

**THE
HUMANITY
OF
CITIES**

**An Introduction to
Urban Societies**

JOHN GULICK

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Gulick, John, 1924—

The humanity of cities: an introduction to urban societies / John Gulick.

p. cm.

Bibliography: p.

Includes index.

ISBN 0-89789-158-9 (alk. paper)

ISBN 0-89789-159-7 (pbk.: alk. paper)

1. Sociology, Urban. 2. Cities and towns. 3. Metropolitan areas. 4. Urbanization. I. Title.

HT151.G798 1989

307.7'6—dc19 88-19283

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Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: 88-19283

ISBN: 0-89789-158-9

0-89789-159-7 (pbk.)

First published in 1989

Bergin & Garvey, One Madison Avenue, New York, NY 10010

An imprint of Greenwood Publishing Group, Inc.

Printed in the United States of America



The paper used in this book complies with the Permanent Paper Standard issued by the National Information Standards Organization (Z39.48-1984).

10 9 8 7 6 5 4

Cover: *World Bank Photo/Ray Witlin*

6

Connections



United Nations/J. Isaac

The previous chapter began with a consideration of alienation from work, one of the classic concepts of what is fundamentally wrong with Western industrial culture, and therefore with Western industrialized cities, and—in the minds of many people—with “the city” in general. Our consideration of the concept did not dispose of it altogether, because outright disposal is not warranted by the information available to us; but it did substantially modify the idea of alienation as a universal characteristic of life in cities. In particular, by viewing work as an integrated, rather than segregated, part of life, we discovered a great variety of work-related interpersonal connections that, on the whole, function beneficially for the actors.

Here, we examine connections further—beyond work-relatedness—but with elaborations on several important factors featured in chapter 5, such as kinship ties, localized and dispersed networks, and others. The emphasis is on small-scale connections. Larger-scale connections are considered in chapter 7.

COMMUNITY AND THE PROBLEM OF STASIS

The word "community" implies a comprehensive system of interpersonal connections, and where the actors are conscious of their involvement in such a system, community is a useful designation for the realities involved. In this sense, occupational communities are discussed in chapter 5. However, the emotional freight the word often carries in the feelings of many people can seriously damage its usefulness. To a considerable extent, people associate community with nostalgia for things past. The phrase, "loss of a sense of community," as a condition of industrialized life, epitomizes this feeling. To the extent that this feeling idealizes the static and the nonchanging, it is an impediment to comprehending life in cities. Furthermore, to the extent that it may impede city dwellers' adaptability to changing conditions, it can do them a serious disservice.

Change is, ironically, one of the constants of life in cities. To be sure, there are relatively stable social systems within these fundamentally changing environments. That city dwellers usually strive to maintain those relatively stable systems as long as they are advantageous is also a constant in the evolutionary processes of cities. If community were generally understood to mean "a relatively stable multifunctional support system whose members are ready to alter it in response to changing conditions," it would be a useful concept. It would represent the optimum in urban social adaptation. But if community is taken to mean "a stable multifunctional support system whose members feel that if it is changed, it will not be a community any more," then the concept is too inflexible. The difficulty can be seen in the accounts of occupational communities in chapter 5. Is Bhim Nagar still a community at all, given the profound changes that have occurred in the Indian caste system? Is Sabo still the same community it used to be before the Hausa, reacting to threats to their ethnic identity, embraced a religious brotherhood, membership in which maintained their distinctiveness from the Yoruba? Answers to questions like these are likely to become mired in arguments about the meaning of community as a static concept. If, however, we look on Bhim Nagar and Sabo as systems of support and survival strategies, we are using a more flexible conceptual image that allows us to take adaptational changes into account. Lynch and Cohen present the Jatavs and the Hausa of Ibadan as adapting their support and survival strategies to serve them under conditions of increased receptive and active scale. Their future success or failure in so doing is what will be important. As to members of the Sunset Scavenger Company and the Portland Local of the ILWU, Perry's and Pilcher's obvious affection for them may increase the risk that they be sentimentalized as threatened static communities. Instead, it is more useful to consider them as people who will try to adapt their support and survival strategies as best they can under changing circumstances. This endeavor will probably result in their not staying the same as they were, which might be interpreted by some people as loss of community, when in fact they might be developing new strategies for survival and support.

The assumption made here is that adaptations to changing circumstances in the interest of support and survival strategies is the norm of life in cities. To facilitate the understanding of this norm, an adaptational conception,

rather than a static one, is needed. Anne Buttimer expresses such a conception well. While her immediate concern is the physical planning of urban neighborhoods, her remarks apply to the whole spectrum of urban support and survival systems:

Livability . . . cannot be defined adequately in terms of systems or states of *being*. For life in residential areas involves a dialogue of behavior and setting, or demand and supply; it is thus essentially a condition of *becoming*. In this existential view, the planner can no longer be considered solely as the manipulator of supply; neither can the academician be seen merely as the investigator of resident aspiration and satisfaction. Least of all, can the citizen be considered a passive pawn of external social or technological processes. . . . For such a joint involvement in the *becoming* of residential areas, a radical new education is needed. . . . We need frameworks for investigation and reflection which do not segment and ossify parts of the city. . . . And we need an empathetic understanding of urban life as existential reality, as lived experience (1980:22-23).

While a static model is inadvisable for analytic purposes, we must never lose sight of the search of many city dwellers to maintain the status quo. We cannot ignore this pursuit, nor should we make value judgments of it. What we must do is assess the extent to which it works as one support and survival strategy among others, and under what circumstances.

Relative stability facilitates some successful strategies. For example, an American analysis of a British survey shows that length of residence is the single most important factor in the sense of community attachment in urban Britain outside London (Kasarda and Janowitz 1974). Shankland, Willmott, and Jordan found that in the Stockwell section of South London "a high degree of population movement almost inevitably works against other things that people value, like neighbourliness, local social contacts, mutual aid and a sense of community," especially among working-class people but less so among professional and managerial people (1977:50). These authors note with approval a plan of the Greater London Council to facilitate tenancy of different generations of families in the same housing projects (p. 151). Norman Dennis (1970:296), in his retrospective study of the devastation caused by a government relocation project in Sunderland, England, refers to long-term residence, accommodation, and adjustment as important factors in inhabitants' satisfaction with their former neighborhoods, however insalubrious the latter may have seemed to middle-class bureaucrats.

The relative stability of residence in neighborhoods in American cities is frequently found to be associated with positive indexes of social cohesion in those neighborhoods (Skogan and Maxfield 1981:148). The longer people have lived in a neighborhood, the more their social lives tend to be focused in it, and the higher the stakes they have in its well-being. People with high stakes in a neighborhood are likely to be involved in various local group activities, including those intended to deter local crimes (p. 233). The effectiveness of such neighborhood activities is, to be sure, varied. Wesley Skogan and Michael Maxfield, in their study of ten neighborhoods in Chicago, Philadelphia, and San Francisco, found that, on the whole, those with low crime rates had high neighborhood integration, of which stability of residence was one component (p. 106). On the other hand, a study of six matched pairs of neighborhoods in

Atlanta found that, while low-crime neighborhoods were more residentially stable than high-crime ones, their residents were older, a phenomenon widely observed to be associated with lower crime rates (Greenberg, Rohe, and Williams 1981:63).

While the beneficial aspects of stability cannot be guaranteed in all cases, they cannot be discounted, either. This situation is nowhere more apparent than in cases where the ranks of long-term residents are decimated by phenomena of larger scale than the neighborhood itself. A poignant example is Richard West's description of the deterioration of one building among many in a section of Upper West Side Manhattan where efforts at revitalization and gentrification are also underway:

Life hadn't always been impossible at 13 West 103rd Street. When Sally moved into her \$125-a-month two-bedroom, the old five-story walk-up had just been . . . renovated. . . . She took the apartment for the same reason she stayed so long—proximity to her subway, to Central and Riverside Parks, to Broadway's stores, and to her church. Back in the middle sixties there was a comfortable neighborhood feeling on the block. She quickly made friends with many families, most of them black working-class. . . .

Over the years, Sally came to believe that the landlord was a cutter of corners. Few dollars ever trickled back for building maintenance. Worse, he hired worthless superintendents who drank a lot, repaired nothing, and for a bottle and a few bills allowed fellow winos to sleep in vacant rooms. . . . Then . . . the super began renting to junkies. . . .

Like hyenas smelling a mortally wounded animal, the pushers and junkies sensed that 13 West 103rd Street was dying. They moved over from abandoned buildings on 102nd and set up shooting galleries in 13 and 11, next door. . . . Within a year of the first junkie's arrival, the violence, police, OD's, thefts, lack of heat and hot water (because the copper plumbing had been removed for sale), and fires had emptied the building except for nibbling rats, dopers, and Sally Chambers. . . . In 1979 . . . she sent her son away to escape life around the home he had known since birth. Now it was time for her to flee (1981:24–25).

Whether those long-term residents who remain in the area and the recently arrived gentrifiers will be able to reestablish neighborhood stability remains to be seen, and it will necessarily take some time.

On the whole, the data support the case for relative stability—gradual, piecemeal change—rather than abrupt, systemic change. But stability can occur under destructive circumstances as well. One is the practice of "redlining," in United States cities, by which banks deny mortgages to blacks who wish to buy houses in areas whites occupy. Redlining is one cause of the restriction of blacks to inner-city areas from which whites have departed. Life in inner-city ghettos, despite the prevalence of violence in them, has been described in terms of a particular kind of stability:

[R]esidents of the ghetto themselves describe a life of monotonous and unremitting changelessness. Hour after hour, day after day, unemployed men stand on street corners waiting for something to happen. . . .

The most salient aspect of the stimulus deprivation in the ghetto community, the feature that gives ghetto life its quality of chronic depression, is the lack of expectation of change. There is a sense of futurelessness that makes activity indifferent, pointless, perfunctory, and invariable (Dumont 1971:55–56).

These are cases where maximized stability is the actual norm, or the condition desired by some but not all actors on the scene. And these cases raise serious questions about the nature of the communities involved.

When terms like community and stability are applied to social situations, assumptions may be made that the facts do not warrant. A more specific concept like support and survival strategy—taking into account whom it benefits and at whose expense it may operate (as in the practice of redlining)—seems to have more analytic power. Community, though, has such attractive connotations that it is unlikely to fall into disuse. And whether more specific, modified versions of it—such as “community of limited liability” and “contrived community” (Suttles 1972; chapters 3 and 4)—will gain widespread currency is an open matter.

A recent and encouraging development in the finer tuning of the community concept is Zane Miller's study (1981) of Forest Park, Ohio. Forest Park (not to be confused with Park Forest, Ill., also a social scientific study subject) is a Cincinnati suburb founded in the mid-1930s as part of the Roosevelt administration's greenbelt community program (see chapter 4). Initiated as an unincorporated settlement by a private developer, it had, by the late 1970s, grown into a fully fledged municipality with a population of about 19 thousand, mostly white, middle-class people but also 19 percent black (p. xvii).

Miller conceives the history of Forest Park as an evolution of different manifestations of community, as follows:

1935–1952:	Metropolitan Community
1953–1968:	Community of Limited Liability
1969–present:	Community of Advocacy

In the first period, Miller argues, community was perceived as a mixed residential/commercial subdivision of metropolis and region, in which inhabitants would be active in civic enterprises for the general welfare (p. 46). In the second period, community continued to be perceived in terms of general civic interest to which inhabitants had obligations but in a context of residential mobility:

[V]illage officials and citizen activists all saw Forest Park as a community of limited liability. There one could . . . be born and raised, work, act out the role of citizen, and die. But few Forest Parkers actually thought of living out their lives in Forest Park. These socially- and geographically-mobile middle-class people had loyalties and ties to non-territorial communities, as well as to their residential locality, and they changed addresses routinely in response to changing job opportunities and family life cycles. Therefore, a community such as Forest Park was primarily important as a place these people could move into and out of with a minimum of social and psychological disruption and a maximum of material comfort. . . .

The idea that Forest Park was a community of limited liability led to a quest for enduring and stable property values, not an enduring and stable population. The problem was how to make the place economically viable for three parties simultaneously: the developer, who owned the undeveloped land; the residents, who bought and sold real estate or rented there; and the village government, which needed a tax base sufficient to provide a level of services attractive to middle-class people, employers of middle-class people, and merchants who catered to middle-class tastes (pp. 94–95).

Miller is concerned with the political activities of these various interest groups and how Forest Park evolved from a community of limited liability into a

community of advocacy, a community of competition for power and scarce resources, a community of distrust and disbelief in established ways and institutions as channels for realizing aspirations or satisfying grievances. It was a fragmented community, turning inward to psychological concerns and to economically motivated anxieties about Forest Park's "deterioration." . . . Forest Park's civic morale sagged . . . undermined by the pressure of voluntary organizations which were parochial, inward-turning, and backward-looking, and whose "civic" activities masked an intensely narrow individualism which placed concern for each person's psychological or material well-being above the welfare of either the city government or the community as a whole (pp. 176-77).

Miller relates this evolution in part to the "me-generation" outlook, as well as to social class and racist concerns which surfaced at the same time. Prominent among the voluntary associations were neighborhood organizations named after various sections of Forest Park which had earlier been designated only by a letter of the alphabet in an attempt to focus communal identity on Forest Park as a whole (p. 145).

Miller's study is based on a dynamic, rather than static, concept of community; it examines conflicting interests without abandoning the general concept of community and is addressed to one of the central components of the humanity of cities: the symbiosis of small-scale support systems and various large-scale structures of which the microlevel support systems are necessary parts.

DISCONNECTEDNESS

Whatever nomenclature we use (community absolute or modified, stability absolute or relative, systems or networks), we are concerned with relationships among people, with interpersonal connections.

Classical urban theory holds that the urban environment is inimical to human connectedness, that, instead, anomie and anonymity prevail. However, classical urban theorists neglected that there are many different kinds of urban environment. Anomie and unwelcome anonymity *do* prevail in *some* of them.

First, let us look at some urban environments in which disconnectedness does occur. Two fairly well-documented examples are multiproblem families (families beset by a variety of serious problems) and some elderly people, all living in United States cities.

Multiproblem families are frequently concentrated in publicly owned, high-rise apartment buildings. The reasons for this concentration lie in the concatenation of racism and rental policies in relation to the welfare system (Rainwater 1970:9). Such projects are notorious for the physical violence—often gang- and/or drug-related—that frequently besets them. For example, early in 1981, there had been 11 murders and 37 other casualties within two months in the Cabrini-Green project in Chicago. These incidents were the results of gang warfare which intimidated the majority of the residents and prompted then-Mayor Jane Byrne to announce plans to move into the project

herself to stay "for as long as it takes to clean it up" (United Press International 1981).

What conditions generate such an environment? Lee Rainwater, in his study of the Pruitt-Igoe project in St. Louis, suggests that part of the answer lies in the high density of people who, because of their overwhelming personal problems, are unable to develop any neighborhood feelings or structures. This situation results in a social vacuum, into which move predatory, violence-prone individuals. Their intimidating presence further discourages any efforts at neighborhood formation. At the root of the situation is the disconnectedness of individual households from one another (1966:27). Rainwater says that "black slum culture" generally includes networks of extended kinfolk (1970:6), considered further in this chapter. In contrast, part of the dynamics of situations like that of Pruitt-Igoe is that too many families are concentrated there who lack the support of such networks; this particular kind of human environment generates anomie and its attendant miseries.

Just as only some slum environments are like this, so are only some concentrations of older people in cities. Firey's description (1968) of single-room occupants in Boston's South End is one example, and Joyce Stephens's study (1976) of elderly tenants in a Midwestern slum hotel is another. In both cases, problems of being elderly in present-day American culture are compounded by problems of being poor. Like Firey, Stephens interprets the plight of the elderly people she studied as a consequence of the nature of industrial society, but not specifically of urban environments. The survival strategies these people use

are inextricably linked to the ever-present threat of deviance, which . . . surrounds these people and perpetually threatens to engulf them. A fundamental mechanism for the control of deviance is their avoidance of close relationships . . . restricting and constraining their ties and dependencies upon others [so] as to minimize the effects of deviance on their own lives. These effects include the high probability that close relationships will become exploitative associations; the constant threat of violence; and the reciprocal norms of distrust and suspicion (1976:39).

Later, Stephens notes that many of these elderly people have had life histories of alienation—that they never lived in cohesive social communities to any great extent (pp. 90–91). Nevertheless, they are "survivors" (p. 94), but their survival strategies do not involve the networks of trust and support that most people need, seek, and find in cities.

Arlie Hochschild's study (1973) of 43 old people living in a small apartment building near San Francisco, while it exhibits some marked differences from Stephens's findings, also seems to illustrate a major point Rainwater and Stephens make in very different contexts: people who are predisposed to alienation and disconnectedness are likely to carry these characteristics over into urban settings which, in themselves, are not preordained to be generators of alienation and disconnectedness.

The few whose family ties were feebly held together by Christmas cards and graduation notices did not "make up for it" by plunging themselves into Merrill Court affairs. They . . . remained aloof from the subculture as well. Moreover, those who had especially strong and rewarding family ties . . . were among the most active in Merrill Court society (Hochschild 1973:95).

MINIMAL CONNECTEDNESS

Hochschild's main point is that most residents of the apartment house have formed a community of pseudo-sibling relationships in which there are rivalries and differences but "not alienation and not isolation" (1973:63). The ability of these elderly people to form a new kind of community in an apartment house was unexpected, hence the title of Hochschild's book, *The Unexpected Community*. Hochschild sees life in Merrill Court as a relatively successful adjustment to the bad social conditions nonaffluent elderly Americans generally face (p. 139).

Unlike the elderly people Stephens studied, most of Merrill Court's residents appear to have been predisposed toward forming supportive relationships. But while predisposition seems important in this matter, it may not necessarily be a determining factor. This contingency is suggested by studies of three social situations in which support and survival strategies have been generated, perhaps even more unexpectedly than in Merrill Court.

Harvey Siegal (1978) reveals one of these situations in his book on single-room occupancy (SRO) tenement and welfare hotels in New York City. Contrasting the single-room occupants with many slum and ghetto dwellers who have a sense of hope and collective vigor, Siegal characterizes them as "socially terminal," without kinfolk or estranged from those who exist, bereft of material resources, living on public assistance, and afflicted with mental and physical ill-health (p. xx). Yet, under these seemingly most unlikely circumstances, a fabric of support strategies has been woven. There are "helping pairs" of people who live together, providing mutual support for their addictive needs (pp. 137-38). Then there are relatively permanent groups of drinkers made cohesive by a variety of reciprocated services (pp. 139-40). And, possibly unique to SROs, Siegal thinks, are quasi-familial groups headed by "matriarchs," each of whom cares for a group of men in various nurturing ways. These women enjoy high status and may perform functions beyond those associated with a particular group. A matriarch may serve as an ombudsman for other residents of the building and may also develop a symbiotic social control relationship with the building's manager (p. 143). Siegal discusses some other social groupings, but these examples will suffice. Unfortunately, we do not know why there is such a contrast, if not contradiction, between the findings of Siegal and Stephens.

Elijah Anderson describes a second situation in which support strategies have been unexpectedly generated in his book about the "extended primary groups" who congregate at Jelly's bar and liquor store in South Chicago. These black men are not typical South Side residents or ghetto area blacks, for most are viewed as marginal or deviant within the larger black population, and in many circumstances they see themselves as deviant or as lacking in moral responsibility by wider community standards. These . . . men . . . hang out and participate with others they know to be drunkards, beggars, and thieves. . . . Most . . . are not involved in continuous responsibility for nuclear families . . . [and] many . . . come up short with regard to general "decency" (1978:31).

Yet, these men have evolved into three groups with collective and personal identities. Each has a relatively stable core, although many persons' identities