

The social dimensions of modern urbanism

Key questions addressed in this chapter

- What are the principal attitudes towards cities in Western societies?
- How does urban living affect people's sense of identity?
- How are social networks structured?
- What are the main tenets of the Chicago School of human ecology?
- Why has the work of the Chicago School been so influential despite much criticism?
- How have the ideas of Georg Simmel influenced the study of social relationships in cities?

The spatial order of the city can only be properly understood against the background of the underlying dimensions of social organization and human behaviour in the city: the urban 'ultrastructure'. The suggestion is not, of course, that the spatial order of the city is subordinate to social factors; the influence of space and distance on individual behaviour and social organization will

be a recurring theme in this chapter as we explore the sociospatial dialectic in close-up.

7.1 Urban life in Western culture

The traditional view of the relationship between people and their urban environments has, for the most part, been negative. It is a view that persists. Public opinion and social theories about city life, together with the interpretations of many artists, writers, filmmakers and musicians, tend to err towards negative impressions. They tend to be highly deterministic, emphasizing the ills of city life and blaming them on the inherent attributes of urban environments.

Evidence from attitudinal surveys, for example, suggests that most people believe city environments to be unsatisfactory. Only one in five Americans thinks that cities represent the best kind of environment in which to live; 30 per cent nominate suburban environments, and 44 per cent nominate small town or rural environments. Data from European surveys show a similar anti-urban

leaning. People's satisfaction with their overall 'quality of life' and with several major components of well-being tends to decline steadily from rural to metropolitan environments. Such data, however, are notoriously difficult to interpret. A case in point is the apparent ambiguity of results that show people professing to prefer rural or small-town living but whose behaviour has brought them to the city, presumably in pursuit of a higher material level of living. The city thus emerges as neither good nor bad, but as a 'necessary evil'.

This lopsided ambivalence towards the city – a grudging functional attraction accompanied by an intellectual dislike – has long been reflected in the literature and art of Western society (including the idiom of popular songs). For every urban thrill and sophistication there are several urban laments and rural yearnings. Some writers have been able to demonstrate how the city has in addition been regarded as a catalyst, a challenge and a 'stage' for the enactment of human drama and personal lifestyle by certain schools of thought. Charles Baudelaire, writing in the mid-nineteenth century, was among the first to see in modern cities the possibility for transcending traditional values and cultural norms.

He saw that the city can turn people outward, providing them with *experiences of otherness*. The power of the city to reorient people in this way lies in its diversity. In the presence of difference, people at least have the possibility to step outside themselves, even if it is just for a short while. It is this quality that makes cities so stimulating to many of us. Yet the significance of the diversity of city life goes much further. As we are exposed to otherness, so our impressions of city life and urban society and the meanings we draw from them are modified and renegotiated. In this way, our cultures (i.e. systems of shared meanings introduced in Chapter 3) take on a fluidity and a dynamism that is central to the sociospatial dialectic.

7.2 Urbanism and social theory

These polarities are also present in the stock of social theories concerning city life. The strangeness, artificiality, individualism and diversity of urban environments have been seen by many social scientists as fundamental



The Galerie Vivienne (1823); a covered walkway of the nineteenth-century metropolis (Paris) and forerunner of the contemporary shopping mall. Photo Credit: Paul Knox.

influences on human behaviour and social organization. This deterministic and environmentalist perspective has had a profound effect on the study of urban social geography as well as on sociology and all the cognate disciplines. It stems from the writings of European social philosophers such as Durkheim, Weber, Simmel and Tönnies, who were seeking to understand the social and psychological implications of the urbanism and urbanization associated with the Industrial Revolution of the nineteenth century.

The kernel of this classic sociological analysis is the association between the scale of society and its 'moral order'. Basically, the argument runs as follows. In pre-industrial society small, fairly homogeneous populations contain people who know each other, perform the same kind of work and have the same kind of interests: they thus tend to look, think and behave alike, reflecting a consensus of values and norms of behaviour. In contrast, the inhabitants of large cities constitute part of what Durkheim called a 'dynamic density' of population, subject to new forms of economic and social organization as a result of economic specialization and innovations in transport and communications technology.

In this urbanized, industrial society there is contact with more people but close, 'primary' relationships with family and friends are less easily sustained. At the same time, social differentiation brings about a divergence of lifestyles, values and aspirations, thus weakening social consensus and cohesion and threatening to disrupt social order. This, in turn, leads to attempts to adopt 'rational' approaches to social organization, a proliferation of formal controls and, where these are unsuccessful, to an increase in social disorganization and deviant behaviour (see Box 7.1).

The Chicago School

The impact of these ideas on urban geography came chiefly by way of their adoption and modification in the 1920s and 1930s by researchers in the Department of Sociology in the University of Chicago (the so-called Chicago School) under the leadership of Robert Park, a former student of Georg Simmel. Like earlier theorists, Park believed that urbanization produced new environments, new types of people and new ways of life. The net result, he suggested, was 'a mosaic of little worlds

which touch but do not interpenetrate' (Park, 1916, p. 608). He encouraged the 'exploration' and empirical documentation of these social worlds by his colleagues and, as a result, there developed an influential series of 'natural histories' of the distinctive groups and areas of Chicago in the 1920s: juvenile gangs, hobos, the rooming-house area, prostitutes, taxi-dancers, the Jewish ghetto and so on. These studies represented part of an approach to urban sociology that became known as **human ecology**, the principles of which are discussed below.

Urbanism as a way of life

A closely related and equally influential approach to urban sociology also sprang from Chicago a few years later: the so-called **Wirthian theory** of urbanism as a way of life. Wirth's ideas, although they contained much of the thinking inherent to human ecology, synthesized a wide range of deterministic principles relevant to individual as well as group behaviour. Wirth, like Park, had studied under Georg Simmel and was heavily influenced by Simmel's (1969) work on 'The metropolis and mental life'. Putting Simmel's ideas together with work from the human ecologists, Wirth produced his classic essay, 'Urbanism as a way of life' (Wirth, 1969), which became one of the most often quoted and reprinted articles in the literature of the city. Wirth attributed the social and psychological consequences of city life (i.e. 'urbanism') to the combined effects of three factors that he saw as the products of increasing urbanization:

- 1 the increased size of populations;
- 2 the increased density of populations; and
- 3 the increased heterogeneity, or differentiation, of populations.

At the *personal* level the effect of these factors, Wirth suggested, is as follows: faced with the abundant and varied physical and social stimuli experienced in the large, dense and highly diverse city environment, the individual has to adapt 'normal' behaviour in order to cope. City dwellers thus become, for example, aloof, brusque and impersonal in their dealings with others: emotionally buffered in their relationships. Nevertheless, the intense stimuli of city environments will sometimes generate what has subsequently been dubbed a 'psychic overload', leading to anxiety and nervous

Box 7.1

Key trends in urban social geography – The growth of Bohemian enclaves

A major change in Western cities in recent decades has been the growth of so-called 'Bohemian enclaves'. Before considering these areas it is worth exploring the origin of this terminology. Bohemia is a region in what is currently the Czech Republic that over the years gradually gained a reputation for liberalism and religious tolerance. However, in the eighteenth century the term Bohemian mistakenly became associated with migrant peoples and especially with gypsies. The famous *Encyclopédie ou Dictionnaire Raisonné des Sciences des Arts et des Métiers* edited by Diderot and d'Alembert, published in Paris in 1775, referred to Bohemians as 'the vagabonds who are professional soothsayers and palm readers. Their talent is to sing and dance and steal' (Blom, 2004).

Later, in nineteenth-century Paris, the term Bohemian became associated with various artistic groups (e.g. writers, poets, intellectuals, painters, sculptors, musicians, students) who were considered to be transient, unconventional and 'gypsy-like' in their behaviour. These artists (together with their associates – dealers, publishers, models, students, friends, mistresses, etc.) congregated in the Montmartre area of Paris. This was an older, hilly, residential district, characterized by narrow streets of cheap rented housing that

had escaped the rebuilding undertaken elsewhere in the city. The lower slopes of Montmartre closer to central Paris were full of facilities that fostered the Bohemian lifestyle: street cafés, theatres, cabarets, nightclubs and brothels. This nightlife of *fin-de-siècle* Paris was made famous in the paintings by the artist Toulouse-Lautrec. Although sometimes romanticized, this was an area plagued by alcoholism, disease and sexual abuse. Montmartre also became an area of transgression by 'respectable' upper-middle class members of society and as it developed into something of a tourist attraction it was overtaken by another Bohemian enclave, Montparnasse, on the left bank of the river Seine. Although the term Bohemian is mostly associated with nineteenth-century Paris, all major European cities had their Bohemian enclaves; thus Dr Johnson referred to the poor writers of 'Grub Street' in London (now the Barbican area).

In essence, Bohemian lifestyles were seen as being in opposition to 'bourgeois' values of hard work, thrift and nuclear family life. However, David Brooks (2000) has argued that in recent years the distinction between bourgeois and Bohemian lifestyles has diminished. The growth of the 'cultural industries' in the late twentieth

century has meant that various non-conformists, eccentrics and mavericks have become incorporated into mainstream capitalist enterprises. Thus, it seems that every major city is now trying to foster its own artistic quarter, and corporations now tolerate and even encourage talented, creative, unconventional employees.

Key concepts associated with Bohemian enclaves (see Glossary)

Bohemia, creative cities, creative class, cultural industries.

Further reading

- Blom, P. (2004) *Encyclopédie: The triumph of reason in an unreasonable age* Fourth Estate, London
- Brooks, D. (2000) *Bobos in Paradise: The new upper class and how they got there* Simon & Schuster, New York
- Hall, P. (1998) *Cities in Civilization* Phoenix, London, Chapter 6

Links with other chapters

- Chapter 5: Box 5.6 The growth of culturally-driven urban regeneration
- Chapter 10: Box 10.4 The development of 'urban nightscapes'

strain. Furthermore, the loosening of personal bonds through this adaptive behaviour tends to leave people both *unsupported* in times of crisis and *unrestrained* in pursuing ego-centred behaviour. The net result, Wirth argued, is an increase in the incidence, on the one hand, of social incompetence, loneliness and mental illness and, on the other, of deviant behaviour of all kinds: from the charmingly eccentric to the dangerously criminal.

Wirth draws a parallel picture of *social* change associated with the increased size, density and heterogeneity of urban populations. The specialized neighbourhoods and social groupings resulting from economic competition and the division of labour result in a fragmentation of social life between home, school, workplace, friends and relatives; and so people's time and attention are divided among unconnected people and places. This weakens the social support and control of primary social

groups such as family, friends and neighbours, leading to a lack of social order and an increase in 'social disorganization'. Moreover, these trends are reinforced by the weakening of social norms (the rules and conventions of proper and permissible behaviour) resulting from the divergent interests and lifestyles of the various specialized groups in the city.

The overall societal response is to replace the support and controls formerly provided by primary social groups with 'rational' and impersonal procedures and institutions (welfare agencies, criminal codes supported by police forces, etc.). According to Wirth, however, such an order can never replace a communal order based on consensus and the moral strength of small

Box 7.2

Key thinkers in urban social geography – Walter Benjamin

A growing influence upon urban studies in recent years is the social critic Walter Benjamin. Born in Germany in 1882, as a Jewish intellectual he was forbidden a university post by the Nazi Party in the inter-war period and forced to flee to Paris where he gained employment as a journalist as well as a social critic. Only a small proportion of his extensive writings were published during his lifetime (he committed suicide in 1940 close to the safety of the Spanish border after the Nazi invasion of France) and even today some of these have not been translated into English. Furthermore, his writings, through extremely stimulating, have an enigmatic, almost poetic, quality. This ambiguity has led to a lively 'Benjamin industry' reinterpreting what he *really* meant. Indeed, some believe that his reputation is massively overrated. Nevertheless, his insights have inspired many contemporary scholars.

The main reason for this attention is Benjamin's famous 'Arcades Project', a description of the throbbing crowds in the covered shopping passages in the cities of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries – but most notably in Paris. Benjamin captured the enormous impact of the modernist metropolis upon the individual with his concept of the urban *flâneur* – the casual stroller through the city. According to Benjamin, the *flâneur* is enthralled and excited by the dynamism and diversity of the

city, but he is never overwhelmed by it. He is engrossed in the spectacle of the crowd but is incapable of participating in it fully.

The *flâneur* was essentially a phenomenon of the metropolis, since smaller urban areas did not display sufficient diversity to permit such voyeurism. Hence, the famous boulevards of Paris designed by Baron Haussmann gave plenty of scope for *flânerie* (see also Box 7.1 on Bohemia). The *flâneur* is also a product of the industrial capitalist city and the enormous display of wealth that it engendered. It is also generally accepted that the *boulevardier* is essentially a male character. In late nineteenth-century cities middle-class women, unless chaperoned, were very much confined to the domestic sphere – unaccompanied women on the streets were more likely to be street sellers or prostitutes. Benjamin felt that a supreme example of the *flâneur* was the poet Charles Baudelaire, who in his famous poem 'To a woman passing by' noted his flirtatious glances at a passing female stranger.

Benjamin saw much beauty in the city and thought many were blinded to this by their everyday urban existence. He was also a deeply troubled person and used his observations to uncover childhood memories, perhaps in the hope of understanding his younger experiences. Benjamin's reputation as an urban commentator continues

to grow and some have even argued that the modern surfer of the Internet is a form of electronic *flâneur*.

Key concepts associated with Walter Benjamin (see Glossary)

Commodification, *flânerie*, *flâneur*, gaze, modernism.

Further reading

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Benjamin, W. (1999) *The Arcades Project* Belknap, Cambridge MA. See also

Benjamin, W. (2002) From the Arcades Project, in G. Bridge and S. Watson (eds) *The Blackwell City Reader* Blackwell, Oxford

Latham, A. (1999) The power of distraction: distraction, tactility and habit in the work of Walter Benjamin *Environment and Planning D* 17, 451–74

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Links with Other Chapters

Chapter 9: Place, consumption and cultural politics

primary groups. As a result, situations develop in which social norms are so muddled and weak that a social condition known as *anomie* develops: individuals, unclear or unhappy about norms, tend to challenge or ignore them, thus generating a further source of deviant behaviour.

One of the persistent problems associated with Wirthian theory has been that the results of empirical research have been ambivalent. Most of the available evidence comes from four kinds of research: studies of helpfulness, conflict, social ties and psychological states. In general, the first two tend to support Wirthian theory, while the second two undermine it.

Studies of *helpfulness* have typically involved field experiments designed to gauge people's reactions to 'strangers' who, for example, reach 'wrong' telephone numbers with their 'last' coin, who have 'lost' addressed letters, who ask for directions and so on. The general drift of the results has been that city dwellers tend to be significantly less helpful than small-town residents. Studies of *conflict* show that both group conflict – racial, social and economic – and interpersonal conflict – certain categories of crime – are disproportionately likely to occur in large communities.

On the other hand, studies that have attempted to compare the number or quality of friendships or *personal relations* have generally shown no difference between different-sized communities, or have shown greater social integration among urbanites. Similarly, studies of *psychological states* such as stress and alienation show that the incidence of such phenomena is just as great, if not greater, in smaller communities.

The public and private worlds of city life

Accepting the validity of such findings, how might they be reconciled? One way is to re-examine the idea of urban social settings, recognizing the distinction between the public and the private spheres of urban life. The former consists of settings where people are strangers, which requires a special etiquette: reserved, careful, non-intrusive. In the public sphere, people must be, or at least appear to be, indifferent to other people. Richard Sennett contends that modern cultures suffer from having deliberately divided off subjective

experience from worldly experience, that we have – literally – constructed our urban spaces in order to maintain this divide:

The spaces full of people in the modern city are either spaces limited to and carefully orchestrating consumption, like the shopping mall, or spaces limited to and carefully orchestrating the experience of tourism . . . The way cities look reflects a great, unreckoned fear of exposure. 'Exposure' more connotes the likelihood of being hurt than of being stimulated . . . What is characteristic of our city-building is to wall off the differences between people, assuming that these differences are more likely to be mutually threatening than mutually stimulating. What we make in the urban realm are therefore bland, neutralizing spaces, spaces that remove the threat of social contact: street walls faced in sheets of plate glass, highways that cut off poor neighborhoods from the rest of the city, dormitory housing developments.

(Sennett, 1990, p. xii)

But avoiding 'exposure', whether through individual comportment or through urban design, is situational behaviour, not a psychological state, and says nothing about people's attitudes and actions in the private sphere. While city dwellers do not lose the capacity for the deep and long-lasting relationships, they gain the capacity for the surface, fleeting, restricted relationships. Fischer drew on this distinction, suggesting that urbanism is not characterized by distrust, estrangement and alienation among neighbours although it is associated with estrangement and alienation from 'other people' in the wider community. In other words, 'urbanism produces fear and distrust of "foreign" groups in the public sphere, but does not affect private social worlds' (Fischer, 1981, p. 306). In Wirthian terminology, this means that urbanism accommodates both 'moral order' and 'social disorganization'.

The self: identity and experience in private and public worlds

Questions about how individuals and social groups come to identify themselves and 'others' require us to reconsider how human subjects are constructed: how we come to think of ourselves within our worlds, both

public and private. This is a fundamentally geographical issue: as 'knowledgeable' subjects, our intentionality and subjectivity are grounded in social relations and direct experiences that are geographically bounded. They are bounded, moreover, by spaces occupied by other 'knowledgeable subjects', which means that our 'selves' are, to a certain extent, constructed by others. We have to accommodate to meanings, roles and identities imposed through the expectations of others.

In order to come to grips with this subjectivity we ought to begin with the 'unknowing subject' through

psychoanalytic theory. For some social scientists, this has carried the attraction of allowing us to admit human emotions such as love, desire, narcissism, anxiety, hate and suffering to our models and theories:

These . . . feelings are the core of our being, the stuff of our everyday lives. They are the foundations of all society. They come before symbolic meaning and value, lead us continually to reinterpret, hide from, evade and recreate thoughts and values. They inspire our practical

Box 7.3

Key thinkers in urban social geography – Jane Jacobs

There are two influential thinkers in the sphere of urban studies called Jane Jacobs. One, Jane M. Jacobs, is a notable contemporary urban theorist (Jacobs, 1996) but this section refers to an earlier writer of the same name. Indeed, few writers have been as influential in urban studies as the earlier Jane Jacobs. She was one of the few academics whose work moved beyond the confines of intellectual circles to influence planners, politicians and the general public (see also Boxes 2.2 and 11.2). Furthermore, although her most famous book *The Death and Life of American Great Cities* was published over 45 years ago (Jacobs, 1961), its message seems just as relevant today as when it first emerged.

Jacobs' work involves two main, inter-related, themes. First, she presented a powerful critique of the low-density, car-dependent, suburban sprawl that characterized US cities after the Second World War. She argued that the powerful zoning policies implemented in suburbia led to a lack of social diversity or social interaction. Second, she championed high-density urban living at a time when many were fleeing the centres of the major US cities. She enthused about the vibrant street-life to be found in high-density cities,

what she termed a 'sidewalk ballet' (Jacobs, 1961, p. 50). Rather than parks or gardens, Jacobs argued that what made for vibrant city life was relatively high densities coupled with social diversity. There were four basic elements in Jacobs' blueprint for a good city: short blocks, mixed land uses, old building mixed in with newer structures and densities of at least 100 units per acre. The role model for Jacobs' ideas was Hudson Street, Greenwich Village, New York, where she lived for many years, and where she found all of the four factors listed above.

Jane Jacobs' work has had a tremendous influence upon planning and is manifest in the 'smart growth' movement as well as the 'new urbanism'. Her emphasis upon downtown living has found a modern reflection in gentrification and the return of the 'creative class' to city centres. However, she would not approve of the social exclusion that often accompanies such inner-city developments. Jane Jacobs survived into her 90s and was living in Toronto when she died in 2006. Truly a legend in her own lifetime, her work is celebrated in a collected edition of her writings edited by Max Allen (1997).

Key concepts associated with Jane Jacobs (see Glossary)

Community, ethnic village, gentrification.

Further reading

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Links with other chapters

- Chapter 2: Box 2.3 Edge cities
- Chapter 7: Box 7.1 The growth of Bohemian enclaves
- Chapter 9: Neighbourhood and Community; Box 9.2 New Urbanism
- Chapter 13: Urban social sustainability

uses of rules and they are the reasons behind our reasoned accounts . . . Without feelings, there would be no uses for rules, ideas, or social structures; and there would be none.

(Douglas, 1977, p. 51)

This approach recognizes that people repress and re-structure their feelings in order to cope with the demands and expectations of others – ‘the construction of the false self’. This can be seen as the first step towards the creation of knowledgeable subjects whose personal and social identities are conditioned by various dimensions of lived experience such as family life, school, community, work and class consciousness. It follows that personal and social identities have to be seen as malleable and flexible, continually subject to negotiation. They are ‘stories told by ourselves about ourselves’ in order to cope with our experiences and to operate successfully in the urban settings in which we find ourselves. They are also part of what de Certeau (1985) called the ‘constant murmuring of secret creativity’ resulting from individuals’ attributing certain meanings to their relations with the world(s) around them.

The significance of this ‘murmuring’ is that it becomes embodied, in time, within cultural practices that constitute an ‘upward cultural dynamics’ that, in turn, engages dialectically with the cultural norms and meanings that are passed ‘downward’ by taste-makers, educators and all sorts of ‘experts’ in science, morality and art. In contemporary cities, the significance of upward cultural dynamics is widely accepted as being of increasing importance. In part, this can be attributed to the swing towards a more open social texture and people’s ability to choose from a multiplicity of lifestyle options and sociocultural contexts (Giddens, 1991).

7.3 Social interaction and social networks in urban settings

Most people are involved in several different social relationships, some of which are interconnected to some extent. We not only have friends, but know friends-of-friends; and kinfolk do not exist in isolation: we may get to know a complete stranger because he

or she is a member of the same club or organization as an uncle, an aunt or a cousin. The way in which these social linkages are structured is often very complex and, overall, they represent the foundations of social organization. Not surprisingly, therefore, the analysis of these linkages – known as social network analysis – has attracted a good deal of attention.

Social network analysis

Basically, social network analysis attempts to illustrate the structure of social interaction by treating persons as points and relationships as connecting lines. The analysis of social networks thus allows the researcher to map out the complex reality of the interpersonal worlds surrounding specific individuals, and has the advantage of not being confined, a priori, to any specific level of analysis such as the family or the neighbourhood. As with the analysis of other kinds of network – in transport geography and physical geography, for example – this approach facilitates not only the ‘mapping’ of the ‘morphology’ of networks (Figure 7.1), but also the quantification of certain key characteristics such as their ‘connectedness’, ‘centrality’, ‘proximity’ and ‘range’.

Empirical research on social networks has suggested that the number of *potential* contacts for interaction in the social networks of ‘typical’ urbanites (defined as white, male, married, about 40 years old, with a child in elementary school) in North American cities is about 1500, with *actual* networks averaging about 400 contacts. For the most part, these networks are loosely or moderately knit, with less than half of any one person’s network knowing one another independently of that person. Furthermore, very few of these social ties provide significant levels of support and companionship.

Any one person may belong to several different and non-overlapping social networks at the same time, and each of these networks may well have different properties: some may be spatially bounded while others are not; some may have dendritic structures while others are web-like, with interlocking ties, clusters, knots or sub-graphs. Early formulations of types of social network were based on the notion of a continuum of networks ranging from *looseknit* (where few members of the network know each other independently) to *closeknit* (where most members of the network know each other);

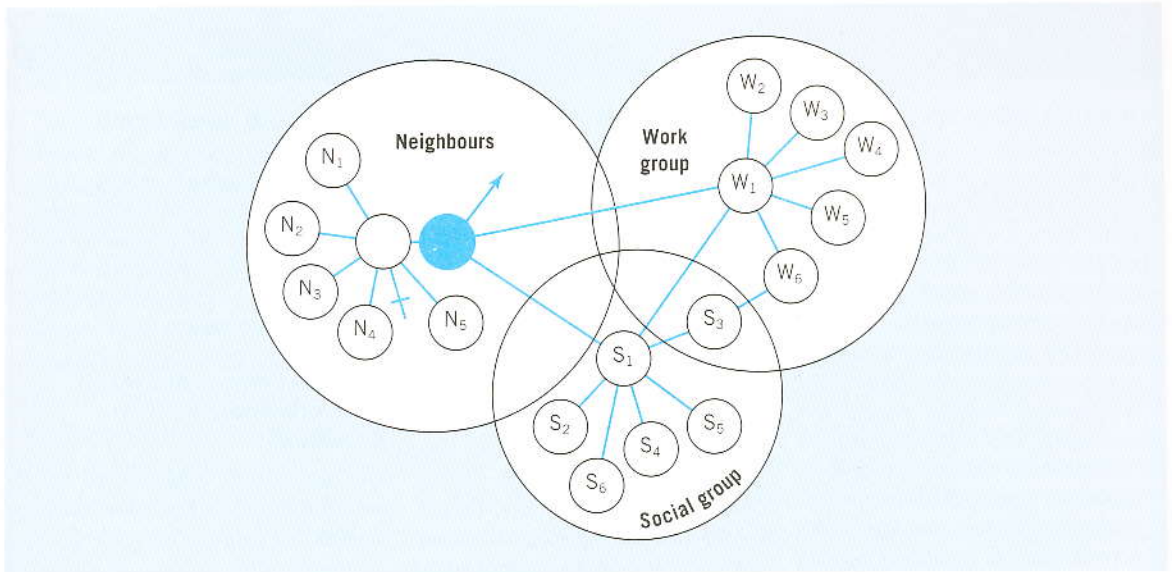


Figure 7.1 The morphology of a husband's social network.

Source: Smith and Smith (1978), p. 106.

but this presents practical difficulties in operationalizing a definition of linkage. Should it extend beyond kinship and friendship to acquaintance or 'knowledge of' another person, or what? And how is friendship, for instance, to be measured?

In an attempt to minimize such confusion, a typology of social situations has been proposed that incorporates the notion of the complexity as well as the structure of social networks (Figure 7.2). The typology can be illustrated by way of the extreme and limiting cases: 'A' and 'B' in the diagram. A is the traditional community as normally understood: social relationships are multiplex in that, for example, neighbours are workmates

are kinsmen are leisure-time companions, and the social network has a dense structure in that everyone knows everyone else. B is the situation of idealized urban anonymous *anomie*: social relationships are uniplex (the taxi driver and his fare), fleeting, impersonal and anonymous, and the social network structure is single-stranded in that only one person knows the others.

Some researchers have suggested – in contrast to the assertions of Wirthian theory – that self-help networks emerge in cities in order to provide help in many different contexts, and that their existence prevents formal welfare agencies from being swamped. The focus of these self-help networks is often the 'natural neighbour': a person with a propensity to become involved or make himself available in resolving the problems of other people, whether for self-aggrandizement, altruism or some other motive. They are usually untrained amateurs who may not consciously recognize their own role in helping others. Indeed, they may not actually provide any direct help themselves but act as 'brokers', putting people in touch with someone who can help.

But the study of social networks does not provide the urban social geographer with a sufficiently holistic approach: there remain the fundamental questions regarding the extent to which social networks of various kinds are spatially defined, and at what scales: questions that

		Structure		
Plexity		Dense	Looseknit	Single
Multiplex	A			
Simplex				
Uniplex				B

Figure 7.2 A typology of social situations.

Source: Bell and Newby (1976), p. 109.

Box 7.4

Key debates in urban social geography – How useful is network analysis?

One of the most important developments in the social sciences in recent years is the rise of various types of network analysis, and these have gradually begun to have an influence upon geography. There are two broad types. First there is *relational* network analysis focusing on the nature of the relationships between people and institutions. This is the most popular form of network analysis in geography, although it is a set of so far rather ill-defined approaches (see Box 10.2). Second there is *positional* network analysis that concentrates on quantitative analysis of the overall structure of networks.

Measures of structures include: *density*: the number of links (or ties) between members as a proportion of all possible links; *reachability*: the average number of links between any two members of the network (the greater is this number the more cohesive is the network); and *distance*: the average number of ties separating two actors in the network (the lower this number the closer are the people in the network).

Quite a large component of structural network analysis concentrates on sub-structures. For example, *cliques* are defined as groups of actors who are strongly linked to each other. *Clans*

are less cohesive groups in which actors are linked together through connections with others. *Cut-points* are nodes in the network that link together both cliques and clans. Unconnected networks are known as *blocks*.

Network analysis is promoted as being 'anti-categorical', meaning that it gives great explanatory power to the nature of relations between people rather than their ascribed characteristics such as class, gender, ethnicity or age. It is also argued that the approach is widely applicable to a broad range of social phenomenon ranging from people to firms. However, critics would argue that in practice network analysis often substitutes one category for another (i.e. linking people by categories of linkage and these can in any case be affected by standard social categories).

A further common criticism of positional network analysis is that it concentrates too much on the overall structure of networks and not enough on the significance of the linkages and what sorts of social exchange is being transacted within them. Relational analysis on the other hand often focuses upon the detailed nature of linkages but frequently without some notion of their overall significance in the wider network. One element so far missing in

a great deal of network analysis is its geographical dimension. Surprisingly, key questions as yet unanswered are how important is propinquity and the characteristics of places on the construction of networks.

Key concepts related to network analysis (see Glossary)

Anti-essentialism, essentialism, network society, spaces of flows, urban villages.

Further reading

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Links with other chapters

- Chapter 9: Neighbourhood and community
- Chapter 10: Box 10.2 What is the value of relational geography?

have as yet received little attention. This brings us to a consideration of the ideas of urban social ecology. Here, we must return once again to the foundational ideas of the Chicago School.

Urban ecology as shaper and outcome of social interaction

Because the deterministic ideas of Robert Park and his colleagues in the Chicago School of urban sociology have

been so influential, they merit careful consideration. The most distinctive feature of the approach adopted by the human ecologists is the conception of the city as a kind of social organism, with individual behaviour and social organization governed by a 'struggle for existence'. The biological analogy provided Park and his colleagues with an attractive general framework in which to place their studies of the 'natural histories' and 'social worlds' of different groups in Chicago. Just as in plant and animal communities, Park concluded, order in human communities must emerge through

the operation of 'natural' processes such as dominance, segregation, impersonal competition and succession. If the analogy now seems somewhat naive, it should be remembered that it was conceived at a time when the appeal of social Darwinism and classical economic theory was strong. Moreover, ecological studies of plants and animals provided a rich source of concepts and a graphic terminology with which to portray the sociology of the city.

One of the central concepts was that of impersonal competition between individuals for favourable locations within the city. This struggle was acted out primarily through market mechanisms, resulting in a characteristic pattern of land rents and the consequent segregation of different types of people according to their ability to meet the rents associated with different sites and situations. Economic differentiation was thus seen as the basic mechanism of residential segregation, and the local dominance of a particular group was ascribed to its relative competitive power.

Functional relationships between different individuals and social groups were seen as *symbiotic* and, where such relationships could be identified as being focused within a particular geographical area, the human ecologists identified *communities*, or *natural areas*: 'territorial units whose distinctive characteristics – physical, economic and cultural – are the result of the unplanned operation of ecological and social processes' (Burgess, 1964, p. 225). As the competitive power of different groups altered and the relative attractiveness of different locations changed in the course of time, these territories were seen to shift. Once more, ecological concepts were invoked to describe the process, this time using the ideas of *invasion*, *dominance* and *succession* derived from the study of plant communities.

The spatial model

These concepts were all brought together by Burgess in his model of residential differentiation and neighbourhood change in Chicago. Observations on the location and extent of specific communities formed the basis for the identification of an urban spatial structure consisting of a series of concentric zones (Figure 7.3). These zones were seen by Burgess as reflections of the differential economic competitive power of broad groups within society, whereas the further segregation of smaller

areas within each zone – such as the ghetto, Chinatown and Little Sicily within the *zone in transition* – were seen as reflections of symbiotic relationships forged on the basis of language, culture and race.

The *concentric zone model* was set out in terms of dynamic change as well as the spatial disposition of different groups. Zones I to V represent, in Burgess's words, 'both the successive zones of urban extension and the types of areas differentiated in the process of expansion' (Burgess, 1924, p. 88). As the city grew, the changing occupancy of each zone was related to the process of invasion and succession, and Burgess was able to point to many examples of this in Chicago in the early 1900s as successive waves of immigrants worked their way from their initial quarters in the zone of transition (Zone II) to more salubrious neighbourhoods elsewhere. In his diagrammatic model, some of the early immigrant groups – the Germans are explicitly noted – have already 'made it' to the area of superior accommodation in Zone III and become the dominant group, replacing second-generation American families who had moved out to colonize the outer residential zone (Zone IV).

Within this broad framework three types of study were produced by the school of human ecologists (Berry and Kasarda, 1977):

- 1 Studies focusing on the process of competition, dominance and succession and their consequences for the spatial distribution of populations and land use. Such work is best represented by the early writings of Park, Burgess and McKenzie described above.
- 2 Detailed descriptions of the physical features of 'natural' areas along with the social, economic and demographic characteristics of their inhabitants. Well-known examples of this type of work include Wirth's study of *The Ghetto* (1928) and Zorbaugh's portrayal of Chicago's 'near' North Side in *The Gold Coast and the Slum* (1929). Zorbaugh's work provides a good example of the intimate portrayal of individual social worlds set in the framework of broader ecological theory. The near North Side area was part of the zone in transition and contained four distinctive natural areas: the Gold Coast, a wealthy neighbourhood adjacent to the lakeshore; a rooming house area with a top-heavy demographic structure

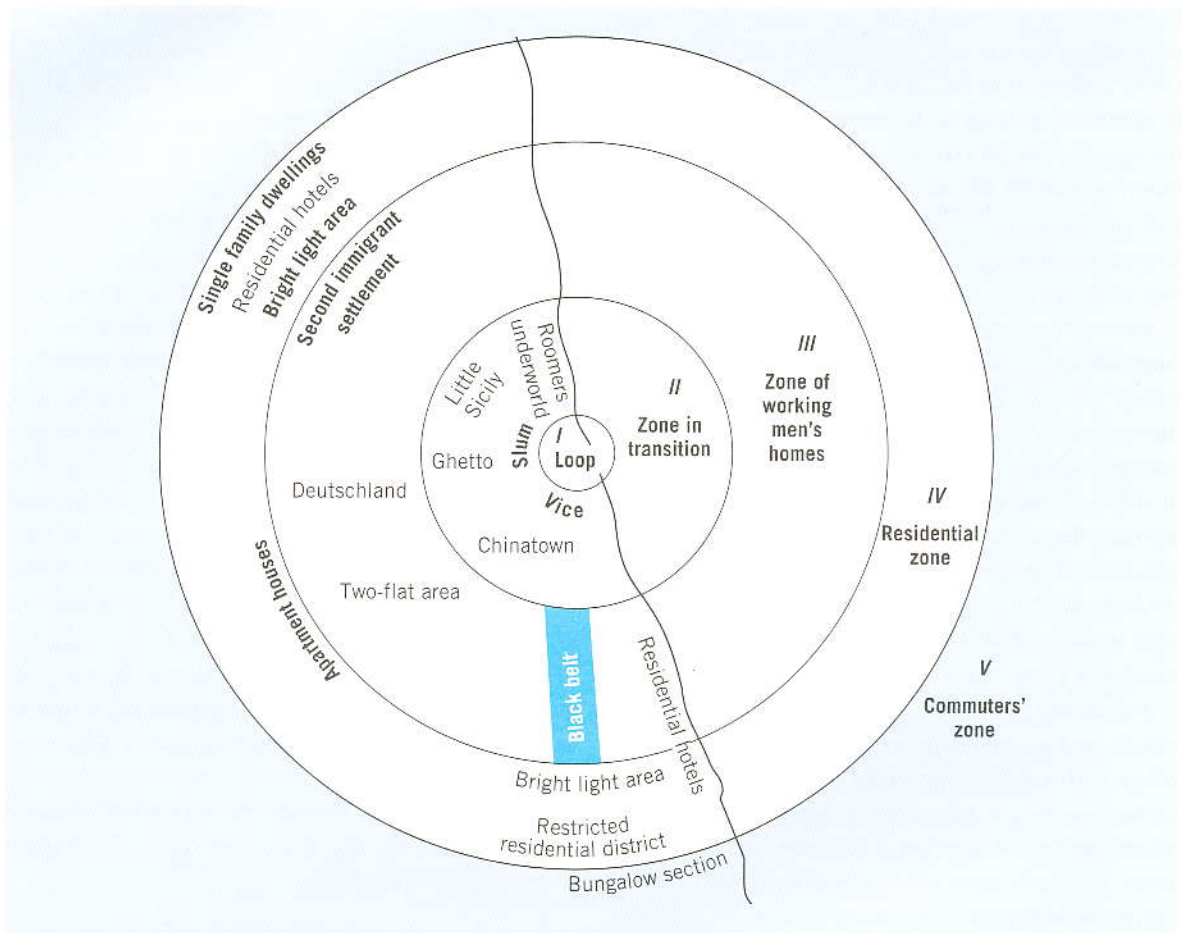


Figure 7.3 Burgess's zonal model applied to Chicago.

Source: After Park et al. (1925), p. 53.

and a high population turnover; a bright-lights district, Towertown, with brothels, dance-halls and a 'Bohemian' population; and a slum area containing clusters of immigrant groups. Zorbaugh showed how the personality of these different quarters related to their physical attributes – the 'habitat' they offered – as well as to the attributes and ways of life of their inhabitants. Moreover, he was also able to illustrate the dynamism of the area, charting the territorial shifts of different groups resulting from the process of invasion and succession.

- 3 Studies of the ecological context of specific social phenomena such as delinquency, prostitution and mental disorders. A central concern was the investiga-

tion of ecologies that seemed to generate high levels of deviant behaviour, and typical examples include the work by Shaw on *Delinquency Areas* (1929) and Faris and Dunham's work on *Mental Disorders in Urban Areas* (1939). Much of this work had a clear 'geographical' flavour since it often involved mapping exercises. It also provided the stimulus for a number of the more recent studies discussed in Chapter 10.

Criticisms of the ecological approach

Ecological research was neglected during the 1940s and 1950s following a series of theoretical and empirical critiques. The most general criticism was directed

Box 7.5

Key thinkers in urban social geography – Robert Park (1864–1944)

When most geographers think of the Chicago School of human ecology, working in the University of Chicago in the 1920s and 1930s, they think of Ernest W. Burgess and his famous concentric ring model of city structure. However, there was one person who arguably had a much bigger influence on the School during his 30 years in Chicago – Robert Park. The scholars who worked in Chicago during the 1920s and 1930s were, in fact, a highly diverse bunch who it seems at the time were not so convinced as subsequent generations of interpreters that they formed a distinctive school! Nevertheless, Robert Park was the key scholar who gave the school an overarching sense of purpose.

Park studied in Berlin under the pioneering German sociologist Georg Simmel and was greatly influenced by Simmel's ideas on the relationships

between territory and behaviour. He was also influenced by another founding father of sociology – Ferdinand Tönnies – but unlike European scholars Park was hostile to 'armchair theorizing'. Instead, he urged his students to walk the streets and mix with all the diverse forms of human life to be found in cities, ranging from the luxurious haunts of the rich to the skid rows of the destitute. Significantly, he had worked as a journalist before taking up the academic life. It is clear from Park's writings that, although he recognized that cities had their dark, dangerous and disordered sides, he found them exciting, stimulating and liberating places.

Key concepts associated with Robert Park (see Glossary)

Biological analogy, biotic forces, Chicago School, human ecology,

natural areas, social Darwinism, zone in transition.

Further reading

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Links with other chapters

Chapter 10: The geography of urban crime

Chapter 12: Residential mobility and neighbourhood change

towards the biological analogies, which had been brought into great disrepute by the parallel concept of *Lebensraum*, part of the theory of geopolitics used to justify some of the territorial claims of Hitler's Third Reich. Other criticisms were more specific, centring on the excessive reliance on competition as the basis of social organization, the failure of its general structural concepts (such as the natural area and concentric zonation) to hold up under comparative examination, and its almost complete exclusion of cultural and motivational factors in explaining residential behaviour.

This last criticism was perhaps the most damaging of all. The first (and therefore best-known) critic of the Chicago School, on the grounds that they overlooked the role of 'sentiment' and 'symbolism' in people's behaviour, was Walter Firey, who pointed to the evidence of social patterns in Boston where, although there were 'vague concentric patterns', it was clear that the persistence of

the status and social characteristics of distinctive neighbourhoods such as Beacon Hill, The Common and the Italian North End could be attributed in large part to the 'irrational' and 'sentimental' values attached to them by different sections of the population (Firey, 1945). In short, social values could, and often did, override impersonal, economic competition as the basis for socio-spatial organization. Firey's work is significant in that it directed the attention of geographers and sociologists to the importance of the subjective world in the understanding of social patterns in cities.

In fairness to the Chicago School, it should be acknowledged that they themselves did not regard their ideas on human ecology as either comprehensive or universally applicable. Park, for instance, clearly distinguished two levels of social organization: the *biotic* and the *cultural*. The former, he argued, was governed by impersonal competition whereas the latter was shaped by the

consensus of social values. These cultural aspects of social organization clearly encompass Firey's notions of sentiment and symbolism, and Park and his colleagues were well aware of their influence. Park believed, however, that it was possible to study the biotic level of social organization separately, treating social values and communications as a kind of superstructure of the more basic level of the community. It is thus not so much the denial of non-biotic factors as the inadequacy of their treatment that led to the unpopularity of traditional human ecology.

Social interaction in urban environments

A quite different approach to the study of social organization in urban environments has developed from the pursuit of another of Georg Simmel's suggestions: that the essentials of social organization are to be found in the *forms of interaction* among individuals. For geographers, it is the qualities of the *nature* and *intensity* of interaction that hold most interest. It is common for the nature of social interaction to be classified according to whether it takes place in the context of primary or secondary settings. Primary relationships include those between kinfolk – based on ties of blood and duty – and those between friends – based on ties of attraction and mutual interest. Beyond this distinction, the nature of primary relationships may be further qualified. For example, family relationships may be differentiated according to whether the setting is a 'nuclear' unit – a couple and their offspring – or an 'extended' unit that includes members of more than two generations. Interaction between friends may be differentiated according to whether the friendship is based on age, culture, locality and so on.

Secondary relationships are more purposive, involving individuals who group together to achieve particular ends. Such relationships are conveniently subdivided into those in which there is some intrinsic satisfaction in the interaction involved – known as 'expressive' interaction – and those in which the interaction is merely a means of achieving some common goal – 'instrumental' interaction. Both kinds are normally set within a broad group framework. Expressive interaction,

for example, is typically facilitated by voluntary associations of various kinds: sports, hobby and social clubs, and 'do-gooding' associations. Instrumental interaction, on the other hand, normally takes place within the framework of business associations, political parties, trade unions and pressure groups.

Social distance and physical distance

The difficulties of conceptual and empirical classifications of different types of interaction are compounded by the fact that the propensity for, and intensity of, interaction of all kinds is strongly conditioned by the effects of distance: both *social distance* and *physical distance*. There is, however, some overlap in practice between these two concepts of distance; and a further level of complexity is introduced by the fact that patterns of interaction are not only affected by the physical and social structure of cities but that they themselves also have an effect on city structure. Unravelling the processes involved in this apparently indivisible chain of events is a central concern of urban social geography. Before proceeding to a consideration of more complex situations, however, some initial clarification of the role of social and physical distance is in order.

The idea of *social distance* has a long history, and is sharply illustrated by Bogardus's (1962) attempt to measure the perceived social distance between native-born white Americans and other racial, ethnic and linguistic groups. He suggested that social distance could be reflected by a ranked scale of social relationships which people would be willing to sanction: the further up the scale, the closer the perceived distance between people:

- 1 to admit to close kinship by marriage;
- 2 to have as a friend;
- 3 to have as a neighbour on the same street;
- 4 to admit as a member of one's occupation within one's country;
- 5 to admit as a citizen of one's country;
- 6 to admit only as a visitor to one's country;
- 7 to exclude entirely from one's country.

It is now generally accepted that the less social distance there is between individuals, the greater the probability of interaction of some kind. Similarly, the greater the physical proximity between people – their ‘residential propinquity’ – the more likelihood of interaction of some kind. The exact influence of social and physical distance depends to some extent on the nature of the interaction concerned, however. Instrumental interaction related to trade unions or political parties, for instance, will clearly be less dependent on physical distance than instrumental interaction that is focused on a local action group concerned with the closure of a school, the construction of a power station, or the organization of a block party.

In most cases, of course, the influences of social and physical distance are closely interwoven and difficult to isolate. Membership of voluntary associations, for example, tends to reflect class and lifestyle, with participation depending largely on social distance. Middle-class groups, in particular, have a propensity to use voluntary associations as a means of establishing and sustaining social relationships. But, because of the close correspondence between social and residential segregation, membership of such associations is also strongly correlated with locational factors.

Geographers, of course, have a special interest in the role of distance, space and location. There is, however, no real consensus on the role of propinquity in stimulating or retarding social interaction. The constraints of distance are rapidly diminishing in the ‘shrinking world’ of modern technology and mass communications. Improvements in personal mobility, combined with the spatial separation of home, workplace and recreational opportunities, have released people from neighbourhood ties. But not everyone, of course, benefits from mobility to the same extent: some people are ‘localites’, with restricted urban realms; others are ‘cosmopolites’, for whom distance is elastic and who inhabit a social world without finite geographical borders.

This tendency towards an aspatial basis for social interaction has been seen by others as a result not so much of increased personal mobility as a product of modern city planning and social values. Colin Ward, for example, argued that modern housing estates have ‘annihilated’ community spirit and replaced it with a parental authoritarianism that restricts the outdoor

activities of children and so retards the development of locality-based friendships from the earliest years of a person’s life (Ward, 1978). Similarly, Susan Keller has claimed that there has been a widespread decline of both organized and spontaneous neighbouring in America because of the combined effects of changes in economic organization and social values. She attributes the decline in neighbouring to four factors:

- 1 the presence of multiple sources of information and opinion via mass media, travel, voluntary organizations and employment away from the local area;
- 2 better transport beyond local boundaries;
- 3 increased differentiation in people’s interests and desires, and greater differentiation in rhythms of work, resulting in less inclination and ability, respectively, to interact with neighbours;
- 4 better social services and greater economic security.

Against such arguments we must set the observation that the residential neighbourhood continues to provide much raw material for social life, especially for relatively immobile groups such as the poor, the aged and mothers with young children. Even the more mobile must be susceptible to chance local encounters and the subsequent interaction that may follow; and most householders will establish some contact with neighbours from the purely functional point of view of mutual security.

The most telling argument in support of the role of propinquity is the way that residential patterns – whether defined in terms of class, race, ethnicity, lifestyle, kinship, family status or age – have persistently exhibited a strong tendency towards spatial differentiation. In a pioneering study, Duncan and Duncan showed that the residential segregation of occupational groups in Chicago closely paralleled their social distance and that the most segregated categories were those possessing the clearest rank, i.e. those at the top and the bottom of the socio-economic scale (Duncan and Duncan, 1955). Subsequent studies of socio-economic groups elsewhere and of racial and ethnic groups in a wide variety of cities have all reported a significant degree of residential segregation. The persistence of such patterns requires us to look more closely at the sociocultural bases of residential segregation.

Box 7.6

Key films related to urban social geography – Chapter 7

Diner (1982) An excellent portrayal of young adults growing up in Baltimore.

The Godfather (1971) Something of a soap opera, but nevertheless a compelling depiction of turf wars among immigrant communities in early twentieth-century urban America. *The Godfather 2* (1974) is even better in this respect.

Grand Canyon (1991) A little contrived, but a thought-provoking and ultimately life-affirming consideration of issues of race, identity and power in Los Angeles.

It's a Wonderful Life (1946) Sickly and sentimental, but also with very dark undertones, this is a classic portrayal of US suspicion of big-city life and a celebration of small-town living.

Magnolia (1999) It is difficult to summarize this ambitious, multiplotted film except to say that it deals with many issues in contemporary US city life. Various sombre, moving, upsetting and amusing, this is a stunning piece of moviemaking.

Mean Streets (1973) A film dealing with life in the New York underclass, plus a path-breaking rock sound track.

Metropolis (1926) A mixture of science fiction and gothic horror, this early film by Fritz Lang is a nightmarish vision of modernism taken to

extremes in a futuristic city in which a populace is enslaved. Visually impressive.

Midnight Cowboy (1969) An Oscar winner focusing on the plight of the marginalized in New York in the late 1960s. A much-celebrated film but one also thought by some to be shallow and superficial.

Paris Texas (1984) A film dealing with family life and the sometimes broken relations between men and women. Set in Los Angeles, Huston and the deserts of the South West, this is a distinctive 'European' take on US cities by German director Wim Wenders. Very slow at times but visually stunning, richly atmospheric and accompanied by a great soundtrack from guitarist Ry Cooder.

Short Cuts (1993) A movie that is similar to *Magnolia* in that it is a multiplotted consideration of contemporary suburban life in the United States (in this case the San Fernando Valley in California). However this film, directed by the much-acclaimed director Robert Altman, is a little less sombre in tone than *Magnolia*.

A Short Film About Love (1988) A film by the brilliant Polish director Krzysztof Kieslowski about the loss of community and the difficulty of finding love in the modern city. It sounds grim but this is ultimately a life-affirming movie by a cinematic

genius (hence anything else by this director is also worth seeing).

Taxi Driver (1976) A now classic portrayal of the US urban dystopia. But beware if you do not like nasty, violent endings.

Trainspotting (1995) Both comic and at times very disturbing, a portrayal of the cynicism surrounding a group of drug takers. Interesting for a depiction of Edinburgh that is far from the usual cultural and tourist image.

Tokyo Story (1953) According to many film critics this is one of the greatest movies ever made (it is in many film fans' top ten). Moving, sad and poignant, but never sentimental, the cult director Ozu portrays the differences between the values of older generations in rural Japan and their modern, urban-dwelling offspring. Essential viewing for all true film buffs.

Wings of Desire (1987) Another enigmatic film by Wim Wenders, it focuses upon the desires of angels who listen in to the thoughts of city dwellers. A film that divides opinion but which is full of memorable images of Berlin.

Witness (1985) A great thriller but also a portrait of the Amish, a religious sect whose puritanism and communal solidarity is skilfully contrasted with the dark side of US city life.

Box 7.7

Key novels related to urban social geography – Chapter 7

The Graduate (1963) Charles Webb. Less famous than the film but nevertheless another readable satire of 1960s US suburbia.

Manhattan Transfer (1925) Dos Passos. Lacking a conventional plot, this novel is an amalgam of many urban dwellers' experiences of the alienation engendered by the twentieth-century metropolis (New York).

Rabbit, Run (1960) John Updike. This novel, together with the three sequels (*Rabbit, Redux* (1971), *Rabbit is Rich* (1980) and *Rabbit at Rest* (1990) charts the changing fortunes of a US suburban male in the post-war years.

Revolutionary Road (1955) Richard Yates. Something of a cult novel, this is yet another tale documenting

thwarted ambitions in 1950s Fordist suburbia. Downbeat material but superbly constructed (and recently made into an award-winning film).

White Noise (1985) Don DeLillo. A satirical look at US post-modern suburban culture.

Chapter summary

- 7.1 Western attitudes towards urban living are characterized by hostility, yet cities are also seen as centres of diversity and opportunity.
- 7.2 The Chicago School of urban sociology interpreted cities through analogy with ideas from plant and animal ecology. Wirthian ideas stressed the destabilizing effect of increasing size, density and heterogeneity of population on existing social norms. Subsequent research has stressed that personal identities are critically influenced by factors such as class, community, work and family.
- 7.3 People belong to different, non-overlapping social networks that vary in structure and intensity. Although highly influential, the ideas of the Chicago School failed to adequately reconcile the relationships between 'economic' and 'cultural' factors in cities. Physical and social distance are intimately connected in urban areas.

Key concepts and terms

Chicago School
concentric zone model
dominance
'expressive' interaction
human ecology
impersonal competition
'instrumental' interaction

invasion
natural areas
'primary' relationships
'psychic overload'
secondary relationships
segregation
social Darwinism

social distance
subjectivity
succession
Wirthian theory
zone in transition

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