

Programme:- Master in Sociology
Postgraduate Department of Sociology
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SEMESTER-II

Compulsory Paper:- C.C. 8 (Urban Sociology)
Unit II:- Theoretical Perspectives in Urban Sociology

CONTEMPORARY THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES:-

The University of Chicago: University of Chicago is the origin of Urban Sociology in the United States. The Urban Environment surrounding the University provided the perfect laboratory for scholars like Robert Park and Ernest Burgess to study the city.

URBAN ECOLOGY (Robert Ezra Park (1864-1944) of the Chicago school):-

Coined concept of Human Ecology as a perspective that attempts to apply biological processes/concepts to the social world since maintained that the city and life in the city is a product of competition in the natural environment, i.e. the natural environment is an instrumental force in determining city characteristics.

- Believed city to be a social organism with distinct parts bound together by internal processes, not chaos and disorder
- City was also a moral as well as physical organization suggesting evaluative judgements
- Focused on the physical form of the city and human's adjustment to the ecological conditions urban life

Theoretical premises

- Influence of natural sciences arguing there is a similarity between the organic and social worlds, i.e. the idea that natural laws can be adapted to society; a form of Social Darwinism

- "Web of life"--all organisms are interrelated, there exists an interdependence of species sharing the same environment that seems to be the product of a Darwinian struggle for existence (numbers of living organisms regulated, distribution controlled, and balance of nature maintained where survivors of struggle find niches in physical environment and in existing division of labour between species)

Symbiotic versus societal organization

Symbiosis: mutual interdependence between 2 or more species

Processes characterizing the growth and development of plant and animal communities applied to human communities.

Community (plant, animal, human): defined as individual units involved in struggle and competition in their habitat, organized and interrelated in most complex manner

Essential characteristics of a community

1. Population, territorially organized
2. More or less completely rooted in the soil it occupies
3. Its individual units living in a relationship of mutual interdependence that is symbiotic rather than societal.

Human community (city) organized on two levels:

1. Biotic or symbiotic (substructure): driven by competition, structure of city resulting from inhabitants' competition for scarce resources, idea is that cities were similar to symbiotic environments
2. Cultural (superstructure): driven by communication and consensus, way of life in the city which was an adaptive response to organization of the city resulting at the biotic level; at the cultural level city is held together by cooperation between actors.

Symbiotic society based on competition and a cultural society based on communication and consensus.

City was a super-organism containing “natural” areas taking many forms:

- ethnic enclaves
- activity related areas (business, shopping, manufacturing, residential districts, etc...)
- income groupings (middle class neighborhoods, ghettos, etc...)
- physically separated areas (rivers, airports, railroads, etc...)

Dynamics and processes of human community:

Human community is a product of the interaction of four factors to maintain biotic and social equilibrium:

1. Population
2. Material culture, i.e. technological developments
3. Nonmaterial culture, i.e. customs and beliefs
4. Natural resources of the habitat

Human societies are characterized by competition and consensus:

- Made up of interdependent individuals competing with each other for economic and territorial dominance and for ecological niches, have competitive cooperation with its resulting economic interdependence)
- At the same time, involved in common collective actions, existence of a society presupposes a certain amount of solidarity, consensus and common purpose

Competition: mechanism of society to regulate population and to preserve balance between competing species, gives rise to domination, invasion and succession, also ecological principles

Domination: result of the struggle among different species

Invasion: introduction of new species would upset old balance where there would then be a struggle for dominance with a process of succession

Succession: various stages or the orderly sequence of changes through which a biotic community passes in course of its development, e.g. territorial succession of immigrant groups

The societal pyramid: a social order conceived as a hierarchy of levels

1. Ecological – the base
2. Economic
3. Political
4. Moral – the apex

While human communities exhibited an ecological or symbiotic order quite similar to that of nonhuman communities, they also participated in a social or moral order that had no counterpart on the nonhuman level. Park studied the ecological order to understand better man's moral order.

Differences between ecology and Human ecology:

- Humans are not as immediately dependent on the physical environment - largely the product of a world-wide division of labor and systems of exchange;
- Humans by means of inventions and technical devices have a great capacity to alter the physical environment; and
- Humans have erected upon the basis of the biotic community an institutional structure rooted in custom and tradition.

Limitations of early urban ecology:

- Focus only on economic competition for land
- Oversimplification and overgeneralization
- Other factors, such as government regulations, sentiments, cultural preferences, are not taken into account