

Reflections on Gottmann's thought

Introduction by the Guest-Editor

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The text on these pages is a brief introductory note by the guest-editor on the contents of Part 1 of the present issue.

Of the three parts of this special number of *Ekistics*, the first, entitled "Reflections on Gottmann's thought," contains 13 articles in three groups. In the first group are those that focus on the thought of Jean Gottmann, such as the papers of Robert Harper, John Agnew, Luca Muscarà, Nicolas Prevelakis, Jean-Paul Hubert as well as Pavlos Tzermias whose essay concentrates more on the relationships between history and geography. The papers in the next group – contributed by Christian Lagarde, Jean Laponce, Ron Johnston, Yasuo Miyakawa and the present guest editor – refer indirectly to the thinking of Gottmann. Lastly are essays by Paul Claval who highlights some relationships with Gottmann's thought, and Thomas Pierre Fournel who provides an in-depth analysis of new geographical realities. Let us examine them analytically.

The first papers of this part emphasize the theme of the relationship of the political thinking of Gottmann with those of urban geography.

● For **Robert Harper** the scientific life of Gottmann is cleanly divided into two parts and in the second he discovers that urban change corresponds to an important economic, social and political change. He writes: "*Megalopolis: The Urbanization of the Northeastern Seaboard of the United States* was a watershed for Jean Gottmann as well as for the study of metropolitan areas. Up until he embarked on his seminal study of the adjacent, interacting huge metropolitan areas from Boston to Washington he had written little about cities and not much more about the United States. After that time the bulk of his writing was about large urban places." But, Harper continues, "in *Megalopolis* Gottmann was already writing about the emerging global economy – and its accompanying global cultures – that increasingly dominated the world through the remaining more than 30 years of his life. The rest of his life would be spent thinking of this phenomenon, discussing it with urbanists throughout the world, and writing about the large urban concentrations of this new world." The study of urbanization brings

Gottmann to the realization that the change had greater depth: "What began as the study of a spatial, regional complex, increasingly turned to concern, even predictions, emphasizing social and economic developments. Now, two good quarters of a century later, he realized that he was dealing with the mutation in the very nature of the city, and in the behavior of urban society" ("The opening of the oyster shell," 1990).

With this opening of his urban thought towards the big economic and social changes of our time to which Harper refers, Gottmann's reflections on contemporary urbanization must be put in the context of his in-depth analysis of territorial systems.

● In the essay that he devotes to megalopolis and global cities, **John Agnew** writes "his urban geography was an outgrowth of his political geography which emphasized historical oscillation between closed and open territorial systems." Consequently "urban development can only be understood in the context of the natures of the territorial system prevalent at a certain historical conjuncture." Gottmann's ideas about urbanization are inseparable from his theories on the partitioning of the world and on the significance of territory: they are inextricably linked together to form a cohesive theory.

● The relationship between Gottmann's contributions to political geography and to urban geography is also analyzed by **Luca Muscarà**. This continuity exists on two levels. First, there is a correspondence between the general historical plan and the author's biography. For example, the context of the Cold War defines a geopolitical scenario characterized by relatively stable borders, which temporarily eclipse the dominant role of political geography in the 1930s and 1940s. In the second postwar period, the newly established political stability fostered economic expansion, a population explosion, development of mass transportation (automobile and airplane), and reconstruction in Europe, all of which contributed to a substantial urban renaissance, a geographic phenomenon anticipated by Gottmann. The second level of investigation moves on from the historical, scientific, and biographical contexts of the epoch to Gottmann's work itself. Here the article attempts to track via its vast bibliography some characteristic constants in the evolu-

tion of his thought, singling out, for example, in what way within megalopolis those factors that had already been theorized to explain the political partitioning of geographical space (such as circulation, iconography, and carrefour) are present.

● **Paul Claval** also refers to, if indirectly, Gottmann's urban geography, but his attention is focused on the changes of urban geography and on the fact that Gottmann could be considered a precursor. "The substitution of cultural approaches to morphological and functional ones was mainly achieved from the 1970s. Some authors had however understood earlier the interest of combining these different perspectives: it explains the interest of Jean Gottmann's contributions to the study of big modern cities."

● With **Pavlos Tzermias's** essay, we move from urban to political geography. The article faces the theme of the relationships between history and geography seen by both geographers and historians. Since for geographers Tzermias takes Gottmann into consideration, his article is an occasion for a detailed re-examination of the theory of political partitioning of space and other themes of the Oxonian master. After all, "the distinction between the 'static' element of geography and the 'dynamic' element of history recalls the concept of iconography proposed by Jean Gottmann. Here, it should be emphasized that Gottmann was conscious of the interdependence of geography and history. In the intellectual environment in which he studied, the frontiers between geography and history were practically non-existent." For historians, the author considered is instead Fernand Braudel. "From the point of view of a historian," Tzermias writes, "it can be said that there are several connections between geography and history. To follow Fernand Braudel, history could be divided into three parts: an immovable history, a history of slow rhythm, and a history formed by short, rapid and nervous oscillations." And although "the almost immovable history," that is, "geographical time and, quite simply, the relations of man who makes the history with the geographical milieu, are of crucial importance under certain conditions," Tzermias shares Braudel's thought. "Je n'ai pas voulu négliger," Tzermias quotes, "cette histoire-là, presque hors du temps, au contact des choses inanimées, ni me contenter à son sujet, de ces traditionnelles introductions géographiques à l'histoire, inutilement placées au seuil de tant de livres, avec leurs paysages minéraux, leurs labours et leurs fleurs qu'on montre rapidement et dont ensuite n'est plus jamais question, comme si les fleurs ne revenaient pas avec chaque printemps, comme si les troupeaux s'arrêtaient dans leurs déplacements, comme si les navires n'avaient pas à voguer sur une mer réelle, qui change avec les saisons" (BRAUDEL, 1990).

As Harper's essay shows, the significance of his study of the American Northeastern megalopolis brought Gottmann to expand his analysis to the issues of contemporary urbanization at a global scale. So Tzermias' essay introduces, as I said, Gottmann's political geography and the two great forces that influence the human geography of the world.

The articles that follow deepen three themes above all: "iconography," territoriality, and finally boundaries and frontier.

● **Nicolas Prevelakis** writes, "Gottmann's 'Iconography' does not make reference to simple images, but to the icons of the Byzantine tradition. Through his studies and his Ukrainian origins, Gottmann was equipped with a profound understanding of Christian Orthodoxy and of the symbolic wealth of icons in the Byzantine and post-Byzantine world." For this Nicolas Prevelakis dedicates his study to an in-depth analysis of the relationship of the concept of Gottmann's iconography – that, as is known, picks up the symbiosis "entre trois éléments essentiels constitutifs de toute société et de toute iconographie régionale: la religion, les passés politiques et l'organisation sociale" (GOTTMANN, 1952, p. 220) – with the Byzantine and Greek

Orthodox traditions.

Tzermias writes: "Jean Gottmann emphasized the necessity 'de faire entrer la géographie régionale dans l'iconographie.' And he writes: 'C'est ainsi que l'iconographie devient en géographie un môle de résistance au mouvement, un facteur de stabilisation politique'." That is a way to resist change.

● **Christian Lagarde** thoroughly examines this dimension using the example of a Southwestern French minority, considering not only its symbols and myths but also its representations. "In contrast to inherited nationalist groupings, political claims have emerged based on cultural, linguistic or religious identity, tending to produce a fragmentation of the nation-state. These processes, more or less violent in their expression, are nourished by *representations*, that is to say manifestations of the *Imaginary*, based often on myths which are variously understood outside, and conserved to a greater or lesser degree inside, the geographical entities to which they apply. Thus the situation lends itself to an analysis in terms of *images*, which may become *icons* when they are invested with the intangible values associated with the sacred, and may thus form *iconographies*."

● Next, my own study examines the formation of community icons at the urban scale from the concept of neighborhood to that of icon. The analysis concerns above all the literature of urban planners and architects that evokes the symbolic values of the city and architecture in contemporary thought and in images of the past.

The two essays that follow are devoted to a second theme in Gottmann's political geography: territory.

● **Ron Johnston** refers to the 1973 book *The Significance of Territory*, recalling that he had "explored the importance of evolving societies of the division of the earth's surface into bounded territories associated with sovereign states." At the same time, however, Gottmann had "identified the contemporary situation as one of considerable fluidity, with territory losing its importance at some scales but retaining it at others." This research, as Johnston writes, concluded 30 years after it was presented, suggests "how that fluidity has developed and how different scales have become important in the use of territoriality strategies."

● A new form of territoriality is investigated by **Thomas Fournel**, who focuses on the inhabitants of Hong Kong who, after the return of the city to China, moved to Canada. "During the last few decades, another form of Chineseness emerged in Hong Kong, modern and capitalist, announcing a new Chinese identity not only for its inhabitants but also for all the overseas Chinese. In particular, the recent brain drain, along with the exodus of business people, ended up in spreading satellite communities in the English-speaking New World. Simultaneously, this complexification of human migration was predicating a new territorial era corresponding to the dispersion of an ethnic group (or even of a family) around the world according to capital accumulation strategy. Therefore, a migrant lifestyle was born, culturally self-sufficient, including a Western developed environment."

Already Gottmann, Johnston writes, "explored the importance to evolving societies of the division of the earth's surface into bounded territories associated with sovereign states."

● A theme closely connected to that of territoriality is that of *confinements*, to which **Jean Laponce** dedicates his article. In the essay, starting from the recognition that Gottmann was right in pointing out a tendency – parallel to the process of globalization – of new states to multiply, he posits how boundaries could be defined from there. "True, the EU and Schengen type of agreements reduce some of these borders," Laponce writes, "but for the world as a whole the century just ended marks a triumph of the movement of nationalities expressed in the juxtaposition of sovereign states with juridical control over separate

territories." He asks: "Will the 21st century reverse the process of fragmentation of the world system of states?" Certainly, "the formation of large economic and military blocs capable of measuring up to the super powers of the time will push the system in that direction; but, ethnic and national conflicts will continue to have an opposite effect. We should thus anticipate that new nations will appear, especially if economic markets and political 'markets' become decoupled from each other, thus allowing very small states to find viable niches in the global economy."

● **Yasuo Miyakawa's** essay is also of great interest. It is well known that Gottmann returned repeatedly to Japan where he was able to closely examine the development of the megalopolis. Miyakawa examines the history of Japanese geography in the light of Gottmann's thought, above all the concepts of central regions, frontier regions, iconography, and orbits. "The development of central regions and the evolution of frontier regions in Japan," he writes, "have been closely interrelated with each other as Japan has become incorporated into the modern world system." Recalling the basic structure and the mechanism of interaction between center and frontier, Miyakawa investigates "the growth of Japan at five historical stages, at each of which the changing role of iconography is examined in relation to the expansion or contraction of Japan's orbit on the global scene."

● This part closes with the contribution of **Jean-Paul Hubert**, who discovered the thought of Gottmann after studies of a quantitative and analytical nature. The interest of this essay derives from the fact that, continuing the same approach, Hubert places the master's thought in the historical context of the years when American geography spread throughout the world. "The

profound transformation of the natural as well as the social sciences," he writes, "was felt with exceptional force in the United States after the Second World War. As a consequence, it became imperative for geography, which was 'born of the need to build a bridge between the natural sciences and the human sciences' (GOTTMANN, 1952), to reconstruct this bridge entirely, in a more rational manner and with a keener awareness of what was at stake than that of the nineteenth-century masters." In this historical and theoretical perspective, Hubert thinks that "after having developed a formal method for the analysis of spatial organization ... [Gottmann] carried out a critical review of existing theories concerning the determining factors of this organization, and devised a new one. Through this epistemological maneuver," Hubert proposes, "Gottmann re-oriented geography by placing it in the realm of the sciences of organization and structures. It is in this very structuralist orientation that the value of this theory lies, although it was acknowledged as such neither by geographers, nor by the main representatives of structuralism." In fact Jean Gottmann's thought continues to influence many contemporary geographers, and his contribution not only represents a bridge between the natural sciences and the human sciences, as he himself wrote in 1952, but a real bridge between the methods of historical and scientific disciplines.

Of course the order I give to the articles of the first part is arbitrary. The effort is to put together the contributions of many authors on the thinking of Gottmann. But the reflection of the great master is so varied and complex that each author gathers a different aspect that is very difficult to coincide with unitary speech.