

KEY ISSUE 4

Why Do Folk and Popular Culture Face Sustainability Challenges?

- Sustainability Challenges for Folk Culture
- Sustainability Challenges for Popular Culture

Learning Outcome 4.4.1

Summarize challenges for folk culture from diffusion of popular culture.

Elements of folk and popular culture face challenges in maintaining identities that are sustainable into the future. For folk culture, the challenges are to maintain unique local landscapes in an age of globalization. For popular culture, the challenges derive from the sustainability of practices designed to promote uniform landscapes.

Many fear the loss of folk culture, especially because rising incomes can fuel demand for the possessions typical of popular culture. When people turn from folk to popular culture, they may also turn away from the society's traditional values. And the diffusion of popular culture from developed countries can lead to dominance of Western perspectives.

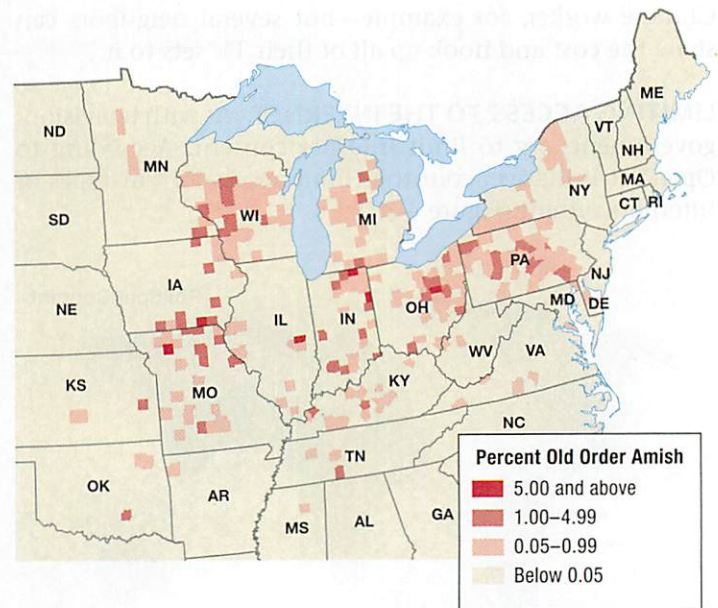
Sustainability Challenges for Folk Culture

For folk culture, increased connection with popular culture can make it difficult to maintain centuries-old practices. The Amish in the United States and marriage customs in India are two examples.

THE AMISH: PRESERVING CULTURAL IDENTITY

Although the Amish number only about one-quarter million, their folk culture remains visible on the landscape in at least 19 U.S. states (Figure 4-39). Shunning mechanical and electrical power, the Amish still travel by horse and buggy and continue to use hand tools for farming. The Amish have distinctive clothing, farming, religious practices, and other customs.

The distribution of Amish folk culture across a major portion of the U.S. landscape is explained by examining



▲ FIGURE 4-39 DISTRIBUTION OF AMISH Amish settlements are distributed throughout the northeastern United States. Amish farmers minimize the use of mechanical devices.

the diffusion of their culture through migration. In the 1600s, a Swiss Mennonite bishop named Jakob Ammann gathered a group of followers who became known as the Amish. The Amish originated in Bern, Switzerland; Alsace in northeastern France; and the Palatinate region of southwestern Germany. They migrated to other portions of Northwestern Europe in the 1700s, primarily for religious freedom. In Europe, the Amish did not develop distinctive language, clothing, or farming practices, and they gradually merged with various Mennonite church groups.

Several hundred Amish families migrated to North America in two waves. The first group, primarily from Bern and the Palatinate, settled in Pennsylvania in the early 1700s, enticed by William Penn's offer of low-priced land. Because of lower land prices, the second group, from Alsace, settled in Ohio, Illinois, and Iowa in the United States and Ontario, Canada, in the early 1800s. From these core areas, groups of Amish migrated to other locations where inexpensive land was available.

Living in rural and frontier settlements relatively isolated from other groups, Amish communities retained their traditional customs, even as other European immigrants to the United States adopted new ones. We can observe Amish customs on the landscape in such diverse areas as southeastern Pennsylvania, northeastern Ohio, and east-central Iowa. These communities are relatively isolated from each other but share cultural traditions distinct from those of other Americans.

Amish folk culture continues to diffuse slowly through interregional migration within the United States. In recent years, a number of Amish families have sold their farms in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania—the oldest and at one time largest Amish community in the United States—and migrated to Christian and Todd counties in southwestern



▲ **FIGURE 4-40 AMISH AND TOURISTS** An Amish man demonstrates a cow milking machine to tourists in Shipshewana, Indiana.

Kentucky. According to Amish tradition, every son is given a farm when he is an adult, but land suitable for farming is expensive and hard to find in Lancaster County because of its proximity to growing metropolitan areas. With the average price of farmland in southwestern Kentucky less than one-fifth that in Lancaster County, an Amish family can sell its farm in Pennsylvania and acquire enough land in Kentucky to provide adequate farmland for all the sons. Amish families are also migrating from Lancaster County to escape the influx of tourists who come from the nearby metropolitan areas to gawk at the distinctive folk culture (Figure 4-40).

Pause and Reflect 4.4.1

In what ways might Amish people need to interact with popular culture?

MARRIAGE IN INDIA: CHALLENGING CULTURAL VALUES

Rapid changes in long-established cultural values can lead to instability, and even violence, in a society. This threatens not just the institutions of folk culture but the sustainability of the society as a whole.

The global diffusion of popular culture has challenged the subservience of women to men that is embedded in some folk customs. Women may have been traditionally relegated to performing household chores, such as cooking and cleaning, and to bearing and raising large numbers of children. Those women who worked outside the home were likely to be obtaining food for the family, either through agricultural work or by trading handicrafts.

At the same time, contact with popular culture has also had negative impacts for women in developing countries. Prostitution has increased in some developing countries to serve men from developed countries traveling on “sex tours.” These tours, primarily from Japan and Northern Europe (especially Norway,

Germany, and the Netherlands), include airfare, hotels, and the use of a predetermined number of women. Leading destinations include the Philippines, Thailand, and South Korea. International prostitution is encouraged in these countries as a major source of foreign currency. Through this form of global interaction, popular culture may regard women as essentially equal at home but as objects that money can buy in foreign folk societies.

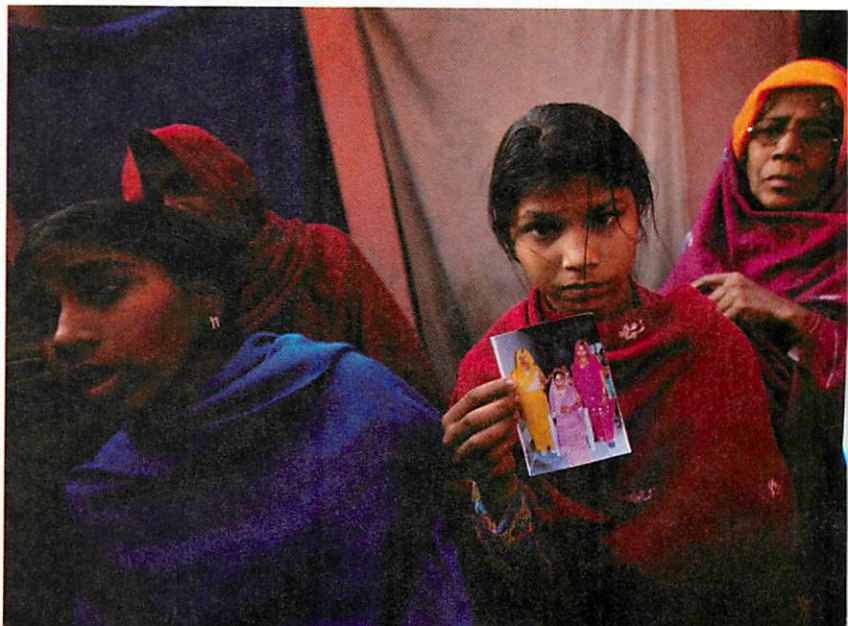
Global diffusion of popular social customs has had an unintended negative impact for women in India: an increase in demand for dowries. Traditionally, a dowry was a “gift” from one family to another, as a sign of respect. In the past, the local custom in much of India was for the groom to provide a small dowry to the bride’s family. In the twentieth century, the custom reversed, and the family of a bride was expected to provide a substantial dowry to the husband’s family (Figure 4-41).

The government of India enacted anti-dowry laws in 1961, but the ban is widely ignored. In fact, dowries have become much larger in modern India and an important source of income for the groom’s family. A dowry can take the form of either cash or expensive consumer goods, such as cars, electronics, and household appliances.

The government has tried to ban dowries because of the adverse impact on women. If the bride’s family is unable to pay a promised dowry or installments, the groom’s family may cast the bride out on the street, and her family may refuse to take her back. Husbands and in-laws angry over the small size of dowry payments killed 8,391 women in India in 2010, and disputes over dowries led to 90,000 cases of torture and cruelty toward women by men.

To raise awareness of dowry abuses, Shaadi.com, an Indian matrimonial web site with 2 million members, created an online game called Angry Brides. Each groom has a price tag, starting at 1.5 million rupees (\$29,165). Every time the player hits a groom, his value decreases, and money is added to the player’s Anti-Dowry Fund, which is shown on her Facebook page.

▼ **FIGURE 4-41 INDIA DOWRY** The photograph is held by the sister of a woman murdered by her husband for not meeting his dowry demands.



Sustainability Challenges for Popular Culture

Learning Outcome 4.4.2

Summarize the two principal ways that popular culture can adversely affect the environment.

Popular culture can significantly modify or control the environment. It may be imposed on the environment rather than spring forth from it, as with many folk customs. For many popular customs the environment is something to be modified to enhance participation in a leisure activity or to promote the sale of a product. Even if the resulting built environment looks “natural,” it is actually the deliberate creation of people in pursuit of popular social customs.

The diffusion of some popular customs can adversely impact environmental quality in two ways:

- Pollution of the landscape
- Depletion of scarce natural resources

LANDSCAPE POLLUTION

Popular culture can pollute the landscape by modifying it with little regard for local environmental conditions, such as climate and soil. To create a uniform landscape, hills may be flattened and valleys filled in. The same building and landscaping materials may be employed regardless of location. Features such as golf courses consume large quantities of land and water; nonnative grass species are planted, and fertilizers and pesticides are laid on the grass to ensure an appearance considered suitable for the game.

UNIFORM LANDSCAPES. The distribution of popular culture around the world tends to produce more uniform landscapes. The spatial expression of a popular custom in one location will be similar to another. In fact, promoters of popular culture want a uniform appearance to generate “product recognition” and greater consumption (Figure 4-42).

▼ FIGURE 4-42 UNIFORM LANDSCAPE Route 66 in Springfield, Illinois.



The diffusion of fast-food restaurants is a good example of such uniformity. Such restaurants are usually organized as franchises. A franchise is a company's agreement with businesspeople in a local area to market that company's product. The franchise agreement lets the local outlet use the company's name, symbols, trademarks, methods, and architectural styles. To both local residents and travelers, the buildings are immediately recognizable as part of a national or multinational company. A uniform sign is prominently displayed.

Much of the attraction of fast-food restaurants comes from the convenience of the product and the use of the building as a low-cost socializing location for teenagers or families with young children. At the same time, the success of fast-food restaurants depends on large-scale mobility: People who travel or move to another city immediately recognize a familiar place. Newcomers to a particular place know what to expect in the restaurant because the establishment does not reflect strange and unfamiliar local customs that could be uncomfortable.

Fast-food restaurants were originally developed to attract people who arrived by car. The buildings generally were brightly colored, even gaudy, to attract motorists. Recently built fast-food restaurants are more subdued, with brick facades, pseudo-antique fixtures, and other stylistic details. To facilitate reuse of the structure in case the restaurant fails, company signs are often free-standing rather than integrated into the building design.

Uniformity in the appearance of the landscape is promoted by a wide variety of other popular structures in North America, such as gas stations, supermarkets, and motels. These structures are designed so that both local residents and visitors immediately recognize the purpose of the building, even if not the name of the company.

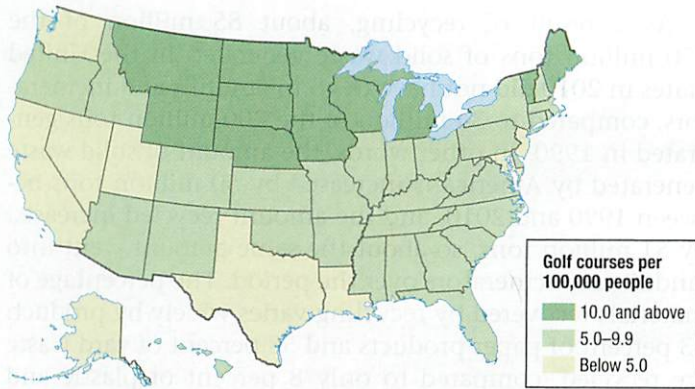
Physical expression of uniformity in popular culture has diffused from North America to other parts of the world. American motels and fast-food chains have opened in other countries. These establishments appeal to North American travelers, yet most customers are local residents who wish to sample American customs they have seen on television.

Pause and Reflect 4.4.2

How might fast-food restaurants reduce adverse impacts on the environment?

GOLF COURSES. Golf courses, because of their large size (80 hectares, or 200 acres), provide a prominent example of imposing popular culture on the environment. A surge in U.S. golf popularity spawned construction of several hundred courses during the late twentieth century. Geographer John Rooney attributed this to increased income and leisure time, especially among recently retired older people and younger people with flexible working hours. This trend slowed into the twenty-first century because of the severe recession.

The distribution of golf courses is not uniform across the United States. Although golf is perceived as a warm-weather sport, the number of golf courses per person is actually greatest in north-central states (Figure 4-43). People



▲ **FIGURE 4-43 GOLF COURSES** The highest concentration of golf courses is in the upper Midwest.

in these regions have a long tradition of playing golf, and social clubs with golf courses are important institutions in the fabric of the regions' popular customs.

In contrast, access to golf courses is more limited in the South, in California, and in the heavily urbanized Middle Atlantic region between New York City and Washington, D.C. Rapid population growth in the South and West and lack of land on which to build in the Middle Atlantic region have reduced the number of courses per capita in those regions. Selected southern and western areas, such as coastal South Carolina, southern Florida, and central Arizona, have high concentrations of golf courses as a result of the arrival of large numbers of golf-playing northerners, either as vacationers or as permanent residents.

Golf courses are designed partially in response to local physical conditions. Grass species are selected to thrive

in the local climate and still be suitable for the needs of greens, fairways, and roughs. Existing trees and native vegetation are retained if possible. (Few fairways in Michigan are lined by palms.) Yet, as with other popular customs, golf courses remake the environment—creating or flattening hills, cutting grass or letting it grow tall, carting in or digging up sand for traps, and draining or expanding bodies of water to create hazards. Ironically, golf originated as part of folk culture, as you can read in the following Sustainability and Inequality in Our Global Village feature.

ENVIRONMENTAL CAPACITY. The environment can accept and assimilate some level of waste from human activities. But popular culture generates a high volume of waste—solids, liquids, and gases—that must be absorbed into the environment. Although waste is discharged in all three forms, the most visible is solid waste—cans, bottles, old cars, paper, and plastics. These products are often discarded rather than recycled. With more people adopting popular customs worldwide, this problem grows.

Folk culture, like popular culture, can also cause environmental damage, especially when natural processes are ignored. A widespread belief exists that indigenous peoples of the Western Hemisphere practiced more “natural,” ecologically sensitive agriculture before the arrival of Columbus and other Europeans. Geographers increasingly question this idea. In reality, pre-Columbian folk customs included burning grasslands for planting and hunting, cutting extensive forests, and overhunting some species. Very high rates of soil erosion have been documented in Central America from the practices of folk cultures.

SUSTAINABILITY AND INEQUALITY IN OUR GLOBAL VILLAGE

Golf: Folk or Popular Culture?

The modern game of golf originated as a folk custom in Scotland in the fifteenth century or earlier and diffused to other countries during the nineteenth century. In this respect, the history of golf is not unlike that of soccer, described earlier in this chapter. Early Scottish golf courses were primarily laid out on sand dunes adjacent to bodies of water (Figure 4-44). Largely because of golf's origin as a local folk custom, golf courses in Scotland do not modify the environment to the same extent as those constructed in more recent years in the United States and other countries, where hills, sand, and grass are imported,



often with little regard for local environmental conditions. Modern golf also departs from its folk culture roots by being a relatively expensive sport to play in most places.

▲ **FIGURE 4-44 SCOTLAND AND U.S. GOLF COURSES** The Congressional Country Club golf course in Bethesda, Maryland (left), made substantial alterations to the landscape. Scotland's Royal Troon Golf Club was built into a seaside dune with little alteration of the landscape.

RESOURCE DEPLETION

Learning Outcome 4.4.3

Summarize major sources of waste and the extent to which each is recycled.

Increased demand for the products of popular culture can strain the capacity of the environment. Diffusion of some popular customs increases demand for animal products, ranging from rare wildlife to common domesticated animals, and for raw materials, such as minerals and other substances found beneath Earth's surface. The depletion of resources used to produce energy, especially petroleum, is discussed in Chapter 9.

DEMAND FOR ANIMAL PRODUCTS. Popular culture may demand a large supply of certain animals, resulting in depletion or even extinction of some species. For example, some animals are killed for their skins, which can be shaped into fashionable clothing and sold to people living thousands of kilometers from the animals' habitat. The skins of the mink, lynx, jaguar, kangaroo, and whale have been heavily consumed for various articles of clothing, to the point that the survival of these species is endangered. This unbalances ecological systems of which the animals are members. Folk culture may also encourage the use of animal skins, but the demand is usually smaller than for popular culture.

Increased meat consumption in popular culture has not caused extinction of cattle and poultry—we simply raise more. But animal consumption is an inefficient way for people to acquire calories—90 percent less efficient than if people simply ate grain directly. To produce 1 kilogram (2.2 pounds) of beef sold in the supermarket, nearly 10 kilograms (22 pounds) of grain are consumed by the animal. For every kilogram of chicken, nearly 3 kilograms (6.6 pounds) of grain are consumed by the fowl. This grain could be fed to people directly, bypassing the inefficient meat step. With a large percentage of the world's population undernourished, some question this inefficient use of grain to feed animals for eventual human consumption.

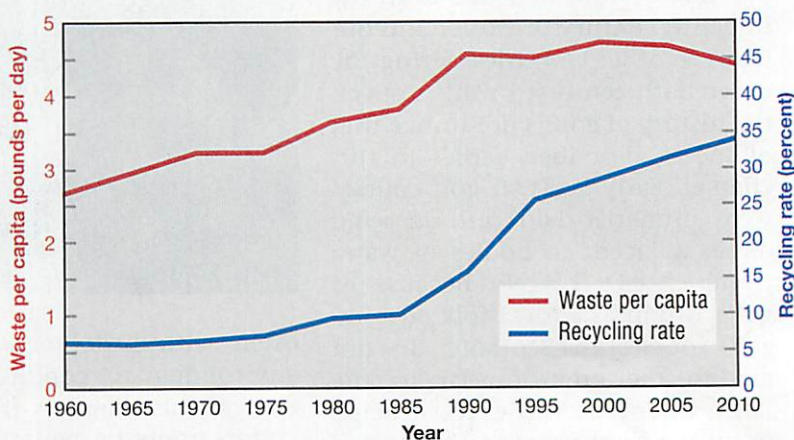
RECYCLING OF RESOURCES. The developed countries that produce endless supplies of consumer products for popular culture have created the technological capacity both to create large-scale environmental damage and to control it. However, a commitment of time and money must be made to control the damage.

Unwanted by-products are usually “thrown away,” perhaps in a “trash can.” Recycling is the separation, collection, processing, marketing, and reuse of the unwanted material. Recycling increased in the United States from 7 percent of all solid waste in 1970 to 10 percent in 1980, 17 percent in 1990, and 34 percent in 2010 (Figure 4-45).

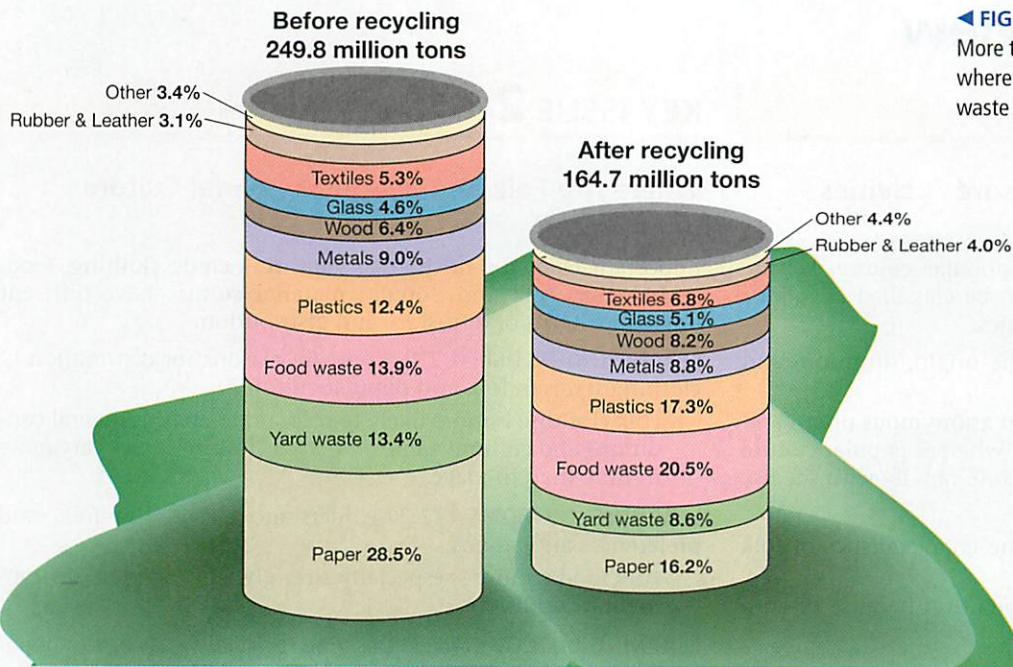
As a result of recycling, about 85 million of the 250 million tons of solid waste generated in the United States in 2010 did not have to go to landfills and incinerators, compared to 34 million of the 200 million tons generated in 1990. In other words, the amount of solid waste generated by Americans increased by 50 million tons between 1990 and 2010, and the amount recycled increased by 51 million tons, so about the same amount went into landfills or incinerators over the period. The percentage of materials recovered by recycling varies widely by product: 63 percent of paper products and 58 percent of yard waste are recycled, compared to only 8 percent of plastic and 3 percent of food scraps (Figure 4-46).

RECYCLING COLLECTION. Recycling involves two main series of activities:

1. **Pick-up and processing.** Materials that would otherwise be “thrown away” are collected and sorted, in four principal ways:
 - **Curbside programs.** Recyclables can often be placed at the curb in a container separate from the nonrecyclable trash at a specified time each week, either at the same or different time as the other trash. The trash collector usually supplies homes with specially marked containers for the recyclable items.
 - **Drop-off centers.** Drop-off centers are sites, typically with several large containers placed at a central location, for individuals to leave recyclable materials. A separate container is designated for each type of recyclable material, and the containers are periodically emptied by a processor or recycler but are otherwise left unattended.
 - **Buy-back centers.** Commercial operations sometimes pay consumers for recyclable materials, especially aluminum cans, but also sometimes plastic containers and glass bottles. These materials are usually not processed at the buy-back center.
 - **Deposit programs.** Glass and aluminum containers can sometimes be returned to retailers. The price a



▲ FIGURE 4-45 RECYCLING IN THE UNITED STATES Recycling has increased substantially in the United States. As a result, the amount of waste generated per person has not changed much.



◀ **FIGURE 4-46 SOURCES OF SOLID WASTE**

More than one-half of paper and yard waste is recycled, whereas only a small percentage of plastic and food waste is recycled.

consumer pays for a beverage may include a deposit fee of 5¢ or 10¢ that the retailer refunds when the container is returned.

Regardless of the collection method, recyclables are sent to a materials recovery facility to be sorted and prepared as marketable commodities for manufacturing. Recyclables are bought and sold just like any other commodity; typical prices in recent years have been 30¢ per pound for plastic, \$30 per ton for clear glass, and \$90 per ton for corrugated paper. Prices for the materials change and fluctuate with the market.

Pause and Reflect 4.4.3

Which, if any, recycling systems operate in your community?

2. **Manufacturing.** Materials are manufactured into new products for which a market exists. Important inputs into manufacturing include recycled paper, plastic, glass, and aluminum:

- **Paper.** Most types of paper can be recycled. Newspapers have been recycled profitably for decades, and recycling of other paper, especially computer paper, is growing. Rapid increases in virgin paper pulp prices have stimulated construction of more plants capable of using waste paper. The key to recycling is collecting large quantities of clean, well-sorted, uncontaminated, and dry paper.
- **Plastic.** Different plastic types must not be mixed, as even a small amount of the wrong type of plastic can ruin the melt. Because it is impossible to tell one type from another by sight or touch, the plastic industry has developed a system of numbers marked inside triangles on the bottom of containers. Types 1 and 2 are commonly recycled, and the others generally are not.

- **Glass.** Glass can be used repeatedly with no loss in quality and is 100 percent recyclable. The process of creating new glass from old is extremely efficient, producing virtually no waste or unwanted by-products. Though unbroken clear glass is valuable, mixed-color glass is nearly worthless, and broken glass is hard to sort.
- **Aluminum.** The principal source of recycled aluminum is beverage containers. Aluminum cans began to replace glass bottles for beer during the 1950s and for soft drinks during the 1960s. Aluminum scrap is readily accepted for recycling, although other metals are rarely accepted.

Four major manufacturing sectors accounted for more than half of the recycling activity—paper mills, steel mills, plastic converters, and iron and steel foundries. Common household items that contain recycled materials include newspapers and paper towels; aluminum, plastic, and glass soft-drink containers; steel cans; and plastic laundry detergent bottles. Recycled materials are also used in such industrial applications as recovered glass in roadway asphalt (“glassphalt”) and recovered plastic in carpet, park benches, and pedestrian bridges.

CHECK-IN: KEY ISSUE 4

Why Do Folk and Popular Culture Face Sustainability Challenges?

- ✓ Folk culture faces loss of traditional values in the face of rapid diffusion of popular culture.
- ✓ Popular culture can cause two environmental concerns—pollution of the landscape and depletion of scarce resources.