

## Mapping the City: Innovation and Continuity in the Chicago School of Sociology, 1920–1934

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**Abstract** This paper examines the historical origins and theoretical underpinnings of the maps of the city of Chicago produced by sociologists at the University of Chicago between 1920 and 1934. I argue that the three mapping schemes produced in those years—the concentric zone map of *The City* (1925), the base map of 75 community areas and the census tract maps published in three volumes of *Census Data of the City of Chicago* (1920, 1930, 1934)—draw upon distinct historical antecedents and have distinct theoretical implications. The first scheme exhibits the strong influence of Johann Heinrich von Thünen’s location theory and maps produced by early Chicago city boosters, the second most clearly exhibits the influence of the Social Survey Movement and of pragmatist philosophy and the third, the influence of the financial and governmental interests of the organizations that made up the Chicago Census Committee. Literature on early urban sociology and mapping in Chicago has hitherto not adequately differentiated these three mapping schemes or problematized the implications of their differences for our understanding of the theoretical commitments of the “Chicago School.”

**Keywords** Mapping · Ecology · Community areas · Social survey movement · Chicago school

This paper examines the historical origins and theoretical underpinnings of the maps of the city of Chicago produced by sociologists at the University of Chicago between 1920 and 1934. While there is an extensive literature on Chicago sociology, much of which makes reference to their mapping efforts, the historically and theoretically distinct mapping projects undertaken by Robert Park, Ernest Burgess and their first

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generation of students have not been adequately differentiated in the existing literature. I refer here to three mapping schemes, all conceptualized and produced under different circumstances but within a span of 15 years: the “concentric zone” model that appeared in print in the *Proceedings of the American Sociological Society* in 1923 and was reprinted in Park, Burgess and Roderick McKenzie’s *The City* (1925); the scheme of 75 “community areas,” a large-scale, collective mapping project, much of the initial work for which was done by Park, Burgess and Vivien Palmer; and, finally, the division of Chicago into 935 census tracts in research spearheaded by Burgess. These three mapping schemes have clearly distinguishable historical antecedents and carry with them distinct and not wholly consonant theoretical implications regarding the social forces that shape urban environments. It is the project of this paper to parse those historical and theoretical distinctions. The payoff is two-fold. Firstly, an historical study of the various ways in which Chicago sociologists mapped their city enriches our understanding of how the Chicago tradition absorbed, modified and elaborated upon earlier traditions in social science, social work and philosophy. Secondly, recognizing the plurality of theoretical positions implicit in these maps will further clarify the multiplicity of theoretical commitments and visions for the future of the discipline contained within that intrinsically messy label, the “Chicago School of Sociology.”<sup>1</sup>

I begin with a review of the literature on early Chicago sociology. Mapping is not a focal point of most of the holistic studies of Chicago sociology, although much of the literature at least touches upon the significance of its maps. Just as the meaning and significance of the maps can only be fully appreciated in the context of the broader aims of Chicago sociology, a thorough understanding of the maps and their origins has implications for the interpretation of all facets of Chicago sociology in the 1920s and 1930s. I next address the history and theory of the three mapping projects in chronological turn. With respect to the concentric zones, I point to the work of German agronomist and economist Johann Heinrich von Thünen and the popular writings of Chicago city boosters at the turn of the century as the major sources of intellectual influence. I then argue that the community areas project organized through the Local Community Research Committee (LCRC) in the mid- to late 1920s owed much to the influence of the Social Survey Movement, a tradition with which the major figures of the Chicago Sociology Department were acquainted both intellectually and personally through Chicago’s Hull House. My discussion of the theory behind these first two mapping schemes revolves around the notion of “urban ecology.” I argue that the more elaborate community area scheme signified a shift in

<sup>1</sup> Although I caution against a monolithic interpretation of the “Chicago School,” I nevertheless resort to that phrase and the related phrase, “Chicago sociology” throughout this paper. In the context of this paper, those phrases are meant as shorthand for the collective work of Park, Burgess and their students in the 1920s and early 1930s, particularly Roderick McKenzie, Vivien Palmer and Louis Wirth. Other departmental students include Ernest Shideler, Harvey Zorbaugh, Nels Anderson, Paul Cressey, Ernest Mowrer, Everett Hughes and Clifford Shaw, all of whom produced important work on urban sociology on their own. Frequently their work was done under the auspices of the Local Community Research Committee (LCRC), later renamed the Social Science Research Committee (SSRC), a University-wide body that organized and funded collective research projects in the social science disciplines in the 1920s and 1930s. My description of their work aims to capture an essentially collective self-understanding, and, as I will argue below, the three distinct mapping schemes that the Chicago School produced do not line up neatly with distinct outlooks of individual members of the department.

the Chicago School's concept of ecology, from a deterministic view borrowing heavily from biology to a view of human communities and social relations as built "on top of" ecological landscapes and thus not subject to the same inexorable laws as plant and animal ecological systems. The final mapping scheme, the census tracts, was a collective effort of the US Bureau of the Census and multiple commercial, governmental and academic interests in Chicago, with Burgess playing a leading role. The census tract project represented a clear move away from ecological theory—and indeed away from a framing sociological theory of any sort—although the project did not represent a permanent change of theoretical outlook for Burgess or his students. Because the census tract project was largely atheoretical, I focus less on sources of intellectual influence and more on the confluence of administrative and financial interests that brought the project to fruition. In my conclusion, I argue that the mapping schemes themselves cannot be treated as simply facets of a single theoretical outlook or as steps towards the elaboration of one. Rather, the maps are indicative of the catholicity of interests and approaches that the Chicago School entertained. While we should not downplay the conceptual divergence of the mapping schemes, we should appreciate the impressive empirical and theoretical advances that these multiple visions of the city collectively enabled.

Literature on the Chicago School's philosophical grounding and intellectual origins is extensive, but there are few commentaries that problematize the distinctions between the different sets of maps. The most comprehensive history of the Chicago School in the relevant time period is Martin Bulmer's *The Chicago School of Sociology* (1984). Bulmer focuses heavily on the institutional character of Chicago sociology, reading most of the important developments in Chicago sociology from the early 1920s onwards through the lens of the LCRC and the Social Science Research Committee (SSRC). He pays close attention to individuals (Park and Burgess loom largest, although he gives due attention to W.I. Thomas as a precursor to firmly institutionalized Chicago sociology), but Bulmer sees their contributions as mediated by institutional allocation of resources and commitments to empirical or theoretical, qualitative or quantitative work established in advance and often by committee. According to Bulmer, historical narratives that do not take adequate account of "the role of foundations of independent research bodies, of research and statistical activity within the federal government, and of the market research industry"—in short, of institutional structures—have missed a crucial dimension of Chicago sociology (Bulmer 1997, pp. 25–26).

Against Bulmer's notion that the Chicago School of Burgess and Park was a brief flowering of creativity "conditioned" by institutional factors (Bulmer 1984, pp. 208–224), many accounts argue that there are essential continuities from W.I. Thomas and G.H. Mead through Park and Burgess to the generation of Herbert Blumer and Everett Hughes and later, Erving Goffman, Morris Janowitz and Howard Becker (see the compiled volumes Tomasi 1998; Fine 1995; Plummer 1997). These narratives point to different features of Chicago sociology in their attempts to locate its prevailing essence over time.<sup>2</sup> But they all, at least implicitly, challenge Bulmer's

<sup>2</sup> Patricia Lengermann distinguishes five common perspectives on the theoretical content of Chicago sociology, including accounts that call it functionalist, symbolic interactionist and dedicated to developing "middle range" theories (Lengermann 1997, p. 240).

account of creativity built on a narrow institutional basis, emphasizing instead the potential for innovation and regeneration Chicago sociology had at least in part because of its self-referential nature.<sup>3</sup> Such interpretations are given some weight by the fact that many of the early interpreters of Chicago sociology were members of the department themselves. Winifred Raushenbush's biography of Robert Park and Robert Faris's *Chicago Sociology, 1920–1932* are two examples (Raushenbush 1979; Faris 1967).<sup>4</sup> Louis Wirth's and Everett Hughes's efforts to collect and standardize the writings of Park and Burgess continued the tradition, as did revisits to the field sites of iconic early ethnographies by later generations of Chicago sociologists. The LCRC commissioned one volume to "take thought of its experience and accomplishments" a mere 5 years after the establishment of the Committee (Smith and White 1968, p. vii; see also Hunter 1974; Suttles 1972).

Andrew Abbott endorses a loose interpretation of the theoretical continuity of Chicago sociology. Reading the work of Thomas, Park, Burgess and the first generation of postwar students as clearly differentiated projects, he argues, for example, that Thomas worked with a "profoundly interpretative frame of mind" developed during his early years as an English professor that set him apart from Park and Burgess, who in many ways were eager to emulate the methods of the natural sciences (Abbott and Egloff 2008, p. 219; Abbott 1999, pp. 193–222; Abbott and Gaziano 1995). Nevertheless, Abbott still finds it useful to identify a kernel of theoretical insight in Chicago sociology—the spatial and temporal contextualization of social facts—that has since been disregarded to the detriment of contemporary sociology (Abbott 1999, pp. 196–198). If Abbott is right that "social facts are *located*" conveys the central theoretical insight of the Chicago School (p. 197), then we should expect their mapping projects to entail substantial and revealing theoretical commitments. I will argue here that they do.

Mary Jo Deegan and Dennis Smith have each focused less on the continuity of the theoretical commitments or substantive interests, instead attempting to distill the meaning of the "Chicago School" by tracing its origins whole cloth to an earlier intellectual tradition. For Deegan, that tradition is the work of Jane Addams and her colleagues at Hull House, whereas for Smith it is the institutionalist economics—a "liberal critique of capitalism"—most strongly associated with Thorstein Veblen (Deegan 1988; Smith 1988). Carla Cappetti locates the work of Thomas, Park and Burgess between two literary traditions, inspired by the writers of realist novels who grappled with the social dynamics and pathologies of urban life (Zola, Dickens, Flaubert and Dostoyevsky, among many others) and inspiring of Chicago urban novelists Richard Wright, James Farrell and Nelson Algren (Cappetti 1993, pp. 1–19). Cappetti is more directly interested in the maps than the authors discussed above, but in her chapter on "Maps, Models, and Metaphors" her focus is on explaining how

<sup>3</sup> See Fine 1995. While many of the contributors to the volume are loath to reduce the complexity of postwar Chicago sociology to a few characteristic features and are hesitant to apply the label "school" to the collection of sociologists working there at the time, the themes of memory, tradition and interpersonal relationships structure the narratives given in several chapters and preserve the notion that there were essential continuities from the work of Park and Burgess to postwar Chicago sociology. The volume's dedication, "To the Second School," gives away the question posed in the title.

<sup>4</sup> Raushenbush was a student of Robert Park, and Faris was both a student and the son of Ellsworth Faris, a long-time faculty member.

ethnography and literary exposition made the formerly “unintelligible and illegible” city slums understandable through a newfound, jointly developed sociological imagination (pp. 34–58). My interest here is in parsing apart the multiple means by which Chicago sociologists alone made the city comprehensible.

Two recent studies by Jennifer Light and Elaine Lewinnek, respectively, pay close attention to the historical antecedents to the concentric zone model (Light 2009; Lewinnek 2010). As possible influences on Burgess, Light points to the concentric model of agricultural land use around an “isolated state” proposed by von Thünen, as well as several plant ecologists, some of them at the University of Chicago, who had modeled the succession of plant growth in roughly concentric patterns (Light 2009, pp. 22–25). Lewinnek focuses on maps produced by Chicago city boosters, real estate developers and professional mapmakers, who at the turn of the century regularly overlaid their maps with concentric circles and proposed building projects that would solidify the concentric scheme of Chicago. Both note the close connection between Burgess’s concentric zone map of Chicago and the ecological theory that developed over time in the work of many Chicago sociologists.

Sudhir Venkatesh, Emanuel Gaziano and Thomas Gieryn likewise give sustained attention to mapping as a central component of Chicago sociology (Venkatesh 2001; Gaziano 1996; Gieryn 2006). Venkatesh relates Park and Burgess’s mapping schemes to the pragmatist philosophical foundations of Chicago sociology, and, like Lewinnek and Light, he emphasizes the frequent convergence of interests between professional sociologists at the University of Chicago and other so-called urban professionals (see Light 2009, pp. 161–163)—particularly city administrators and social workers—that made studying and reforming the city intractably interconnected projects. Gieryn presents map-making, and urban ethnography more generally, as complex processes that depended for their success on more than their philosophical foundations. In order to establish the city as a “truth-spot,” argues Gieryn, the Chicago sociologists had to depict it for their audience as a space, the identity of which “oscillates between a given thing found in ‘nature’ and a manipulated artifact of laboratory metrology” (Gieryn 2006, p. 12). Eventually, when this dual identity of the city gained currency, the use of city as a site for research came to legitimate the intellectual products of maps and ethnographic accounts. Gaziano draws substantially on Gieryn’s work but focuses on the ecology metaphor as a means of theoretical legitimation and as a tool for conceptual understanding, in the work of the Chicago School as well as other sociological and biological projects.

Much of the literature cited above shares the common impulse to distill a single meaning for the phrase “Chicago School,” a natural and to some degree necessary undertaking if one is going to attribute to it any heuristic or analytic value. However, it is perhaps an indication that the coherence of the label has often been taken too much for granted that the considerable differences among the several mapping projects has not received more attention in the literature. To the extent that they address Chicago School mapping, none of the preceding studies thoroughly explore how the various mapping projects relate to one another. Still less do they address, as I propose to do here, theoretical incongruities and disparities of creative vision evident in the mapping efforts of the Chicago School. Bulmer broaches the topic when he asks, rhetorically, who would think to associate Chicago sociology with the origins of census tract data collection (Bulmer 1984, p. 189). He raises the question in order to

debunk the old stereotype of Chicago sociology as predominantly qualitative, but he leaves the matter there. He does not follow up by asking why Burgess moved so quickly from concentric zone mapping to census tract mapping, nor does he interrogate how theoretically compatible the two projects are. Lewinnek argues that the concentric zone model continued to hold sway as the privileged view of the city from the Chicago School even as the model became untenable in light of careful ethnographic study (pp. 212–214). She focuses on Walter Reckless and Clarence Glick as the exemplary successors to Burgess, both of whom worked to preserve the concentric model by designating areas that did not neatly fit its predictions as additional “zones in transition” (p. 213). However, the community area project followed fast on the heels of Burgess’s concentric zone map and enlisted the participation of many members of the department, including Burgess himself. The participants in that project cannot be said to have felt the concentric zone model as a theoretical burden they had to keep defending. The project moved ecological theory in a direction not anticipated in *The City*, but it remained just as theory-laden. Reckless’s and Glick’s monographs notwithstanding, it is more productive to see Chicago School mapping as a series of three distinct projects pursued in quick succession (in fact, the latter two projects were at some moments pursued simultaneously), rather than as a single, highly schematic proposal followed by a series of stopgap attempts to preserve its relevance in the face of mounting evidence against it.<sup>5</sup> Light pursues the development of mapping at Chicago from Burgess to Homer Hoyt, a Chicago PhD in economics and later real estate developer, emphasizing the continuities both in terms of their commitment to ecological theory and their attempts to map circular patterns of urban growth (Light, pp. 70–81). However, she does not trace the interests of the University of Chicago Sociology Department itself beyond concentric zone mapping. Gieryn’s thesis is that the city needed to fulfill a dual role for Chicago sociologists, namely, as a found thing and as a laboratory artifact. His paper argues, as this paper will argue, that Park, Burgess and their students viewed the city through multiple theoretical lenses, often oscillating back and forth among them for heuristic purposes. Whereas Gieryn and Gaziano focus on metaphorical representations of the city as “laboratory” and “ecology” in Chicago sociology, however, I take as my subject the cartographic maps that Chicago sociologists produced in the same years.

### Concentric Zone Mapping

The Chicago School’s cartographic mapping of the city began with the now-famous scheme of five “concentric zones” that first appeared in print in Burgess’s article, “The Growth of the City: An Introduction to a Research Project” in *Proceedings of the American Sociological Society* in 1923. It was reprinted in *The City* (1925), coauthored by Burgess, Park and Roderick McKenzie, the last a one-time Chicago student who was by 1924 a professor at the University of Washington. The concentric zone scheme was not intended to be specific to Chicago, but rather consisted in five zones that Burgess understood to make up any urban ecology: the central business

<sup>5</sup> Reckless, in fact, relied only on community area maps in *Vice in Chicago* and did not reproduce the concentric zone scheme in its original or in a modified form (Reckless 1933).

district, the zone in transition, the zone of workingmen's homes, the residential zone, and the commuter's zone (Park et al. 1925, p. 51). Onto the zones Burgess then translated specific features of the city of Chicago, mostly having to do with ethnic and national demographics: the "Black Belt," "Little Sicily," "Deutschland," the "Ghetto," "Underworld" and "Chinatown," among others (p. 55).<sup>6</sup> The concentric zones were deeply tied to the notion of the city as an "urban ecology." Burgess, Park and McKenzie argued that urban institutions and social processes were an adaptive system, responsive to exogenous shocks like immigration and technological innovation in a way that made the city amenable to comparisons to ecosystems in the natural world. The authors of *The City* argued that the zones expanded outward in a process of succession as industries developed, pushing the most desirable residential areas ever further from the city center and leaving low-income and immigrant family homes in the "zone of workingmen's homes" and the uneasy "zone in transition" closer to the central business district.

The forces that change the social order in this ecological model are primarily economic ones. Although the designation of the city as an "urban ecology" calls to mind the influence of biology more than economics, the "workingmen" and "commuters" of the model were economic classes, understood to be the assemblages of individuals maximizing their own interests in finding the best available land at the best price. The various ethnic and national group identities that were overlaid on the concentric scheme, meanwhile, were presented as products of collective segregation, a process that "offers the group, and thereby the individuals who compose the group, a place and a role in the total organization of city life" (p. 56). The social groups that appear, in this model, to be built on top of on the ecological areas of the city would eventually be elaborated and further refined as the "community areas" and neighborhoods within them.

The concentric zones described by Burgess were ideal types. The designations of economic classes (which defined the zones) and ethnic groups (which cut across them) were analytic simplifications, and the model took no account of the physical geography of the city or contingent historical and legal factors that might distort land rent. As Burgess frankly acknowledged, the "ideal scheme" was complicated by "the lake front, the Chicago River, railroad lines, historical factors in the location of industry, the relative degree of the resistance of communities to invasion, etc." (p. 52). An equally important feature of the model is its temporal dynamism. The theory expressed by the concentric zone map entails the claim that the standing of the five concentric zones relative to one another will change over time as the city grows. The processes of growth and succession were central to the theories of plant ecologists as much as they were to the concentric zone model.<sup>7</sup> Growth of cities would continue indefinitely (Burgess 1930, p. 163) and—at least according to two Chicago students—transformation of the urban center would stop only when the city reached an

<sup>6</sup> See Figs. 1 and 2.

<sup>7</sup> Several foundational texts in ecological theory are excerpted in Park and Burgess's textbook *Introduction to the Science of Sociology* (1921): William Wheeler's *Ants, Their Structure, Development and Behavior* (1910), Eugenius Warming's *Oecology of Plants* (1909) and Frederick Clements's *Plant Succession* (1916), among others (Gaziano 1996, pp. 880–881; see also Park and Burgess 1969, pp. 169–172, 175–182, 182–184, 525–527). By contrast, the Social Survey Movement is not given much space in the text, despite its importance for Chicago School work in other contexts.

“equilibrium of decay” in which the central zone stopped expanding and remained static in a state of poverty (Light 2009, p. 27; Anderson and Lindeman 1928, p. 87).

There was no shortage of models for Burgess and the coauthors of *The City* to draw upon when they conceived of the concentric zone model and the accompanying ecological theory. Mapping Chicago as a series of concentric zones was commonplace among city boosters and urban planners in the early years of the twentieth century. Daniel Hudson Burnham’s *Plan of Chicago* (1909) is a concentrated example of such maps, in that it was both an anthology of earlier mapping efforts, several of which visualized Chicago in concentric rings (see Burnham and Bennett 1993[1909], pp. 41, 44–45, 81) and presented a concerted vision for future city planning. Burnham’s *Plan* was an expensive and successful force in guiding the future of urban development in Chicago: Lewinnek cites \$234 million as the total sum spent on municipal bonds to enact parts of the *Plan*, most notably Chicago’s lakefront parks (Lewinnek 2010, p. 206).

However, in terms of its theoretical ambitions, a different antecedent source bears a closer resemblance to Burgess’s map. I emphasize above that Burgess’s concentric zones are ideal types, and the same cannot be said of boosters’ and city planners’ earlier concentric maps of Chicago. One of the distinctive features of Chicago boosterism was an emphasis on the unique geographical advantages of Chicago (Burnham and Bennett 1993[1909], pp. 31–34; Lewinnek 2010, p. 206; Cronon 1991, pp. 31–54). Chicago boosters and city planners did not generally consider their visions of Chicago as predictive models for other urban centers, whereas, by its inclusion in *The City*, Burgess’s concentric zone model was embedded in a theory of urban ecology and claimed a greater theoretical import. In that respect, the model most closely resembles the mapping work of German economist and agronomist von Thünen. To explore the possible influence of von Thünen, however, it is necessary to turn away from Burgess’s paper, “The Growth of the City” and look at the role of his collaborators in bringing *The City* into print.

While the concentric zone map first appeared in a paper authored independently by Burgess, the proposal to embed that map in a general text on “Human Ecology”—the project that was to become *The City*—was first raised in correspondence between Burgess’s collaborators Park and McKenzie. From the start, both of them held high aspirations that the book would be comprehensive and agenda setting in the same manner as Park and Burgess’s *Introduction to the Science of Sociology* (1921). McKenzie wrote to Park that it ought to “be worked out in some such way as [Park] and Burgess developed [their] General Sociology. That is, starting with an introduction, stating the meaning and scope of Human Ecology, then developing the system of concepts involved in Ecology, illustrating the processes by selected readings.”<sup>8</sup> In a sense that project was dropped. *The City* does not approach the *Introduction* in terms of total length, nor does it make the same effort to produce a comprehensive typology of concepts (although that breadth of vision is still visible in Louis Wirth’s bibliography). Nor does *The City* include selected readings from foundational and contemporary sources in the way that the *Introduction* does. However, the volume that was the final product of Park and McKenzie’s conversation retained a high level of ambition in other ways. For one thing, it was brought rapidly into print. McKenzie

<sup>8</sup> McKenzie to Park, July 19, 1924, Robert Park Papers, Box 14.



wrote in his first letter on the topic to Park, “there is no doubt but that the book should be gotten out at the earliest possible date,”<sup>9</sup> and production was further hastened by the December 1925 meeting of the American Sociological Society, where Park served as president and designated the organizing theme as “the City.” Secondly, the chapters of *The City* (many of which had been previously published) tackled the big problems of urban sociology, frequently at a high level of abstraction, setting a research agenda for the field.

Park included in a letter to McKenzie of August 1, 1924 a proposed outline of the book, organizing “existing materials under a series of categories as Burgess and [Park] did in the Introduction to Sociology” (a suggestion that initially came from McKenzie).<sup>10</sup> In the same letter Park raised the question of formative influences on human ecology and suggested that “there is a good deal of material in the German literature, and possibly in the French.” He gave explicit mention to only one text in the letter, however, “a pamphlet...entitled ‘City Building’” that he had purchased on his trip to Germany 2 years earlier:

by “City” they mean the central business area, but as the central business area is responsible for the concentric organization of the cities into areas of slums, rooming houses, apartment houses, *etc.*, we can use that concept for that particular type of process and organization.<sup>11</sup>

In all likelihood Park’s pamphlet drew upon the work of von Thünen, the originator of concentric mapping and location theory in Germany. The similarities between von Thünen’s model as Park describes it and the concentric zone map that ultimately appeared in *The City* are clear, and Park’s time in Germany<sup>12</sup> provide a plausible course by which von Thünen could have directly impacted the development of Chicago sociology.

In *Der Isolierte Staat in Beziehung auf Landwirtschaft und Nationalökonomie*. [*The Isolated State in its Relation to Agriculture and National Economy*], (first published in 1826, expanded in 1842), von Thünen hypothesizes about the patterns of land use that would emerge in an “isolated state,” a single city surrounded by uniformly flat, uniformly fertile land. Like Burgess’s concentric scheme, the model that resulted from von Thünen thought experiment was an ideal type that he fully acknowledged would have no direct parallel in reality.<sup>13</sup> Land rent would be determinative of how the isolated city’s hinterland took shape, and at further distances from the city, lower-yield agricultural activities would take place until the point at which cultivating land for any purpose would exceed the cost of bringing goods to market in the city. Both models focus on economic interest as the driving force behind urban structure and processes, although von Thünen paid less attention to the mutual interdependence that economic activity imposes upon people. For him, social actors

<sup>9</sup> McKenzie to Park, July 19, 1924, Robert Park Papers, Box 14.

<sup>10</sup> Park to McKenzie, August 1, 1924, Robert Park Papers, Box 14.

<sup>11</sup> Park to McKenzie, August 1, 1924, Robert Park Papers, Box 14.

<sup>12</sup> Park received a PhD from Heidelberg in 1903. He took two trips to Germany, in 1910 (with Booker T. Washington; see Raushenbush 1979, p. 51) and in 1922. On the latter trip he kept journal recording personal experiences as well as a record of books and magazines relevant to “human geography.” Diary of a trip through Germany. Robert Park Papers, Box 16.

<sup>13</sup> In fact, the original title of the book was *The Ideal State* (von Thünen 1966, p. xxi; Barnes 2003, p. 76).

were individuals whose economic behavior would depend on their location with respect to the central city but for whom group membership was unimportant. Furthermore, von Thünen posited that the rings of his concentric model would be dynamic over time. “With a general rise in living standards,” von Thünen writes, “crop alternation [the third ring from the center] will in due course become the ruling farm system,” diminishing the importance of the others (von Thünen 1966, p. 141).

That Park’s interest in German social theory influenced his own contributions to *The City* is confirmed in his correspondence with McKenzie. Although Burgess had less direct contact with the German tradition, he at least appreciated its relevance to Chicago sociology enough to allow it a privileged place in the *Introduction*.<sup>14</sup> As for Burgess’s concentric zone model itself, it is clearly reminiscent of von Thünen’s model. The similarities of Burgess’s and von Thünen’s concentric models have been recognized by some recent commentators (Light 2009; Sinclair 1967, p. 78), and although von Thünen’s work receives no explicit mention in the text of *The City* or in Wirth’s bibliography, it is difficult to imagine that, after his time in Germany, Park was unfamiliar with von Thünen<sup>15</sup> or that he was unconscious of the similarity between von Thünen’s model and Burgess’s.

Finally, a word on the afterlife of this first mapping effort from the Chicago School: the concentric zone model remains widely recognizable, but its substantive influence at the University of Chicago was limited. Few of the major ethnographic monographs published by Park and Burgess’s students reproduced the scheme (see Zorbaugh 1929; Thrasher 1963[1927]; Mowrer 1972[1927]; cf. Wirth 1956[1928]; Anderson 1923; Shaw 1930; Cressey 1932; Hughes 1979[1931]; Reckless 1933), and Zorbaugh included it primarily to stress its limitations.<sup>16</sup> Park and Burgess themselves quickly moved on to new mapping projects after *The City*. Theoretically, this was a move away from ideal-type analysis and towards a more empirically grounded ecological theory. It entailed not just rethinking on the part of Park and Burgess, but also a turn towards different and more contemporary sources of intellectual inspiration.

## Community Area Mapping

The concentric zone scheme did not go far towards a sophisticated, particularistic analysis of Chicago, but Chicago sociology’s next effort to map the city did much

<sup>14</sup> Georg Simmel receives 43 mentions in that text, more than any other theorist; further references are made to Werner Sombart, Ferdinand Tönnies and Freud, giving German social theory more prominence in the volume than any theoretical tradition save plant ecology.

<sup>15</sup> Von Thünen was well known and respected in Germany, so much so that by the 1920s prominent scholars in the fields of location theory, historical theory and economics had all declared themselves to be his heirs (Blaug 1979, pp. 27–28).

<sup>16</sup> In *The Gold Coast and the Slum*, Zorbaugh pays homage to the concentric zone model for representing “the processes of expansion, succession, and ‘centralized decentralization’ displayed in the growth of every city” (p. 231), but he does so only at the end of the volume, after presenting and analyzing thirteen community area maps. The chapter in which the concentric zone map appears is primarily a reflection on the meaning of “community,” and Zorbaugh contends that “an area does not become a community merely by virtue of having distributed over it...people having certain interests in common...An area becomes a community only through the common experiences of the people who live in it, resulting in their becoming a cultural group, with traditions, sentiments and attitudes, and memories in common” (pp. 222–223). That is, it is not economic interest but shared identity that makes a community.

more in that respect. From 1924 to 1930, the LCRC delineated 75 distinct “community areas” in the city (Bulmer 1984, pp. 129–150).<sup>17</sup> Many, but not all, of the community areas were bounded on all sides by physical barriers, most frequently railway tracks and embankments, industrial areas, the Chicago River and Lake Michigan. Railways and the river marked off areas close to the city center, whereas industrial areas and empty lots were prevalent further out on the periphery. Some, like the university’s home of Hyde Park, had long-standing historical status as independent neighborhoods or real estate developments, while other boundaries and names were original definitions of the LCRC. In one now notorious instance, Burgess designated as “New City” the community then (and still) widely known as Back of the Yards. His intent was to avoid any negative association with Chicago’s stockyards, but within the community itself the old name has stuck much more than Burgess’s sanitized version (Hunter 1974, p. 79).

Much of the preliminary work for the community area project was done by Vivien Palmer, who described the vision implicit in the mapping scheme as follows:

Mr. Park and Mr. Burgess looking over the city saw it as an aggregation of many small territorial groupings—immigrant colonies of first, second, and third settlement, suburban communities, industrial suburbs, gold coasts, hobohemias, truck garden districts, apartment house areas, bungalow neighborhoods, and so on. Each of these districts they looked upon as a distinct cultural complex, as a world in itself with its own characteristic institutions and its own distinct mode of life. They felt that general statements concerning the city as a whole did not give specific enough data on which to base sociological research, but that it would be necessary to study each of these social environments minutely in order to obtain an understanding of the peculiar social situations, the whole immediate social setting in which any particular sociological problem manifested itself.<sup>18</sup>

By identifying the community areas as what Park and Burgess “saw” in the city, a model that was for the first time differentiated enough to “give specific enough data on which to base sociological research,” Palmer ascribes no significance to the schematic concentric zones as a prior product of the Chicago School. With the community areas project, Burgess and his colleagues took upon themselves the tasks of providing a definition for “community” that would both further the theoretical paradigm of urban ecology and identify a series of real communities within the city that, once set on a map, would provide a viable foundation for further empirical research. In both respects, the community area scheme proved impressively successful. Not only did the community area scheme set the frame for numerous empirical studies well beyond Park and Burgess’s first generation of students, the names of the community areas were eventually established, by municipal ordinance, as the official names of the city’s distinct areas (Venkatesh 2001, p. 276).

<sup>17</sup> See Fig. 3.

<sup>18</sup> Vivien Palmer, “The Study of the Growth of Local Communities of Chicago,” January 1929. Social Science Research Committee Papers, Box 14. See also Palmer 1932.

The community area map differed not only in its level of detail from the concentric zones, but also in its basic theoretical assumptions. Gone from this model is the assumption that economic interest is the primary driving force behind the formation of the urban environment, and the acknowledgement that each community forms “a distinct cultural complex, as a world in itself with its own characteristic institutions and its own distinct mode of life,” at the very least, pushes far into the background the aspiration to create a generalized model for urban growth applicable to all cities. However, the community area model does not abandon or directly conflict with the ecological theory that is so central to *The City*. Instead it elaborates the ecological theory in a new direction, emphasizing contingency and agency in human interaction more strongly than biological or economic causes or causal mechanisms.

First associated with concentric zone mapping, the ecological theory of the Chicago School could easily have developed towards greater economic determinism. Park and Burgess could have moved from the ideal-typical scheme of zonal urban development to either (1) the strong claim that the zones were the *real* products of rational individuals competing for scarce resources, land foremost among them, or (2) the position that the ideal-typical concentric zone model were so analytically sound that many further inferences and deductions about urban social organization could reasonably be made from it. As Emanuel Gaziano’s survey of the ecological metaphor in interwar sociology and biology reveals, a move towards greater biological determinism was an equally plausible path for ecological theory as it developed at Chicago. As Gaziano writes, there were “negotiable boundaries between the *social* and the *natural* in 20th-century science” (Gaziano 1996, p. 874), and sociobiology developed from many of the same progenitors and claims essentially the same explanatory mandate as sociology. The heuristic utility of borrowing concepts from the natural sciences was a double-edged sword for sociologists, then and now: the more successful naturalistic explanations of human behavior and social structure are, the less autonomous and independently meaningful sociology appears. Ultimately, however, the Chicago sociologists embraced neither rational choice theory nor ecological process as a sufficient basis for understanding human social behavior. At Park’s urging, departmental students instead went out into the city to get the seats of their pants dirty in ethnographic work. In doing so, they collectively re-envisioned the city as a set of community areas rather than as a series of concentric circles, and they redirected their ecological vision away from deterministic models of human behavior.

A passage from Vivien Palmer’s *Field Studies* manual attempts to justify this melding of community studies and ecological theory:

Social areas in modern society are usually in a state of flux, reflecting the ceaseless flow of life itself[...]

Ecological areas give a more permanent, though at the same time a more arbitrary, basis. Yet inasmuch as they take into account physical and economic factors which exert an influence upon the location of groups, they bear a significant relationship to the social area[...]

The ecological areas, in other words, are pigeonholes on the landscape which the investigator uses in studying the surge of social life. Experience has shown that social groupings tend to segregate within those pigeonholes. But while the sociologist uses these divisions to pool data over a period of time, he is always

interested in using the social areas which are contained within the ecological boundaries and he uses these as the basic unit for his investigations of any given period (Palmer 1928, p. 80).

A similar statement is attributed to Park in Ernest Shideler's dissertation:

When we seek to determine and describe the institution which grow up on the ecological organization, or the processes by which these institutions grow up, then we are in the realm of community organization...Every type of social organization may be assumed to rest upon the basis of an ecological organization (Park, quoted in Shideler 1927, p. 5).

The juxtaposition between ecological and social areas here is perhaps an uncomfortable one, but it does demonstrate Palmer's and Park's shared commitment to integrating ecological theory and the community area scheme as two facets of a single vision of the city.

The ecological metaphor that pervades Chicago sociology is thus an important point of continuity tying together the concentric zone and community area maps. It helps to make sense of why the same group of sociologists moved so quickly from concentric mapping to community area mapping. Continuities notwithstanding, however, the differences between the two mapping schemes are foundational, and they are thrown into relief by their respective historical precedents. When we look for the likely sources of influence behind the community areas project at the University of Chicago, we find reference points wholly different from the early concentric circle models discussed above.

One vital source for the community area project as it developed at Chicago was the series of reform-oriented urban studies now known collectively as the Social Survey Movement. Between 1890 and 1920, social surveyors produced voluminous studies on major urban centers including London, Pittsburgh, New York, Chicago and Springfield. Among the most prominent and influential were Charles Booth's *Life and Labour of the People in London* (1889–1903), the six-volume Pittsburgh Survey, sponsored by the Russell Sage Foundation and edited by Paul Kellogg (1909–1914), Jacob Riis's *How the Other Half Lives* (2010), B. Seeböhm Rowntree's *Poverty: A Study of Town Life* (1980), the *Hull-House Maps and Papers* (Residents of Hull-House, a social settlement, 1895) and W.E.B. Du Bois's *The Philadelphia Negro* (1973). They relied heavily on visuals and were clearly attuned to their significance. Booth and the *Hull-House* authors both included large-scale, foldable maps in their published volumes at a time when the cost of doing so was considerable (see Booth et al. 1970; Residents of Hull-House 1895). Florence Kelley of Hull House made inclusion of the removable maps (modeled on Booth's) a condition of publication when the publisher hesitated to include them (Bulmer et al. 1991, pp. 122, 137). Du Bois's maps resemble the Hull House ones insofar as they throw into relief the containment of the urban poor within a few, clearly defined city blocks (Du Bois 1973, p. 1; Bulmer et al. 1991, pp. 21, 175). After the publication of *How the Other Half Lives* Riis reflected that photography, not drawing, was "evidence of the kind [he] wanted" to tell his story (Riis, p. 483),<sup>19</sup> and although he included no maps he described his city in evocative, visual language:

<sup>19</sup> Although he was not a trained photographer, Riis's pictures in *How the Other Half Lives* made an instant impact and have had a long afterlife as objects of historical study (Riis 2010[1890], pp. xii, 485–488).

a map of the city, colored to designate nationalities, would show more stripes than the skin of a zebra, and more colors than any rainbow. The city on such a map would fall into two great halves, green for the Irish prevailing in the West Side tenement districts, and blue for the Germans on the East Side. But intermingling with these ground colors would be an odd variety of tints that would give the whole the appearance of an extraordinary crazy-quilt (Riis, p. 18).

The social survey writers thus shared with the LCRC researchers a vision of their respective cities as patchworks of “distinct cultural complex[es], [each] as a world in itself with its own characteristic institutions and its own distinct mode of life.” There was, furthermore, a direct institutional link between the Social Survey literature and the Chicago School, as Park regularly taught a course on the Social Survey. He kept good records of his teaching, and his course on ‘The Social Survey,’ taught over many years, offers some insights into the commonalities of the survey projects and his own. In particular, Park’s description of Social Survey in an early introductory lecture reflects precisely the epistemological sentiment behind the construction of the community areas, captured in Vivien Palmer’s notes quoted above:

The expert presents the point of view. It is part of his work to popularize and make intelligible this point of view. The result of the survey should justify in the minds of the community the new point of view. This is part of the educational task.

The men who have made the surveys know this; it is my business to call your attention to it so that you should not think the survey was a mere formal thing.<sup>20</sup>

As Park noted, the aim of the Social Survey Movement writers was to interpret the social conditions of their cities and simultaneously make a case for political reform and social welfare. In general, the surveys were carried out outside the auspices of the newly emergent professional discipline of sociology<sup>21</sup> by citizens who aspired to objectively rigorous and thorough documentation, on the one hand, and, on the other, to produce studies that would “justify” their own conclusions “in the minds of the community.” The social surveyors intended their own expert authority to put them in greater touch with the public rather than cutting them off from it. They hoped to bring a new awareness of the condition of the urban poor and systematically disenfranchised to a wide readership and, ultimately, to serve as a force for reform by raising awareness.

Park and Burgess did not follow the social survey writers in their overt politicization<sup>22</sup> but certainly did echo the manner in which the surveyors collected their data.

<sup>20</sup> Notes for “Soc. 36,” c. 1921, Robert Park Papers, Box 5.

<sup>21</sup> Du Bois was an exception in this regard. He was invited to conduct the Philadelphia study by the University of Pennsylvania. At the time he was teaching at Wilberforce University (and, to his displeasure, was not allowed to teach sociology). After the completion of the study he took up a teaching position at Atlanta University (Du Bois 1973[1899], p. 5).

<sup>22</sup> In *The City*, for example, Burgess wrote that “neighborhood work” could only hope to have a “scientific foundation if it [would] base its activities upon a study of social forces.” Lacking such a scientific basis, social work could never hope to make the transition from “futile” and “ignorant” good intentions to an effective tool to combat the pressing problems of modern urban society (Park et al. 1925, pp. 154–155). Similar statements can be found in Park.

The LCRC mobilized a large contingent of researchers and insisted on gathering original ethnographic and quantitative data. At Chicago, this building up of an independent database of information about the city proved extremely fruitful: the LCRC used the community area “base map” as a template to represent the organization of immigrant groups in Chicago, distribution of population by age and occupation, the prevalence of sexually transmitted disease and deserted homes by area, to name just a few of the demographic trends they explored. The scheme was further elaborated by Chicago students working on individual dissertation projects who made use of its partitioning scheme to set the terms of their own ethnographic studies. This model of collective urban research, eschewing the use of existing government data, followed a course already set by the social surveyors. Booth’s *Life and Labour*, the *Hull-House Maps and Papers* and the Pittsburgh Survey had all credited multiple authors upon publication. Rowntree and Du Bois relied on assistants to complete the exhaustive house-by-house surveys that they considered essential to their projects.

Among the social surveyors we can identify two distinct reasons for this methodological approach, both of which resonate in the work of the Chicago School. Booth and Rowntree (who explicitly followed Booth’s example) both insisted that the existing data on their cities, gathered by government agencies, would not be adequate to support careful studies of poverty (Bulmer, Bales and Sklar, eds., pp. 72–74; Rowntree, p. vii). Both aspired to understand poverty and unemployment in individual cities in more detail than the census data would allow, and they set out to investigate what new social divisions *within* the city those demographic indicators (and particularly, a quantifiable “poverty line”) would suggest, rather than simply to map poverty onto existing political representations of the city (Booth 1967, pp. 180–184; Rowntree 1980, pp. 27–31). In their community area mapping, the Chicago sociologists likewise turned away from using political ward maps as a basis for studying the city. Burgess in particular would, as we will see below, further solidify his desire not to rely on political wards as the basis for data collection in his work on the *Census Data* volumes.

A second, distinct reason for initiating independent ethnographic investigation and data-gathering is evident in the *Hull-House Maps and Papers*, written collaboratively by residents of the Hull House settlement, all of them in close personal contact and collaboration with the poor immigrants whom they served. Jane Addams, Kelley and their colleagues recognized, as Park and Burgess later would, that their work would have limited impact if they could not enlist the cooperation of the population about which they were writing. At Hull House, to “justify in the minds of the community the new point of view” meant not only to illustrate to the privileged class, “how the other half lives” (as it primarily did for Riis) but to offer to poor immigrant Chicagoans a means of understanding their own predicament. Park and Burgess likewise recognized the importance of persuading the community to share their understanding of the community area partitioning of the city. This is evident in their frequent references to the city as a “social laboratory” and in their anxieties about being able to conduct properly controlled experimental research within it. We find Burgess writing, for example,

what is meant by the phrase, the city as a laboratory for social science research?  
If it is anything more than a metaphor, it must mean the establishment of a

control over observation and experimentation in urban behavior essentially the same as that provided by the physical, chemical, or biological laboratory (Burgess, quoted in Bulmer 1984, pp. 156–157).

The potential for human subjects to be uncooperative and derail experimentation and social scientific progress was readily apparent and certainly recognized by Park and Burgess at the time (see Gieryn 2006; Venkatesh 2001; Burgess comments on the difficulty of gathering “basic social data” in Smith and White 1968, pp. 47–66).

Pierre Lannoy has proposed that Park’s essay on “The City,” first published in 1915 and later to become the title piece in *The City*, was in fact a “radical critique of the social survey movement” (Lannoy 2004, p. 35), and that Park was neither very familiar with nor very sympathetic to the particular combination of scientific rigor and community involvement attempted by the social surveyors. Lannoy argues persuasively that there is a substantial gap between the texts Park was required to teach and his own political and theoretical sympathies. Others have generalized this divergence between *The City* and the survey, arguing that the Social Survey Movement represents “a sociological road not taken” in the early days of the discipline (Bulmer et al. 1991, p. 245). With respect to the specific issue of mapping, however, important parallels between Park and the social surveyors are clear. They shared an interest in the city as the primary site of social problems, a commitment to collective social study and an epistemological outlook that sociological analysis was a creative project and not “a mere formal thing.” Lannoy does not consider the Social Survey Movement alongside the community areas project of the LCRC, where he would have found affinities much more readily. The lesson here is not so much that there was a definitive, sharp divergence between the Social Survey Movement and Chicago sociology, but rather that the Chicago sociologists of the 1920s and 1930s embraced a range of methodological approaches to sociological mapping. What is rejected in *The City* is embraced in the community areas project.

Alongside the Social Survey Movement, pragmatist philosophy—itself to a large extent a product of the University of Chicago—looms large as a formative influence on the community areas mapping project. The relationship between pragmatist philosophy (particularly that of G.H. Mead and John Dewey) and Chicago sociology has been much commented on (Joas 1993, 1997; Venkatesh 2001; Gross 2007; Lewis and Smith, 1980; Fisher and Strauss, 1979a, 1979b), and there is compelling evidence that the ideas of pragmatism influenced the community areas project in particular, sometimes overlapping substantially with the influence of the Social Survey Movement. Park recognized this latter point and thought it important enough to bring to the attention of his students when speaking on the Social Survey Movement. In his lecture notes he wrote,

[I] have sought to define this larger movement of which the Survey Movement is a part. I have not given it a name.

I might call it the sociological movement; sociology has grown up during this period. Sociology seeks to analyze, describe and explain just these social facts upon which we are now seeking more and more to conduct our common life together[...] There has grown up in this same period a school of philosophy which is intimately associated with this movement. This is pragmatism. I can not



undertake to interpret pragmatism here or indicate its deeper connections with this movement of which I speak. It again has insisted on the importance of fact as over against mere speculation defining our larger views of life[...]

I might call this larger movement the pragmatic movement. I think I will. In this sense pragmatic would mean that fact is never quite a fact merely because it is investigated and recorded. It only becomes a fact in the fullest sense of the term when it is delivered and delivered to the persons to whom it makes a difference. This is what the survey seeks to do.<sup>23</sup>

Park's lecture notes make clear the connection that he saw between the pragmatist philosophy and the work of the social surveyors, in terms of their treatment of fact and value, their understanding of the relationship between the expert and the public and their interest in the analysis and explanation of observed social facts. The fact that he identifies professional sociology with this "larger movement" does not necessarily imply that Park saw himself as part of it, but the (admittedly very general) description of what sociology seeks to do here lines up well with the descriptions he gave elsewhere of what his own work sought to do; namely, to combine a theory of social life as artifactual with an experimental social science geared towards the understanding and control of it. In the essay, "The City as a Social Laboratory," Park wrote,

the new social order...is more or less of an artificial creation, an artifact. It is neither absolute nor sacred, but pragmatic and experimental[...]

Social science is now seeking, by the same methods [as natural science] of disinterested observation and research, to give man control over himself (Park 1952, p. 75).

In this passage, Park again refers to the "pragmatic point of view" (75), not as a fully elaborated, nuanced philosophical system but as a rough stand-in for the insight, shared by Mead, Dewey and Park himself, that social facts are the products of human social activity and that our social behavior in turn depends upon our interpretations—generated in the process of interaction—of those social facts (see Gross 2007, pp. 193–194; Joas 1993, pp. 20–22; for detailed discussions of Mead see Joas 1985; Lewis and Smith 1980, pp. 120–148).

Given the looseness with which Park wrote about pragmatism and the "pragmatic point of view," it is prudent to acknowledge that the influences of pragmatism and the Social Survey Movement on Chicago sociology overlapped. There are, furthermore, historical connections and interpersonal relationships beyond the University of Chicago Sociology Department that makes it difficult to keep separate the influence of those two intellectual traditions on Park and his colleagues. Before he produced *The Philadelphia Negro*, Du Bois had studied under William James at Harvard (as had Park), and Jane Addams of Hull House was both personal friendly and professionally affiliated with Dewey (who occasionally taught at Hull House) and Mead (Deegan 1988, pp. 251–253). The Chicago sociologists were in dialogue with pragmatist principles both directly, through the concurrent presence of Mead at Chicago and through Park's time studying with James at Harvard, and indirectly, though the social survey writings of Addams and Du Bois.

<sup>23</sup> Lecture notes, "Soc. 36." Robert Park Papers, Box 5.

Those overlaps notwithstanding, in at least one important respect the intellectual influence of pragmatism on Chicago sociology was not replicated by the social surveyors. Whereas the relationship between the expert and the public, innovative methods of empirical data collection and the relationship between scientific objectivity and the reform impulse were all explored by the social surveyors in ways that provided cues for Park and Burgess, Park and Burgess did not read the social surveyors as scholars with a vested interest in theorization and generalization.<sup>24</sup> Turning once again to Park's lecture notes, we find him writing:

the survey, as it is ordinarily conceived, is distinguished from other sociological investigations as to form and content. In form it is, as the name implies, an attempt to bring within a single viewpoint facts, of which the connection, viewed superficially, does not always appear. Its methods are statistical and descriptive, and are to produce a report which has the precision and accuracy and the impersonality of science.

As regards content, however, the survey is practical rather than scientific. It has been described as a kind of social and economic stocktaking, but it is at the same time a diagnosis. *It is intended less to develop general principles than to apply them to individual situations.*<sup>25</sup>

Emphasizing the politicized nature of the survey studies, Park argued to his students that the social surveyors were mostly interested in revealing the *particularly* abject conditions of the urban poor, immigrants or marginalized racial minorities, because such particularistic observations would make a stronger case for reform than a general theory that presented such conditions as consequences of the usual, perhaps even inevitable, course of urban development. Meanwhile, Park and Burgess themselves were interested, in the community areas project as in *The City*, in fitting their visualizations of the city into a larger theoretical framework that would allow them to elaborate a testable research agenda. To the extent that the social surveyors did elaborate research agendas for the future, they found few followers and little financial backing (see Bulmer et al. 1991, pp. 40–49 (on Pittsburgh), p. 184 (on Du Bois)).

The community area project was theory-laden and intimately tied to the notion of the city as ecology. Because they thought that the Survey Movement had few

<sup>24</sup> I predicate the above claim on Park's and Burgess's reading of the social survey literature because one could make a case that it was an unfair reading. The generalizing impulse was not absent from the authors of the social surveys. Du Bois was a polymath whose social theoretical ambitions were as great as those of Park and Burgess. Rowntree wrote that he undertook his study of York because it was "impossible to judge" a priori "how far the general conclusions arrived at by Mr. Booth in respect of the metropolis would be found applicable to smaller urban populations" (p. viii), and in his conclusion he suggested that his results in a "typical provincial town" were probably representative (p. 301). The Pittsburgh Survey, to the extent that it was theoretical, concerned itself seriously with the concepts of ecology and succession. The total survey was "an analysis of the social forces that shaped the city's growth" (Bulmer et al. 1991, p. 251). In his serial *Charities and Commons*, Kellogg grappled with a way to understand the "muddled metropolitan geography" of greater Pittsburgh (Greenwald and Anderson 1996, p. 69). Meanwhile, in his introduction to John Fitch's *The Steel Workers*, Kellogg stressed that this study of labor conditions concerned not just those in Pittsburgh but all those throughout the country who relied on the products of its massive industry (Fitch 1911, p. v). Although he did not present a general theory of urban growth to explain it, Kellogg clearly understood the significance that urban geography held for the self-understanding of his subjects and for the understanding of the surveyors.

<sup>25</sup> Lecture notes, "Soc. 36." Robert Park Papers, Box 5 (emphasis mine).

theoretical lessons to offer, Park and Burgess had to look elsewhere to develop their ideas about ecology. I will argue that G.H. Mead's philosophy provided important aspects of the theoretical framework that stood behind the community area mapping scheme.

A redirection and elaboration of ecological theory was crucial for the community area project to succeed as a basis for theoretical—and not just ethnographic—understanding of the city. Mead faced a related problem. As were practically all of his contemporaries in philosophy and social science, Mead was deeply challenged by the intellectual revolution initiated by Darwin, and much of Mead's philosophical writing was dedicated to the problem of explaining human action in a way that preserved the relevance of subjective meaning and interpretation. For Mead, this entailed theorizing about the distinctively human behavior of “role-taking” as a means to self-understanding and the understanding of others. Self-consciousness and communication are possible, Mead suggests, only when we are able to imagine ourselves in the role of the other and thus imagine a response to verbal and visual cues that we ourselves provide in communication. The “construction of a self” and, contingent upon that, intersubjective meaning, grow out of “any gesture by which the individual can himself be affected as others are affected...which therefore tends to call out in him a response as it would call it out in another” (Mead, quoted in Joas 1985, p. 108). The concept of role-taking as necessary for human communication was meant to be a bulwark against the reduction of human behavior to the study of animal behavior (Joas 1985, p. 53). Those who conducted ethnographies with the community area scheme in mind began with understandings of communication and meaning very similar to Mead's. The community areas were as they were because members of the community had a shared understanding of themselves and of the boundaries of their communities; in Palmer's words, these communities would be constantly “in a state of flux” as the intersubjectively determined meanings of boundaries and identities changed, but they could always be “pigeonholed” into the categories of the more permanent ecological landscape. The key to sound sociological investigation, according to Palmer, was to understand *both* the ecological basis of urban structure and the dynamics of communities build on top of that basis, without reducing the latter to the former.

## Census Tract Mapping

The third and final set of maps I consider here are those originally published in a series of three volumes of *Census Data of the City of Chicago*, for the years 1920, 1930 and 1934, respectively,<sup>26</sup> under the editorship of Ernest Burgess. 499 tracts were used in the 1920 volume, 935 tracts in the 1930 and 1934 volumes.<sup>27</sup> The institutional

<sup>26</sup> Although it was an off-census year, a volume was commissioned in 1934 by ordinance of the city council so that the city would have up-to-date information on the effect of the Depression on “changes of residences, occupation of dwellings, housing needs, health of the people, etc.” (Newcomb and Lang 1934, p. v).

<sup>27</sup> See Fig. 4. Fewer tracts were used for the 1920 census because Burgess and his colleagues were retrospectively reworking data that had already been collected, and they did not have the means to extract data along the lines of the smaller 935 census tracts that they used from 1930 onwards.

setting for the endeavor was the Chicago Census Committee, composed of the newly renamed SSRC at the University of Chicago and a number of local businesses and civic organizations<sup>28</sup> and working in cooperation with the US Bureau of the Census. The basic aim of the tract maps that the Census Committee produced was to partition the city into the smallest possible units, which could in principle be reassembled along any axis and made to represent the city in fundamentally different ways: “the small unit areas are adaptable to...internal combinations through which new knowledge is discovered” (Burgess and Newcomb 1933, p. xi). This final mapping project, then, represents another change of course for Burgess, and one that is perhaps harder to comprehend than the move from concentric zone mapping to community area mapping. The census tracts broke with the community areas and the concentric zones insofar as they were an attempt at a fully instrumental, theory-free representation of the city. The notion of census tracts distanced Burgess and his SSRC colleagues from their efforts to define bounded neighborhoods under the name of community areas that aligned with the collective self-understanding of the residents of Chicago. Although Burgess’s introductions to the published *Census Data* volumes express nothing but enthusiasm for the delineation of the census tracts as a major sociological achievement, they clearly no longer reflect what, in Palmer’s words, Park and Burgess “saw” in the city.

My commentary on the historical roots of the census tract project are briefer than the corresponding commentaries above on the concentric zones and the community areas, for three reasons. Firstly, as I have already noted, the census tract scheme deliberately eschewed theory. There was no von Thünen, Mead or Social Survey Movement clearly informing this mapping project and structuring its theoretical meaning. On the contrary, Burgess and his collaborators embraced and advertised the fact that the tract data would be useful to sociologists, businesspeople, public health officials, politicians and journalists alike. Secondly, the Chicago sociologists had less autonomy over this census tract project than over the two discussed above. Here, Burgess was contributing to an existing initiative with a history dating back to the US Constitution (although the census was admittedly undergoing significant transformations in the 1930s, given advances in statistical techniques and a dire economic climate; see Anderson 1988, pp. 159–190) rather than creating anew an explicitly sociological vision of the city. More than the University of Chicago Sociology Department, it was the prior work of the US Census Bureau that made the *Census Data* volumes and their maps possible. Finally, census tract mapping did not have a long afterlife in Chicago sociology. The census tract maps neither attained the iconic status of the

<sup>28</sup> In addition to the SSRC, the members organizations of the Chicago Census Committee were: the Chicago Association of Commerce, Chicago Church Federation, Chicago Community Trust, Chicago Council of Social Agencies, Chicago Department of Public Health, Chicago Plan Commission, Chicago Real Estate Board, Commonwealth Edison Company, *Chicago Daily News*, *Chicago Evening Post*, *Chicago Herald and Examiner*, *Chicago Tribune*, Illinois Bell Telephone Company, Northwestern University, People Gas Light and Coke Company and the Weibolt Foundation (Burgess and Newcomb 1931, p. 3).

concentric zone maps nor did they prove such a rich basis for further empirical study as the community area base map. The census tract maps are, to be sure, an important part of the legacy of the Chicago School, but they are primarily important for what they contributed to commercial life in Chicago, to social study in the public sphere and to the methodology of the national United States Census. When Chicago sociologists pursued their own ethnographic research in the wake of the *Census Data* volumes, they reverted to use of the community area mapping scheme, as in the several volumes of *Local Community Fact Books* (see Wirth and Furez 1938), or to a halfway point of “subcommunities,” defining neighborhoods more narrowly than the 75 community areas but nonetheless moving away from the theory-free cells of the *Census Data* volumes (Hauser 1938, p. 67).

A few comments are in order to situate the *Census Data* volumes in the longer history of the US Census. Before 1920, census data had been published in Chicago, as in most cities across the United States, by political ward, divisions that reflected political interest above all and changed every few years, thus making intra-city data comparisons, between neighborhoods and over time, very difficult. A significant move towards a new system was made in 1910, when census data in Chicago and several other major cities was collected and recorded by tract. The data was not published in this form, however, as it was deemed too expensive (Burgess and Newcomb 1931, pp. 1–2). The Chicago Census Committee’s achievement was to define a stable set of 935 tracts and find funding, from governmental and private sources, to make the publication of data by tract possible. Burgess and his colleagues at the Census Committee were eager to have Census data tabulated by tract available, and the US Census Bureau ultimately agreed to publish data by tract “within reasonable limits for the sake of making the census figures more useful to the people whom they represent” (Burgess and Newcomb 1933, pp. xi–xiv; Truesdell 1932, p. 79).<sup>29</sup>

After the publication of the *Census Data* volumes, several other cities followed Chicago’s model and began to collect data in terms of census tracts rather than political wards. As such, the *Census Data* volumes and the census tracts they constructed to partition the city have rightly become a central part of their legacy. In Martin Bulmer’s words, Burgess “may be fairly claimed [as] the father of modern census tract statistics, both by example and as a coordinator of pressure on the Bureau of the Census to make data available in that form” (Bulmer 1984, p. 157). But we ought to question why Burgess took the project on, when it was so conceptually at odds with his earlier work on the concentric circles and the community areas. The notion that Burgess did not care about the theoretical implications of his maps or their consistency over time seems unconvincing. There is textual evidence throughout this paper that Burgess and his colleagues cared deeply about theory and its implications for mapping, most notably in their engagements with ecological theory and references

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<sup>29</sup> Truesdell was Chief Statistician for Population of Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census.

to pragmatism. Yet Burgess acknowledged and embraced the fact that the census tract maps implied no particular theory about urban social organization. Indeed, that was one of the principal selling points of the mapping scheme and the accompanying *Census Data* volumes. It is equally implausible to suggest that the census tract project represented a permanent intellectual evolution for Burgess or the Chicago School. Burgess's later writings and those of his students stressed the concepts of community and neighborhood and built off the community area project much more than the two other mapping projects. The *Local Community Fact Books* and the subcommunities have already been mentioned. In 1930, the same year that Burgess published the second *Census Data* volume, he collaborated with Palmer on an LCRC-published volume, *Social Backgrounds of Chicago's Local Communities* (Burgess and Palmer 1930).<sup>30</sup> Ultimately the most satisfying answer is that Burgess himself, like the department of which he was a member, was willing to countenance some theoretical catholicity in the pursuit of new and promising empirical methods and interpretive frames.

## Conclusion

This paper has argued for the differentiation of three mapping schemes that were products of the University of Chicago Sociology Department in the 1920s and 1930s. The concentric zone scheme, the community areas scheme and the census tract scheme were all produced within a few years of each other and under the leadership of the same scholars, namely Robert Park and Ernest Burgess. The differences are not the product of competing visions from separate individuals working in a common department. Nor are the maps three progressive steps along the way to the elaboration of a single methodological and theoretical perspective, however loosely defined. Their underlying differences are the products of the Chicago sociologists following, at different moments, distinct theoretical insights and opportunities for empirical investigation.

My paper has outlined the theoretical implications of these three visions of the city, and, though a reading of archival and published papers, I have outlined likely sources of intellectual influence behind each of the schemes. The

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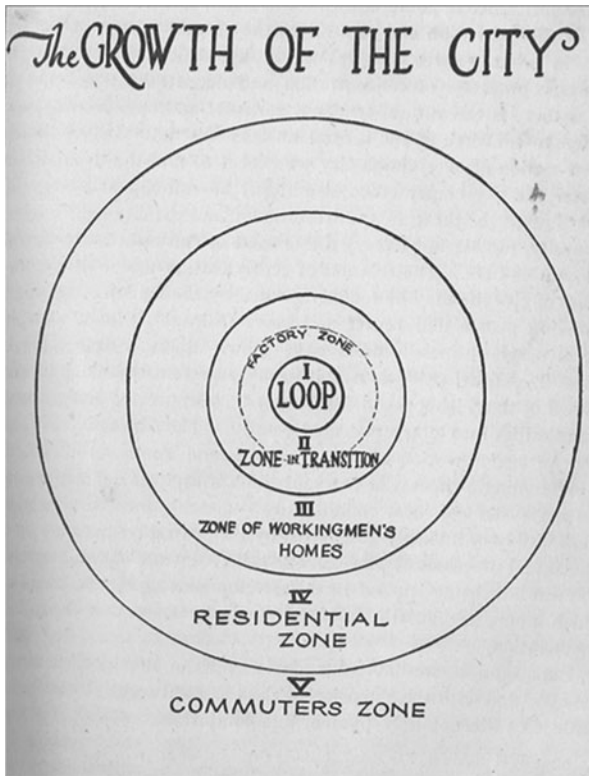
<sup>30</sup> There is even some evidence that Burgess had second thoughts about the census tract project when he still served on the Census Advisory Committee. In his papers he retained a letter from W.L. Austin at the Bureau of the Census to Ralph Goodman of the Chicago Census Advisory Committee. In the letter Austin urges continued adherence to the census tract scheme that was worked out in 1930, and in the final paragraph he writes, "Professor Burgess has been one of the most prominent members of the committee working on the present Chicago tracts and I am somewhat surprised that he should be urging this departure from the tract system which has been worked out through three decades of experience. The tracts for 1930 were revised by the committee with which he is identified." Unfortunately, Burgess's practice of not keeping copies of his own letters makes it difficult to know exactly what his objection was. W.L. Austin to Ralph Goodman, 15 October, 1940. Ernest Burgess Papers, Box 50.

concentric zone map is most plausibly traced back to von Thünen's model of agricultural development around an "isolated state," as well as Chicago boosters' early maps of the city. The community area project involved much more collective and empirical effort, and it depended not only on a more exhaustive investigation of the city itself but also on two distinct intellectual traditions, namely, the Social Survey Movement and pragmatist philosophy. Both traditions were deeply intertwined with the intellectual life of Chicago sociology: the Social Survey Movement through courses taught by Park and through the presence of Hull House in the city's North Side, pragmatist philosophy through the presence of Mead at the University and through Park's time as a student under William James. Plant ecology, discussed extensively in Park and Burgess's *Introduction* and in *The City*, served as the starting point for the urban ecological theory implied in both of the preceding mapping schemes. The census tract project, meanwhile, was a collaborative effort of political, academic and commercial interests in Chicago, and while Burgess mobilized the resources of the SSRC to delineate the tract boundaries and collect census data, he was more than happy for others to use the data to their own instrumental ends, without regard for the theoretical commitments of Chicago sociology.

A rough characterization of the progress from concentric zones to community areas to census tract mapping would be to say that Chicago sociology moved towards ever-increasing atomism and analytical precision in their maps of the city. This is true, and it is not a coincidence. In the period of interest, advances in techniques of data collection and analysis were beginning to make such increasingly exhaustive and precise empirical study possible (Stigler 1999, pp. 157–172; Porter 1986, pp. 18–39). Another pattern I have stressed in this paper is the gradual elaboration of the vision of the city as ecology, through the concentric zone and community area maps, then a turn away from that theory in the census tract maps. Ultimately, however, we should resist them impulse to fit the several Chicago mapping projects into a neat narrative of how the Chicago School visualized the city or how their vision of the city evolved over time. The distinct histories and theoretical implications of the mapping projects are noteworthy, but so too is the ability of Park, Burgess and their students to work with each of the schemes, sometimes simultaneously, visualizing and revising visions of the city in work that fueled empirical and theoretical advances in sociology for many years. Their impressive range should not invalidate any one of their projects for reasons of incoherence, but it should caution us against characterizing their "school" too simply or categorically.

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Appendix



**Fig. 1** Concentric zones. From Robert Park, Ernest Burgess and Roderick McKenzie. 1925. *The City*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1925



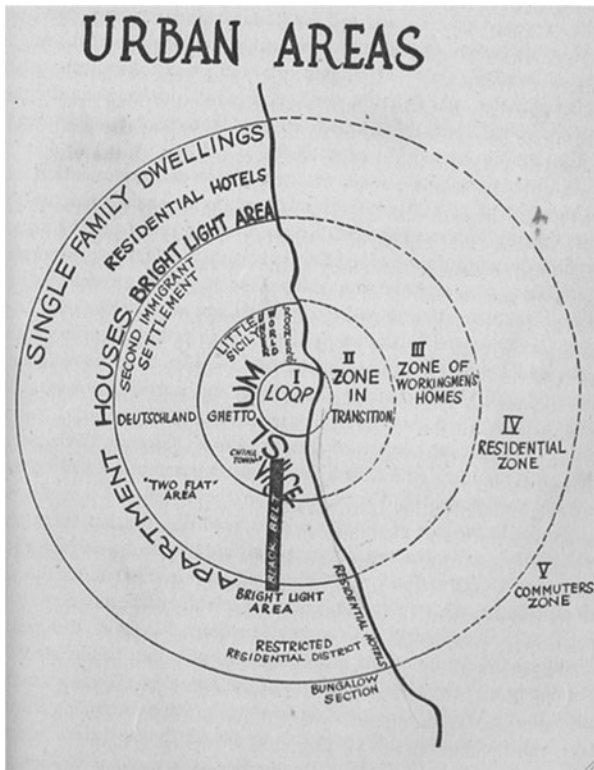


Fig. 2 Concentric zones, with demographic features of Chicago

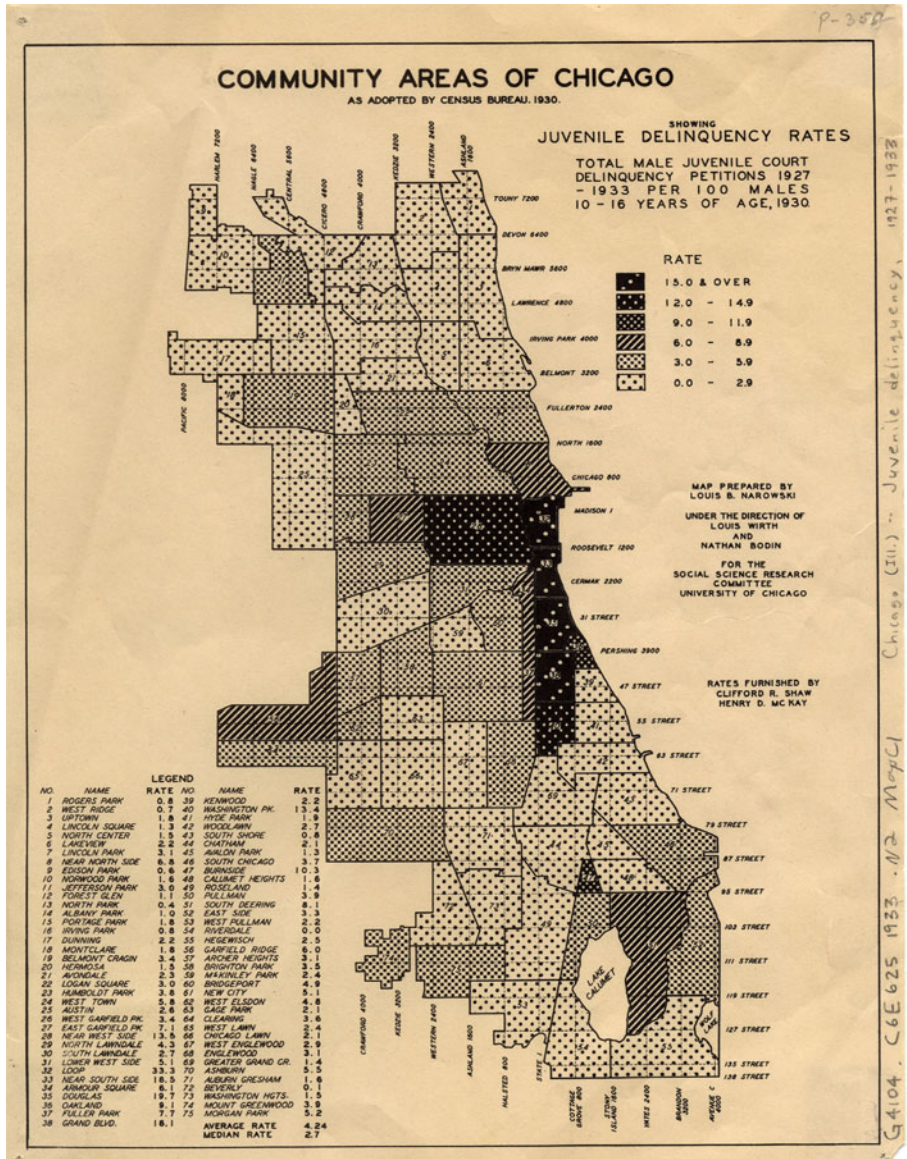


Fig. 3 Community area map, displaying juvenile delinquency rates. From the University of Chicago Map Collection, call number G4104.C6 E625 1933

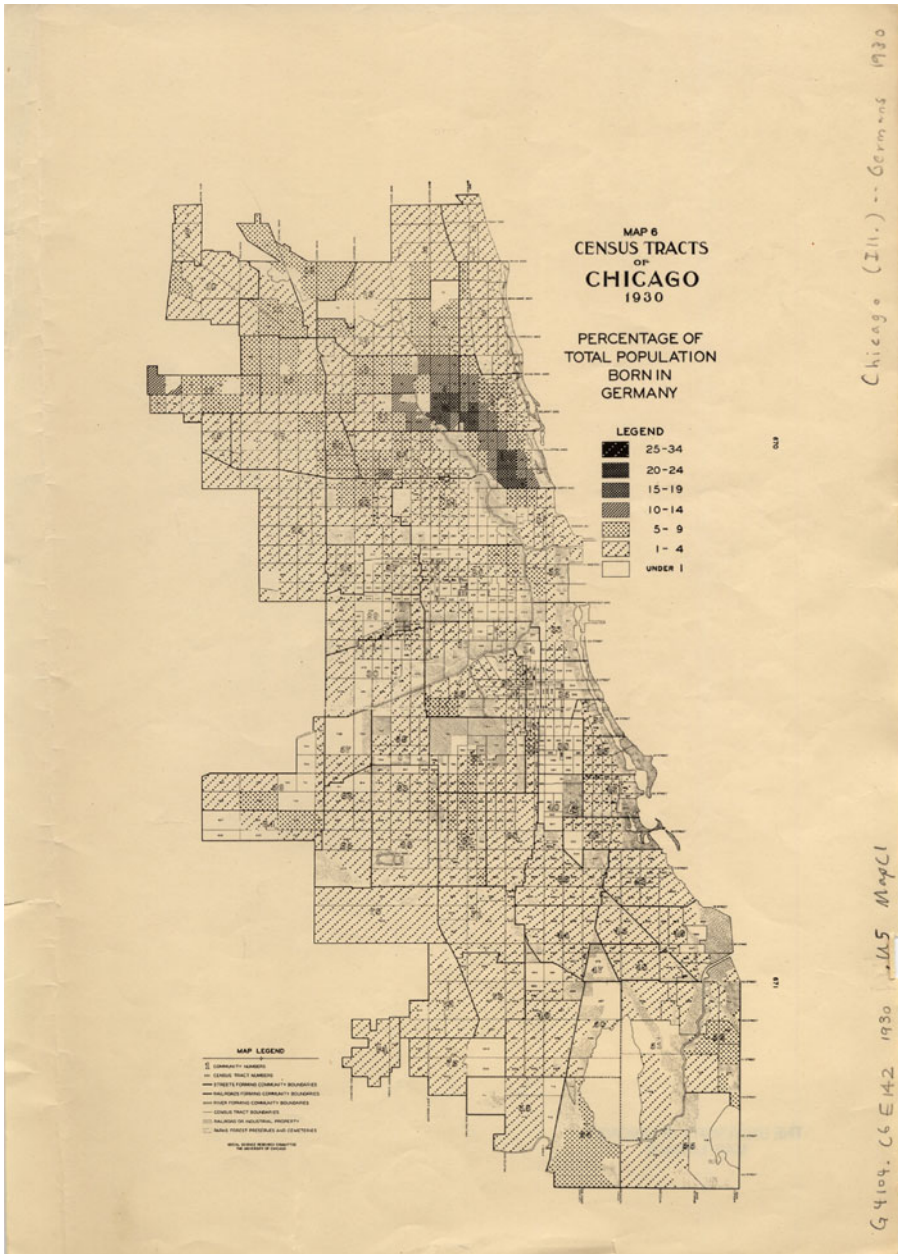


Fig. 4 1930 Census tract map, showing percentage of population born in Germany. From the University of Chicago Map Collection, call number G4104.C6E142 1930

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