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CHAPTER 1

The Chicago School of Sociology

Survival in the Urban Jungle

ANJA JØRGENSEN AND DENNIS SMITH

Noticing the unnoticed

The sociological ideas that came from Chicago, and the debates surrounding them, are a central part of the repertoire available to anyone seriously interested in exploring how modern society – and perhaps especially the everyday life of modern society – works: in other words, the largely unnoticed routines, structures and assumptions that shape our everyday social existence. We take for granted the speed, complexity, diversity and anonymity of modern urban life. Individuals adapt to those conditions without a conscious effort of thought. However, it was not always like this. Chicago was a dramatic example of the large modern business and manufacturing city, relentlessly imposing and impersonal. It posed the challenge of survival under conditions that we all now take for granted but which shocked people profoundly when they first appeared. The modern city was deeply disturbing. Chicago in particular became the object of intense sociological attention, focusing on the often-unnoticed aspects of urban everyday life.

Chicago sociology provides an interesting perspective on everyday life because these new conditions constituted a catalyst in the development of a wide range of lifestyles and ways of behaving that Chicago sociologists used as a point of departure for their research. Based upon a mixture of anthropological field study, life story and mapping techniques, they used everyday life as an empirical base for understanding larger social phenomena, social processes and social actions characteristic of modernity. Their objectives were to understand social life in the urban environment, approaching the city as being synonymous with modernity, by mixing an empirical orientation with theoretical pragmatism, and being preoccupied with human experience, and

finally driven by social and political circumstances. In this chapter, we initially briefly outline the socio-historical background of the development of Chicago sociology and discuss the founders and most prominent figures of the so-called ‘Chicago School’. Finally, we propose four trajectories along which the varied contributions of Chicago sociology to everyday life research developed.

The growth of the City of Chicago and sociology in Chicago

Chicago began as a frontier settlement.¹ By the 1850s it was a major entrepôt and processor of grain and livestock, a railroad and shipping terminal and a magnet for incoming Irish, Poles, Swedes, Danes and Germans. Thirty years later, by the 1880s, the city had grown in size more than 15-fold, drawing in immigrants from southern Europe and the south. It had become the fourth biggest city in the country. Table 1.1 illustrates the rapid growth in population of Chicago at 30-year intervals, 1850–1940.

Another three decades brought spawning suburbs, imposing architecture, great civic parks and growing racial tension, culminating in a massive riot in 1919. By 1940, Chicago, long established as the nation’s second city, was highly segregated, notorious for gang crime, ridden with political corruption and dominated by an increasingly well-organized Democratic Party machine.

The University of Chicago was established in 1892 as part of a sustained bid for respectability and influence which also led to the great Columbian Exposition (or Chicago World Fair) the following year. It was at the University of Chicago, that the world’s first sociology department was established. Albion W. Small (1854–1926) was the sociology department’s founding professor. One of its main self-imposed tasks was to map the urban jungle and make sense of the

Table 1.1 Rapid growth in the population of Chicago at 30-year intervals (1850–1940)

Year	Population size	Ranking within United States
1850	29,963	24th
1880	503,185	4th
1910	2,185,283	2nd
1940	3,396,962	2nd

Source: adapted from Gibson (1998).

pathways people wove through it. Sociology as a practical, empirical science was only just emerging from the more abstract and metaphysical realm of social philosophy. Meanwhile, social philosophy, which continued to influence sociology, was in its turn struggling to detach itself from the grip of religious orthodoxy. Christianity remained a powerful force, but the blows struck by Charles Darwin's theory of evolution shattered many spiritual certainties.

The early Chicago sociologists drew upon the very 'American' approach of pragmatism, which said that the best test of a concept's or theory's truth or validity is whether it helps someone with a problem to think their way through to a practical solution. Educationist John Dewey (1859–1952) and philosopher George Herbert Mead (1863–1931), both of the University of Chicago, were adherents of this approach. Both also helped in the practical work of Hull House, a settlement that worked closely with immigrant communities in Chicago, especially women.² Another powerful influence was German philosophy and social science. For example, some Chicago sociologists drew upon the work of Georg Simmel (1858–1918), who analysed the condition of the restless urbanite no longer supported or hemmed in by strong communal values. Robert E. Park (1864–1944), perhaps the best-known of the Chicago sociologists, was a great admirer of Simmel.

Among the Chicago sociologists, there were at least four main responses to the modern city and the capitalist market driving so many of its processes. One response was optimism, the response that says: 'How promising! Things are going well in our cities even if that is not always obvious on the surface. Basically, everything is in place to enable us to build a good society in which people can be comfortable and live productive and satisfying lives. We just have to work hard to help make this happen.' Louis Wirth (1897–1952) was one of the Chicago sociologists subscribing to this view, despite some ambivalence, as we shall see later.

Another approach comes from outrage. It says: 'How unjust! People are not being treated in the way that their humanity requires. Nor is society organized to give everyone a fair chance to live the comfortable, productive and satisfying lives to which they have a right. We must make the existence of this injustice clear to everybody.' Albion W. Small, as mentioned the first head of the Chicago sociology department, began as a determined optimist about modern America but became progressively more disillusioned and outraged.

A third approach responded to life in the city by saying: 'How complex! We need to engage our capacity for empathy but at the same time step back a little. We must use our powers of objective observation to convey as accurately as possible the challenges and dilemmas facing people in different situations as they adjust to modern urban society.' William I. Thomas (1863–1947) spent most of his career trying to combine as effectively as he could the twin missions of exposing injustice and conveying the complexity of social life.

A fourth approach says: ‘How interesting! When you look beyond the passions aroused by particular struggles between individuals and groups you can see patterns that are invisible to those most directly involved. It is a fascinating challenge to bring to light these unnoticed trends and processes, to see the similarities that lie behind the fascinating mix of diverse ethnic, cultural and socio-economic groups that jostle with each other in cities.’ Robert E. Park was guided by the two responses ‘how complex’ and ‘how interesting’ throughout his career as a sociologist.

To summarize: between 1892 and the end of the First World War, the Chicago School of sociology, as it later became known, began to establish the traditions of thought and work that made it famous. Those were the days of Small, Thomas and, at Hull House, the radical feminist Jane Addams (1860–1935).³ During the 1920s and the early 1930s, the Chicago School was dominant in American sociology, intellectually and institutionally. During that period, Park reigned alongside Ernest W. Burgess (1886–1966).⁴ By the end of the Second World War, however, the Chicago School had lost its institutional dominance in the face of the challenge coming from sociology departments in places like Columbia and Harvard.

Let us trace the changing ways in which Chicago sociology noticed the unnoticed by looking at the writings and contributions of the following individuals: Albion W. Small, William I. Thomas, Jane Addams, Robert E. Park and Louis Wirth. We shall conclude by briefly reviewing four different research traditions or trajectories that came out of the Chicago School: human ecology, social (dis)organization, social psychology and action research.

	Optimism (‘How promising!’)		
Curiosity (‘How interesting!’)	Louis Wirth	Albion W. Small	Outrage (‘How unjust!’)
	Robert E. Park	William I. Thomas	
	Sensitivity to ambiguity and contradiction (‘How complex!’)		

Figure 1.1 Responses of Chicago sociologists to capitalism and the modern city

Albion W. Small

In Albion W. Small's view, before sociologists could make their full contribution to society, they would have to strengthen sociology itself. Small wanted to build up sociology as a discipline with at least as much credibility as economics (see Small 1905). He wanted sociology to have theoretical rigour and political clout. It should also have the practical tools to discover the knowledge policy makers and administrators needed to pursue those interests. Small wanted to produce not dreamers but practical researchers. That meant hard fighting within the University of Chicago itself. For example, Small challenged the claim of academic economists to have a monopoly over teaching statistics.⁵

Within two years of his appointment at Chicago, Small had written a textbook with the help of George E. Vincent, the department's first graduate student. This book, *An Introduction to the Study of Society*, was put before undergraduates as a 'laboratory guide' (Small and Vincent 1894: 15). The laboratory was, in effect, the city of Chicago. Over two decades before the era of Park and Burgess, Small and Vincent emphasized themes that became closely associated with the Chicago School. For example, the increase in residential segregation on lines of national, ethnic or religious background and economic circumstances; the part played by public opinion; the need for more effective involvement by professionals and educated citizens in the politics and administration of the city; and the project of organizing systematic empirical research at ground level, so to speak, covering as many aspects of the city's development as possible.

Small wanted sociologists to construct a 'natural history' of Chicago, looking in detail at how its population was distributed and grouped, the forms of conflict that arose, and the 'defects and failures of institutions and activities ... especially faults of municipal government'. He was especially impressed by the work underway at Hull House, where 'sociological maps' were being produced. Small wanted more such maps to be made that would 'show by colours (a) the distribution of nationalities; (b) the average weekly wages; (c) the location of churches, schools, jails, police stations, saloons, gambling houses, brothels, etc.' (Small and Vincent 1894: 195–6). Small spent almost his entire career at Chicago making the case for sociology and fighting to build up his discipline within the university. His colleague, William I. Thomas, provided one of the first major examples of what an empirical sociologist with theoretical insight could produce.

William I. Thomas

The Polish Peasant in Europe and America (originally published in 1918–20) is William I. Thomas's masterpiece, written with Polish philosopher Florian W.

Znaniecki (1882–1958). This is an ambitious book with a challenging intellectual agenda. It shines a spotlight on the hidden structures and processes that channelled demographic flows across the Atlantic and shaped and reshaped the inner lives of the migrants themselves. Consider the range of themes that are covered: a comparison between change processes occurring in Poland and the United States during the late 19th and early 20th centuries; an analysis of the way transformations at the level of social organization and the level of the personality intersect and interact; with respect to each society, examination of specific institutions and practices such as the family, marriage, social class system, cultural environment, economic life and religion, relating them to broader societal developments placed in a historical and comparative context; suggestions about potential strategies for dealing with different aspects of social and personal disorganization; systematic speculations about possible patterns of future development in Polish and American society; and finally, a checklist of theoretical and practical issues requiring investigation through comparative research.

The task for sociologists, say Thomas and Znaniecki, is to examine social organization; that is, the way human behaviour is regulated by rules embedded in institutions. Social psychology conducts parallel studies of individual organization, which means personal rule-following by specific men and women expressed in terms of their consistently applied attitudes and values. If attitudes shift and support for institutional rules is weakened or withdrawn, the likely result is social disorganization. As long as at least some individuals remain 'organized' at a personal level, there is scope for innovators to emerge from amongst this group, people who can lead the way towards a new, more stable, form of social organization.

In practice, processes of disorganization and reorganization are underway constantly. In Poland, for example, the rural peasant family and the old-style peasant village were both in decay by the late 19th century. However, in that society peasant leadership was so dynamic that the gap was filled by a multitude of cooperative enterprises such as agricultural associations, which were not just economic but also social, engaging the active interest of all concerned. Things were different for Polish immigrants in America. Polish-American associations were set up but they turned out to be too narrow and parochial to bind the Polish community together. As Thomas and Znaniecki observed, it was left in a state of social disorganization:

How could the resulting delinquency, immorality, family break-up and demoralization be dealt with, in Chicago and elsewhere? Enter the social technician who could intervene actively in practical situations by suggesting 'thorough schemes and plans of action' which would help individuals

to develop 'the ability to control their own activities by conscious reflection.

(Thomas and Znaniecki 1918–20/1927: 72)

Thomas worked hard to develop the social technician's role, as he saw it, through his involvement in the reform activities organized by Hull House. He was prominent in the work of the Juvenile Protective Association, the Immigrants' Protective League and the Chicago Vice Commission, set up in 1910. These involvements allowed him to obtain a large amount of case-study material, including life histories, which he regarded as an especially useful kind of empirical evidence.

Thomas's practical involvement in reform work was closely intertwined with his scholarly writing. For example, in works such as *Sex and Society* (1907), he examined the part played by gender in the workings of social personality and social organization. In particular, he argued that women had been victims of subjection throughout the ages. At the time this was a 'dangerous' opinion. When he made the same point in a lecture on women, one of his enemies denounced his words in a letter to the university president as a 'vicious attack upon the social system of America'.⁶

Thomas analysed these materials with an approach to human action that reflected the deep influence by pragmatism, although he always denied being greatly influenced by John Dewey, his co-worker at Hull House. Thomas's approach emphasized the interplay of four key factors. One was the part played by the pursuit of control of a person's environment as a means to improve survival chances. Control was achieved through a second factor, the application of attention to the world, looking for opportunities to manipulate it. Once control has been acquired, conscious control can relax into regular habit, the third factor. Finally, habit is always liable to be disrupted by a situation of crisis that revives and focuses attention and the search for control. These crisis situations are occasions when 'social technicians' are often especially useful.

Unfortunately, no social technician was on hand to alleviate Thomas's unhappy situation when he encountered his own crisis in 1918, shortly before the publication of *The Polish Peasant*. The FBI arrested him at a Chicago hotel where he was sojourning with the wife of an army officer who was serving in France. There was a court case, and although Thomas was not convicted of any charge, the publicity ruined his hopes of continuing his academic career in Chicago. Ironically, the target of the prosecution may not have been Thomas himself, but his wife Harriet, who was, like Jane Addams of Hull House, an active campaigner in the peace movement opposing US military involvement in the war in Europe.

Jane Addams

Jane Addams combined action research with social work. Her main base was Hull House, a settlement established in 1889 by herself and Ellen Gates Star (1859–1940) which had very close connections with the Department of Sociology at the University of Chicago (see Deegan 1988).⁷ The residents of Hull House were mainly female (Levin and Trost 1996: 138). Settlements of this kind were typically set up to give middle-class students and graduates contact with people in slum areas. The settlement movement started in London, England, where a group of students connected to the church established Toynbee Hall in the East End of London. The intention was that Christian students would stay in the settlement and help poor people improve their way of life. More specifically, the encounter between residents/students and the underprivileged from the poor areas of Chicago would strengthen the poor personally, culturally and in literary culture, while at the same time giving students from better-off families an in-depth and direct knowledge of how life was experienced in the poor areas (Jørgensen 1999: 7ff).

At Hull House an extensive research programme was carried out to map the scale, magnitude and character of social problems in the poor areas in Chicago (Deegan 1995: 335). This research took the form of ‘action research’, and had a clear political aim: to change the situation of the underprivileged. Addams made a distinction between research that would contribute to improvements in society, and research that would contribute to the development of sociology (Hull House 1895/1970). Addams, her fellow researchers and other persons close to Hull House especially emphasized the first of these in their own work. Martin Bulmer puts it this way:

In Chicago ... Hull-House became not just an independent social agency but a centre at which reformers, politicians and academics discussed social problems in depth. In Chicago, some of the earliest local surveys were carried out by members of the settlement house movement, many of whom were middle-class women college graduates, for whom social welfare was one of the few socially acceptable forms of work open.

(Bulmer 1984: 23)

The anthology *Hull House Maps and Papers* (1895/1970), edited by Jane Addams, contains contributions from residents, mainly touching on the problem of poverty. Their research agenda and techniques became a model for subsequent Chicago sociologists (Deegan 1995: 55), taking as a starting point the geographical location and distribution of the phenomena being studied, a precursor of the mapping technique later taken up and refined by human ecologists such as

Park and Burgess. The Hull House anthology dealt with, for example, disease and social conditions, exploitation of labour, ghettos and immigrants, social relief organizations, work and creativity, and also the condition of women in Chicago.

Through the efforts of Addams, Hull House was connected to many national and international political associations and pressure groups, through which research results could be distributed and transformed into action (Sibley 1995: 164ff). She took an active part in several feminist movements including the Woman's Peace Party (Sibley 1995: 165), involvements that marginalized her within sociology circles and in society (Deegan 1995: 336). Addams's political commitments made many in the outside world increasingly suspicious of her. Indeed, at the beginning of the First World War members of the Department of Sociology at the University of Chicago cut off relations with Hull House (Deegan 1995: 335; Sibley 1995: 166ff). Commentators, such as Irene Levin and Jan Trost (1996), Mary Jo Deegan (1995) and David Sibley (1995), argued that the Department of Sociology was quite pleased to be rid of the women associated with Hull House.

Robert E. Park

Robert E. Park believed the city could most fruitfully be understood as a concentrated and extreme version of processes within society as a whole. He opposed the construction of urban and rural areas as two divided worlds. According to Park, modern industrialized society has an influence on social processes and relations, no matter whether the geographic context is urban or rural. In the city, however, these effects occur more quickly and affect a larger number of individuals.

Park's reaction to urban conditions was a combination of his great curiosity about the new phenomena and problems that sprang up in the city, and his awareness that the city distils the essence of the complex social relations of modernity. He was preoccupied by the fact that the social geography of the modern city developed in accordance with fixed patterns so that different groups of society were not distributed evenly over urban space. This interest led him to the development of human ecology. Park wanted sociology through empirical research to form the basis of public discussion, debate and politics as a crucial part of modern democratic society. In his view, sociologists had to leave the library and 'get the seat of their pants dirty in real research' (quoted in Lindner 1996: 81).

Together with Roderick McKenzie and Burgess, Park published the anthology *The City* in 1925. This anthology developed the approach of human ecology,

which is concerned with understanding and explaining the regularities of urban processes and the social life that develops within them (Park, Burgess and McKenzie 1925). In his article 'The city: suggestions for the investigation of human behaviour in the city environment' (1915), Park focused on mobility and segregation as the main causes for the impersonality of city life. Like Simmel, Park saw urban culture as distinct and different from small communities in rural areas. However, there are many highly nuanced moral environments in the cities, making it difficult to maintain the idea of one single urban culture. Although there are probably certain circumstances which characterize urban life and urban culture as a whole, over time, every single individual in the city discovers 'the moral climate in which his peculiar nature obtains the stimulation that bring his innate qualities to full and free expression' (Park 1915: 608).

Human ecology was a human analogy to the ecology of plants. The Danish phytogeographer Eugenius Warming (1841–1924) and his dissertation *Oecology of Plants – An Introduction to the Study of Plant Communities* (1895/1909) inspired Park, Burgess and McKenzie to draw upon scientific work about plants and their ability to create communities. They developed human ecology on the basis of Warming's research among the hydrofyt, xerofyt, halofyt and mesofyt communities. The main points in Warming's work were that each species lives in harmony with its natural conditions; if these natural conditions change, some species can be forced to move or be destroyed if they do not manage to accommodate; species are not distributed evenly throughout their growing zone; the species are in constantly conflict about territory (they try to force their way into each other's territory in order to change the equilibrium); and the species will settle down in places where they can protect themselves from competition and where they can contribute to the community. Park and his colleagues drew upon these ideas when formulating the well-known concentric circle-model of the city of Chicago, as illustrated in Figure 1.2.

The model helps explain that newcomers start their life in the city of Chicago in the zone in transition II and then work their way out to zones III, IV or V. Thus, every person belongs to a certain community and a certain geographical area in the city. Processes of sorting and shifting occur among the different elements of population and different zones of transition until people find the places where they most effectively can protect themselves from competition and contribute to the community (Park et al. 1925).

Apart from demographic segregation and physical expansion, human ecology also grasped phenomena such as social interaction and processes of social change. Human ecology made it possible to contain these aspects in one single coherent understanding, whereby social interaction and social change are seen as processes that develop in accordance with certain patterns from one order to another. According to Park, social action should be understood as a

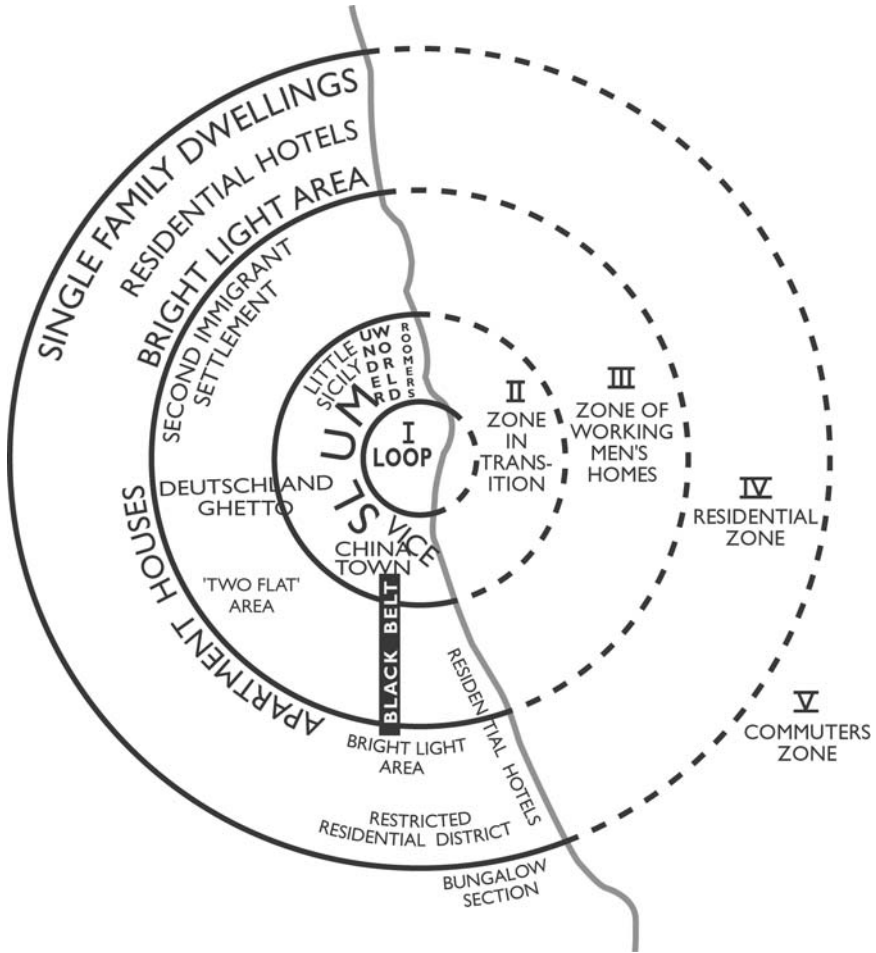


Figure 1.2 The Burgess model of the expansion of the big city and the different urban districts

Source: Park, Burgess and McKenzie (1925: 54).

process occurring in different phases such as competition, conflict and assimilation or absorption, each representing different forms of interaction and different stages in an evolutionary process (Park and Burgess 1921: 785). Competition and conflict belong to the basic level, whereas adaptation and assimilation occur at a higher level, where society has acquired more structure and become a political and moral community. The argument is that social interaction grows from a primitive or natural order, where the important thing is to survive, and develops until a superstructure with common morality, norms and values has been established. In this way, competition and conflicts provide a

basis for a more refined community, a society with political and/or moral community, as Park and Burgess have it.

Park and Burgess were opposed to others who tried to draw analogies between nature and the social world, such as for example Adam Smith in *The Wealth of Nations* (1776/2007). While Smith had his point of departure in the idea of 'the survival of the fittest' (that is, 'every man for himself'), Park and Burgess, on the contrary, argued that society is about competitive collaboration, so that individuals are at the same time both in competition and in collaboration with each other within the political and moral community (Park and Burgess 1921: 558). Competition between individuals undergoes a transformation from the basic level of existential competition to a social level where competition consists of a struggle to obtain the necessities of life (Gaziano 1996: 881). These two different levels are named the symbiotic and the social level, respectively.

How was research to be carried out within this human ecology paradigm? 'Go into the district', 'get the feeling' and 'become acquainted with people': Park's instructions, as reported by his students, may seem trivial at first sight. These instructions do not have much in common with the sophisticated techniques and refined approaches we know today from methodological discussions on field studies. However, they should be understood against the background of the 'sociology of the library' (Lindner 1996: 82). Park, who often took his students with him to different places in Chicago to observe people, insisted that field studies were at least as important as visiting the library and looking for information in archives. He himself characterized his typical instructions to a researcher as expressing 'the art of looking at events as evidence of things in progress, the full significance of which he does not seek to assess' (Park 1955: 110; Lindner 1996: 81).

Park recommended anthropological field studies in the city and the specific method the Chicago sociologists named 'mapping'. According to him, the modern (or civilized) human being lives in the city where the social life can be studied as if it was a laboratory (Park 1952: 73). The anthropological approach, modern/civilized men and women, and the city were, in Park's view, aspects of the same subject. According to him, the sociologist should study people in their normal and natural neighbourhood environments, in contrast to laboratory experiments in which the researcher artificially isolates individuals in order to observe individual reactions. This is because sociology focuses on relations and interactions between individuals, groups, institutions, and so on:

Because of the opportunity it offers, particularly to the exceptional and abnormal types of man, a great city tends to spread out and lay bare to the

public view in a massive manner all characters and traits which are ordinarily obscured and suppressed in smaller communities. The city, in short, shows the good and evil in human nature in excess. It is this fact, perhaps, more than any other which justifies the view that would make of the city a laboratory or clinic in which human nature and social processes may be most conveniently and profitably studied.

(Park 1915: 612)

The diverse new relationships and ways of life that flourish in the city when people are released from traditional norms are best studied in-depth with the aid of anthropological methods. Burgess and Thomas as well as Park's contemporaries and students such as Frederic Thrasher, Harvey W. Zorbaugh, Nels Anderson and Donald R. Cressey were all inspired by anthropology. They used a combination of different methods when they carried out their fieldwork in the city of Chicago. Thus, observation methods were widely used in many empirical studies. Park believed it was necessary for the researcher to have direct contact with his field to get the right feeling of the current complex of problems.

This method of carrying out observations has little to do with what we today call field observations, based as it is on a number of more formalized techniques and guidelines. While there are hardly any explicit reflections about method in the works of the early Chicago sociologists, this was not because they did not think about what they did and what consequences it had for their research. Rather, this absence has to be seen in the light of the fact that field studies in sociological contexts were very new and different, and also that for example Park was extremely busy counterbalancing and opposing what he called 'library sociology'. In short, the Chicago sociologists were more interested in developing a new form of field-oriented sociology in actual research practice than in drawing up formal procedures and rules. The following quotation from Park to his students has been noted by Howard S. Becker (b. 1928), a later exponent of Chicago sociology:

You have been told to go grubbing in the library, thereby accumulating a mass of notes and a liberal coating of grime. You have been told to choose problems wherever you can find musty stacks of routine records based on trivial schedules prepared by tired bureaucrats and filled out by reluctant applicants for aid or fussy do-gooders or indifferent clerks. That is called 'getting the hands dirty in real research'. Those who thus counsel you are wise and honourable; the reasons they offer are of great value. But one thing more is needful: first hand observation. Go and sit in the lounges of the luxury hotels and on the doorstep of the flophouses; sit on the Gold Coast

setters and on the slum shake-downs; sit in Orchestra Hall and in the Star and Garter Burlesk. In short, gentlemen, go get the seat of your pants dirty in real research.

(quoted in Lindner 1996: 81ff)

For this reason, Park's 'method' has sometimes been characterized as a kind of advanced journalism. 'Super journalism', 'reporters in depth', 'super reporters' and also 'engaged journalism' are merely some of the labels that have been attached to this special method of Park. He was known to go for many walks in Chicago, and obviously this was an important source of inspiration and influence for him, but he never finished and published in book form any major empirical field study. Park primarily wrote articles about different empirical problems and phenomena, as well as a number of articles that shed light on concepts and theories. His sociological approach was mainly influential through his tutorial sessions with students and his discussions with colleagues.

Park's fascination with and inspiration by journalism were far from incidental, and were a result of his own experiences in that occupation. After he received his education (in engineering, psychology, history and philosophy), he worked over a 20-year period as a journalist at different daily papers in Minneapolis, Detroit, Denver and New York, and as a press agent for the black civil rights campaigner Booker T. Washington (Lindner 1996: 33). Park wanted to take the commitment and spirit that reigned in journalism to the university environment. Within the press world it was more important to discover new tendencies and problems, presenting these impressions in a way that readers found interesting and relevant, than it was to produce dense and difficult scientific treatises on theory or methods. However, it is important not to misunderstand Park in this respect: he did indeed believe that journalism could have a stimulating effect on sociology, but he did not believe that sociology was identical to journalism.

The preference that Chicago sociologists such as Park had for empirical studies has subsequently been criticized as being subordinated to the idea that true knowledge and understanding are only achievable through first-hand observations (see, for example, Downes and Rock 1998). However, Park's approach was much more subtle and complex than this implies. He certainly thought that journalism combined certain working methods (specifically the use of observation and interviews) with a daring spirit, and that this combination could indeed inform contemporary sociology. However, it was a special spirit or method of work that he wanted to see imported from journalism, not its lack of interest in theoretical matters. Park, however, was keen to ensure that sociological research should have a basis (human ecology) that

was not dominated by the need to conform to the dictates of a specific theory. In particular, the researcher had to be very careful to ensure that a preoccupation with current theory and existing scientific knowledge did not overshadow the field study and its potential for producing new insights. In Park's view, in fieldwork it is important to strike a balance between familiarizing yourself with the case or phenomenon under study and maintaining sufficient detachment to ensure objectivity. Furthermore, scientific research had to be carried out without prejudices and without too many presumptions about the likely findings (Lindner 1996: 101).

Louis Wirth

Louis Wirth, born in Germany, was a first-generation American and a second-generation Chicago sociologist. Wirth came to the United States in 1911 when he was 14 years old, although he did not take American citizenship until 13 years later. He was first a doctoral student then, from 1931, a teacher at the University of Chicago where he remained until his death in 1952. Wirth's intellectual career was shaped by his dual heritage, both European and American. From Germany and Central Europe he drew upon writers such as Georg Simmel and Karl Mannheim (1893–1947) with their sensitivity to the themes of fragmentation and alienation in urban life. From his Chicago teachers, especially Park, Wirth learned the pleasure of exploring the dense anthropological and cultural texture of specific human communities in the city, revelling in their complexity. This approach was strongly evident in his first major work, *The Ghetto* (1928/1998).

Take, for example, Wirth's description of the regular market in the district of Maxwell Street, Milwaukee Avenue and Division Street in Chicago. He noticed that local Jewish traders had a strong preference for that area. Why? Because in the 1920s it was a 'Polish' area and Poles from all over the city came there to do their shopping. There is an irony in this. In Poland, anti-Semitic feelings had a long history, often leading to acts of violence. But here, in the Chicago markets, the two sides seek each other out. They have contempt for each other but they 'know' each other and understand each other's business methods. They can haggle at length and enjoy little victories by bargaining the other down. These observations made this part of the book a kind of postscript to *The Polish Peasant*, in which Thomas and Znaniecki as mentioned above had looked at the European origins of Chicago's Poles. Wirth complemented this by looking at how Jews from Europe, including Poland, had settled into Chicago life.

Typically, newly arrived Jews in America recreated the ghetto, maintaining a separation between themselves and non-Jews. Within the ghetto, old European

divisions amongst different groups of Jews persisted. Over time, many Jews in Chicago began to assimilate with mainstream society, especially on the north and south sides of the city. Paradoxically, as more Jews moved out of the old ghetto on the west side of Chicago, new ghettos were recreated in more prosperous districts, and as a result, 'ghettoized' personalities persisted. This failure to escape the ghetto horrified Wirth. In his view, the ghetto was 'shallow in content and out of touch with the world ... the product of sectarianism and isolation, of prejudices and taboos ... a closed community'. In fact, 'not until the Jew gets out of the ghetto, does he live a really full life' (Wirth 1928/1998: 225–6).

So Wirth did not romanticize the local Jewish community. In fact, his comments did not just apply to Jews but to all those trapped by poverty, ignorance or conservatism in their little local 'villages'. But where are escapees from the ghetto, Jewish or non-Jewish, to go? And will they be better off? To these questions Wirth had two answers, one pessimistic, one optimistic.

Especially during the 1930s, Wirth was intensely aware of living in an anomic society experiencing a near-catastrophic 'disintegration in culture and group solidarity' such that 'much of life's activity loses its sense and meaning' (Wirth 1936: xxv). In his paper 'Urbanism as a way of life' (originally published in 1938),⁸ he argued that ecological processes in the city were detaching people from 'organic nature' (Wirth 1938: 46). They became locked into an impersonal world of 'secondary' relationships where utility and efficiency were paramount while kinship, neighbourhood and old ethnic solidarities were breaking down. Human ties became 'impersonal, superficial, transitory and segmental' (Wirth 1938: 54), and human exchanges were conducted in 'a spirit of competition, aggrandisement and mutual exploitation' (Wirth 1938: 56). At best, men and women were likely to become insecure, irritable and liable to extreme mood swings. At worst, they face 'personal disorganization, mental breakdown, suicide, delinquency, crime, corruption and disorder' (Wirth 1938: 61). This was Wirth's gloomy and pessimistic perspective on urban living.

So, at least on the face of it, during the 1930s Wirth was not able to invest confidence in either the local urban community or the big city as a potential framework for providing a satisfying and meaningful human existence. However, by the late 1940s he had a more positive and optimistic response to this issue. It was the task of intellectuals such as Wirth himself to take the lead in shaping a new urban culture based on open communication and a positive spirit of mutual tolerance, compromise and cooperation between groups. That meant influencing public opinion by getting into the public arena: it was not possible any more for 'saints to sit in their ivory towers while burly sinners rule the world' (Wirth 1948: 15). So Wirth got into the public arena. He advised the National Resources Planning Board (1935–43), and then, in 1944, became

Director of Planning for the Illinois Post-War Planning Commission. He very actively campaigned for the establishment of public planning bodies at the level of the metropolitan region, dealing with matters such as housing, health, transport and education. In this way, Wirth put into practice the strategy of taking useful knowledge and strategies developed within social science departments into the public realm of government and politics.

Wirth had the same taste for dealing with empirical complexity that both Thomas and Park had injected into the Chicago School. He was less detached than Park but he did not follow Thomas's tactic of, so to speak, getting down into the bear pit and fighting alongside those who had been unjustly treated. Instead he preferred to reach upwards towards the heights of power and try to change the rules by which resources were distributed and applied. He was a planner rather than an agitator. Furthermore, he was an optimistic planner, and reinjected into the Chicago School the strong confidence in the future of the United States that had been Small's hallmark when he first became head of Chicago's Department of Sociology over half a century before.

The four trajectories of the Chicago School

We conclude this chapter by observing that there have been many attempts to divide and classify the Chicago school into different periods, just as many efforts have been made to subdivide the school into different scientific clusters and approaches (see, for example, Abbott 1999; Andersson 2003; Bulmer 1984; Carey 1975; Fine 1995; Hannerz 1980; Kurtz 1984; Lindner 1996; Smith 1988). Andrew Abbott (1999), for instance, argues that there were three trajectories: *a human ecological trajectory*, *a trajectory of social (dis)organizing* and *a social psychological trajectory*. Perhaps it is more reasonable and accurate to include a fourth trajectory, one based on the *action research and social work* that developed close to the student settlement Hull House in Chicago. By summarizing these approaches below, we shall review the ground we have just covered from a different perspective before concluding on the continued relevance to everyday life sociology of the Chicago School.

The human ecological trajectory

Focused on the relations between the spatial and the social. This trajectory was inspired by biology; in the theoretical and conceptual development biological metaphors were used and biological analogies were drawn. This trajectory is mainly represented by Robert E. Park, Ernest W. Burgess and Roderick McKenzie, who jointly published the book *The City* in 1925. The

book was an attempt to formulate the human ecology as a theoretical background for studies of the relations between the social and the city as locality.

Park defined human ecology 'as an organization that springs up from the competition that is linked to the struggle to survive' (in Gaziano 1996: 886). The human ecological perspective is seen as a natural stage of evolution (civilization process), where the first stage constitutes an unconscious community marked with competition between individuals. From this grow more refined sorts of communities: economic, political, organizational and moral, which are all based on communication rather than competition, and which replace each other successively and rebuild on the remains from the former period. At each level there are also different forms of interactions, starting with competition at the basic level and continuing with conflict at the economic level, adjustment at the political level and finally incorporation or assimilation at the moral level. Competition occurs in such a way that the biological balance is undermined in the course of time. In order to get to a new balance a process of stabilization takes place (termed succession) that entails a spatial or geographical dispersal (Park 1952: 229; Burgess 1925/1967: 51).

As has been argued, on this point Park and Burgess differ from other authors who have tried to make analogies between the natural and the social world, for example Adam Smith in his *The Wealth of Nations* (1776/2007). The golden age of the human ecological trajectory was from about 1921 to about 1932. Emanuel Gaziano (1996) has argued that the approach of using plant biology as a metaphor for the development of society began as early as about 1910 at the University of Chicago. This was four years before Park was appointed at the university and about 15 years prior to the publication of *The City: Suggestions for Investigations of Human Behaviour in the Urban Environment* by Park, Burgess and McKenzie (1925).

First published in 1895, Eugenius Warming's treatise *Plantesamfund: Grundtræk af den økologiske Plantegeografi* was translated into English in 1909. The English version, entitled *Oecology of Plants – An Introduction to the Study of Plant Communities*, was welcomed all over the world. In Chicago, according to Gaziano (1996: 878), there was very close contact between biologists and sociologists. Gaziano argues that *ecology* was used explicitly as a term in sociology for the first time in *The City* from 1925. When Park wrote the article entitled 'Suggestions for investigations of human behaviour in the urban environment' (the first chapter in *The City*, also by Park, was entitled in a similar way), he did not use the biological terms but these were added to the edition from 1925. There are various articles about different biological subjects from plant community to community of ants and animal behaviour in the *Introduction to the Science of Sociology* from 1921 by Park and Burgess.⁹

The trajectory of social (dis)organizing

Robert E. Park's students in particular contributed a variety of empirical studies: for example, of immigrants (Thomas and Znaniecki 1918–20/1927), homeless people and tramps (Anderson 1923/1998), life in the ghettos (Wirth 1928/1998), 'taxi-dance halls' (Cressey 1932), specific areas of Chicago (Zorbaugh 1929/1976), criminal gangs (Whyte 1943/1993) and criminals (Shaw 1930/1966). Chicago was the main research site for many anthropological field studies. Although many of these studies were based on the human ecological approach, other theoretical aspects were also introduced.

Louis Wirth based his way of thinking on the trajectory of social (dis)organizing, but he was not especially interested in human ecology. He was, among others, inspired by Georg Simmel, and his works can be regarded as a further development of the analysis that Simmel made in his essay about the big cities and the mental life that was published in 1903. William I. Thomas is another of the principal characters of this trajectory. As has been discussed, together with Florian Znaniecki, he wrote *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America* with its analysis of the culture and social organizing of immigrants. This thorough analysis of the Polish immigrants' life within the social and cultural conditions they experienced in America is one of the first studies of immigrants' culture and social organizing; in this work, for the first time, 'the life story' method was employed.

These studies of social organizing and disorganizing showed how people experienced life and how societal changes at the macro level became noticeable at the micro level. These studies were intended to elucidate the complexity of social problems without giving instructions about how these social problems could be solved or should be mitigated. In other words, while many of these studies appealed indirectly to social reformers, they entrusted to others the task of organizing and implementing the reform work. They analysed the complexity of the relevant social situations and often displayed their injustice, but did not provide specific guidance for action.

The social psychological trajectory

The main focus here was on the relationship between individual consciousness and the group/society, mainly represented by George Herbert Mead and John Dewey, but later sociologists like Erving Goffman (1922–1982), Howard S. Becker (b. 1928), Herbert Blumer (1900–1987) and William I. Thomas were also of pivotal significance. To take one example, Thomas and Znaniecki contributed to this social psychological trajectory with their conceptual work on attitudes and desires (Abbott 1999: 6). According to Thomas and Znaniecki,

relations between the individual and the social had to be examined in the light of objective elements (social values) as well as subjective characteristics (attitudes). It is action (or activity) that connects the individual with the objective elements.

The individual is shaped, besides social values, by four basic desires: the desire for new experiences, the desire for security, the desire for attention and also the wish for recognition or acknowledgement. These desires are of differing importance to each individual and are closely connected with their temperament or attitude. When an individual with their basic desires interacts with the group, a process takes place that transforms their temperament into a social personality. Thomas and Znaniecki defined social psychology as the science that examines attitudes in the light of social culture and examines values especially those that regulates the rules of social behaviour (Bulmer 1984: 56ff). For Thomas and Znaniecki, social theory united social psychology and sociology (Bulmer 1984).

Action research and social work

Finally, turning to the sociological work of the women in Hull House, this can be regarded, on one side, as an extension of the positions of John Dewey, George Herbert Mead and William I. Thomas (Deegan 1995: 336),¹⁰ and on the other side, as a new kind of sociology, in which committed practitioners combined home and work in a new kind of intellectual and practical community. In this they carried out research, conducted political and theoretical discussions in public, and carried out specific social work for the poor in Chicago, such as is the case in the work of Jane Addams at Hull House (Deegan 1995: 336).

Mary Jo Deegan states that the research carried out at Hull House can be characterized as 'cultural feminism' and 'critical pragmatism'. According to Deegan, while cultural feminism placed feminine values at the centre, critical pragmatism was focused upon the requirement to produce progressive, free and independent knowledge about everyday life problems (Deegan 1995: 336). Deegan labels the combination of these two approaches as 'feministic pragmatism', and she considers it to have been unique at that time, providing a means with the help of feminine values to try and resolve or alleviate the problems of everyday life (Deegan 1995: 336).

The workers at Hull House moved beyond the dominant attitudes of their contemporaries at the University of Chicago – which were, as has been seen, a mixture of curiosity, awareness of complexity, outrage at injustice and optimism about the possibilities for melioration – to a new and more challenging approach: that is, social and political action. It is ironic that this fourth stream of Chicago sociology, the one that sought to change society as well as study it,

an approach that was pioneered by a corps of daring and amazing women, should be the one that was afterwards neglected, downgraded and ignored not only by contemporaries but also, until recently, by the historians of the Chicago School.

All four trajectories deal with and touch upon the world of everyday life in each their different way and they therefore also in different ways contribute with invaluable insights into the world of everyday life.

As we have tried to demonstrate throughout this chapter, the Chicago School is compound and diverse in many ways. However, one of the common features in this tradition has continuously been a focus on the everyday life based on studies of the very diverse population of the city of Chicago. By observing, interviewing and mapping different social and ethnic groups in their so called 'natural environments', Chicago sociologists used everyday life as a point of departure for understanding internal differences between these groups, and especially how these different social and ethnic groups handled the new circumstances, conditions and possibilities that were produced by the modern urban environment. By using the everyday life perspective it was possible to learn more about lifestyles and sub-cultures that were previously unknown, and at the same time focus on life conditions – often very unequal – which left some groups in underprivileged positions while others enjoyed highly privileged situations of life.

Following the foundational period of the Chicago School from the late 19th to the early 20th century, which has constituted the focal point of this chapter, sociologists trained at the University of Chicago continued to develop and refine the different perspectives. Later sociologists such as Erving Goffman, Herbert Blumer, Everett C. Hughes and Howard S. Becker are some of the prominent successors and heirs to this tradition.

Notes

1. On the development of the city of Chicago, see Mayer and Wade (1969). See also <http://www.encyclopaedia.Chicagohistory.org/pages/700025.html>.
2. On Dewey, see Ryan (1995) and Westbrook (1991). On Mead, see Cook (1993) and Joas (1985). On Hull House, see Bryan and Davis (1991), Hull House (1895/1970) and Addams (1910).
3. On Small, see Christakes (1978) and Dibble (1975). On Thomas, see Janowitz (1966) and Volkart (1951). On Addams, see Linn (2000).
4. On Park, see Matthews (1977). On Burgess, see Bogue (1974).
5. For details, see http://www.brocku.ca/MeadProject/Small/Small_1894_letter.html.
6. Quoted in Matthews (1977: 102).
7. Mead and Thomas from the Department of Sociology played a significant mentoring role for a large part of the scientific work that was carried out in Hull House (Deegan 1995: 335).

8. Originally from Wirth (1938). Citations are to the version republished in Hatt and Reiss (1957: 46–63).
9. Human ecology developed into different directions, hence it includes the direction of Park, Burgess and McKenzie, in which the ecological ideas are used as metaphors and analogies, and in a more fundamentalist direction that in a determinist way interprets all aspects of social and cultural life as a result of natural selection – a position that among others W. C. Allee presents in his article ‘Co-operation among animals’, published in the *American Journal of Sociology* in 1931 (Gaziano 1996: 884). In many studies that are based on the human ecology way of thinking, an explicit review of human ecology has not been formulated; terms like ‘natural development’, ‘natural history’ and ‘natural process’ remain indications that the human ecology constitutes the theoretical basis.
10. The pragmatic inspiration was derived from, among others, Dewey, Mead and Thomas.

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