

Questions

1. Describe the geography of something which you have brought with you to this interview today.
2. How far do you agree with Friedman's (2005) argument which states that "the world is flat"?

Prompts

Question 1

Your phone is always a good place to start – think about how it is made and what it does. You could also think about the product lifecycle – does the disposal of your phone have a geography to it? If you do not want to speak about your phone, think about your clothing or shoes.

Question 2

This is a question about globalisation – does the world become flat because of how globalisation connects us? If you believe it does, then why, and if you believe it does not, what is your justification for that?

Suggested answers

Question 1: Describe the geography of something which you have brought with you to this interview today.

The thing which I have brought with me today with the most geography is my phone. I have an iPhone, and there is a lot of geography involved throughout. Firstly, I think that Apple is representative of a truly globalised company; their phones are designed in California but outsourced in the production phase to places where cheaper labour is available. This is significant and is one of the main trends of the deindustrialisation of the West. These phones are produced and then exported across the world, to almost every country. However, to me, the more interesting piece of geography is what happens at the end of the product's lifecycle. There is currently a great degree of waste associated with how we use goods, and, of course this has contributed to climate change. Apple, in what is perhaps a move of corporate greenwashing, has changed how iPhones are treated at the end of their use. Apple has a robot called LIAM – or rather many robots by this name – which destroys unwanted iPhones and recycles their components. This means that the key materials are able to be used again in new phones or computers, not only reducing costs for Apple, but also reducing the environmental cost of buying an iPhone. There is a lot of geography in our everyday devices, not only at the start and end – but also in the way in which they connect us and contribute to the space-time compression which has been created by the internet. These are geographies which are often ignored, especially by those who do not study geography, but are crucial in the way in which we live our lives.

I think that my jacket is also an example of something with an important geography. While my jacket, itself, was produced in China, there are perhaps more important lessons, other than globalisation, which can be demonstrated by the clothing industry. The clothing industry as a whole is particularly environmentally unfriendly, because of the way in which it runs a short use “throwaway fashion” cycle. This is important in terms of how much waste we produce and its impact on the environment. Clothes are difficult to dispose of, but a geography of clothing should not just be critical, it should also offer solutions. This is why I think it is important to recognise that there are solutions to how we can be more sustainable, such as keeping clothes for a long time, buying them from charity shops, and giving our clothes to charity shops when we no longer need to use them. In this way, geography can show

us a way forward which does not fit an economic paradigm of consumerism, like in economics, but rather a geographical paradigm which is in harmony with the environment.

Important Wider Concepts:

This question requires you to pay attention to your surroundings and apply your geographical knowledge to the world around you. In this case, it is important to be able to apply geography to the stuff you have with you. In my opinion, your best bet is your phone – there is geography in its production, use and disposal. This raises the more important point that you need to pay attention to your surroundings. Think about what else they could ask you to apply your learning to; it is a skill which is not too hard to master, especially if you practise like this. Also, I would recommend choosing something to talk about which you are comfortable with, as this could lead into a wider conversation. For example, you could speak about globalisation in more depth if this is something which you would feel confident discussing in more detail during the interview. Remember, the interview will be like a conversation, so you should expect to be asked follow-up questions on what you say. This means that it is important to only go down paths which are familiar to you.

Question 2: How far do you agree with Friedman's (2005) argument that "the world is flat"?

I do not agree with the argument that the world is flat. If anything, I believe the opposite – the world has been made less flat by globalisation. This is because globalisation has accentuated inequalities between countries. Many people, including Friedman, speak of the “level playing field” created by globalisation, but this playing field is just as uneven as it has ever been. Those with a better education, and with better connections – in other words, the elite and superrich – are automatically better off than those who cannot afford these things. Furthermore, economic liberalisation (one of the central aspects of globalisation) has meant that the global superrich have been able to avoid paying taxes, via tax havens. Thus, they have managed to become even richer compared both to people of the same nationality, and when compared internationally. This shows how globalisation has made the world less equal on a national and international scale. Washington Consensus programmes have been forced on many countries through conditionality by the IMF and World Bank, regardless of the situation, and have led to stagnating growth and an inability to compete with other nations. This economic liberalisation, combined with privatisation and spending reductions, has left many nations further behind others, in terms of development, than ever before. For this reason, it does not seem possible to say that the world is flat; it has become far more uneven than before as a result of globalisation.

However, it is also possible to argue that globalisation has managed to make the world flatter. On the most basic level, it is now easier to communicate with people around the world than ever before – which demonstrates how the world is now flatter. Previously, there were major barriers to communication between countries. These include physical barriers like mountains and the ocean, but most importantly the ever-present barrier of distance. However, because of the destruction of space by time, also known as the space-time compression, countries today are now closer than ever; it is possible to send a message to anyone in the world almost instantly because of messaging services like Facebook, which have served to eliminate barriers and borders to make the world flatter. Furthermore, in terms of development, the era of globalisation has also witnessed an incredible levelling. In this globalised era, we have witnessed the incredible development of China, which has dragged hundreds of millions of people out of poverty, as well as the rise of many other Asian nations – including the Tiger Economies. With China and India now on the rise, we are perhaps even beginning to see a disruption of US hegemony and thus can see how

globalisation has managed to make the world flatter by reducing the inequalities between countries.

On balance, I believe that the stronger argument is that the world has not become flatter. This is because, while we have seen some countries develop, increasingly more have been left behind. Furthermore, national inequalities continue to rise, as we see the creation of the global 1%, with the rest of the people left behind with stagnating wages since the 1970s. This has been shown in America: despite constant rises in productivity, wages have not increased. Furthermore, there are still barriers to the internet. Many people are unable to access the internet, including people in the most developed countries, such as the US and UK, because of the high inequalities which are present in these areas. Thus, I think that it is stronger to say that the world is now less flat than it has ever been as a result of globalisation, in contrast to the arguments of Friedman.

Important Wider Concepts:

The important part of this question is “how far do you agree”, which means that they are looking for some balance in your answer. Your answer does not have to be as balanced as mine is – the first two paragraphs are there to show you the arguments for and against this statement. It is, however, important that you address the other side, even if it is just to show why it is wrong. This is what I did in the last paragraph, and it is a good way of coming down on one side. You don’t have to argue a position if you do not want to – so having balance, like in the first two paragraphs, would be a good idea if you want to do that. Remember, in human geography, there is no right or wrong answer, because it is a humanity. While the interviewers may disagree with you, if you show good reasoning then they will rate it just as highly as someone who they agree with. It is also possible that this question could be a source question, where you are given an extract from Friedman’s book and have to react to it, but this doesn’t significantly change how you should approach it. If this were the case, you would just have to address the specific part of the book and then link it to wider arguments. For example, if he is focused on the internet in the extract, you would have to speak about the internet first, before moving on to speak about wider things, such as development. The other important lesson from this is to use any reading you may have done – there are plenty of opportunities to bring in reading, here, as most people will have read about globalisation. Interviewers always like it when you do this, so if you can include it, do so. But do not try to force it in too much.