstein's articles appeared to confirm Planck's theories on quantum physics independently. Over time, discoveries from more scientists, like the Danish scientist Niels Bohr, helped to further develop the acceptance of the quantum theory of the hydrogen atom in 1913.

This level of scientific cooperation transcended international borders and transformed the world we live in. While quantum mechanics may seem like an obscure scientific discipline, the application of this science is all around us. By using the theories of quantum mechanics, scientists have realized that electrons behave both as a wave and as a particle. This discovery has resulted in a number of inventions we use every day, such as transistors in radios and lasers in DVD players. Quantum mechanics also has other useful, but less common, applications such as atomic clocks and quantum cryptography. These studies also led to the development of nuclear weapons.

CERN

The spirit of European-wide scientific cooperation and collaboration is alive and well in the European Organization for Nuclear Research (CERN). CERN is a partnership of 20 European nations started in 1954 with the stated goal of promoting collaboration among scientists from many different countries. This goal has proven to be remarkably successful in generating innovative, world-changing scientific discoveries.

In fact, it is the search for more ways to advance cooperation that brought CERN arguably its most famous scientific advancement. In 1989, an English computer scientist at CERN named Tim Berners-Lee launched a new technology designed to help scientists around the world share information instantly. This technology became known as the World Wide Web, and it has revolutionized the way the
world exchanges information. These days, CERN is in the news for its particle accelerator and the continuing search for the sub-atomic particles like the Higgs boson. The Higgs boson or "God particle" is a particle that many believe to be fundamental building block of the universe. Identifying and understanding this particle could open doors to scientific advancements we can’t even imagine.

The European Union (EU)

Beyond science, Europe has sought to avoid the mistakes that led to World War I and World War II by binding the continent together economically. On April 18, 1951, six countries—Germany, France, Italy, the Netherlands, Belgium, and Luxembourg—signed a treaty to run their coal and steel industries under a common management system. The goal was to share control of two industries that were most important for waging war on the continent.

Over time, this union grew deeper. In 1957, these countries joined together in the European Economic Community (EEC). The EEC allowed open travel across borders and agreed to common banking regulations. By 1993, the union had expanded to 12 countries and changed its name to the European Union (EU). Since then, the EU has grown to include 27 countries. Of these, 17 now use the same currency: the euro. People inside the Eurozone can move freely from country to country, using the same currency.

The Channel

New construction projects have also helped bring the people of Europe closer together. Until the mid-1990s, the only way to cross the English Channel, between the United Kingdom and the continent, was by ship. Then, in 1994, French and British banks and construction companies finished a 23.5-mile tunnel under the English Channel. It’s now possible to travel between the United Kingdom and France by train. This Channel Tunnel, or Chunnel for short, carries both passengers and goods between these two countries, further increasing the economic connections within Europe.

4.3.8 Tensions and Conflicts

How have diversity and ethnic nationalism caused tensions in Europe?

At the same time scientists all over Europe were working together to understand the mysteries of the universe, other groups were tearing the continent apart. Ethnic and nationalist movements in Germany, Italy, and Spain were dragging the continent into war. The fighting started in Spain in the 1930s, and by 1940 the entire continent was in the middle of a brutal military campaign that would devastate the continent and result in the ethnic cleansing of millions of minorities.

World War II

Among the many reasons why Europe descended into war in 1939 was the German people’s ideas about their racial superiority. These ideas, emphasized by German Chancellor Adolph Hitler, convinced Germans that they should rule over other ethnic groups and nations. Under Hitler, Germany provoked a war in Europe to allow Germans to settle in the countries of Poland, Russia, and the Ukraine—by removing the populations living there.

During the war, Germany, its allies, and the countries they occupied carried out a campaign of ethnic cleansing against Jews and many others. The term ethnic cleansing means trying to kill an entire ethnic group or using terror to force members of the group to leave on their own. The Germans and their allies imprisoned and killed more than 6 million Jews as well as millions of Slavs, Roma, communists, gay people, and many others. This massive killing is now known as the Holocaust.

Genocide in the Balkans

For centuries, the Balkan Peninsula, a region in Southeast Europe, has been the site of violent ethnic conflict due to its diverse population of Christians and Muslims among the region’s many Serbs, Croatians, Slovenians, Albanians, Greeks, and Turks. After World War II, the dictator Josip Tito united the Balkans—by force—into a country called Yugoslavia. When Tito died in 1980, the different national groups began to struggle for power. Beginning in 1991, different countries, such as Slovenia and Croatia, began to break away, resulting in several wars between the countries and their ethnic groups. The Serbians, a Christian ethnic group in the former Yugoslavia, conducted a campaign of ethnic cleansing against Muslims, and later against Albanians. United Nations troops eventually entered the region to restore peace, but violence continued until 1999.
The Irish Troubles

Yugoslavia is not the only place in Europe that has experienced ethnic and national divisions. Between the 1960s and the 1990s, Ireland and the United Kingdom were the sites of ethnic and religious violence between Catholics and Protestants, and between Irish people and English people. The root of these disputes comes from the long and sometimes violent relationship between Ireland and the United Kingdom. For centuries, Ireland had been ruled by England. Throughout this time, some groups in Ireland struggled to achieve independence. However, the compromise that helped Ireland achieve independence in the 1900s split the island into the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland.

While Catholics and Protestants live in both countries, the Republic is mostly Catholic and Northern Ireland has a Protestant majority. These religious divisions, along with the long struggle for independence, led to violence in Northern Ireland in the 1960s. There were bombings, riots, and shootings between Catholics and Protestants and Irish and English. When the British Army was sent in to restore order, the situation grew worse. At one point, the violence even spread to England. Finally, the two sides signed a peace treaty in 1998, and since then the violence has mostly stopped.

4.3.9 The New Europe

How does Europe deal with diversity today?

Since the end of World War II, Europeans have created institutions to reduce the risk of conflict and promote unity. Additionally, European countries such as the United Kingdom and France have largely retreated from their colonies overseas. As they left, many residents of these former colonies have immigrated to Europe. This has created a Europe that is far more culturally diverse than it was just a few decades ago.

With the creation of the European Union, many of the national divisions across Europe have come down. Citizens of any of the 27 member countries can travel and work freely anywhere within the EU. This has resulted in Polish bartenders in Ireland, Spanish economists in Germany, and French bankers in the United Kingdom. It has also created a sense of European identity that older generations did not feel.

New Arrivals to Europe

But Europeans moving from country to country are not the only ones adding to the diversity of their continent. As more immigrants from overseas move to the continent, Europeans are presented with new challenges to unity. In France, for example, there are now large numbers of Algerians. In the United Kingdom, there are large numbers of Indians and Pakistanis. These groups have added to the cultures of their new home countries, but they have also added a layer of ethnic diversity some in Europe are uncomfortable with.

Today, the people of France attend church less often than they once did. While many Catholics still live in France, the laws of the country avoid favoring any religion. The new Algerian community, however, is primarily Muslim. Unlike most French, the Algerian community tends to practice their religion openly. This has caused many leaders in France to worry that the Muslim community favors their Muslim identity over their new French identity. Some French leaders have written laws banning the wearing of face scarves in public or head coverings in schools. These leaders believe their decisions are increasing the national unity of French citizens, but the new laws have angered many Muslims in France.

As Europe becomes more diverse, it will need to adapt to the changing environment. In the past, this has been difficult. Europe's history is full of religious wars, ethnic conflicts, and national conflicts. However, there are also periods of international cooperation that Europeans can look to for inspiration. As the continent enters a new period of cultural diversity, the steps European leaders take will determine whether more unity or more division will result.