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## ECONOMICS, ESTHETICS AND ETHICS IN MODERN URBANIZATION

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The paper from which this article is abstracted was published as an afterthought to Gottmann's major work *Megalopolis* (1961). The full text is available in pamphlet form from The 20th Century Fund, 41 East 70th Street, New York.

### POWER AND PRESTIGE IN THE CITY

For many thousands of years the majority of mankind lived in the rural countryside and worked at making the soil yield the raw materials necessary to feed and occupy everybody. Only a minority inhabited cities—densely built-up small areas, set aside from the «open country» as separate entities, endowed with a set of laws and regulations peculiarly their own. Walls, ramparts, or at least legal lines enclosed them. In some cases city people may have engaged in farming outside the walls; they may have drawn most of their income from agricultural revenues. But the city was more typically specialized in trade, manufacture, administration, and in large gatherings for religious, political, recreational, or commercial purposes. These specially *urban* functions carried power, and with power, prestige. For whether it was a temple, a market, a tribunal, or a king's residence that originally determined the city's growth on a given site, a city was always a seat of some kind of power. A scholarly international meeting recently held in Chicago to examine the origins of the urban process in ancient times published its proceedings under the title: *The City Invincible*. Indeed, the city was a place from which the open country was dominated, where wealth was gathered, the locus of authority and responsibility. It claimed a long, lasting future of dominance.

Change affects much more than the attitude of the rural population towards the modern urban centers. It modifies the very structure of the city, the means and the aims of those who plan, build, and govern cities. Architects and urbanists used to be concerned mainly with beauty and prestige: their job was to build churches and castles, fortresses and ramparts. Because all these buildings housed prestigious and respected functions and people, they had to be spectacular, to impress the outsider, the people passing by. A certain kind of beauty, of esthetics was indeed one of the buildings'

functions. It may have been functional to decorate and overstress the esthetic features. This past of architecture and urbanism has brought us an extraordinary artistic heritage, in fact most of the world's marvels. A great art thus evolved, going through many styles, schools, and stages.

The people of our century are more intent than ever on preserving the monuments of the past, on treasuring and admiring the art and techniques of architectural and urbanistic beauty. Every city retains, for the various aspects of community life, an urgent need of spectacular buildings, the materials, design, and appearance of which give expression to the beauty, dignity, and authority of the functions performed within and to the virtues of the owner, whether private or public, individual or corporate. But this is no longer the main market for the talents of the architect, urbanist, and builder. Those talents and endeavors are also and increasingly to be exercised for a completely different market of mass consumption, mass transportation, mass production, for the daily use of the rank and file as much as and perhaps more than for the use of those who hold power and prestige. And still we all want the city to be beautiful, as well as comfortable and accessible to all. The urbanization of the world carries with it social progress: a more urbane way of life for the vast majority of the people, more comfort, better education, more leisure, and better taste. Two centuries ago people craved more happiness for all; now we talk of the opportunity for excellence. Our social and political ethics require the greatest possible equality in distribution of benefits. Are such requirements consistent with esthetic demands inherited from a very different past, and with the economic mechanisms of the time?

These are not purely academic questions. The solutions provided are molding the environment of our generation and the next. Their discussion

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Note: According to the editor, Jaqueline Tyrwhitt, "the paper from which this article is abstracted was published as an afterthought to Gottmann's major work *Megalopolis* (1961). The full text is available in pamphlet form from The 20th Century Fund, 41 East 70th Street, New York." (Source: *Ekistics: Reviews on the Problems and Science of Human Settlements*, vol. 15, no. 89, April 1963, pp. 197-204).