

**E-content for M.A. Semester IV  
Paper: EC-01 (Urban Geography)**

**Theories of Urban Landuse  
Concentric Zone Theory by Burgess**

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**Introduction**

Each city is unique in respect of the detailed pattern of its internal landuse, yet there is a considerable degree of repetition in the broad geographical arrangement of various categories of urban landuse from one city to another. Even a casual inspection of cities reveals that different areas of the city have been given for different landuses. But in most of the city a generalized pattern of landuse can be observed which reflects the role of certain controlling factors like the land values, accessibility and the history of urban growth. On the basis of some generalized pattern of urban landuse a number of theories have been propounded which attempts to generalize about the arrangement of landuse regions within a city. These theories are also known as ‘models of internal structure’ of towns and also urban growth theories. In this regard important theories are as follows:

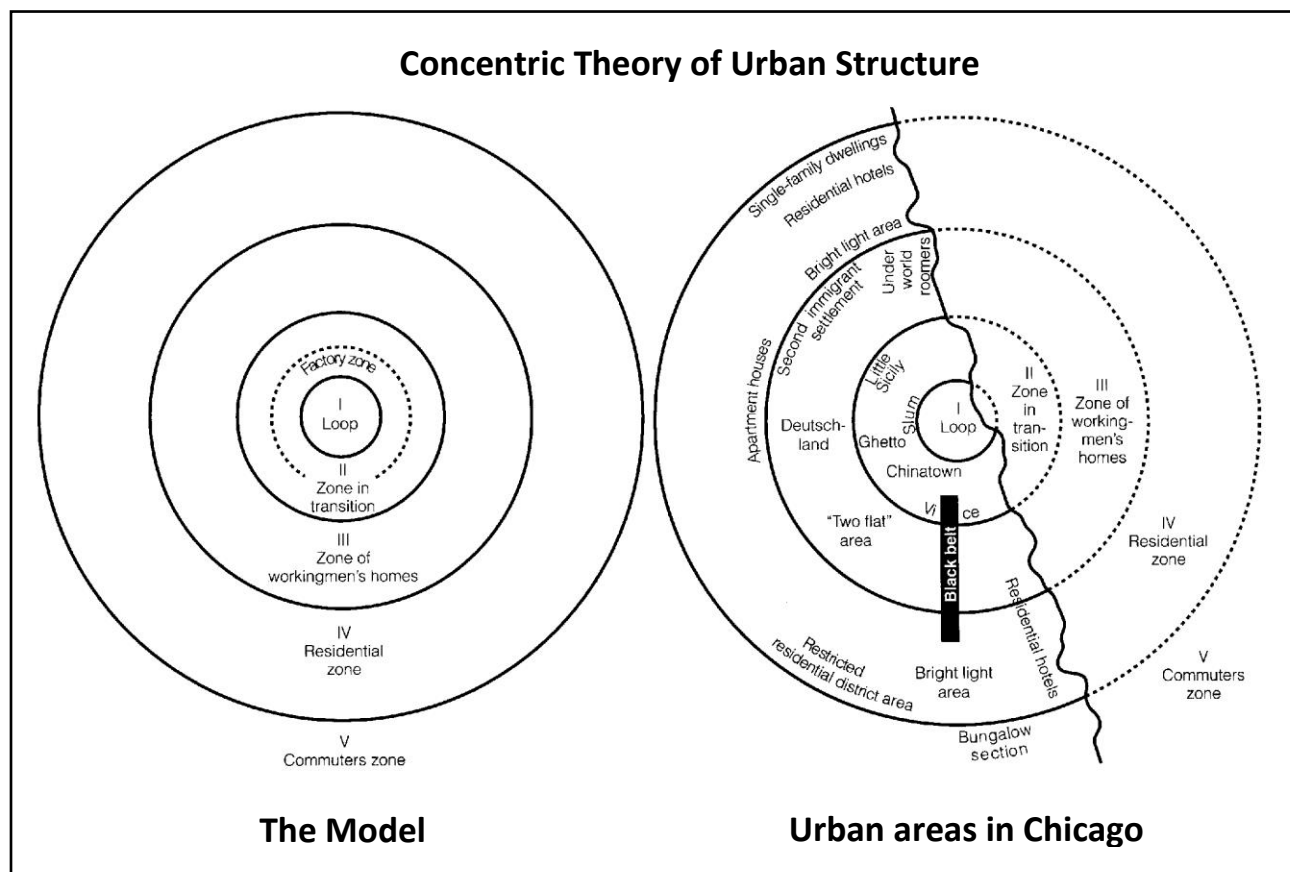
1. Concentric zone theory by Burgess
2. Sector theory by Hoyt
3. Multiple Nuclei theory by Harris and Ullman
4. Fused Growth theory by Garrison
5. Work Home Concept by Rame Gowda

**Concentric zone theory by Burgess**

The concentric zone scheme or model of urban landuse was propounded by E.W. Burgess, an American urban sociologist in the year 1925 on the basis of study of American cities in general and Chicago in

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particular. Burgess concept was first published as, 'The growth of the city: an introduction to a research project' – a chapter in the book "The city" written with R.E. Park in 1925. It is known as concentric zone model or zonal theory of urban landuse pattern. It is one of the earliest theoretical models to explain urban social structures. It is also the earliest descriptive urban landuse model which divided cities in a set of concentric circles expanding from the downtown to the suburbs. It is based on the concept that the development of a city takes place outwards from its central area, to form a series of concentric zones. According to Burgess there are five concentric zones showing different types of landuses. They are –



**Zone I- Central Business District** – It is the most inner circle forming the core of the city. In Chicago it is known as 'Loop'. Burgess model has also termed the zone as 'Loop'. In New York it is known as Downtown. In this zone where most of the tertiary employment is located and also

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transport infrastructure is converging making this zone most accessible. CBD is the focus of commercial, social, and civic life. This zone is characterized by large number of sky scrapper buildings mostly engaged in commercial activities like retail trade, business, departmental stores, hotels and restaurants, banks, offices, clubs, theatres, etc. In America it occupies the least space and most part is non-residential.

**Zone II- Zone of Transition** – This zone encircles the core or the CBD of zone I. In this transitional zone older private houses are either in the process of being taken over for offices and light industry or in the process of subdivision to form smaller dwelling units. This is the area of the city to which immigrants are attracted. This zone is always changing in character as business and light manufacturing encroach into this zone of residential deterioration. It is inhabited by poor people and labourers who work in business or light manufacturing. It has old structure houses, availability of rooms on rent, low income people and narrow streets, It is characterized by “vice” areas inhabited by unstable social groups rather than by settled families. In American it contains poorest segment of urban population notably first generation immigrants.

**Zone III- Zone of Working Men’s Houses-** This is the third concentric circle inhabited by the workers in industries who have escaped from area of deterioration but who desire to live within easy access of their work. This zone has the advantage of being located near the major zones of employment. Some older residential buildings in the city are found in this zone, but socio-economic groups are stable and largely consist of working class families. In Chicago, this zone is dominated by two storey buildings in which house owners live in lower storey while the upper storey was given to tenant. The inhabitants of this zone work either in business activities of CBD or in the light manufacturing. Houses of medium income group people are found in this zone.

**Zone IV- Zone of Better Residences-** Encircling Zone III is the zone of better residences. It is “residential area” of high class apartment buildings

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or of exclusive “restricted” districts of single family dwellings. The people living here are engaged in certain profession like bank, commercial institution, manager, clerks, etc. The multi room dwellings of this zone have vast open space in front of their houses which is used for gardening.

**Zone V- The Commuter’s Zone-** According to Burgess it is the outermost circle beyond the city limits. It is known as commuter’s zone, suburban areas or satellite cities. People inhabiting this zone daily commute to main city for work. It is characterized by high class residences developed along lines of rapid travel. The residences are widely spaced and there are open spaces between two houses. Here expensive houses are located in a rural sub-urbanised setting. Here there still be open country and former villages changing in character and functions to become dormitory settlement for commuters who travel to work in the City. Commuting costs are highest. Prior to mass diffusion of the automobile most of these settlements were located next to rail stations.

The main points of Burgess model can be summed up as follows –

1. City centre characterized by business activities and light manufacturing which is also zone of employment.
2. Encircling city centres are the zones of different class residences.
3. Poor people prefer to live near their place of work where living conditions are poor.
4. As we move away from inner city towards periphery gradually better class residential dwellings are found.

Burgess work is based on the ‘bid rent curve’. This theory states that the concentric circles are based on the amount that people will pay for any use of land. Since the city centre is characterized by converging transportation line it has the highest accessibility, therefore, landuse value is highest. Only commercial activities can pay high rent for small size of land on the basis of profits that are obtainable from maintain from maintaining a business on that land. The centre of the town has highest number of customers so it is profitable for retail activities. Manufacturing

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will pay slightly less for the land as they are interested in the accessibility of workers, transportation of raw material and finished products. Residential land use will take the surrounding land. Away from the city centre the land value declines which gives rise to the zonation of different class of residences from working men's houses in the inner part to high class residences in the commuter's zone.

Besides there is a strong historical element in the Burgess scheme. According to Burgess urban growth is a process of expansion and reconversion of land use with a tendency of each inner zone to expand in the outer zone. In his model zone is expanding towards working class zone creating a transitional zone with reconversion of land use.

### **Criticism of Burgess Model**

The concentric zone model of Burgess has been challenged by several contemporary urban geographers e.g. M. Alihan, M.R. Davie, Walter Firey and R.E. Dickinson. Some of the criticism of Burgess model are as follows :

1. This model does not work well with cities outside United States, particularly with those developed under different historical contexts.
2. Even in the United States due to advancement in transportation and information technology and also due to transformation of global economy cities are no longer organized with clear zones.
3. It explains peculiar American cities where inner city is poor while suburbs are wealthy. In some countries just reverse situation is observed.
4. Burgess model assumes an isotropic plain- an even, unchanging landscape while physical features may restrict the growth of town in certain direction or make some locations e.g. location along river front or sea front desirable for residential purposes.
5. In many cities decentralization of shops, manufacturing industry and places of entertainment are observed in different parts of the city.

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6. Due to urban regeneration and gentrifications- sometimes more expensive property can be found in formerly low class housing areas.
7. It does not take into account local urban politics and forces of globalization.
8. This model does not fit well on polycentric cities for example most of the cities of India.

Burgess also accepted that his concentric zone model can be modified by some physical and cultural factors e.g. nature of surface, transportation routes etc. The expansion of city may take place along transportation routes to exhibit radical form of cities. In this way concentric zone model can be distorted or modified.

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