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**Urban Sociology**

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**Lecture 2**

**Sociological Theories of Urbanization and Key Concepts**

Welcome back to the course on Urban Sociology. Today, we will talk about the sociological theories of urbanization and the key concepts. We will also look at some of the classical theories and see how the city looks differently when viewed from different lenses.

For today's lecture, we will start with the Chicago school of thought and cover Ernest Burgess' concentric zone model. After which, we will discuss about Simmel's Metropolis and Mental Life. And then, we will move on to Louis Wirth's theorization of urbanism as a way of life, which is still very important. We will further discuss the theory, discuss the theory of Ferdinand Tonnies on Gemeinschaft and Gesellschaft or the community and society. Finally, we will look at two Marxian urban theorists David Harvey and Manuel Castells. So, let us begin.

The roots of urban sociology can be traced back to the first independent department of sociology in the United States set up by Albion Small at the University of Chicago. The Chicago School believed that cities do not grow up at random, but in response to the advantageous features of the environment like, maybe, maybe near fertile plains or maybe near the shores of the rivers.

Borrowing principles from biology, botany as well as ecology, the Chicago school initially looked at how human beings adapted to the environment. But later, the focus was on the struggle for scarce urban resources, most commonly land, in the city. In a sense, the human ecology approach had transitioned to an urban ecology approach.

For today's lecture, we will focus on the work of Ernest Burgess, who also based his theory on city growth on social Darwinist principles. He formulated a city-based approach which grew in concentric rings with the central business districts or the loop at the core and the commuter's zone in the outermost ring beyond the city limits. To explain briefly, while the inner-city areas near the central business district were full of slums and warehouses, the outer

suburbs and the commuter's zone consisted of white collar middle class homes and the economically advantaged sections.

Now, let us look at this diagram for a little more clarity on the theory. According to the concentric zone model, the modern city grows around the market which here is the loop, as you can see, in the center of the map. It is also called the central business district, the CBD. It has the highest competitive land prices. This zone also has a greater population density. There is a diversity of activity here with the most advanced modes of transport characterizing this area.

Now, surrounding this area, as you can see, are four more zones. So, first is the, is what is known as the zone of transition, as you can see in the map, which is closest to the loop. So, it is composed of slums and warehouses. This space is characterized by vice, poverty, disease, crime, and social disorganization is most pronounced here.

Just adjacent to this, as you can see, is the inner city or the zone of working-class men's home. This is the residential area of the second generation of immigrants who found their employment in the center and were able to escape the zone of transition. There is reduced commuting cost here due to this area being nearer to the working areas.

After this, we find the residential zone or the outer suburbs inhabited by middle classes. There are mostly white-collar homes. This area is full of shops, parks, large gardens but they come with an increased commuting cost as it is further away from the center. At the very end, as you can see, we find the Commuter's zone, where the economically advantaged population live.

This area is geographically stable with upper class families with their modern modes of transport. The cost of commuting is significantly high here. This area exhibits the highest quality of life with large homes and low population density. What is interesting here is that with the expansion of the city, there is a process of distribution that takes place which shifts and sorts and relocates individuals and groups by residence, occupation and income. We can also see how there is a tendency of each inner zone to extend its area by the invasion of the next outer zone. This process is called succession, again, a term borrowed from plant ecology.

Ernest Burgess's theory of city growth was first published in the book known as *The City*. According to Burgess, the city constantly grew due to population pressure in the form of concentric rings. There would be spatial competition in the city which was marked by the dual process of central agglomeration and commercial decentralization. This means that there is spatial competition that attracted new business and commercial activities to the center of

the city, at the same time, repelled other activities to the fringe area. Thus, as certain activities got pushed to the fringe of the city, the city would continue to grow outwards.

If we are to critically examine this model, then we would find that the model does not take into account the possibility of a city with multiple centers. In fact, it is a very simplistic way to think that the city grows in neat concentric circles where Homer Hoyt too pointed out that they may grow in irregular blobs.

Another theory of urban sociology that gives us a very different perspective to look at the city is one by Georg Simmel. Georg Simmel was concerned with the patterns of behavior and ways of thinking that were found in the city. Another theory of urban sociology that gives us a very different perspective to look at the city is the one given by Georg Simmel. Georg Simmel was concerned with the patterns of behavior and the ways of thinking that were found in the city.

He was also interested with the idea of modernity that is associated with the ways of thinking and the patterns of behavior. If we read Simmel's essay on the metropolis and the mental life, we see how for him, the subtle aspects of modernity manifested itself within the large city through consciously directed behavior. His theorization provides us with the psychosocial aspect of the life of the city.

Imagine a person who has lived his whole life in the rural areas and is coming to the city, let us say, for some alternative livelihood opportunities. And the person witnesses, for the first time in his or her life, extreme daytime traffic, car honking, a stream of pedestrians waiting for their turn to cross the road. That person would be absolutely paralyzed by what Simmel calls the 'excess of nervous stimulation.'

Loud noises, people bumping into each other, for a first-time visitor of the city, this experience would be absolutely shocking, even disorienting. Given the slower more smoothly flowing rhythm of the small town, the city feels fast paced. If we would have to react to everything that happens around us, it would stimulate the nerves to their utmost reactivity until they can no longer produce any reaction at all.

Thus, for anyone, they would effectively need to adjust to this new environment if they wish to stay in the growing metropolis. A response is needed, but not just any kind, a defensive response is needed. We create a protective layer for ourselves as a response to the sensory experiences. Simmel noted that in order to survive in the city, we develop something that is called a blasé attitude, which is a blurring of the senses or filtering out of all that is loud and irrelevant to one's own personal needs.

Our acute attention to the small things happening around us get replaced by indifference. We become emotionally more reserved and well, less sensitive. Simmel also follows that the metropolis has been the site, the seat of money economy, and this has affected us. He says that the modern mind has become more and more a calculating one. It is rational calculation that is needed to survive in the world of capitalism in the city.

He also believes that cities are sites of advanced economic division of labor. Thus, there is a necessity to specialize to find a source of income. The lives of city dwellers are now also governed by clock time and play out within a constructed space. The built environment of concrete, steel and glass. But Simmel did not see this as a bad thing because to him modernity would mean the possibility of immense freedom and independence of the individual, free in contrast to the trivialities that bind the small-town people. Above all else, people would be free to nurture their very own individuality.

Louis Wirth was another prominent name who was a part of the Chicago School. He was greatly inspired by the work of Georg Simmel who is often referred to as the father of urban sociology. Wirth's idea of the city was quite different from the Chicago School of thought. He believed that there was something about the city that produced unique behaviors that might be called the urban way of life.

In his very popular essay, *Urbanism as a way of life*, Wirth stated that the interaction between three factors actually produces contemporary urbanism. He believed that urbanism was the product of large population size, density and heterogeneity. Wirth described the effects of these three variables.

So first is large population size. Greater the size of the population, greater the diversity of social roles and the diversity of population. This leads to increased anonymity and breakdown of primary social relations of kinship. Formal mechanisms of social control are said to replace primary relations of kinship as a means of organizing the society.

Coming to density, increased density results in increased competition among individuals. This creates a particular need for specialization. Coming to heterogeneity, interaction with actors from different races, ethnicity, social status, et cetera results in great tolerance among individuals. In the end, he did highlight the fact that urbanism as a culture would also entail some amount of social disorganization.

He believed that the contact between city dwellers is fleeting and impersonal or a means to an end, as we have discussed in the last lecture, that people in the cities usually meet towards

particular common purpose, particular common ends, rather than being satisfying relationship in themselves. The biggest problem of Wirth's theorization is that it is mainly based on observations of American cities, and yet it is generalized almost everywhere.

The first generation of sociologists, were concerned with the impact of urbanization on European societies. Ferdinand Tonnies was one of the early German social philosophers who addressed these questions in his book *Gemeinschaft and Gesellschaft* published in 1887, often translated as *The Community and Society*.

Tonnies looked at the social changes that accompanied the transition from a traditional community to a modern urban society. He focused on the changing modes of social relationships with the emergence of capitalism in the west. He formulated his concepts in terms of two ideal types for the purpose of comparison. First, he defines *Gemeinschaft* as a traditional community that existed in feudal organizations where persons were bound together by shared values and social traditions. Social solidarity stemmed from member's common identity and kinship.

In contrast to this, industrialization and the rise of urban centers marked the transition to a *Gesellschaft* type of society which was typically a city. It had heterogeneity of values and traditions. According to Tonnies, individual differences would operate to reduce social solidarity and individualism becomes the paramount value at the expense of communal solidarity.

The *Gesellschaft* is also characterized by artificial, mechanical and rationally contrived structure of relationship. Here again, we can attempt to critically look at this theory and we find that he did not consider any conflict relationships in his analysis of the urban society. Even the two ideal types do not actually exist in reality, but are just mental constructs which serve the purpose of comparison.

The next two theories that I am going to discuss are comparatively recent and the writers harp on the fact that urbanism must be analyzed in relation to the major patterns of political and economic changes in the society. First, let us talk about David Harvey and his theory of space. Now, Harvey was heavily influenced by Karl Marx, and he argues that urbanism is an aspect of the created environment brought about by the spread of industrial capitalism.

He goes on to say that in traditional societies, the city and countryside were clearly differentiated. But in the modern world, industry blurs the division between the city and the countryside. Agriculture has become mechanized and is run according to consideration of price and profit, much like industrial work, and this reduces the difference between the social life of urban and rural people.

In modern urbanism, space is getting restructured continuously. The process is determined by where large business firms choose to place their factories. They are constantly weighing up the relative advantages of new locations against the existing one. Let us say, if production costs become cheaper, somewhere else, factories will be closed down in one place and be opened there. Again, expansion of suburban development, which ultimately restructures the space again, can be due to ethnic discrimination as was the case in the United States, where the whites wanted to move away from the inner city areas.

Next, we move on to Manuel Castells' theory on urbanism and urban social movements. Manuel Castells' stresses on the spatial aspect of urban society, where he points out that in order to understand cities, we must first understand the underlying processes by which spatial forms are being created and transformed. Thus, his basic conception is that urban structure and urban forms are not naturally produced but socially produced.

In fact, the layout and the architectural feature of the cities and the neighborhoods express struggles and conflicts between different groups of the society. Strongly influenced by Marx, Castells sees the city as an integral part of collective consumption, which is in itself, an integral part of industrial capitalism.

For example, people collectively consume leisure amenities, transport services and schools which are a product of the process of modernization. But this created environment does not simply reflect the activities of the wealthy and the powerful but also the underprivileged groups. These groups also wish to improve their living conditions and protest against many urban problems in very different ways like pollution, defending parks, defending green patches in the city.

This array of urban social problems creates a range of social movements. Castells studied the Gay Movement in San Francisco, which succeeded in restructuring the neighborhoods and cultural values. Many gay bars and organizations opened and flourished in that neighborhood. Thus, according to Castells, urban social movements are urban oriented mobilization that influence social change and transform the urban meanings.

Urban social movements in this definition do transform urban meanings that is they undermine the social hierarchies which structure urban life and create instead, a city organized on the basis of values and autonomous local cultures. Manuel Castells' theorization about urban social movements presents a serious challenge to many of the apolitical assumptions of American urban sociology. Both politics and social science had always regarded this sphere of civil society as a non-political sphere. Thus, his theory radically changed the course of the studies of urbanization.

Finally, we might think about why we read the classical theories even to this date. The nature of urban society has greatly changed from that time that these scholars were writing in. But these theories did manage to make a path-breaking contribution in terms of how social groups are spread out in the urban or about how the space in the city is transformed due to conflicts between different groups of people.

But the problem here is that these theories are almost all rooted in Euro-American experiences. Since most of what we know about urban theory is produced in the global north, it becomes hard for us to understand its applicability in the global south, the kinds of problems that we are facing being a community of the global south. Being in India, we need more scholarship that looks at the nature of urbanism and urbanization in cities of the global south.

Thus, to conclude we can say that although the classical theories may not be applicable to our cities, these theories were still some of the first who attempted to study the urban society systematically, and thus, they have retained their importance even to this day and age.

These are the references that have been used to make this lecture, and this would be shared with all of you. Thank you all for joining and we will again meet in the next class which is globalization, technology and the growth of cities.