

Schriftenreihe der Forschungsgruppe "Metropolenforschung"  
des Forschungsschwerpunkts Technik - Arbeit - Umwelt  
am Wissenschaftszentrum Berlin für Sozialforschung

FS II 01-502

**The Berlin "Großstadt-Dokumente":  
A Forgotten Precursor of the  
Chicago School of Sociology**

Dietmar Jazbinsek, Bernward Joerges and Ralf Thies

Wissenschaftszentrum Berlin für Sozialforschung gGmbH (WZB)  
Reichpietschufer 50, D-10785 Berlin  
Tel. (030)-25 491-0 Fax (030)-25 491-254 od. -684



# **The Berlin "Großstadt-Dokumente": A Forgotten Precursor of the Chicago School of Sociology**

## **Summary**

Between 1904 and 1908, there appeared in Berlin 51 volumes called collectively *Großstadt-Dokumente*, which presented a vast mosaic of the modern metropolis. While the Berlin series was ignored by proponents of contemporary academic sociology in Germany, it was well received by the founding fathers of the Chicago School of Sociology. Chicago's adoption was aimed at filtering out the sociological components from the mixed genre of journalistic, literary and research styles of writing which is so characteristic of the *Großstadt-Dokumente*. The descriptive material compiled by the series editor, Hans Ostwald, and his co-authors was translated by Louis Wirth into the terminology of American urban sociology. Other members of the Chicago School adapted theoretical fragments from the *Dokumente* to their own studies. The distinction of social types developed by Julius Bab in his studies of the Berlin bohemia, for example, has been taken up by Thomas and Znaniecki in their classic *The Polish Peasant* and from there "invaded" American sociology. More significant than occasional theoretical borrowing is this: The *Großstadt-Dokumente* constitute at the outset of the 20<sup>th</sup> century a model research style which would later become the hallmark of the Chicago School—the exploration of urban milieus, based on collective collaboration and devoted to an ethic of urban ethnography. This style of research was branded "Americanism" by early German sociology and was discounted for a "lack of theory".

## **Die Berliner "Großstadt-Dokumente": Ein in Vergessenheit geratener Vorläufer der Chicago School of Sociology**

### **Zusammenfassung**

Die insgesamt 51 Bände der Schriftenreihe Großstadt-Dokumente, die in den Jahren 1904 bis 1908 erschienen sind, fügen sich mosaikartig zu einem Panorama der modernen Metropole. Während die Berliner Reihe von den Vertretern der zeitgenössischen Soziologie in Deutschland ignoriert worden ist, wurde sie von der Gründergeneration der Chicago School of Sociology intensiv rezipiert. Die Rezeption in Chicago war darauf angelegt, aus der Mischform journalistischer, literarischer und wissenschaftlicher Schreibweisen, die für die Großstadt-Dokumente charakteristisch ist, die soziologischen Anteile herauszufiltern. Das "Beobachtungsmaterial", das der Herausgeber Hans Ostwald und seine Koautoren zusammengetragen haben, ist von Louis Wirth in die Terminologie der amerikanischen Stadtforschung übersetzt worden. Andere Mitglieder der Chicago School haben Theoriefragmente aus den Großstadt-Dokumenten in ihren eigenen Studien adaptiert. So ist die Unterscheidung von Persönlichkeitstypen, die Julius Bab in seinem Beitrag über die Berliner Bohème entwickelt hat, von Thomas und Znaniecki in ihrem Klassiker *The Polish Peasant* aufgegriffen worden und von dort aus in die amerikanische Soziologie "eingewandert". Wichtiger als solche vereinzelt Theorieanleihen ist jedoch der Umstand, dass die Großstadt-Dokumente ein zu Beginn des 20. Jahrhunderts einzigartiges Modell für den Forschungsstil abgeben, der später zum Markenzeichen der Chicago School geworden ist: die Erkundung städtischer Milieus, die in einem kollektiven Arbeitszusammenhang erfolgt und dem Ethos einer urbanen Ethnographie verpflichtet ist. Dieser Forschungsstil ist von den Repräsentanten der frühen deutschen Soziologie mit dem Schlagwort des "Amerikanismus" belegt und mit dem Vorwurf der "Theorielosigkeit" bedacht worden.



## **Introduction: "Berlin—the European Chicago"**

In October 1891, Mark Twain visits Berlin—and discovers America. He is a widely traveled man, he knows the landscapes and the great cities of both the New World and the Old. As is true for most Americans, traveling to Europe means for Twain traveling into the past, the land of his forebears, a sentimental journey to medieval towns, to time-honored churches, castles and chateaux. An American writer wanders through the streets of a European city, at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and suddenly the modern catches up with him: "I feel lost in Berlin."<sup>1</sup> The very first sentence of his impressions of the Berlin visit attests to an unmistakably modern experience: the feeling of being lost in the vastness of a metropolis. He wanders through Berlin and discovers an astonishingly progressive, through-and-through new city, "the newest I have ever seen." And a comparison occurs to him: "Berlin is the European Chicago" (*ibid.*, p. 88/89).

Berlin and Chicago—at present hardly anyone would pair these two cities. But at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century they equally represented a concept of the modern in which America was the measure of all things. Chicago stood for "the most American of all American cities" (d'Eramo 1996, p. 13); Berlin was described as the "most recklessly Americanized [city] in all of Europe" (Scheffler 1910, p. 141). One date was decisive for the emergence of the new Berlin that Mark Twain detected here: 1871, when Berlin became the capital of the German *Reich*. It gained new political and economic functions and received important impetus for far-reaching changes in its shape and culture as Berlin grew and expanded into its hinterland. From 1871 to 1895 its population doubled from 820,000 to 1.6 million. Immigration accounted for two-thirds of this increase. Berlin grew into Germany's leading commercial and industrial metropolis.<sup>2</sup> Entire road blocks were torn down, roads were broadened and laid anew. Save for a few buildings, the old baroque Berlin vanished almost completely. "The main mass of the city looks as if it had been built last week, the rest of it has a just perceptibly graver tone, and looks as if it might be six or even eight months old," noted Mark Twain (1963, p. 88).

Modern Chicago was born the same year: in October 1871, almost the entire inner city was destroyed by a storm lasting a day and a half. Immediate reconstruction made Chicago into

---

<sup>1</sup> Mark Twain: *The German Chicago*, quoted after Twain, 1963, p. 87. This essay was first published 1892 in the *New York Sun*; a German translation appeared in 1897 from Hillger Verlag, Berlin/Leipzig, in the collection *Die Million-Pfundbanknote und andere Erzählungen*.

<sup>2</sup> See Michael Erbe: "Berlin als Industriemetropole," in Ribbe 1987, p. 721-731.

the newest and most modern city of the New World. And the great myth of Chicago was born: like a phoenix the city had risen from its ashes. From 1870 to 1890, its population quintupled from 300,000 to 1.5 million. At a time when much of New York, Philadelphia and Boston retained a European look, Chicago had become the American city in its purest form.

Mark Twain's likening of Berlin to Chicago proved seminal: Again and again it was taken up in the Berlin literature of the following years.<sup>3</sup> Foreign travel writers in particular, that is professional observers, took Chicago as their point of reference. Theodore Dreiser visited Berlin in 1912 and noted: "Berlin cannot be equaled in Europe. (...) Berlin is new, green, vigorous, astounding—a city that for speed of growth puts Chicago entirely into the shade" (Dreiser, 1913, p. 466, 468).

While Berlin's modernity provoked Mark Twain's and Theodore Dreiser's amazement and admiration, German intellectuals at the turn of the century would agree with the assessment but not the judgment. The blending of Modernity and America which made the two concepts almost synonymous found expression in the catchphrase of "the American menace." Dread of egalitarian tendencies of American society, but also of New World economic domination, became apparent here. This fear found its expression in catchwords such as *Amerikanismus* and *Amerikanisierung*, which permeated the cultural-political debates around 1900. Superficiality, lack of tradition, "massification," mechanization, trivialization, mental and spiritual degeneration, "antification" (like the insect)—these and similar epithets for America were played out in a critique of civilization and industry embraced by large parts of the bourgeois intelligentsia prone to defend 19<sup>th</sup> century values against the modern.<sup>4</sup>

The turn-of-the-century art and architecture critic Karl Scheffler systematically applied the notion of Americanism in all its facets to the then-new Berlin. In his polemic, "Berlin, the Fateful City," written in 1910, he uses the notion as his leitmotif. He deplored that one would no longer find authentic Berliners in Berlin but instead only immigrants, just a "hungry tribe of parvenus," eschewing all distinctions of class and proper convention. Behind this attitude there lurks the fear of a leveling of culture, which he felt one could discern in America. He writes of "a monstrous mish-mash, which reigns in Berlin since 1980 and which must reign there. Not in Sidney, not in Chicago can there have been such confused goings-on" (Scheffler

---

<sup>3</sup> Whether Mark Twain in fact came up with this comparison is a moot question; in any case, an earlier source is not recorded.

1910, p. 150/51) Thus Scheffler, too, compares Berlin to Chicago. Chicago is not perceived, as Marco d'Eramo writes, "as something unique, as in the self-representations of Paris the Inimitable or New York the Extraordinary. No, Chicago is seen as exemplary (...) for the inquiry into modern society Chicago became the case in point par excellence" (1996, p. 255). In this sense, the numerous comparisons of Berlin with Chicago refer to something beyond the city: Chicago stood for the march into modernity and was suitable as a metaphor for Berlin's urban upheaval as much as a *menetekel* for the threat of cultural decay.

### **The *Großstadt-Dokumente* and the New Berlin**

Everyday life in the city renamed by Walther Rathenau as "Spree-Chicago" (after the river Spree that runs through it) at the outset of the 20<sup>th</sup> century is depicted in a book series of 51 volumes published between 1904 and 1908 under the title *Großstadt-Dokumente*. The aim of its editor, the writer and journalist Hans Ostwald, was to document both the dark side of urban modernization and the accomplishments of the *Berliner Moderne*. On a blurb put out by the publishing house, he writes: "Even those who recognize and escape from the abominable damages wrought by the big city will not be able to deny it a certain cultural value (*Kulturwert*)." Ostwald and the writers who co-authored these volumes were not interested in Berlin as the political capital, as the Prussian military city or as seat of the emperor but as an arena of technical and cultural change. Whereas the new, "Americanized" Berlin was rejected by large parts of the contemporary intelligentsia, the authors of the *Großstadt-Dokumente* took a positive stance toward Americanism in the sense of the modernization of urban infrastructures and triumph of mass culture.

In his volume *Berliner Warenhäuser* (Berlin Department Stores), the economist Leo Colze describes the newly opened *Kaufhaus des Westens* as a technical and organizational masterpiece, modeled on American examples. Clerk, an insider in the Berlin administration who wrote under an alias, calls in his volume *Berliner Beamte* (Berlin Civil Servants) for a push toward more effectiveness and rationalization. In order to do away with outdated office technology and inefficient public management, he suggests: "Americanism is nowhere as needed as in bureaucratic operations. When in American public administrations typewriters had already been rattling for a long time, in Germany only a few commercial firms had

---

<sup>4</sup> See for instance Lüdke et al. 1996.

introduced them on a provisional basis" (Vol. 43, p. 45). And Edmund Edel observes that the occupants of the new office and business districts of the city were a type driven by "an almost American haste! who does "not only feel flattered but actually valued at his real worth if he is taken for an American" (Vol. 50, p. 57, p. 75).

The new, the American Berlin is only one of the images that run through the 51 volumes of the *Großstadt-Dokumente*. Three quarters of the series treat Berlin themes, the rest cover Vienna and other European cities. A glance at the list of titles demonstrates the variety of themes taken up in the series, each volume being devoted to one special aspect of urban life. In the spirit of an urban ethnography *avant la lettre*, many of the contributing authors report from participant experience when they explore the hidden areas of city life: Georg Bernhard ventures on a tour through the executive floors of a major bank; Albert Südekum visits a proletarian family in a one-room flat of a rear building; Arno Arndt mingles with the crowds at the horse racing track at *Hoppegarten*; Felix Salten deciphers the ceremonial etiquette at the Viennese Royal Ball; Max Winter spends the night with homeless people in the sewers below Vienna. The results of these observations are presented to the readers in a mixture of journalistic, literary and scientific styles that could best be characterized as "sociological travel guide".

Forty authors cooperated in the series, at first glance a heterogeneous group of journalists, writers, professionals, politicians, public servants and scientists. In this wide spectrum, two types of authors stand out. On the one hand are those who write from their own professional experience, mostly medical doctors and lawyers. As "initiates," they give inside accounts of their institutions; they are familiar with intimate details not accessible to outsiders. The other type is journalists or writers who in their routine work for the press cultivated a keen eye for novel, the unfamiliar of the metropolis.

Around 1900, many of the participants in this project were only at the beginning of their publishing careers; for more than a few the *Großstadt-Dokumente* was their first published book. In 1904, when the first volume appeared, Ostwald was just 31. Before that he had trained as a goldsmith and published a novel based on his experiences as a journeyman. His writing and editorial skills were entirely autodidactic. In a very short time he advanced to become one of the best-known Berlin publicists and was seen as "parvenu par excellence" himself. Although most of his co-authors had graduated from universities—in the humanities,

the law, medicine, but also economics—none came from university teaching or research. The authors of the *Dokumente* did not form a school in the terms of science studies; nevertheless, their composition was not a random constellation. By virtue of their collective affiliation with art circles, newspapers and social reform associations, the core members of the group around Ostwald constituted a highly interactive community. It was the same intellectual milieu of the Berlin bohemia that for a while was also frequented by leading protagonists of early sociology such as Franz Oppenheimer, Georg Simmel and Werner Sombart.

A central group of authors of the *Großstadt-Dokumente* came from the entourage of Magnus Hirschfeld and the *Wissenschaftlich-humanitäres Komitee* (WhK) he co-founded in 1897. An essential goal of this sexual reform association was the abolishment of §175 of the penal code, which made homoerotic relations between men a criminal offence. Hirschfeld himself contributed to the series a text on alcoholism in the big city as well as the book *Berlins Drittes Geschlecht* (Berlin's Third Sex), a sort of tourist guide through Berlin homosexual subculture, which today is one of the classics of the gay movement. The authors Max Marcuse, Johannes Werthauer, Wilhelm Hammer, Hans Freimark and Ostwald himself belong to the WhK group. Their *Großstadt-Dokumente*, ten volumes in all, deal predominantly with issues of "sexual and social hygiene." Between 1908 and 1914, this group further elaborated on the 'urbanity and sexuality' theme in the journal *Sexual-Probleme* (editor: Max Marcuse). Members of the WhK and other authors of the *Großstadt-Dokumente* also were among the contributors of the journal *Diskussion* that Ostwald edited and published from 1910 to 1913. All this points to the relative cohesion of the community of authors.

Ostwald created, with the carefreeness of an outsider, a medium in which the borderlines between professional competencies and the distinctions between intellectual cultures were outplayed. Literary, journalistic and social science guidelines were inseparably connected in his planning of the project. It is a witness to a historic phase in which socially committed literature; social reportage and social research began to evolve as separate genres, yet their borders remained permeable. Thus, the series was a kind of writing workshop in which varying models of describing the big city were tried out. Delving into the 51 volumes 90 years after their first publication, the reader is astonished at how many of the documentary experiments of the *Großstadt* authors make sense to this day, for instance the reproduction of personal documents used by many of the authors to substantiate their records. In two cases, the diary of a forced laborer (Vol. 33) and the biography of a pub musician (Vol. 19), such

first-hand documents fill the entire volumes. With respect to other empirical approaches, some of the *Dokumente* mark the departure from everyday practice (looking around, talking to people) to a methodical approach (participant observation, interviewing).

Looking at the thematic breadth and methodical repertoire, one will be put hard to find, at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, an enterprise of urban research—in the widest sense of the word—of comparable scope. Closest may come the studies initiated under the direction of Robert E. Park in Chicago 10 years later, albeit in a methodically much more sophisticated and theoretically ambitious perspective. In view of the parallels in urban development and urban research, it may not be a coincidence that the Berlin series met with great interest at the department of sociology at Chicago.

### **The *Großstadt-Dokumente* in the University of Chicago's Regenstein Library**

In January 1909—immediately after the Berlin series ended—the first mention of the *Großstadt-Dokumente* appears in the American Journal of Sociology (AJS): four relatively late contributions are referenced under the rubric "Recent Literature."<sup>5</sup> In due time, the ASJ, edited by Albion Small, was to become the most important medium of publication for the Chicago School of Sociology (Abbott 1999, p.104 f.). In 1915, the AJS carried the treatise "The City: Suggestions for the Investigation of Human Behavior in the City Environment"—in which Robert E. Park for the first time outlined the basic thoughts and problems of urban research in a Chicago perspective. Possibly, the mention of the Berlin series in the American Journal of Sociology was the occasion for the sociology faculty to take a closer look at Ostwald's urban research project.<sup>6</sup> In any case, a check of the accessions of the Regenstein Library shows that all 51 volumes of *Großstadt-Dokumente* were bought in the summer of 1914 at the initiative of the department of sociology. One can assume that ordering the *Dokumente* at considerable cost was not done without a special reason. Whether the purchase played a role in the hiring of Park, who was brought to the sociology faculty as a lecturer by Thomas that same year, must remain open. In any case, the Chicago sociologists' interest in

---

<sup>5</sup> American Journal of Sociology, Vol.14 (1908/1909), p. 553f. Listed are Vols. 37 (*Der internationale Mädchenhandel/The International White Slave Trade*), 45 (*Großstädtisches Wohnungselend/Big City Housing Misery*), 48 (*Geschlecht und Verbrechen Gender and Crime*) and 49 (*Gefährdete und verwahrloste Jugend/Endangered and Neglected Youth*).

<sup>6</sup> In our archival researches in Berlin, Chicago and elsewhere, we did not find a single indication of personal contacts between the two groups of scholars.

Ostwald's large-scale publishing undertaking clearly did not follow retrospectively from their own research but preceded it.

A little detail demonstrates the endeavor to comprehensively access Ostwald's city research project. The holdings of the Regenstein Library include an anthology, which must be considered an antiquarian rarity: in addition to four *Großstadt-Dokumente a Sittengeschichte* by Alexander Schmitz, which initially appeared outside the series. This volume was acquired after 1920, that is at a point in time when the regular volumes of the *Dokumente* were all available at the library, with one exception: Volume 20X on the subject of female homosexuality. This study by Wilhelm Hammer, titled *Die Tribadie Berlins*, had been banned under the emperor and therefore was practically unavailable as a single volume. Censure could be bypassed, and the Regenstein collection be completed, only by acquiring the entire collection.

In addition to the *Großstadt-Dokumente*, the Regenstein Library holds a selection of Ostwald's works that obviously was put together purposefully and expertly, concentrating on material of a documentary nature. His vast literary production is not represented, but the library has the most important of his studies of hoboism, his seminal documentations of the language and songs of the *Lumpenproletariat*, his 10-volume study on *Das Berliner Dirnentum* (Berlin Prostitution) as well as his comprehensive work in the history of German culture and manners. The Ostwald collection of the Regenstein unites titles published between 1900 and 1931 and thus covers almost the entire publishing career of Ostwald. There are few German libraries that can rival this well-considered compilation of works.

Out of the 50 copies of the *Großstadt-Dokumente* acquired in 1914 by the Regenstein we could locate and inspect only 39 in May 2000. By a stroke of luck we discovered that some of the *Großstadt-Dokumente* volumes, and also a few Ostwald books, still contain the old lending cards of the university library. These lending cards register, next to the titles of the book, the names and dates of borrowers in the handwriting of the library staff and the stamped-in dates of borrowing and returning. These cards are an instructive source regarding the perusal of the *Großstadt-Dokumente* at The University of Chicago. The following selection is limited to some of the more prominent protagonists of the Chicago School.

- One of the earliest entries is in 1916 and gives *William I. Thomas* as reader of volume 42 of the series. In this *Dokument*, Walter Bahn, a lawyer, describes the grievances of Wilhelminian criminal justice based on case histories of his own law practice.<sup>7</sup>
- The first volume of *Großstadt-Dokumente*, where Ostwald presents a collection of his reportages on the Berlin underground, has been lent to *Louis Wirth* in January 1925.
- Also in 1925, *Walter Cade Reckless* signed in for Volume 7 of the *Dokumente* (Hans Ostwald: *Berliner Kaffeehäuser*/Berlin Coffee Houses).
- *Ernest W. Burgess* has borrowed Ostwald's treatise of the *Berliner Spielertum* (The Berlin Gambling Scene, Vol. 35) in spring 1929.
- A year later, *Robert Faris* took home three volumes.

A literature review found in the Burgess estate shows that Robert Faris had read carefully the volumes he borrowed.<sup>8</sup> Under the heading "Report of Readings of German Literature," he summarizes ten contributions to the series. The sample seems to be random since no thematic or otherwise systematic criteria of selection are apparent. Each abstract comprises some 20 lines and summarily indicates the subject as "case study," "a sort of historical study" or "a series of word pictures." Repeatedly Faris points out the "lively" writing style of the Berliner authors. His overall impression after studying these *Großstadt-Dokumente* is expressed in the preliminary note: "One feels that the cities have not changed much in the last quarter of a century. Certainly the same processes seem to be operating."

Faris literature overview had been an exercise for the seminar on "The Growth of the City" which Burgess had offered in the winter term of 1930. The preparation of a "book report" was mandatory for participants. As opposed to other course papers, in particular the presentations of student projects, the literature overviews rarely found their way into the Burgess estate, so we could not find summaries of the remaining 40 volumes of the *Großstadt-Dokumente*. What we do find, however, is that at the beginning of the 1930s a whole series of Burgess' students (for instance E. Jackson Baur, Charles A. Ferguson, Richard C. Garrison, Herbert Goldhamer und Edward Byron Reuter) show up on the *Großstadt-Dokumente* lending cards. For more than a quarter century after their publication, the Berlin volumes were included as illustrative material in the training of those Chicago sociology students who could read German.

---

<sup>7</sup> The most famous defendant represented by Bahn was the shoemaker Wilhelm Voigt who made history as the *Hauptmann von Köpenick*.

Judging from the lending cards, the Chicago sociologists studied not only the series itself but also its "contextual" literature, i.e., other publications of the Berlin authors. A few examples may suffice: Ostwald's book series *Das Berliner Dirnentum* was consulted by Thomas. The date is illegible, but probably it was borrowed in 1923 or earlier, around the time Thomas wrote his study of delinquent young women, "The Unadjusted Girl" which also treats prostitution and appeared in 1923. Thomas may have consulted Ostwald's material in preparing this study, although he does not reference it. *Burgess* borrowed the 1911 annual volume of the journal *Sexual-Probleme* in 1926. In this issue, papers appeared by, among others, Max Marcuse and Viktor Noack as well as reviews of recent books by Georg Buschan, Magnus Hirschfeld and Hans Ostwald (*Berlin und die Berlinerinnen*—Berlin and its Women). Later issues were lent by Ruth Shonle Cavan, Louis Wirth and Kimball Young, some of Park's more prominent students.

Of course the lending cards do not say much about the actual use made of the Berlin literature.<sup>9</sup> Since none of the cards gives the date of issue, there is a possibility that the cards we found are duplicates, the original cards having either already been lost or fully filled in. Also unknown remains the use of a book inside the library, since an entry was only made when books were taken outside. Finally, we remain ignorant of the books, which may have been owned privately by Chicago sociologists.<sup>10</sup> As shown in the following section, at least Wirth has concerned himself much more intensely with the *Großstadt-Dokumente* than can be concluded from the lending cards.

### **Louis Wirth reads Hans Ostwald**

The collection "The City" which appeared in 1925 is among the most important textbooks of the Chicago School. Besides characteristic separate entries and specimens of research work, treating among other themes the press and the hobo, this volume contains two programmatic chapters. In the introduction, Robert E. Park presents a systematic outline of research problems that engaged urban research in a Chicago perspective; in the concluding section,

---

<sup>8</sup> University of Chicago, Joseph Regenstein Library, Department of Special Collections, E.W. Burgess-Papers, Box 130, Folder 7.

<sup>9</sup> In addition, the information on the lending cards of later volumes is hard to decipher. Often names are unreadable and stamped-in dates are incomplete. A graphological expertise could probably tell us more about who has been among the Chicago readers of the Berlin studies.

Louis Wirth attempts a systematization of research findings to date, alongside the themes initially introduced. In presenting the research literature, the "disciple" (it was the first major publication of the 28-year-old Wirth) follows at least approximately the sequence of presentation of his "teacher", Park. Note that the "Bibliography of the Urban Community" is far more than a mere enumeration of titles. A programmatic prefatory note from a Chicago perspective precedes each thematic section, and the contents of a great number of publications are translated into this language of American urban sociology. Concluding his collation of sociologically relevant city literature and its high point is his section on "The Study of the City" where he opposes two modes of study: the reform-oriented administrative approach of the "social surveys" on the one side and the scientific approach of social research on the other. While "social surveys" aimed at the diagnosis and therapy of social problems, the essential characteristic of social research, he holds, was its political disinterestedness.

The self-concept of American urban sociology clearly was that their own studies belonged to the second kind. Among the research which according to Wirth was congruent with the Chicago School, in terms of both its systematic as well as co-operative disposition and their reformist abstinence, he singles out in his commentaries two series of studies preceding the Chicago School: Charles Booth's "Life and Labour of the People of London" (1892) and Ostwald's *Großstadt-Dokumente*. The American characterizes the Berlin undertaking as a "series of fifty volumes by various authors giving accounts of personal experience and investigation in the local communities and among various groupings and personality types in the city of Berlin and in some other large cities of Europe" (ibid., p. 226).

While the 16 volumes of the London series are mentioned only in the final section, Wirth lists the various volumes of the Berlin *Großstadt-Dokumente* separately in the thematically arranged sections of the bibliography. Finally, the special importance of the Berlin project from a Chicago perspective is underlined by the fact that—with two exceptions—all volumes of the *Großstadt-Dokumente* are annotated, while this is the case for only about half of the references included. In his commentaries Wirth points to the way the various studies of the Berlin series are related thematically. This is worth noting since the observations of our city researchers are nowhere comprehensively documented in tables, theses or definitive

---

<sup>10</sup> Even if Park's name is on none of the lending cards that have been preserved, we find it unlikely that the voracious reader Robert Park would have ignored a book series for which his colleagues Burgess and Thomas showed sustained interest.

theoretical statements. The status of the more analytical passages, scattered over a body of text comprising more than 5000 pages, may—borrowing a notion from Wolf Lepenies—be characterized as a "hidden sociology of the city" (1988, p. 185f).

The first leitmotif of the *Großstadt-Dokumente* Wirth extracted is the notion of a "classification of types." Whether the series deals with young females (Vol. 17), emancipated women (Vol. 26) or unmarried mothers (Vol. 27), with musicians (Vol. 19) or civil servants (Vol. 43), with dance halls (Vol. 4) or variety shows (Vol. 22), the commentaries always include an indication that the respective authors attempt a social typology. Wirth has indeed brought out here one of the leitmotifs of the Berlin series.<sup>11</sup> And he elaborates a second one: the increasing professionalization and specialization of work which at the turn of the 19th century went beyond the sphere of machinery and big industry, spreading to "unruly" occupations as well. Thus the *Großstadt-Dokumente* extended their studies to beggars (Vol. 1), pimps (Vol. 5), sportsmen (Vol. 10), card players (Vol. 35) or money lenders (Vol. 38). "Showing the extent to which fraud has become a technical profession" (Wirth 1925, p. 219)—this is one of the typical comments (referring to Vol. 21, *Berliner Schwindel*/Berlin fraud).

In order to put the varied topics of the *Großstadt-Dokumente* into a more analytic framework, Wirth utilizes the terminology of Chicago human ecology. Nowhere in the German originals is there talk about "processes of segregation, allocation, and communication" (Wirth on Vol. 13) or the "natural history of the city population" (on Vol. 48). These translations, or transpositions, into sociologese are often to the point, but sometimes misleading, too. Hyan's criminal portraits (*Schwere Jungen*/Tough Guys, Vol. 28) turn into a study of professional boxing; Werthauer's scenes from criminal justice (*Moabitrium*, after the Moabit prison in western Berlin) is rendered as a study of a Berlin living quarter in the bibliography. Obviously Wirth had not read these volumes at that time.

Possibly, he made up for this later on, since he continued his conversation with the *Großstadt-Dokumente* even after he had become a professor in the Chicago sociology department himself. This is born out by the collection of materials for the major book project of his last 10 years. Under the working title "The Sociology of the City—An Introduction to Urban

---

<sup>11</sup> Wirth's enumeration could be supplemented by other titles: Particular types are distinguished for example in Hirschfeld's study of homosexual meeting places (Vol. 3), Ostwald's study of coffee houses (Vol. 7), or Katscher's study of Berlin gambling clubs (Vol. 25).

Civilization" Wirth prepared several designs for this *opus magnum* and sketched out the first few chapters. The book was never finished though; according to his biographer, Salerno, Wirth was far too preoccupied with responsibilities outside academic work (1987, p. 47). For the prospective standard textbook on the sociology of the city, Wirth apparently wanted to reintroduce his old idea of a bibliography organized along chapter themes. More than 20 of these thematic literature registers have been preserved, partly in the form of lists, but also in the form of collected reference cards. Among those we could evaluate, we again found the titles of five *Großstadt-Dokumente*.<sup>12</sup> The allocation of various volumes to the chapters of the prospective book is markedly different from the one in "The City". This and little details, such as the page references on a file card referring to Ostwald's *Tanzlokale in Berlin* (Berlin Dance Halls) show that Wirth must have consulted the *Großstadt-Dokumente* again at this later date. In sum, although a great many new works in urban sociology had appeared in the meantime, 30 years after their publication and at least ten years after their inclusion in the "Bibliography of the Urban Community," Wirth remained convinced of the value of the *Großstadt-Dokumente*.

### **Citational Practice and Intellectual Style**

The importance of early American urban research for the history of sociology can scarcely be overestimated; entire books could be filled with lists of publications about the Chicago School of Sociology (see Kurtz 1984). Yet only two publications have, as far as we can see, pointed out Wirth's commentary on the *Großstadt-Dokumente*.<sup>13</sup> One is a text on the beginnings of German urban sociology by Woodruff Smith, published 1972; Smith observes here that between 1900 and 1910, over and above historically oriented research, empirical approaches to studying cities were developed, and in this context attributes to *Großstadt-Dokumente* the status of classics on the authority of Louis Wirth (Smith 1979, p. 2). The second reference comes from the sociologist Alessandro Pizzorno who counts, in his preface to the Italian edition of "The City", the Ostwald series among the *illustri predecessori* of the Chicago School (Pizzorno 1987, p. ii). But neither Smith nor Pizzorno or any other historian of the social sciences looked further into Wirth's clues about the Berlin precursor. This includes the

---

<sup>12</sup> Vol. 4, Hans Ostwald: *Berliner Tanzlokale* (in: Box XLII, Folder 3). Vol. 8, Georg Bernhard: *Berliner Banken* (in: Box XLII, Folder 6). Vol. 44, Martin Ebeling: *Großstadt-Sozialismus* (in: Box XL, Folder 1 und Box XLIII, Folder 1). Vol. 50, Edmund Edel: *Neu-Berlin* (in: Box XLI, Folder 1).

<sup>13</sup> Of course we cannot pretend to cover this very extensive secondary literature. Our evaluation includes a complete search of the SSCI since 1956.

American historian Peter Fritzsche who in 1994 published the first learned study of the contribution of the Berlin series to urban research in the "Journal of Contemporary History." Although he compares Ostwald's work with Park's, and even considers it "much closer in spirit" than his second comparison case, Booth's famous London study, he skips over the reception of the Berlin project in Chicago (Fritzsche 1994, p. 396).

There is a simple explanation for this blank in the secondary literature: Not a single direct quotation from the *Großstadt-Dokumente* can be found in the classic Chicago texts, including the celebrated dissertation series from the 1920s. For several reasons it would be premature, however, to jump to conclusions with regard to the relationship between the two enterprises in urban research by considering citation practice to be the decisive criterion.

In the first place, the studies accounting for the early fame of the Chicago School, i.e., the research documents on the "natural areas" of the big city, in general contain very few citations. To a very large degree they consist of a combination of their authors' own observations, notes on conversations and documents found in the field. A good example for this form of presentation is Wirth's study "The Ghetto", published in 1928, on the everyday life of Jews in Chicago. Here, the chapter on Maxwell Street, the main street of the ghetto, is partially written as reportage, and Wirth uses, as much as possible, direct speech and vivid visual imagery. He quotes extensively from newspaper articles and occasionally inserts passages from autobiographical material. Only where he attempts a typology of ghetto residents does his study become more analytical.

In short: The writing style of Wirth's study perfectly corresponds to that of many *Großstadt-Dokumente*. In the bibliography of 1925, Wirth himself singled out the "classification of types" as the guiding analytical principle of the Berlin series. If, nevertheless, he does not refer in his own empirical work to Ostwald or others among the Berlin authors, this has, by the same token, a plausible reason. There are scarcely any programmatic or analytical statements worth quoting in the texts of the *Großstadt-Dokumente*. While Ostwald and his co-authors have experimented with a variety of urban research methods, they utterly failed to explicitly reflect their methodology. For this reason, the Berlin city texts appear in the Chicago studies—if at all—only as background literature. Nels Anderson, for instance, references in the bibliography of his study "The Hobo," published in 1923, reportage material by Josiah Flynt, Jack London and Henry Mayhew, as well as Ostwald's text *Die Bekämpfung*

*der Landstreicherei* (Fighting Hoboism), which in turn belongs to the immediate textual surroundings of the *Großstadt-Dokumente*. The "Selected Bibliography" of Reckless' dissertation "The Natural History of Vice Areas in Chicago," finalized in 1925, contains in the section on "Studies in Urban Community Life" the entry "Grossstadt Dokumente, edited by Ostwald, Berlin, 1905." Under "Studies on Prostitution," the single volume *Zehn Lebensläufe Berliner Kontrollmädchen* (Ten Biographies of Berlin Controller Girls) by Wilhelm Hammer appears, and in the section "Descriptive Literature on Vice Areas in Cities" one finds two further works by Ostwald, the *Großstadt-Dokument Berliner Tanzlokale* (Berlin Dance Halls) as well as the book series *Das Berliner Dirnentum* (Prostitution in Berlin).

In Reckless' dissertation, the similarities between the Berlin studies on prostitution and his own approach are still manifest. Like Ostwald in his volume on Berlin dance halls, Reckless describes the cabarets, cafés and dance halls of the big city as transitional institutions, bordering on red light milieus; like Hammer in his volume on Berlin prostitutes, Reckless renders verbatim the life stories of several women. The similarity had already attracted the attention of Niles Carpenter, who compared Ostwald with Reckless in his "The Sociology of City Life" (see Carpenter 1931, p. 258f.). By contrast, the thoroughly reworked published version of "Vice in Chicago" bears no relation to the Berlin precursors; the more so as Reckless had deleted all references to the *Großstadt-Dokumente* from the printed edition.

The study by Reckless is not the only case in which traces that led from Berlin to Chicago have been obliterated after the fact. The second volume of the *Großstadt-Dokumente* provides another instance: Here, the theatre critic Julius Bab describes the Berlin Bohemia as a community of outsiders, which could emerge only in a modern metropolis. These "cultural rebels," as Bab calls them, perform in his view the function of challenging the "social lies of custom and convenience." The social type of the bohemian is contrasted with two other types: the philistine, the fuddy-duddy whose horizon ends with the reigning order, and the Olympian, the heroic "defender of social life." For Bab, Olympians are the larger-than-life artists who after a period of youthful rebellion accommodate society "in order to, from now on, ameliorate and upgrade it from the inside" (GD 2, p. 96). More than 10 years later, William I. Thomas and Florian Znaniecki have taken up the distinction between "bohemians, philistines and Olympians" in their *opus magnum* "The Polish Peasant in Europe and America." Quintessentially, their narrative of the lives of Polish immigrants to the USA amounts to a tale of trilogy of social types: the bohemians, cultivating their non-adaptedness,

the philistines, unable to respond to new challenges by virtue of their rigid personality structure, and finally the "creative personalities," distinguished by their learning ability.

Taking off from a classic work of the Chicago School, this typology has made its career in American social science. Probably the best known adaptation is the scheme of three "universal types" put forward by David Riesman in "The Lonely Crowd" (1950) where he distinguishes the anomalous (the bohemian), the adjusted (the philistine) and the autonomous who is able to flexibly choose between conformity and non-conformity (the Olympian). Nobody has noticed that this typology is in fact a non-acknowledged citation from the second volume of the *Großstadt-Dokumente*, simply because Thomas and Znaniecki failed to reference the source of their concept. There is, however, another classic work of the Chicago School which indicates how much Bab's contribution was appreciated: The appendix of the textbook "Introduction to the Science of Sociology", published in 1924 by Robert E. Park and Ernest W. Burgess, cites *Die Berliner Bohème* under the rubric "Social Types", right after the reference to the "Polish Peasant" (p. 731). Equally revealing, one year later Louis Wirth has singled out Bab's book as a "unique contribution to the mentality of city life" (Wirth 1925, p. 188). It was never directly quoted anywhere however.

The situation is quite different with regard to Simmel, Bab's teacher.<sup>14</sup> As is generally known, Park and his colleagues not only read and quoted Simmel's essays but also translated many of them, although the conceptual and writing style of the German sociologist could hardly be farther from Chicago's understanding of urban research. As Abbott notes, "Chicago writing lacks the Latinate literacy and high tone of the Europeans" (1999, p. xxx). The intensity of the reception of Simmel's writings cannot hide the fact that the Chicago sociologists never aspired to the levels of abstraction scaled by the German mastermind himself. A good example is Wirth's paper "Urbanism as a Way of Life": Whereas it sets out very clearly indeed the Chicago perspective on city life, its more theoretical passages are restricted to paraphrases of Simmel's essay on *Die Großstädte und das Geistesleben*. The same applies to the work of Robert E. Park, in which Simmel's intellectual style becomes changed beyond recognition. As Donald Levine put it: "Where Simmel was casual—in his acquisition of facts—Park was enthusiastically rigorous; where Simmel was rigorous—in the analysis of structural properties—Park was typically casual" (Levine 1985, p. 115).

---

<sup>14</sup> Bab read 1899 sociology under Simmel in 1899 and for many years the two cultivated a friendship (see Gassen/Landmann 1958, p. 107, 274).

As with Park, this mix of strengths and weaknesses is characteristic of Ostwald's oeuvre. Compared to Simmel's more intuitive approach, Ostwald's perspective on the metropolis is more systematic, but at the same time rather unspectacular, at least for someone like Park who was familiar with the principles of reportage in the city. Rarely did Ostwald formulate his basic tenet—that nothing substitutes for first-hand experience and observation—as vividly as in an article on a sensational murder case in a Berlin tenement building. Here he demands of his readers: "Go there yourself. Have yourself a look at such a house, such a backyard. Not just in some reproduction..."<sup>15</sup> Ostwald's appeal anticipates Park's mandate to his Chicago students 20 years later: "Go into the district (...); get the feeling (...); become acquainted with people (...)" (quoted after Lindner 1996, p. 82).

Next to social reportage, both Ostwald and Park saw in the big city novel an important reference point for their understanding of realism, and shared similar views. Ostwald writes, for instance, in the introduction to the first volume of *Großstadt-Dokumente*: "The astounding rapidity of the growth of the big cities almost excludes that their giant-like content can be represented in a work of art, for instance a novel. This has even escaped a Zola and we will be content that we have overcome the times of such novels." In 1915, Park expresses a very similar point in his first draft for a Chicago program of urban research: "We are mainly indebted to writers of fiction for our more intimate knowledge of contemporary urban life. But the life of our cities demands a more searching and disinterested study than even Emile Zola has given us in his experimental novels..." (Park 1915, p. xxx).

The list of intriguingly parallel programmatic statements by the two urban writers could be extended. Both, Park and Ostwald, saw in the metropolis the emblem of the modern; for both the big city did not represent chaos but a social organism with intelligible regularities. Both nourished a preference for marginal groups and subcultures of the city, and both shared an aversion to the "guardians of mores and morals" (*Sittenwächter*, Ostwald) and "do-gooders" (Park), those who set out to do away with what they saw as certain public nuisances without really knowing and understanding them. Donald Levine could write: "Park's disavowal of Simmel was no less real for being merely implicit" (Levine 1985, p. 115), and one could add: the closeness of Park and Ostwald was no less real for not being capable of substantiation by direct citation.

---

<sup>15</sup> Hans Ostwald: Lucie Berlin, in: *Das Neue Magazin*, 73 (1), 02.07.1904, p. 12.

## The Response to the *Großstadt-Dokumente* in Germany

While the Chicago sociologists appreciated the Berlin series as a coherent research program, the German exponents of the discipline passed it over without comment. Is it conceivable that the series simply went unnoticed by all the prominent social scientists of the time, such as Robert Michels, Franz Oppenheimer, Georg Simmel, Ferdinand Tönnies or Max Weber?

For two reasons we hold that this is unlikely. First, the series was enormously successful; some of the volumes went into more than 20 printings. Not that the *Dokumente* met only the interest of the general reading public; they also drew a great response in the professional literature. To date, we could ascertain more than 80 reviews in German-language professional and academic journals. Beyond reviews of individual volumes, the series was present in the social science journals of the time through contributions of its authors.

The other reason why the series can hardly have been simply overlooked in academia is that its authors, including Ostwald, have had multiple personal contacts with representatives of contemporary sociology. Bab's longstanding friendship with Simmel is only one of several examples for such contacts:

- *Carl Grünberg*, who later became founding director of the famous Frankfurt *Institut für Sozialforschung*, asked Max Winter in 1912 to let him use his research materials;<sup>16</sup>
- *Robert Michels* corresponded with Wilhelm Hammer about Hammer's research on prostitution;<sup>17</sup>
- *Franz Oppenheimer* frequented for several years circles of the Berlin bohemia such as *Die Kommenden* or the *Ethischer Klub*, together with *Dokumente*-authors Hirschfeld, Hyan and Ostwald;<sup>18</sup>
- *Ferdinand Tönnies* and Albert Südekum cultivated a life-long friendship;<sup>19</sup>
- *Max Weber* signed in 1905, together with Oppenheimer and Sombart, the petition for the foundation of the German *Mutterschutzbund* (Association for the Protection of Mothers), which had been drafted by Max Marcuse, another prominent *Dokumente* author.<sup>20</sup>

---

<sup>16</sup> Letter from Grünberg to Winter, October 2, 1912 (source: Max Winter estate, Arbeiterkammer Wien).

<sup>17</sup> See Hammer's postscript for the 20<sup>th</sup> edition of Vol. 23 of the *Großstadt-Dokumente*, p. 105f.

<sup>18</sup> Oppenheimer 1964, p. 121f.

<sup>19</sup> See their correspondence, Tönnies estate, Schleswig-Holsteinische Landesbibliothek Kiel..

<sup>20</sup> See *Monatsschrift für Harnkrankheiten und Sexualhygiene*, No. 3, 1905, p. 149 f.

Because of the public response to the series and the personal contacts of its authors, we feel certain then that leading academicians were not ignorant of the *Großstadt-Dokumente* but consciously passed them over. We assume, in other words, that the Berlin city research project was not seen as a serious contribution to the field of academic sociology. Possibly, due to the makeup of the series, it was perceived as betraying scientific standards for the sake of appealing to the mass public. And certainly its subject matter—the subcultures of the "dark corners" of the big city—in the view of many German sociologists just did not represent a *Kulturwert*, a cultural value (Ostwald).<sup>21</sup>

This attitude can be well exemplified by Werner Sombart's stance. Sombart, too, cultivated personal relations with *Dokumente* authors. Before the First World War he was friends with Felix Salten, another prominent member of the group, and had joined the *Verein für Soziale Kolonisation* (Association for Social Colonization), a social reform organization founded by Ostwald.<sup>22</sup> Sombart's image of the city (and of city research) was fundamentally different from that reflected in the *Großstadt-Dokumente*. This becomes clear, for example, in the controversy over the social relevance of advertising, which Sombart and Edmund Edel fought out in 1908 in the Berlin weekly *Morgen*.<sup>23</sup> Their disagreement is instructive because Edel, as an author of the *Großstadt-Dokumente* attacks here a proponent of contemporary academic sociology. Also, beyond advertising, the *Kulturwert* of the big city is at stake in their dispute.

Sombart's essay criticizes advertising as the characteristic expression of modernity. In its obtrusive omnipresence, he writes, it ruins the image of the city and is "for everyone human strictly disgusting." As a "necessary component of every American, that is sheer capitalistic, economy" advertising is the more developed "the more developed Americanism is," he wrote. In 1904, Sombart had acquainted himself first-hand with the United States, traveling to the country whose influence on German cultural life he judged so highly destructive.<sup>24</sup> In an essay that became famous, "Why is there no Socialism in the United States?", one of the products of this journey, he depicts America as "big-city-land" because here the "idea" of the big city would find its clearest expression and visualization. Once more, he cites Chicago as the

---

<sup>21</sup> It will not have escaped Americans that the *Großstadt-Dokumente* were perceived rather as *Trivilliteratur* in Germany, and this may explain a certain reluctance to reference the series.

<sup>22</sup> See Lenger 1994, p. 183.

<sup>23</sup> Werner Sombart, *Die Reklame*. *Morgen*. *Wochenschrift für deutsche Kultur*. March 6, 1908; Edmund Edel: *Kunst, Kultur und Reklame*. *Morgen*. May 8, 1908.

<sup>24</sup> Sombart participated in the Congress of Arts and Sciences, organized in conjunction with the St. Louis World Fair in 1903-04.

exemplary American city, and opposes it to Nürnberg: "What has Nürnberg in common with Chicago? Nothing but purely exterior features (...) *Dem Geiste nach nichts*"—nothing spiritually (1906, p. 13). Nürnberg, the venerable German city, rich in its traditions, stands here for organic growth and unmistakable cultural identity; in contrast, Chicago represents proliferating expansion, "massification" and civilization as opposed to culture. Much as Karl Scheffler and other cultural critics mentioned earlier, for Sombart Berlin had become a city, which was Americanized through and through. In his *America* book he speaks about the "American spirit" which "we encountered in Berlin so many times" (ibid. p. 18). Elsewhere he designates Berlin a "suburb of New York" and the "desert of modern technological cultures" (1907, p. 173-174). His attack on advertising is then directly aimed at Berlin, whose business districts were studded with *Litfaßsäulen* (large sidewalk cylinders for poster advertising, invented by Ernst Theodor Litfaß) and all kinds of commercial promotion, as contemporary photos from around 1900 show.

Edel, himself a trained poster painter and copywriter, answered Sombart unambiguously: "His essay simply misses the point" (*sein Artikel hat daneben gehauen*). And he adds:

"Unfortunately Sombart is too much of a cultured man. At least in this case: unfortunately. Nowadays the word culture is in everybody's mouth at all occasions. What is culture? Is not a factory smokestack as precious for our culture as the polished fingernails or silken underpants of a groomed waistcoat aesthete (*Westenschnittästhet*)? (...) And the few little people who cannot suffer the smokestacks or the cheap posters will have to retreat into themselves like butterfly cocoons or walk the streets and hold their noses. Even through the streets of the big city that are lost anyway to refined culture life, as Sombart says. Permit me to shake my head and ask which cultures are generated in flat country except potato and beet cultures to which we have only digestive relations" (1908, p. 603).

Advertising was a new material reality in the cityscape of the early 20th century. Its symbolic power for the process of urbanization was recognized by both authors. Sombart perceives it as a sign of cultural decay; for Edel, it constitutes a "cultural factor" (1908, p. 603), a necessary expression of living urbanity. The question of cultural value exposes the rift that not only separated Edel and Sombart but cut right through the intelligentsia of the turning century. Edel and Sombart are like two railway travelers who sit opposite each other in the same

compartment. Both move at the height of their times but whereas one looks forward into the journey and welcomes what is ahead, the other looks back, grieving what is about to vanish.

Sombart's view of urban development is reflected in his ideas about urban research. Here, too, his resentment is manifest in the reproach of Americanism. To comprehend his attitude, one must keep in mind that the Chicago School of Sociology was, in the time of the Weimar Republic, primarily regarded as an enterprise for the standardized recording of mass data and not as a project of urban ethnography.<sup>25</sup> In one of the first reports by a German sociologist on urban studies in the USA, the division of labor and technicity are singled out as the prominent characteristics of Chicago's brand of empiricism (Walther 1927, p. 49f.). Robert E. Park is introduced here as the organizer of mass surveys and engineer of a research factory (ibid. p. 69). Andreas Walther proved especially impressed by the mapping technique (ibid. p. 61).

Among the sociologists of the Weimar Republic, Walther was alone in assuming that American cartographic methods were the wave of the future.<sup>26</sup> The development of empirical social research in Germany had come to a standstill during World War I after a promising prelude with the great surveys of the *Verein für Socialpolitik* or earlier studies by Tönnies in Hamburg. Of all presentations at annual meetings of German sociologists between 1910 and 1930, only three were devoted to methodological subjects. Not a single speaker thought it necessary to present results of an empirical study. At the time, sociological professionalism was measured primarily against the level of abstraction of terminological architectures. The protagonists of the discipline, who were greatly concerned about a specifically German sociology, equated "empiricism" with "Americanism" and rated both as signs of decaying thought.<sup>27</sup> The works of Park et al., which during that time were most influential in the US, did not go unnoticed in Germany; but they were considered utterly lacking in theory.

In conclusion, we offer a fictional—that is, mediated by us—dialogue of the year 1931, a kind of dispute between Chicago and Berlin, between American and German sociology, concretely between Louis Wirth and Werner Sombart, two outstanding representatives of the discipline

---

<sup>25</sup> In Germany, the qualitative parts of Chicago's field research were recognized as its central characteristic only 70 years later (see especially Lindner 1990). A further indication of the way it was received, commented on by Martin Bulmer: "The Chicago School tends to attract admirers and critics who are very ready to read into history tendencies within the discipline which they either like or dislike" (1984, p. 224).

<sup>26</sup> This changes only with the Third Reich, when Walther had the opportunity to try out the social cartography methods he had become familiar with in Chicago in a project for the delimitation of "socially corruptive" (*gemeinschädlichen*) areas in the city of Hamburg (see Roth 1987).

<sup>27</sup> Schad 1972, p. 46f.; Käsler 1984, p. 86. See also Weyer 1984.

who most certainly knew Ostwald's *Großstadt-Dokumente*. That Wirth has read them is borne out by his bibliography. That Sombart knew them is highly probable, not only because he had personal contacts with Ostwald but also because he has read Wirth's bibliography entry by entry.

In the *Handwörterbuch der Soziologie* of 1931, Sombart closes his chapter on *Städtische Siedlung, Stadt* (urban settlement, city) with recommended literature. He starts with a reference to Wirth's "Bibliography of the Urban Community" and asks at the end, after enumerating 30 more sources: "Strangely enough the bibliography mentioned first, otherwise so rich in content, contains only 6 of the remarkable 30 works I have listed here. Why?" (1931, p. 533). That same year, Wirth has given an indirect answer to this in the *Kölner Vierteljahreshefte für Soziologie*. In a literature review, he castigates the German sociologists "on their lofty academic throne, doing their arm-chair philosophy" and their dismissal of the work of Chicago as "a form of journalistic reportage" (1931, p. 547).

Sombart's article in the *Handwörterbuch* can in turn be read as a counteroffensive because here he takes an explicit position with respect to Park's and his colleagues' research program: "Since usable material comes only from bringing it together under a theoretically flawless, that is fruitful perspective, I find it doubtful whether the industrious inquiries of the American urban and rural 'sociologists' will produce much insight in societal connections" (ibid. p. 531). Sombart makes it clear, even by the way he uses his quotation marks, that he does not take the urban sociology of Chicago very seriously. It can be inferred easily, from this comment, why Sombart—who must have studied Wirth's inventory very carefully indeed and therefore also must have noted the *Großstadt-Dokumente*—found none of these books "remarkable".<sup>28</sup>

Much as he saw a "mass phenomenon" in the American big city, Sombart saw a mass phenomenon in American urban research, a soulless product of collective forces, that put into jeopardy his almost aristocratic ideal of the "outstanding personality". In our view, the factors responsible for the belated reception of the Chicago School also account for the ignoring of the *Großstadt-Dokumente*. Alternative "homemade" research approaches contradicted

---

<sup>28</sup> In a French perspective, the outcome of the contest would have been considered *remis*. In his comparative review of two overviews of Chicago School methodology, the sociologist Maurice Halbwachs summarizes a year later: "En somme, tandis que les sociologues allemands ne sortent guère de la théorie, les Américains ne se préoccupent peut-être pas assez des idées et vues directrices" (1932, p. 81).

traditional thought patterns of established disciplines and were ignored or forgotten in Germany. While the *Dokumente* were incorporated into the canon of respectable research literature in America—from "The City," 1925, up to Peter Fritzsche's "Vagabond in the Fugitive City", 1994—the group around Ostwald was excommunicated from social science research traditions where the action took place—in Berlin, Vienna or Hamburg.

### **A Final Note**

Chicago's peculiar reception of the Berlin studies made us speculate on whether the intellectual impact of Ostwald's panoramic vision of the modern metropolis could have taken a different form. For them, the *Großstadt-Dokumente* served as a prototype of that research style which in due time was to emerge as a trademark of the Chicago School: the collaborative investigation of the urban landscape by a collective of authors. But Ostwald's initial idea underwent substantial changes in the course of its transatlantic migration. The Chicago sociologists read the *Dokumente* with a view to reverse and "re-academicize" the mélange of writing styles characteristically and, at least in part, consciously cultivated by the Berlin authors. In this, they followed two strategies: the combination of ethnographic approaches to describing the city with quantitative approaches and a reformulation of empirical data in the theoretical framework of human ecology. Nevertheless, the repudiation of Chicago-style sociology as sociological "Americanism" by German representatives of the discipline remained firmly in place.

Only since the immediate post-WWII-years has US-style empirical social research in a general way been recognized and taken intellectually seriously in German sociology—in the course of a broad "re-education" of German social scientists at US universities and the homecoming of social scientists from American exile. And although Chicago sociologists like Nels Anderson, Everett C. Hughes, Morris Janowitz and—indirectly, in his function as president of the International Sociological Association—Louis Wirth himself were very much participating in this process of re-education, it would again take 40 years or more until their early contributions to urban sociology were taken note of on the continent. The reason is that urban sociology in the early Chicago mold had already lost much of its influence on mainstream sociology in the face of approaches orientated to strictly quantitative analysis of

"variables" as established in the US by the group around Paul F. Lazarsfeld.<sup>29</sup> Only after this particular sociological paradigm—strongly oriented toward opinion and market survey research—had in its turn lost persuasiveness were the early Chicago studies rediscovered as forerunners of a new "interpretive paradigm".

---

<sup>29</sup> For the opposition between Park's "contextualism" and Lazarsfeld's "variable empiricism" see Abbott 1997.

## Sources

Louis Wirth Papers, Joseph Regenstein Library of the University of Chicago

Box XL, Folder 1

Box XLI, Folder 1

Box XLII, Folder 3, 6

Box XLIII, Folder 1

## References

- Abbott, Andrew. 1999. *Department and Discipline. Chicago sociology at One Hundred*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Anderson, Nels. 1923. *The Hobo. The Sociology of the Homeless Man*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Bulmer, Martin. 1984. *The Chicago School of Sociology: Institutionalization, Diversity, and the Rise of Sociological Research*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Carpenter, Niles. 1931. *The Sociology of City Life*. New York: Longmans, Green & Co.
- D'Eramo, Marco. 1996. *Das Schwein und der Wolkenkratzer. Chicago: Eine Geschichte unserer Zukunft*. München: Kunstmann.
- Dreiser, Theodore. 1913. *A Traveler at Forty*. New York: The Century Co.
- Edel, Edmund. 1908. "Kunst, Kultur und Reklame." *Morgen*, May 8: 601-605.
- Fritzsche, Peter. 1994. "Vagabond in the Fugitive City: Hans Ostwald, Imperial Berlin and the Grossstadt-Dokumente." *Journal of Contemporary History* 29:385-402.
- Gassen, Kurt and Michael Landmann. 1958. *Buch des Dankes an Georg Simmel*. Berlin: Duncker & Humblot.
- Halbwachs, Maurice. 1983. *L'évolution des recherches économiques*. Cambridge: University Press.
- Käsler, Dirk. 1984. *Die frühe Soziologie 1909 bis 1934 und ihre Entstehungs-Milieus. Eine wissenschaftssoziologische Untersuchung*. Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag.
- Lenger, Friedrich. 1994. *Werner Sombart 1863-1941. Eine Biographie*. München: Beck.
- Lepenes, Wolf. 1988. *Die drei Kulturen. Soziologie zwischen Literatur und Wissenschaft*. Reinbek: Rowohlt.
- Levine, Donald N. 1985. *Ambivalent Encounters: Disavowals of Simmel by Durkheim, Weber, Lukács, Park, and Parsons*. In Donald N. Levine. *The Flight from Ambiguity* (p. 89-141). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Lindner, Rolf. 1996. *The Reportage of Urban Culture. Robert Park and the Chicago School*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Lüdke, Alf, Inge MarBolek and Adelheid von Saldern, eds. 1996. *Amerikanisierung. Traum und Alptraum im Deutschland des 20. Jahrhunderts*. Stuttgart: Steiner.
- Oppenheimer, Franz. 1964. *Erlebtes, Erstrebtes, Erreichtes. Lebenserinnerungen*. Düsseldorf: Melzer.
- Park, Robert E. and Ernest W. Burgess. 1924. *Introduction to the Science of Sociology*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

- Park, Robert E., Ernest W. Burgess and Roderick D. McKenzie. 1925. *The City*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Pizzorno, Alessandro. 1987. "Introduzione." In *La Citta*. Milano: Comunità.
- Reckless, Walter C. 1925. *The Natural History of Vice Areas in Chicago*. Chicago: Dissertation, Department of Sociology and Anthropology
- Reckless, Walter C. 1969. *Vice in Chicago*. Montclair, N.J.: Patterson Smith.
- Ribbe, Wolfgang, ed. 1987. *Geschichte Berlins. Zweiter Band. Von der Märzrevolution bis zur Gegenwart*. München: Beck.
- Roth, Karl Heinz. 1987. Städtesanierung und "ausmerzende" Soziologie. Der Fall Andreas Walther und die "Notarbeit 51" der "Notgemeinschaft der Deutschen Wissenschaft" 1934-1935 in Hamburg. In Carsten Klingemann (ed.) *Rassenmythos und Sozialwissenschaften in Deutschland* (p. 370-393). Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag.
- Salerno, Roger A. 1987. *Louis Wirth. A Bio-bibliography*. New York: Greenwood Press.
- Schad, Susanne Petra. 1972. *Empirical Research in Weimar-Germany*. Paris: Mouton.
- Scheffler, Karl. 1910. *Berlin. Ein Stadtschicksal*. Berlin: Erich Reiss.
- Smith, Woodruff D. 1979. "The emergence of German urban sociology 1900-1910." *Journal of the History of Sociology* 1:1-16.
- Sombart, Werner. 1907. "Wien." *Morgen*, July 19: 172-175.
- Sombart, Werner. 1908. "Die Reklame." *Morgen*, March 6: 281-286.
- Sombart, Werner. 1931 "Städtische Siedlung, Stadt." In *Handwörterbuch der Soziologie*. Stuttgart: Enke
- Sombart, Werner. 1969. *Warum gibt es in den Vereinigten Staaten keinen Sozialismus?* Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft.
- Twain, Mark. 1963. "The German Chicago." In *The Complete Essays*. Garden City, New York: Doubleday.
- Walther, Andreas. 1927. *Soziologie und Sozialwissenschaften in Amerika*. Karlsruhe: Braun.
- Weyer, Johannes. 1984. *Westdeutsche Soziologie 1945-1960. Deutsche Kontinuitäten und nordamerikanischer Einfluß*. Berlin: Duncker & Humblot.
- Wirth, Louis. 1925. *A Bibliography of the Urban Community*. In Robert E. Park, Ernest W. Burgess and Roderick D. McKenzie. *The City* (p. 161-229). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Wirth, Louis. 1931. "Drei amerikanische Neuerscheinungen zur Großstadtsoziologie." *Kölner Vierteljahreshefte für Soziologie*, 10: 547-550.
- Wirth, Louis. 1964. "Urbanism as a way of life." In *On Cities and Social Life*. Chicago: University Press.



**Veröffentlichungsreihe**  
**der Arbeitsgruppe "Metropolenforschung"**  
des Forschungsschwerpunkts Technik - Arbeit - Umwelt  
am Wissenschaftszentrum Berlin für Sozialforschung

## 2001

FS II 01-501

**Jörg Potthast**

*Wenn Riesen tanzen lernen.* Großflughäfen und Flexibilisierung aus wartungssoziologischer Perspektive. 31 Seiten

FS II 01-502

**Dietmar Jazbinsek, Bernward Joerges und Ralf Thies**

The Berlin "Großstadt-Dokumente": A Forgotten Precursor of the Chicago School of Sociology. 25 Seiten

## 2000

FS II 00-501

**Katharina Peters**

*When Reform Comes into Play:* Budgeting as Negotiations between Administrations. 21 Seiten

FS II 00-502

**Matthias Horwitz**

*Rechtswissenschaftliche Expertise für den Tiergartentunnel.* Zur Institutionalisierung eines Grenzobjekts. 47 Seiten

FS II 00-503

**Bernward Joerges und Terry Shinn**

*Research-Technology.* Instrumentation Between Science, State and Industry. 22 Seiten

**Vergriffen:** Veröffentlicht unter dem Titel "A Fresh Look at Instrumentation" (Teil 1) und "Research-Technology in Historical Perspective: An Attempt at Reconstruction" (Teil 2) in Bernward Joerges and Terry Shinn (Eds.) *Instrumentation between Science, State and Industry.* Sociology of the Sciences Vol. XXII. Dordrecht/Boston/London: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2001, S. 1-11 und S. 241-248

FS II 00-504

**Bernward Joerges**

*Technik - Das Andere der Gesellschaft?* Ein Rückblick auf 20 Jahre Soziologie städtischer und anderer Artefakte. 20 Seiten

FS II 00-505

**Dietmar Jazbinsek**

*Kinometerdichter.* Karrierepfade im Kaiserreich zwischen Stadtforschung und Stummfilm. Mit Filmessays von Arno Arndt, Alfred Deutsch-German, Edmund Edel, Hans Hyan, Felix Salten und Walter Turszinsky. 66 Seiten

FS II 00-506

**Bernward Joerges**

*Metropolitan Time*. Reflections on the Millennium, Calendars, and Gregorian Hegemony. 34 Seiten

## 1999

FS II 99-501

**Ralf Thies und Dietmar Jazbinsek**

*Embleme der Moderne*. Berlin und Chicago in Stadttexen der Jahrhundertwende. 26 Seiten

**Vergrieffen:** Veröffentlicht unter dem Titel „Berlin – das europäische Chicago. Über ein Leitmotiv der Amerikanisierungsdebatte zu Beginn des 20. Jahrhunderts“, in: Clemens Zimmermann und Jürgen Reulecke (Hg.), *Die Stadt als Moloch? Das Land als Kraftquell? Wahrnehmungen und Wirkungen der Großstädte um 1900*. Basel, Boston, Berlin: Birkhäuser 1999, S. 53-94

FS II 99-502

**Katharina Peters**

*Der Plumpsack geht um: Berliner Budgetkreisläufe*. 40 Seiten

**Vergrieffen:** Veröffentlicht unter dem Titel „Die Doppelkonstruktion budgetärer Wirklichkeit. Repräsentationen und Praktiken der Finanzverwaltung“, in: *Zeitschrift für Soziologie*, Jg. 29, Heft 2, April 2000, S. 121-137.

FS II 99-503

**Dorothea Kress**

*Großstadt und Geschlechterordnung*. Geschichten aus dem Kino. 18 Seiten

FS II 99-504

**Matthias Horwitz**

*Max Webers Institutionalisierungskonzept*. Über den Zusammenhang von Ideen und Interessen am Beispiel Stadt. 36 Seiten

FS II 99-505

**Katharina Peters**

*Wenn Reform ins Spiel kommt*. Über das inneradministrative Verhandeln von Berliner Globalsummen. 29 Seiten

## 1998

FS II 98-501

**Dietmar Jazbinsek und Ralf Thies**

*Berlin/Chicago 1914*. Die Berliner Großstadt-Dokumente und ihre Rezeption durch die Gründergeneration der Chicago School of Sociology. 56 Seiten

FS II 98-502

**Jörg Potthast**

*"Sollen wir mal ein Hochhaus bauen?"* Das Architekturbüro als Labor der Stadt. 84 Seiten

FS II 98-503

**Bernward Joerges**

*High Variability Discourse in the History and Sociology of Large Technical Systems*. 31 Seiten

**Vergriffen:** Veröffentlicht in Olivier Coutard (Ed.), *The Governance of Large Technical Systems*, London and New York: Routledge 1999, 258-290

**1997**

FS II 97-501

**Katharina Peters**

*Die gerech(ne)te Stadt*. Streitgespräch in Berlin - ein Essay. 34 Seiten

FS II 97-502

**Bernward Joerges**

*Die Brücken des Robert Moses oder: Do Politics Have Artifacts?* Zur Konstruktion von Stadtraum und Stadtgesellschaft in technik- und planungssoziologischen Diskursen. 29 Seiten

**Vergriffen:** Veröffentlicht unter dem Titel "Die Brücken des Robert Moses. Stille Post in der Stadt- und Techniksoziologie" in *Leviathan* 27, 1, 1999, S. 43-63 (Teil 1) und unter dem Titel "Brücken, Busse, Autos und andere Verkehrsteilnehmer. Zur Repräsentation und Wirkung städtischer Artefakte" in Gert Schmidt (Hg.), *Automobil und Automobilismus. Technik und Gesellschaft Jahrbuch 10*, Frankfurt am Main/New York: Campus 1999, S. 197-218 (Teil 2); English version: "Do Politics Have Artefacts?" und „Scams Cannot Be Busted“, in: *Social Studies of Sciences*, Vol. 29, Nr. 3 (June 1999), S. 411-431 und S. 450-457

FS II 97-503

**Matthias Horwitz**

*High-Tech Beton für den Potsdamer Platz*. Zur Institutionalisierung eines Wissensobjektes. 48 Seiten

**1996**

FS II 96-501

**Dietmar Jazbinsek und Ralf Thies**

*Großstadt-Dokumente*. Metropolenforschung im Berlin der Jahrhundertwende. 89 Seiten

FS II 96-502

**Katharina Peters**

*Pausenhalle der Transformation*. Skizze eines ostdeutschen Amtes in Nachwende-Zeiten. 23 Seiten

**Vergriffen:** Veröffentlicht unter dem Titel „Warten auf Godot. Eine Skizze ostdeutscher Bürokratie im Transformationsprozeß“, in Stefan Hirschauer und Klaus Amman (Hg.), *Die Befremdung der eigenen Kultur*, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp 1997, S. 198-217.

FS II 96-503

**Matthias Horwitz, Bernward Joerges und Jörg Potthast (Hg.)**

*Stadt und Film*. Versuche zu einer 'Visuellen Soziologie'. Mit Beiträgen von B. Joerges, D. Kress, A. Krämer, D. Naegler und J. Potthast. 113 Seiten

## 1995

FS II 95-501

**Barbara Czarniawska and Bernward Joerges**

*Travels of Ideas*. Organizational Change as Translation. 37 Seiten

Auslaufend. Veröffentlicht in: Barbara Czarniawska & Guje Sevón (eds.), *Translating Organizational Change*, Berlin etc.: De Gruyter 1996, S. 13-48.

FS II 95-502

**Richard Rottenburg**

*When Organizations Travel*. On Intercultural Translation. 43 Seiten

Auslaufend. Veröffentlicht in: Barbara Czarniawska & Guje Sevón (eds.), *Translating Organizational Change*, Berlin etc.: De Gruyter 1996, S. 191-240.

Bei Ihren Bestellungen von WZB-Papers schicken Sie bitte unbedingt einen an Sie adressierten **Aufkleber** mit, sowie **je Paper** eine **Briefmarke im Wert von DM 1,00** oder einen **"Coupon Réponse International"** (für Besteller aus dem Ausland).

Please send a **self-addressed label** and **postage stamps in the amount of 1 DM** or a **"Coupon-Réponse International"** (if you are ordering from outside Germany) for **each** WZB-Paper requested.

**Bestellschein**

**Absender • Return Address:  
Order Form**

An das  
Wissenschaftszentrum Berlin  
für Sozialforschung  
**PRESSE- UND INFORMATIONSREFERAT**  
Reichpietschufer 50  
D-10785 Berlin

*Hiermit bestelle ich folgende(s)  
Discussion Paper(s):*

*Please send me the following  
Discussion Paper(s):*

--	--