

## From the Planners' Bookshelf...

### Urban Sociology: A Human Ecological Perspective.

William A. Schwab, Addison-Wesley, 1982.

#### From CharacterTowns.org...

##### Importance.

The social realm of sustainability is the most neglected by urban and city planners. Sociology is the profession to add the needed *umph* to SWOT analyses and community scans while comprehensive plans are constructed.

Professor Schwab's book, while dated 1982 is not dated in the sense of the quality of his presentation of the basics of sociology at the urban scale...essential study material for those interested in providing depth to urban planning and urban plans.

##### Content Tease.

"Urban sociology overlaps psychology..., geography..., political science..., anthropology..., social work..., city planning... and urban history. With so much overlapping of interests with other disciplines, how can the study of cities be organized in a systematic and understandable way? A perspective within urban sociology known as human ecology" is the answer. "In fact, some urban sociologists have gone as far as to suggest that the enormous output of empirical research and theoretical essays by human ecologists has provided the closest thing to a systematic theory of the city." [p3-5]

Robert Park [1864-1944] introduced the idea of human ecology in the US in the early days of the 20<sup>th</sup> century at the University of Chicago. The work of Park in 1916, "The City: Suggestions for the Investigation of Human Behavior in the Urban Environment" and that of Louis Wirth in 1939, "Urbanism as a Way of Life" provide the basis of modern urban sociology. Wirth worries about the consequences of city size, density and socio-economic heterogeneity. Individual and group relations among themselves and with civic and private organizations creates systemic conditions that determine where people live, what groups they associate with and how likely they are to advance in societal and economic terms.

Chapter Three is entitled "The Origins of Cities"; combined with Louis Mumford's *The City in History*, Jacob Bronowski's *Ascent of Man* and Francis Fukuyama's *State-Building, Governance and the New World Order in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, can give one an understanding of the original purpose of cities and their evolution through the Industrial Revolution in a way that presents conditions, still present, that can inform plans for a city's future. Sociology is, in many cases, a new addition to the multi-discipline quiver of city planning that requires study to be fully engaged.

##### Purpose.

It is important to energize the role of governments and institutions in order to release the full creative power of society and its members. Sociologists are the additive that completes the city planning team in the quest for urban sustainability.

