

Principles of Sociology

DEPARTMENT OF ECONOMICS

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**Urban Sociology: Forms of urbanization
in contemporary social world**

**The early sociological
approaches to urbanization**

- ***Ferdinand Tönnies (1855- 1936)***
- Tönnies was particularly concerned about the effects of city life on social bonds and solidarity.
- Tönnies argued that the process of urbanization, which occurred with the Industrial Revolution, radically changed social life.
- He supported that the industrialized, modern societies had been marked by a profound transformation in terms of social relationships.
- He pointed out the transition from *Gemeinschaft* to *Gesellschaft* .
- *The term Gemeinschaft refers to the* community bonds, which are based on traditional, close-knit ties, personal and steady relationships between neighbors and friends, and a clear understanding of one's social position and intentions.
- The term *Gesellschaft refers to the 'associational'* bonds, namely relatively short-lived, fleeting, transitory and instrumental social ties.

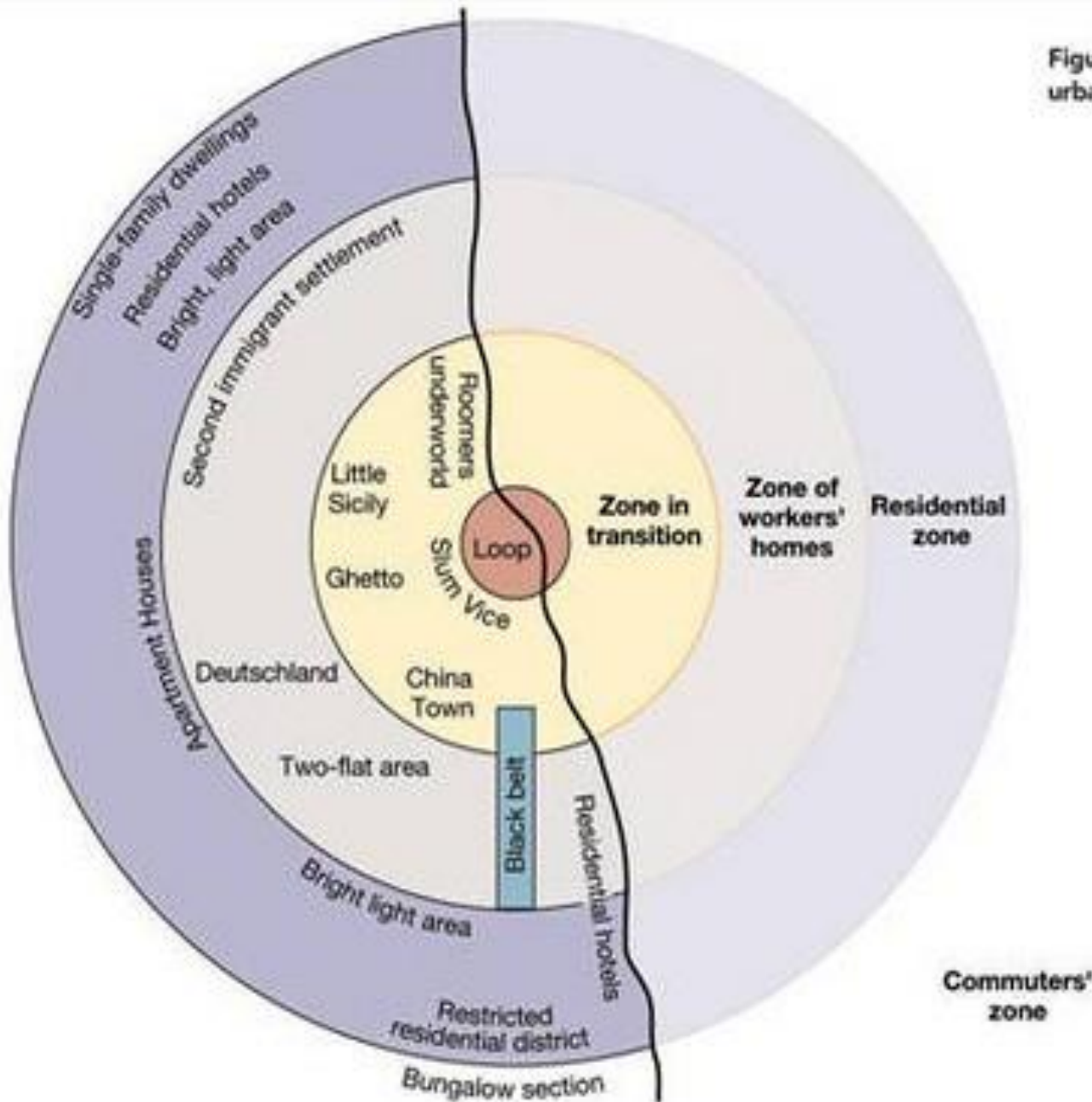
- ***Georg Simmel (1858-1918)***

- According to Simmel, city dwellers are bombarded with images, impressions, and sensations.
- In front of this condition, people attempt to protect themselves from the assault of ‘changing images’ by becoming quite blasé and disinterested, adopting a ‘seen-it-all-before’ attitude.
- By adopting this blasé attitude city-dwellers distance themselves from one another emotionally.
- Individuals are experienced day-to-day many fleeting contacts with other people, and so they seem to result in an ‘urban reserve’ in interactions with others.
- This urban experience seems to be largely emotionless and cold, leading to widespread feelings of impersonality and even isolation.
- Simmel also argues that the fact that the city is ‘the seat of the money economy’ entails profound effects on individual’s personality.
- The life in urban capitalistic financial centers demands punctuality, rational exchange and an instrumental approach to business.
- This condition demotivates people from developing emotional connections with one another and encourages rational, hard-headed, impersonal dealings between people, who are transformed to ‘calculating minds’.

- *The Chicago School (1920-1940) [R. Park, E. Burgess, L. Wirth]*
- *The ecological approach*
- Ecology is a term taken from a physical science and refers to the study of the adaptation of plant and animal organisms to their environment.
- In the natural world, organisms tend to be distributed in systematic ways over the terrain, such that a balance or equilibrium between different species is achieved.
- Processes of competition, invasion and succession are presented also in urban areas.
- The Chicago School argued that the sitting of major urban settlements and the distribution of different types of neighborhood within them could be understood in terms of similar principles.
- In the initial stages of the growth of modern cities, industries congregate at sites suitable for the raw materials they need, close to supply lines. Populations cluster around these workplaces, which come to be increasingly diversified as the number of the city's inhabitants grows. The amenities thus developed become correspondingly more attractive, and greater competition develops for their acquisition.

- The rising of land values and property taxes making it harder for families to carry on living in the central neighborhood, except in cramped conditions or in decaying housing where rents are still low.
- The centre is dominated by businesses and entertainment.
- The more affluent private residents move out to newly forming suburbs around the perimeter.
- This process follows transport routes, since these minimize the time taken in travelling to work.
- Processes of invasion and succession occur within the segments of the concentric rings. Thus, as property decays in a central or near-central area, ethnic minority groups might start to move into it. As they do so, more of the pre-existing population start to leave, precipitating a wholesale flight to neighborhoods elsewhere in the city or out to the suburbs.
- **Criticism**
- The tendency of ecological perspective to view urbanization as a 'natural' process ends up neglecting the decisive role of conscious design and planning in city organization.

Figure 11.8 The ecological model of urban land use: Chicago in the 1920s



- **Urbanism ‘as a way of life’**
- **Louis Wirth** (1897-1952) perceived urbanism as a whole way of life, not an experience limited to some areas of society. To Wirth, urbanism consists of a type of social existence.
- One fundamental trait of urban experience is what Wirth called ‘secondary contacts’.
- The term ‘secondary contact’ differ from ‘primary contacts’, namely the contacts that sustain communal and family bonds.
- ‘Secondary contacts’ refer to the fleeting and impersonal contacts between city-dwellers.
- This type of contacts have many times an instrumental character, as they function as means to some goals.
- According to Wirth, those who live in urban areas tend to be highly mobile, moving around to find work and to enjoy leisure and travel. Thus, the social bonds between them are feeble.
- Another reason for the weak social ties has to do with the competitive character of urban life.
- Nevertheless, Wirth recognized that modern cities were centers of freedom, toleration and progress.
- Wirth also saw that urbanism spread beyond city boundaries, as the process of suburbanization, with all of its necessary transport systems and infrastructure shows.

Later sociological approaches to urbanization

- **The city as the field of opportunities and diversity**
- Claude Fischer (1984) pointed out that urban way of life consists of a social condition that promotes the development of diverse subcultures.
- City-dwellers have the possibility to collaborate with others of similar backgrounds or interests to develop local connections.
- Urban social space is an open space for the creation of various types of social groups (religious, ethnic, political and other subcultural groups).
- A large city is a ‘world of strangers’, yet it supports and creates personal relationships.
- Modern cities do frequently involve impersonal, anonymous social relationships, but they are also sources of diversity and, sometimes, intimacy.

- **Urbanization and capitalism: D. Harvey and M. Castells**

- According to *David Harvey*, urbanism is one aspect of the created environment brought about by the spread of industrial capitalism.
- In the modern industrialized world, the division between city and countryside is not clear, as agricultural production is largely mechanized and oriented to profit-making, just like industrial work.
- This historical process had as outcome the development of similar modes of living both for urban and rural people.
- Harvey argues that space is continually restructured.
- The process of spatial restructuration is determined *a)* by private companies' choices concerning the installation of their factories, research and development centers, *b)* by governments' policies over land and taxation, and *c)* by the activities of private investors-real estate agents.

- **Manuel Castells** argues that the physical shape of cities is a product of both market forces and the power of government.
- Government utilize the means of taxation and public investments on infrastructure, in order to ‘produce’ the urban space and to ‘define’ the conditions of city life.
- Government policies determine the quality and level of ‘collective consumption’ (Schools, transport services and leisure amenities etc.).
- Large corporations, banks and insurance companies provide capital for building projects, and in that sense these private agents largely control the processes of urban space’s production.
- Castells underlines the importance of the struggles of underprivileged groups to alter their living conditions.
- Urban problems stimulate a range of social movements, concerned with improving housing conditions, protesting against air pollution, defending parks and green belts and combating building development that changes the nature of an area.
- According to Castells, the spatial form of cities expresses social struggles and conflicts between different groups in society.
- Urban environments represent symbolic and spatial manifestations of broader social forces.

The development of the cities

- **Basic traits of ancient cities:**

- **a)** High walls: most of the ancient cities were fortified in order to be protected against military assaults.
- **b)** The central area was a ceremonial, commercial and political centre.
- **c)** The dwellings of the ruling class or elite tended to be concentrated near the centre. The less privileged groups lived towards the perimeter of the city or outside the walls, moving inside if the city came under attack.
- **d)** Spatial division in terms of ethnicity and religion.
- **e)** The division between city and countryside was clear.

- **Industrialization and Urbanization (18th-19th century)**

- The process of industrialization propelled the movement of the population into towns and cities, and away from the rural communities.
- The expansion of cities was the historical outcome of:
 - a) population increase
 - b) the migration of outsiders from farms, villages and small towns
 - c) international migration (cross-national immigration into European cities, and transatlantic immigration).
- The basic reasons for this phenomenon of population's movement were the lack of opportunities in the rural areas and the attractions of cities, as the later were perceived as 'sources' of jobs, goods and services.

- Cities became the centres of financial and industrial power.
- The development of modern cities has had an enormous impact, not only on habits and modes of behaviour, but on patterns of thought and feeling.
- The evaluation of this phenomenon of urbanization has been polarized.
- The *optimistic account* of urbanization supports that cities are the hearthstone of productive, financial and commercial development and of cultural diversity and creativity.
- According to this view, urban areas are the places of tolerance, progress, freedom and individual's emancipation.
- The *pessimistic account* of urbanization views city as a chaotic place that is marked by anonymity, insecurity, high rates of crime and corruption, pauperism.

- **Urban trends in the developed world**

- *Suburbanization*

- In the USA, the process of suburbanization reached its peak in the 1950s and 1960s.
- The basic reason for the movement to the suburbs was the avoidance of racial mixing.
- Gradually, the white domination of suburbia in USA is being mitigated as professional, upper-middle class groups of various ethnic minorities have been moved there.
- The spatial segregation that suburbia reflect and reproduce relies on the dimension of social class.
- Suburban dwellers hunt for upgraded housing, schools, services and amenities.

- In the UK, many of the suburbs around London grew up between the two world wars, and clustered round new roads and links by underground trains that could bring commuters into the centre.
- In the 1970s and 1980s, there was a massive migration of the residential population from central city areas to outlying suburbs and dormitory towns or villages.
- During this period, the rapid loss of manufacturing industry in north brought about an important reduction of the population of inner-city areas.
- At the same time, many smaller cities and towns grew quickly.
- The phenomenon of ‘flight to the suburbs’ has had dramatic implications for the health and vitality of both British and American urban centres.

- ***Inner-city decay***
- The growth of the suburbs has multiple implications on conditions of living in central urban areas.
- The inner-city decay is an urban phenomenon that is characterized by:
 - **a)** dereliction and dilapidation of building stock in city centers
 - **b)** rising of unemployment rate
 - **c)** rising of crime rate
 - **d)** depleted local services and amenities
- The basic reasons for the inner-city decay are:
 - **a)** loss of local tax revenues
 - **b)** limitation of local authorities' budgets
 - **c)** decrease in provision of welfare services
 - **d)** deindustrialization

- **Gentrification**

- The term gentrification depicts the movement-return of higher income groups to the city centers.
- This movement is accompanied by the the renovation of buildings in dilapidated city neighborhoods and the provision of amenities, like shops and restaurants.
- The gentrification of inner-city areas has occurred in many cities in Britain, the USA and other developed nations, and seems set to continue in years to come.
- The white, upper-middle class newcomers hunt for cheap ‘antique’ housing, closer access to their city-based jobs, and a trendy urban lifestyle (high-quality cultural, culinary and entertainment options).
- They present themselves as ‘open-minded’ about racial and ethnic difference, but in reality they don’t develop relationships with the old residents.
- Demographic changes, tertiarization of urban economy and cultural imaginary are the three basic reasons for this ‘return’ to inner-city areas.

- **Urbanization in the developing world: The paradigm of Megacity**

- The world's urban population could reach almost 5 billion people by 2030 and the United Nations estimates that almost 4 billion of these urban dwellers will be residents of cities in the developing world.
- Manuel Castells refers to megacities as one of the main features of third millennium urbanization.
- Megacities are huge agglomerations of people and consist of crucial hubs of productive, financial, communicative activities at global level.
- According to Castells, megacities function as magnets for the countries or regions in which they are located.
- Besides serving as nodes in the global economy, megacities also become 'depositories of all these segments of the population who fight to survive'.
- The rising of the rate of urban growth in the world's lesser-developed regions is due to:
 - **a)** high fertility rates among people already living in cities
 - **b)** migration from rural areas to urban areas (because of the dereliction of traditional systems of rural production and the offering of job opportunities in megacities).

- *Living conditions in cities in the developing world*
- The migration of enormous number of unskilled and agricultural workers to urban centers brings about the expansion of informal economy.
- Poor and unskilled workers work in manufacturing, construction and small-scale trade sectors of economy, outside regulatory framework and so without law protection.
- The life in these urban areas is riddled with extreme problems and risks:
 - a) pollution
 - b) housing shortages
 - c) inadequate sanitation
 - d) unsafe water supplies
 - e) poor provision of welfare services (healthcare, education, training, culture)

● **Globalization and the Global city**

- Globalization propels the interdependency of cities and promotes the horizontal links between cities across national borders by transforming them vital hubs within the global economy.
- New global networks of cities are emerging.
- Urban centers have become critical in coordinating information flows, managing business activities and innovating new services and technologies.
- The functioning of the new global economy relies on a set of cities with developed informational infrastructures and a ‘hyperconcentration’ of facilities.
- Saskia Sassen uses the term *global city* to refer to urban centers that are home to the headquarters of large, transnational corporations and a superabundance of financial, technological and consulting services.

- The contemporary globalized world economy has attributed a critical strategic role to major cities.
- Global cities present four main traits:
 - 1) They have developed into ‘command posts’ for the global economy.
 - 2) They are the key locations of expanding tertiary sector of global economy.
 - 3) They are the sites of production and innovation in financial and service industries.
 - 4) These cities are markets on which the ‘products’ of financial and service industries are bought, and sold.
- New York, London and Tokyo are prototypes of global city.
- Beneath these, a new set of ‘regional centres’ is developing as key nodes within the global economy. Cities such as Madrid, Sao Paulo, Moscow, Seoul, Jakarta and Buenos Aires are becoming important hubs for activity within the so-called ‘emerging markets’.

- **Inequality in the global city**

- Global cities are often marked by social antithesis and socio-economic inequalities.
- On the one hand, the ‘growth sectors’ of the new economy (financial services, marketing, high technology) are staffed by well paid employees.
- On the other hand, the wages of those employed to clean and guard their offices are dropping.
- According to Sassen, we are witnessing the ‘*valorization*’ of work located at the forefront of the new global economy, and the ‘*devalorization*’ of work, which occurs behind the scenes.
- The affluent employees who work in finance and global services receive high salaries, and they tend to live in gentrified urban districts.
- The process of gentrification is accompanied by the creation of low-wage jobs in restaurants, hotels and boutiques, namely in services that are offered to the well paid city-dwellers.
- While central business districts are the recipients of massive influxes of investment in real estate, development and telecommunications, marginalized areas are left with few resources.

- Within modern global cities, two segregated worlds (social worlds of affluence and poverty) coexist.
- Mike Davis has pointed out that accessible public spaces have been replaced by walled compounds, as affluent neighborhoods are guarded by electronic surveillance, rich residents hire private police to keep street gangs at bay and ‘corporate citadels’ have been created.
- In his study of Los Angeles, he noted that life is made extremely hard for the poorest and most marginalized residents.
- Davis designated those techniques that purport to deter people from using the public spaces of the city:
 - **a)** Benches at bus stops are barrel-shaped to prevent people from sleeping on them
 - **b)** scanty public toilets
 - **c)** sprinkler systems in many parks
- Police and city-planners have attempted to contain the homeless population within certain regions of the city but in periodically sweeping through and confiscating makeshift shelters, they have effectively created a population of ‘urban bedouins’.

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