

BOX 3.1 Wirth's Urbanism as a Way of Life: The Effects of Size, Density, and Heterogeneity

The effect of size:

1. The larger the population, the greater the chances for diversity and individualization.
2. Competition and formal mechanisms of social control would replace primary relations of kinship as a means of organizing society.
3. The larger the population, the greater the specialization and functional diversity of social roles.
4. Anonymity and fragmentation of social interaction increase with size.

The effect of density:

1. Greater density intensifies the effects of large population size.
2. Greater density creates the blasé attitude and the need to tune out excessive stimulation.
3. Greater density produces greater tolerance for living closely with strangers, but also greater stress.
4. Escape from density produces development of the fringe and greater land value in suburbia.
5. Density increases competition, compounding the effects of size.

The effect of heterogeneity:

1. The greater the heterogeneity, the more tolerance among groups.
2. Heterogeneity allows ethnic and class barriers to be broken down.
3. Individual roles and contacts become compartmentalized according to different circles of contacts. Anonymity and depersonalization in public life increase.

that contained both negative and positive aspects. Essentially, Simmel viewed the city as simply different. In his formulation, Wirth stressed the dark side of Simmel's vision: Urbanism as a culture would be characterized by aspects of social disorganization. Most central to Wirth's view was the shift from primary to secondary social relations. Wirth tended to see urban anonymity as debilitating. More specifically, the effects of the three factors on social life can be expressed as a series of propositions, as indicated in Box 3.1.

Wirth's work has been exhaustively tested, mainly because it was so clearly stated (Fischer, 1975). Unfortunately, the core assertion that size, density, and heterogeneity cause behaviors considered urban has not been borne out. If we look at the propositions presented in Box 3.1, many of the assertions appear to be accurate descriptions of social interaction in the large city, and they help to provide a more detailed picture of what urbanism as a culture is like.

How true the theory contains some truth, we cannot be certain that these factors will produce specific results. Cities merely concentrate the effects of societal forces producing urban culture. Surely we know that small towns are affected by many of the same social forces as the central city, although the types of behaviors that we observe in these environments may differ in type and intensity.

Finally, Louis Wirth held strongly to the view that the true effects of urbanism would occur as a matter of evolution as cities operated on immigrant groups to break down traditional ways of interacting over time. He did not see the larger city acting as an environment to bring about immediately the change he predicted. These things would take time, perhaps a generation. "Urbanism as a Way of Life" would inspire other urban sociologists to analyze the development of new suburban lifestyles ("Suburbanism as a Way of Life"; see Fava, 1980) and to compare urban and suburban lifestyles ("Urbanism and Suburbanism as Ways of Life"; Gans, 1968). We will return to the topic of urbanism and continue discussing the refinement of Wirth's ideas up to the present in Chapter 9. Wirth's work also inspired a subsequent generation to plow through census data and derive the statistical regularities of urban living. Much urban research is similarly conducted today.

THE CHICAGO SCHOOL OF URBAN SOCIOLOGY

Robert Park and Human Ecology

Robert Park (1865–1944) attended the University of Michigan and began his career as a newspaper reporter, first for the *Minneapolis Journal* and later for the *New York Journal*. He was assigned to the "police beat" where he would have to pound the streets of the city to develop leads and check facts for his newspaper articles. He later became city editor for the *Detroit Tribune* and drama critic and reporter for the *Chicago Journal*.

Park returned to graduate school. He studied first at Harvard University and then at Heidelberg University in Germany, where he attended lectures by Georg Simmel. He returned to the United States in 1903 and met Booker T. Washington, the most influential African American leader of the day and the founder of the Tuskegee Institute. For the next decade Park served as Washington's personal secretary, revising papers and speeches. Park used his spare time to investigate lynching in the American South and to write about race relations in the United States. In 1912 Park organized a conference on race relations at Tuskegee. He was approached by W. I. Thomas, who had recently completed his graduate work and now was teaching at the University of Chicago. Thomas had been a student of Park's at the University of Michigan and

join other scholars in the newly formed department of sociology (Blumer, 1984; Mathews, 1977).

In 1914, at age forty-nine, Park joined the faculty of the University of Chicago on a part-time basis. Park's approach to the sociological study of the urban environment was clear: He urged his students to "get the seat of their pants dirty" by getting out into the neighborhoods of the city, studying the many different groups of people who had come there. While Park worked on his own study of the development of the immigrant press in the United States, he and Ernest Burgess conducted undergraduate classes and graduate seminars that required students to go into the community, collect data from businesspeople, interview area residents, and report back with their information.

From the very first, the Chicago School sociologists adopted a conceptual position that we know as human ecology—the study of the process of human group adjustment to the environment. Whereas European thinkers such as Weber, Marx, and Simmel viewed the city as an environment where larger social forces of capitalism played themselves out in a human drama, Chicago School sociologists avoided the study of capitalism *per se*, preferring instead a biologically based way of conceptualizing urban life. For them urban analysis was a branch of human ecology. Their ideas brought them closest to the work of the philosopher Herbert Spencer, who also viewed society as dominated by biological rather than economic laws of development. Economic competition, in this view, was a special case of the struggle for survival. All individuals in the city were caught up in this struggle and adjusted to it in various ways.

According to Park, the social organization of the city resulted from the struggle for survival that then produced a distinct and highly complex division of labor, because people tried to do what they were best at in order to compete. Urban life was organized on two distinct levels: the biotic and the cultural. The *biotic level* refers to the forms of organization produced by species' competition over scarce environmental resources. The *cultural level* refers to the symbolic and psychological adjustment processes and to the organization of urban life according to shared sentiments, much like the qualities Simmel also studied.

In Park's work, the biotic level stressed the importance of biological factors for understanding social organization and the urban effects of economic competition. In contrast, the cultural component of urban life operated in neighborhoods that were held together by cooperative ties involving shared cultural values among people with similar backgrounds. Hence, local com-

ative, symbolic ties, whereas the larger city composed of separate communities was organized through competition and functional differentiation. In Park's later work, however, the complex notion of urbanism as combining competition and cooperation, or the biotic and the cultural levels, was dropped in favor of an emphasis on the biotic level alone as the basic premise of urban ecology. This led to some of the earliest critiques of the ecological perspective, faulting it for ignoring the role of culture in the city, or what Simmel would call the important influence of modernity, and for neglecting the basis of community (Alihan, 1938), which was social and not biological.

Other members of the early Chicago School translated the social Darwinism implicit in this model into a spatially attuned analysis. For Roderick McKenzie, the fundamental quality of the struggle for existence was position, or location, for the individual, the group, or institutions such as business firms. Spatial position would be determined by economic competition and the struggle for survival. Groups or individuals that were successful took over the better positions in the city, such as the choicest business locations, or the preferred neighborhoods. Those less successful would have to make do with less desirable positions. In this way the urban population, under pressure of economic competition, sorted itself out within the city space. McKenzie explained land-use patterns as the product of competition and an economic division of labor, which deployed objects and activities in space according to the roles they played in society. Thus, if a firm needed a particular location to perform its function, it competed with others for that location. The study of urban patterns resulting from that process would be studied by a new group of sociologists known as ecologists.

Burgess's Model of Urban Growth

Ernest W. Burgess developed a theory of city growth and differentiation based on the social Darwinist or biologically derived principles that were common in the work of Park and McKenzie. According to Burgess, the city constantly grew because of population pressures. This, in turn, triggered a dual process of central agglomeration and commercial decentralization; that is, spatial competition attracted new activities to the center of the city but also repelled other activities to the fringe area. As activities themselves located on the fringe, the fringe itself was pushed farther out from the city, and so on.

The city continually grew outward as activities that lost out in the competition for space in the central city were relocated to peripheral areas. This sorting led, in turn, to further spatial and functional differentiation as activities were deployed according to competitive advantages. In Burgess's theory,

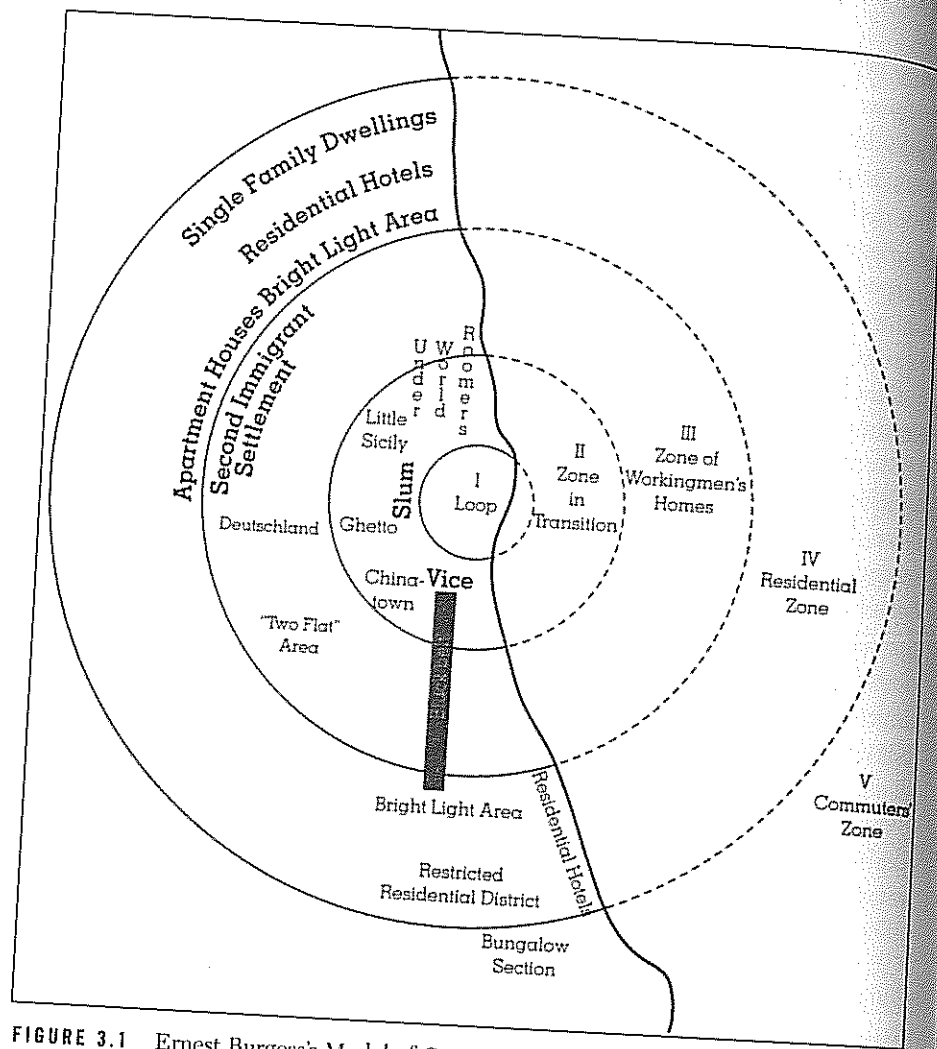


FIGURE 3.1 Ernest Burgess's Model of Concentric Zones

business district that would dominate the region and be the site for the highest competitive land prices, while the surrounding area would comprise four distinct concentric rings (see Figure 3.1).

The importance of Burgess's model cannot be overemphasized. First, he explained the pattern of homes, neighborhoods, and industrial and commercial locations in terms of the ecological theory of competition over "position," or location. In short, competition produced a certain space and a certain social organization in space. Both of these dimensions were pictured in the concentric zone model. Those who could afford it lived near the center; those who could not arranged themselves in concentric zones around the city center.

Second, Burgess's model explained the shifting of population and activities within the space of the city according to two distinct but related processes: centralization and decentralization. His theory explicitly related social processes to spatial patterns—a most important link for all theorizing about the city that was to follow and a view that is quite compatible with the aims of the new urban sociology.

Finally, Burgess revealed that the characteristics of the social organization of the urban population were spatially deployed. A gradient running from the center to the periphery characterized the attributes of the urban population. Individual traits such as mental illness, gang membership, criminal behavior, and racial background were found to be clustered along the center/periphery gradient of the city. Cutting across the urban form from the central business district (known as the CBD) to the outskirts, Chicago School researchers, using census data, found that the incidence of social pathology decreased, while homeownership and the number of nuclear families increased. The inner zones, therefore, were discovered to be the sites of crime, illness, gang warfare, broken homes, and many other indicators of social disorganization or problems.

In practice, however, research on the internal structure of cities contradicted Burgess's view of concentric zones. Other models of the city argued that cities had multiple centers rather than a single urban core. The first critique of Burgess's model was proposed by Homer Hoyt (1933) and was called "sector theory." Hoyt suggested that cities were carved up not by concentric zones but by unevenly shaped sectors within which different economic activities tended to congregate together, that is, agglomerate. Hoyt suggested that all activities, but especially manufacturing and retailing, had the tendency to spin off away from the center and agglomerate in sectors that expanded outward. Thus, the city grew in irregular blobs rather than in Burgess's neat circles.

The idea of multiple nuclei as the shape of the city further developed Hoyt's break with Burgess and is similar to the current multicentered approach used in this book (see Chapter 1). It was introduced in a classic paper by Chauncy Harris and Edward Ullman (1945). They suggested that within any city, separate functions and their particular needs require concentration within specific and specialized districts. Thus, within cities, similar activities often locate in the same area, forming agglomerations, or minicenters. Cities often grow asymmetrically around these multiple nuclei.

A common assumption of all of these models is that the city remains the central place that dominates all other areas. In recent years this way of thinking about urbanized areas has declined, and a focus on the individual city has given way to the regional perspective, which stresses the relative independence of

multiple centers within the larger metropolitan region. While ecologists were concerned with location and with thinking of social activities as located in space, their biologically based explanation for perceived activities and spatial patterns has been rejected in recent years in favor of the new urban sociology (see Gottdiener and Feagin, 1988).

The Chicago School Studies

The work of the early Chicago School dominated urban sociology in the prewar years. For about a decade, beginning in 1925, a veritable flood of work poured out of the sociology department. Surveying just the books alone (that is, ignoring master's and Ph.D. theses produced at that time), the following list samples their accomplishments. All of these books were published by the University of Chicago Press: F. Thrasher, *The Gang* (1927); Louis Wirth, *The Ghetto* (1928); Ruth S. Cavan, *Suicide* (1928); Clifford S. Shaw, *The Jackroller* (1930); Harvey W. Zorbaugh, *The Gold Coast and the Slum* (1929); E. Franklin Frazier, *The Negro Family in Chicago* (1932); Paul G. Cressey, *The Taxi-dance Hall* (1932); Walter C. Reckless, *Vice in Chicago* (1933); Norman Hayner, *Hotel Life* (1936); and then later, St. Clair Drake and Horace R. Cayton, *Black Metropolis* (1945). Regarding this list, it can also be said that although gender issues were not well articulated at that time, women were involved in the Chicago School.

This marvelous output was produced with a similar stamp. It took an important social phenomenon, such as suicide, and located the distribution of its incidence in the space of the city. Chicago researchers then analyzed it in terms of the relation between the individual and the larger social forces of integration/disintegration. Most often this meant that phenomena were explained as products of social disorganization, particularly the breaking up of primary social relations through city living, as Wirth's theory suggested. As a result, the Chicago School was eventually criticized for reinforcing a negative view of city life.

Despite their limitations, we can appreciate the positive aspects of these early efforts. First, Chicago School researchers explicitly connected social phenomena with spatial patterns; that is, they thought in sociospatial terms. Second, they took an interactionist perspective. Individuals were studied in interaction with others, and the emergent forms of sociation coming out of that interaction were observed closely. Finally, they tried to show the patterns of adjustment to sociospatial location and developed a rudimentary way of speaking about the role of individual attributes in explaining urban phenomena. It was true that they focused almost exclusively on social disorganization and pathology; the breakup of family integration, for example, was given much more attention than questions of race or class.

BOX 3.2 Case Study: Gangland Chicago, 1927

The population of gangs in the 1920s was composed principally of recent immigrants to this country. Of the total gang census taken by Thrasher amounting to 25,000 members in a city of 2 million, roughly 17 percent were known as Polish gangs, 11 percent were known as Italian, 8.5 percent were Irish, 7 percent were black, another 3 percent were mixed white and black, 2 percent were Jewish, and so on, with the largest percentage of all gangs composed of "mixed nationalities" known exclusively for their territory, not for their ethnicity (1927:130). According to Thrasher, roughly 87 percent of all gang members were of foreign extraction! The gang phenomenon was explained in part by the lack of adjustment opportunities for immigrants, in part by the carryover of Old World antagonisms, and also by the need to defend territory against "outsiders."

Thrasher's study demonstrates sociospatial thinking. As Robert Park (Thrasher, 1927:vii) comments in his introduction: "The title of this book does not describe it. It is a study of the gang, to be sure, but it is at the same time a study of 'gangland,' that is to say, a study of the gang and its habitat, and in this case the habitat is a city slum."

Note Parks's grounding of the study in a biological metaphor by his use of the word habitat. Today we would adopt the sociospatial perspective and say territory or space. Gangland is the city space where gangs lived. Their influence was felt all over. What Thrasher did was locate gangs in their space. In fact, he found "three great domains" of gangdom—the "northside jungles," the "southside badlands," and the "westside wilderness." Using Ernest W. Burgess's map of Chicago (see Figure 3.1), Thrasher provided details for each of these areas and the gangs they contained. Within gangland, "the street educates with fatal precision" (1927:101). The northside covered an area directly north of the downtown, or the "loop" on the Burgess map, and behind the wealthy neighborhoods that lined the shore of Lake Michigan. It was home to the "Gloriannas," the site of "Death Corner" and "Bughouse Square," and a gang so threatening that Thrasher disguised its real name.

The westside was the most extensive slum area producing gangs, and it encompassed the area west of downtown, spreading out both northward and southward. The westside was home to the "Blackspots," the "Sparkplugs," the "Beaners," and the "hard-boiled 'Buckets-of-Blood'" (1927:9). On the southside of Chicago are located the stockyards and miles of railroad yards. Most of the blacks settled there, but the area remained dominated by Poles and Italians. The latter gangs were known as the "Torpedoes" or the "So-So's." Black gangs of the time were the "Wailing Shebas" or the "Wolves."

As a territorially divided area, the city of Chicago and its environs pulsed with the give-and-take confrontations among the various gangs. Only the relative scarcity of killing weapons such as handguns kept the constant confrontations from erupting into the type of carnage characteristic of many cities today. For students of contemporary urban sociology, there can be no better example of spatially sensitive research than Thrasher's original study. It is doubtful, too, that in today's urban environment anyone could carry out the kind of exhaustive census on street gangs that Thrasher did. Certainly his study is now outdated. But like the pyramids, it remains an inspiration across time.

Another way to appreciate their achievements is by returning to the original case studies. A particularly vivid ethnography is Frederick M. Thrasher's 1927 study of *The Gang*. Thrasher spent eight years tracking down the youth gangs of Chicago and in the end was able to identify 1,313 of them. Today media coverage tends to associate street gangs with black or Hispanic teenagers in the inner city and lament their violent ways, as exemplified by such films as *Boyz N The Hood* and *Colors*. Thrasher's work takes us back to the city of some seventy years ago when gangs were as much of a problem, but they were almost all white. Thrasher's study is described in more detail in Box 3.2.

McKenzie and the Metropolitan Community

Roderick McKenzie, a student of Park and Burgess, sought to apply the principles of human ecology to a regional metropolitan approach. He viewed the development of the metropolitan region as a function of changes in transportation and communication that produced new forms of social organization. These stages of development were the pre-railway era (before 1850), the railway era (1850–1900), and the motor transportation area (1900 to present). McKenzie considered technological change to be the key variable in producing spatial patterns in urban society, as he states in his introduction to *The Metropolitan Community*:

Formerly independent towns and villages and also rural territory have become part of this enlarged city complex. This new type of super community, organized around a dominant focal point and comprising a multitude of differentiated centers of activity, differs from the metropolitanism established by rail transportation in the complexity of its institutional division of labor and the mobility of its population. Its territorial scope is defined in terms of motor

McKenzie's ideas were recognized as a significant contribution to the field at the time. In some respects, his approach may be viewed as a precursor to the general concept of the multicentered metropolitan region emphasized by the sociospatial approach. But McKenzie did not have a great influence on later sociologists, and he is sometimes overlooked even by contemporary human ecologists. It is interesting to speculate on the reasons for this oversight. In the 1950s a new field of study, regional science, began investigating metropolitan regions from the perspective of economic geography, an approach with less appeal to urban sociologists. McKenzie's focus on the metropolitan region conflicted with the more general tendency of urban sociologists to focus their research and writing, as well as fieldwork, on the central city. A serious consideration of his regional perspective would have led urban sociology out of the city and into the suburban region, something that would not happen for several decades but is a central focus of this text.

FROM HUMAN ECOLOGY TO URBAN ECOLOGY

In 1945, Walter Firey published a study of land use in Boston titled "Sentiment and Symbolism as Ecological Variables." He noted that large areas of land in downtown Boston were reserved for noneconomic uses. Parks and cemeteries, as well as a 48-acre area in the center of the city that had formed the original "commons" of the community, had never been developed. In addition, an upper-class residential neighborhood known as Beacon Hill retained its privileged position as a home to wealthy and established Boston families despite its location near the downtown area. Each of these observations ran counter to the concentric zone model. Firey suggested that "sentiment" and "symbolism" were important ecological factors that influenced spatial patterns of development in urban space (Firey, 1945). Although other sociologists offered little systematic elaboration of the ideas Firey presented in this important piece of research, his work is often referred to as the "socio-cultural school" of human ecology.

After World War II, the ecological approach enjoyed something of a renaissance because ecologists paid careful attention to the census of population and how demographic locational patterns had changed. By 1950, it was found that the U.S. population had matured and spread out across metropolitan regions. In addition to altering population dispersal, the war years had changed the locational patterns of U.S. industry. Many industrial plants dispersed to the countryside during the 1940s. As a result of the war effort against Japan, heavy industries were decentralized and relocated to the