

From the global network of megalopolises to the political partitioning of the world

The guest-editor's introductory statement

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● From Paris to Ekistics: The validity of a great geographical theory

This special volume of *Ekistics* began in a very simple way. In 1996 an important symposium devoted to the thought of Jean Gottmann was organized at the Sorbonne by Paul Claval, George Prevelakis and André-Louis Sanguin. Jean Gottmann was one of the greatest geographers of the 20th century. The title of this meeting made explicit reference to the Gottmannian concept of "iconography" and to the way in which it could apply to the identity of Europe after the fall of the Berlin wall and the collapse of the Soviet Union. The conference attracted many researchers to Paris, not just experts and admirers of Gottmann's thought. There were also numerous young scholars, who discovered the thought of the great geographer evoked by the political events of the time.

In truth, as George Prevelakis writes for this special volume, the outcome of the Paris conference on current European issues was not entirely convincing. Although dedicated to Gottmann and his thought, the Paris conference focused more on research concerning single European cases after the recent political events. There was at least one exception though; the

quest for a unified European iconography – an issue that Gottmann would have attributed to a need for security, as opposed to the possibility of maintaining a variety of European iconographies – in Gottmann's perspective could have been an indicator of Europe's strength.

But there is no doubt that the greatest appeal of the conference for researchers interested in the distribution of humans in space had been the opportunity to verify in the light of recent events in the political geography of Europe the validity of a modern theory of the relationships of human communities with territory. That important studies on the matter would be published for a wider readership than that of the Paris conference seemed thus a good reason to propose to the Editor of this journal to host them in *Ekistics*, although some of the papers in English had already been published.

Therefore it seemed to me that it would be of interest to return to the initial proposition of the Paris conference, emphasizing not so much the single cases of Europe in the light of Gottmann's political thought, but on the contrary the validity of the ideas of Gottmann in the light of European events, without concerns of a geo-political nature having to resolve single cases. The initial interest of the Paris conference regained importance by showing that it was necessary to read again the work of Gottmann to measure its validity in terms of the contribution it could make to the explanation of the European concerns that emerged after the collapse of the Berlin wall.

Many papers, especially those presented in the first part of the Paris conference, would certainly have been of great interest to a Society such as the World Society for Ekistics (WSE) and to a journal such as *Ekistics* devoted to the theories of the human occupation of inhabited space. It would also have been a way to remember that Jean Gottmann had been President of the World Society for Ekistics and had collaborated assiduously with the journal since the 1960s. The publication of the papers of the Paris conference turned then into an occasion to measure the validity in time of this theory and to verify to what degree and in what way it had kept on developing. The request to the authors was to publish the studies presented in Paris or to write new studies on the same matter, but expressly focusing

on illustrating the thought of Gottmann became the new spirit of the special issue. At the same time it also became legitimate to address the same request to all the partners of *Ekistics*. And the result was that all the contributions are new.

● A second impulse

The second impulse for a publication on the thought of Jean Gottmann came from the consideration of what had happened above all in Anglo-Saxon geography after the disorientation produced by the collapse of the so-called *new geography*. The whole validity and modernity of the thought of the great master consists in the fact that, in those same years in which American geography denounced the “*exceptionalism*” of French geography, Gottmann too was aware of the necessity to overcome the “*exceptionalism*” proposed by French geography, and this was confirmed by the important considerations of Maurice Le Lannou. For the “*exceptionalism*” the interest of geography is in the specific cases and not in theories. But the differences between the thought of Gottmann and that of the “*new geography*” were very relevant. Perhaps for excess of abstraction the “*new geography*” proposed, as other sciences, a widespread use of statistics and, above all, mathematics. But, not long after 1953, the year in which this American experience began, numerous scholars of the “*new geography*” started to recognize its limits. And sooner or later the “*new geography*” was abandoned.

Unlike the American experience that, for excess of abstraction, would quickly be shown inadequate, Gottmann completed the paradigmatic turn by reapproaching the geography of the French school. Indeed he succeeded in bringing geography – a discipline whose existence is justified by the need to explain the variety of the inhabited world – close to the epistemological way with which historians have brought history closer to the other human and social sciences. This is testified by the interesting interview that Gottmann granted to the historian Miloš Perović. In this interview it emerges how much for the Oxonian master human geography remains a discipline that is not epistemologically different from all other forms of knowledge in the intent, confirmed in the conclusions, to provide some references of a practical nature. But geography is methodologically different; first of all because it draws the proof of its statements from the historical reality of territories; and secondly for the attention, similar to that of history, that combines the rigor in the documentation of facts and circumstances with the caution towards conclusions that are too simple and easy.

A few essays of this volume help us to understand this contribution of Gottmann. This is an aspect that Pavlos Tzermias, a historian interested in the relationships between history and geography, reflects well in its articulations and references. And it is also noticed in the articles of John Agnew or Luca Muscarà, who underline the connections that intervene between the various parts of the thought of Jean Gottmann. In other words we are in the presence of a real new theory that justifies the judgment that Gottmann deals with a new anthropocosmos and ekistic model parallel to the one proposed by Constantinos Doxiadis.

● The geographical theory of Jean Gottmann

In the context of these considerations, the commemoration of the 10th anniversary of the death of Jean Gottmann – the third motivation for the preparation of the present volume of *Ekistics* – is a duty and homage to his thought and the continuous flowering of the studies that he initiated. But it is also an opportunity to recognize in an appropriate way the remarkable place of Gottmann in the history of the geographical thought of the second half of the last century, which is the fruit of his work on *Megalopolis* or of his contribution to the solution of the epistemological problems of geography.

First of all it is important to consider the theory he elaborated to explain the relationships of man with geographical space, a theory he formulated in a famous essay of 1948 (*De la méthode d'analyse en Géographie humaine*) and in the chapters on geography (1) and on regional geography (8) of his book *La politique des États et leur géographie* (1952). But it is necessary to clear the field from a possible misunderstanding, i.e. the conviction that this theory is just a political theory. If someone thinks that the geographical theory of Jean Gottmann is political because it is proposed and formulated in a book on political geography, the reading of the book helps to clarify this point. The tendency to the *compartimentation* (partitioning) of space is as diffused as the tendency to the *centralisation* and to the creation of “*carrefours*” (crossroads). It is in the *carrefours* that we find the temple, the castle and the market, i.e. the points of departure of the city since antiquity (religion, politics and economy). But *centralisation*, i.e. the tendency to serve parts of the space starting from a center, lives together with a tendency to divide the space for services or to give identity to a territory which a people considers its own. This “*service partitioning*” lives always together with *circulation* (movement), the first great strength working on the world surface to displace raw materials, products, men and ideas. The “*political compartimentation*” (partitioning) (states, regions but also empires or federations) is the answer to that other big strength working on the Earth, i.e. that coming from the world of ideas, values (*iconographies*) and myths, rites and liturgies to restrain the tendency to the “*service compartimentation*” (service partitioning) that is perpetually moving.

That is not just a political theory but a general theory of the human occupation of the Earth's surface. And, since the human activity that Jean Gottmann confides to geography is to live together – in the accessible and humanized space – with other men and nature, this theory appears to me a true ekistic theory or even a new anthropocosmic model after the model of Doxiadis.

From a casual encounter with a great geographer interested in society and geography, this volume became an occasion to revisit this scientific theory measuring its congruence with the problems of the following years, that is with subjects in which both the World Society for Ekistics and this journal have always been interested.

● The three parts

However the subdivision of this volume of *Ekistics* into three parts does not correspond to the above theories. Although more than one article was eligible to be included in more than one part, I made an effort to bring together:

- in the first part (vol. 70, no. 418/419, January-April 2003), the studies that directly or indirectly contribute to the explanation of the thought of the great master; this part is concluded by Jean Gottmann's complete bibliography first compiled by Lord Patten and subsequently updated by Luca Muscarà;
- in the second part (vol. 70, no. 420/421, May-August 2003), the studies on the particular form of regionalism that Gottmann attributed to contemporary urbanization that speak of “*megalopolis*”; this part also contains those articles that investigate the political dimension of the city and concludes with a revisitation of contemporary urbanization in an attempt to evaluate the forecasts of both Gottmann and Doxiadis;
- in the third part (vol. 70, no. 422/423, September-December 2003), a collection of papers in which the authors question whether and how the cognitive tools proposed by Gottmann facilitate the understanding of the evolution in contemporary geography in terms of change, partitioning and centrality.

Acknowledgements

With tender salutations I desire to turn here to Madame Bernice Gottmann to thank her for her kindness in accompanying me in the task I have undertaken, assuring me of her collaboration and support. In this respect I already had the opportunity to appreciate the proximity on the occasion of the Paris conference, and other occasions to renew my acquaintance with so many people born in the long years when I had the good fortune to accompany Jean Gottmann in his "transhumance" and in his scientific meetings.

My thoughts go to Jean Laponce, Ron Johnston, Christian Lagarde, Yasuo Miyakawa, Michel Phlipponneau, François Gay, I.B.F. Kormoss and Alan Henrikson, Jean Bastié, Dov Mir, Jean-Robert Pitte and all the others who have been able to collaborate with me on this volume of *Ekistics*. I wish to thank them for their encouragement.

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– if I had not had the good fortune to be able to count on such an intelligent and careful, willing and generous friend, affectionately sensitive to my worries, my doubts, my hesitations. I owe my gratitude to him for encouraging me to undertake such an enterprise and giving me the peace of mind with which I have been able to solve the numerous problems of a guest-editor. It is to him that I also owe my gratitude for the help of his close collaborators who supported me in the course of this tiring effort. My thanks go to every one of them, starting with R.J. Rooke and Alex Freme-Sklirou, in the hope that success will smile on the whole enterprise.

Finally, with the modesty that always accompanies a relationship between father and child when practicing the same discipline, I cannot close this preface without mentioning the assistance of Luca Muscarà and all the trouble he has taken to provide day-by-day assistance during these two years of work. The greatest reward that can be attributed to him is to recognize the work he has been able to do and continues to do to complete the analysis of Jean Gottmann's thought which has gone a great deal beyond what I have been able to complete myself in previous studies and also on this occasion.



Fig. 1: Jean Gottmann with Calogero Muscarà in Rio de Janeiro, August 1982.