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Urbanism could be approached from the point view of human personalities.

It could be understood as a set of **attitudes and ideas** and **constellation of personalities** engaging in typical forms of collective behaviour.

The **superficiality, anonymity** and the **transitory character** of urban-social relations make intelligible the sophistication and the rationality ascribed to city-dwellers. He/she gains freedom from the personal and emotional controls of intimate groups, and loses the spontaneous self-expression, the morale, and the sense of participation that comes from living in an integrated society.

This constitutes essentially the state of **anomie** that Durkheim alludes to in describing the various forms of **social disorganization in the modern era**. The **'fragmented'** or the **'schizoid'** nature of urban personality has to do with the **multiplication** of roles or the **segmentalization** of human relationships. All the roles are **differentiated** functions. **Personal disorganization, mental breakdown, suicide, delinquency, corruption, disorder** etc. are expected more under these circumstances.

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Module 3: Theories of Urban Sociology

Lecture 18: Louis Wirth: "Urbanism as a Way of Life" (continued)

The characteristic apathy of many urban dwellers is quite probably linked to the fact that one must compartmentalize one's role-playing to carry on an effective urban existence. Competing claims upon individual results in disinvolvement from a large segment of the social world.

The most important characteristic of collective behaviour in urban environment is dense anonymity. The results of which may be tragic, such as riots or crowd behaviour.

At the same time, the juxtaposition of divergent personalities and modes of life tends to produce a **relativistic perspective** and a sense of **toleration** of difference which may be regarded as prerequisites for rationality and which lead towards the secularization of life.

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Finally, Wirth cautions the reader by pointing out that the **direction of the ongoing changes** in urbanism will for good or ill **transform not only the city but the world**. Therefore, the concept of urbanism needs to be taken seriously. Only by means of some such theory will the sociologist escape the futile practice of voicing in the name of urban sociology a variety of often unsupportable judgments concerning such problems as poverty, housing, city-planning, sanitation and violence.

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An Evaluation of the Chicago School

Several limitations of the Chicago school have been pointed out by its critics.

First and foremost, this theoretical school suffers from lack of cross-cultural perspective. The Chicago sociologists were responding to one kind of city. They were looking at the North American city moving into the high gear of industrialization. The neglect of historical or cross-cultural comparisons limited the significance of their work. Moreover, many of the ideas voiced by the ecological theorists do not apply to today's cities since they are much better planned.

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The other source of the **one-sidedness** of the analysis was their focus on **social problems**. The Chicago school produced works such as ***Family Disorganization, The Gold Coast and the Slum, The Gang, Social Factors in Juvenile Delinquency***. One of the reasons could be that the studies were being done soon after the worst economic crisis of 1920s. It was the end of the era of the serious depression.

The critics of the Chicago School point out that the scholars had taken a **negative view of the consequences of human mobility and cultural change**. The socio-cultural critique of human ecology debunked the notion that **market** pressures always triumphed over **cultural factors** in the form and function of the cities.

Finally it could be said that because of their emphasis on a '**natural habitat**' the ecological perspective primarily supports the **status-quo** and therefore promotes a **conservative political philosophy**.

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Module 3: Theories of Urban Sociology

Lecture 18: Louis Wirth: "Urbanism as a Way of Life" (continued)

Reference:

- Wirth, Louis. 2005 (1938). "Urbanism as a way of life". In *The Urban Sociology Reader*. Jan and Mele (ed.). London: Routledge. .
- Gottdiener, Mark and Ray Hutchison (2006) *The New Urban Sociology*. Boulder: West View Press.

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