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The Spatial Transformation of the Urban Environment in the Conditions of Post Industrial Development of Society: Dedicated to the 100th Anniversary of Jean Gottmann, Immanuel Kant Baltic Federal University, 23-26 August 2015, Russia.

Jean Gottmann as a Visionary and a Critic

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ABSTRACT

This is an introductory paper to the special issue on “The spatial transformation of the urban environment in the conditions of post-industrial development of society” conference dedicated to the 100th anniversary of Jean Gottmann. The conference was held at the Institute of Environmental Management, territory development and urban planning of the Immanuel Kant Baltic Federal University, Kaliningrad, Russia. The special issue presents a number of scientific papers, which represent different view angles on regional development in the context of globalization.

Keywords: Jean Gottmann, Economic Geography, Regional Economy, Kaliningrad Region

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1. AN INTRODUCTORY TO A SPECIAL ISSUE

To a degree, petty worries are a bane of all of us, making it difficult to perceive complex ideas. To grasp their complexity, one should stop and take a deep breath, which is not easy in the constant race for novelty – The untreatable disease of communities, where changes ceased to be a means and became an end in itself. In these societies, the new is never history repeating itself – history has to be forgotten, so that the great creations of the past do not dispirit the authors of mediocre inventions claiming to be innovative.

It is the desire to stop, take a deep breath, and look from afar at the legacy of such a bright and original geographer as Jean Gottmann (1915-1994) that brought together Russian and international geographers, philosophers, and economists in Kaliningrad at the 11th Socratic Readings. The choice of conference location was both random and deliberate. It was random, because Gottmann was born in Kharkov, and his hometown would be the most logical place to celebrate the 100th anniversary of his birth. However, Kharkov

can boast neither the people realising the depth and importance of Gottmann’s contribution, nor the intellectual environment necessary for a dedicated search for the objective truth in social sciences.

The choice was deliberate because the Immanuel Kant Baltic Federal University is establishing itself as Russia’s intellectual outpost in Europe. The Kaliningrad region is assuming the role once performed by the Baltics – that of a bridge between the USSR and the West, a “window to Europe” bringing new trends and ideas into the large country. To a great degree, this determined the special role these republics played in the USSR. However, the Baltics lost this function as they regained independence, which was followed by intellectual provincialisation and searching for national identity through settling accounts with the past. These attempts resulted in a petty and meaningless confrontation with Russia. Their functions are increasingly assumed by the Kaliningrad region and its major intellectual centre – The oldest university in Russia¹. Kaliningrad

¹ The practices adopted by IKBFU’s European neighbours stress the inadequacy of claims regarding the unreasonableness of connecting

seems to be the best place in Russia to commemorate probably the only geographer who was acquainted with Einstein (1879-1955) and received grants on the recommendation of Oppenheimer (1904-1967).

The choice of location was deliberate since it was the first time the Socratic Readings were held as an international conference. If, earlier, individual international scholars accompanied by personal translators participated in the events, at the 11th readings, most presentations were made by scholars from Italy (three presentations), the Netherlands, Poland, the USA, and France (one presentation from each country). These required significant organisational efforts, including providing simultaneous translation, which was successfully done at IKBFU. The university boasts a complete infrastructure for holding international research conferences. It considerable experience could not but translate into high professionalism.

The conference's international guests were surprised at the very format of the Socratic Readings, which does not have analogues in other countries. The readings were originally devised as an audacious intellectual expedition, a landing on the continent or island where no topographer had gone before. Hence, the readings' retro style procedure dating back to the times when science was a romantic search for the objective truth rather than an activity aimed at earning money and satisfying twisted bureaucratic needs. The idea of Socratic Readings was first voiced by the eminent Russian epistemologist Rozov (1930-2011). The first Socratic Readings were held in 1993 in Rostov. Unlike most philosophers, Rozov attached equal importance to knowledge and ignorance. One cannot say that Democritus did not know what the atomic nucleus consist of, he was not aware of it, Prof. Rozov would often say.

Therefore, the first and foremost function of scientific cognition is formulating questions, i.e., making transition from non-awareness to ignorance. This can be followed by searching for answers. Therefore, scholars should gather together not only to discuss research findings, but also to revise the picture of the world prevalent in their sciences. The first stage of a study should be not putting forward hypotheses, but the transition from non-awareness to ignorance, recognising the border between them. Following the best Socratic traditions, Rozov used to emphasise that learning to think means holding one's personal inner conference, i.e., learning to object to oneself and ask oneself questions.

The best conference procedure is the absence of a procedure. The readings serves scholars, rather than scholars serve the readings. If we gather for a joint search for the truth, nothing should stand in our way. Therefore, there is recommended presentation time of 40 min and the speaker is not to be interrupted under any circumstances. Question and discussion time is not limited

either, sometimes sessions "drag on," but this is freedom as the recognition of necessity. True democracy can be only elitist. Only in a group of not more than 30 people, one can hold a round table discussion. Moreover, people at the table have to be compatible. In this case, the major concern of the chair is to begin the session on time.

The Socratic spirit is a product of the supreme ethic principles of scientific research formulated in 1942 by Robert King Merton (1910-2003). These are communalism (all scientists should have equal access to scientific goods), universalism (all scientists can contribute to science), disinterestedness (scientists are supposed to act for the benefit of a common scientific enterprise, rather than for personal gain), and organized skepticism (scientific claims must be exposed to critical scrutiny before being accepted). The readings are guided by all the four Mertonian norms. There is no place for self-advertising. At the conference, neckties are abandoned and the communication between the participants is most informal. This spirit reigned at the 11th Socratic Readings.

In her presentation "geographical reality in the framework of the social relay theory," Kuznetsova (Russian State University for the Humanities) stressed two theses of Rozov's social relay theory that are of paramount importance for current studies in the field of socioeconomic geography. The first thesis is that any sociocultural object has non-attributive properties "recorded" in the social memory rather than the object's material. A dean differs from his or her colleagues not by some special qualities, but rather by his or her functions, which can be observed in the dean's office, the rector's office, etc. This explains the society's "wave ontology" built in the framework of the above theory. The second thesis is that any analysis of any sociocultural phenomenon should be based on the idea of reflecting systems (i.e., those describing themselves for regulating their own actions). However, a researcher studying such a system should take a "supra-reflective" position, since the object of study is the system in its wholeness as an aggregate of actual actions and the means to cognise them. A town is a good example of a reflecting system, since its functioning (including architectural solutions, settlement patterns, industrial and recreational facility siting, urban lifestyle, etc.) largely depends on the way its uniqueness and dynamic is understood. Reflection provides an answer to the momentary question "what to do?" The scholar having taken a "supra-reflective" position can answer the question "what is going on?" The difference between this position and understanding the particularities of perceiving a sociocultural situation make it possible to enhance the understanding of the geographical reality in view of new philosophical findings.

Probably the most Socratic presentation – "The concept of megalopolis half a century later" was made by Guy Burgel (Paris West University Nanterre La Défense). It did not praise the scholar, whom the speaker admired and of whom he has the warmest memories. On the contrary, the speaker tried to be critical and thorough, as well as respectful and friendly – just as he remembered Gottmann. Professor Burgel believes that, in Megalopolis (1961), the French-American geographer invalidated the antique wisdom that "no man putteth new wine into old bottles." A most innovative

the histories of the Albertina and IKBFU. The University of Tartu dates its history back to Academia Gustaviana, although there was no higher educational institution in Derpt in 1710-1802. It is of interest that, in 1952, the University of Tartu celebrated its 150th anniversary, whereas, in 1982, it held a pompous 350th anniversary celebration, i.e., the continuity was clearly recognised even by the "occupation authorities."

book, it anticipated the information society concept. It was written in the USA in the English language following the best classical traditions of the French school of human geographical thought established by de la Blache (1845-1918), de Martonne (1873-1955), and Demangeon (1872-1940).

The classical approach explains the exceptional, even excessive, scope of the study. The book's 800 pages cover everything from "geology to ideology." It also has some technical flaws, for instance, rather primitive and not always accurate maps. However, in the framework of this purely classical approach, Gottmann did not only anticipate Bell's (1919-2011) ideas presented in *The End of Ideology, The Coming of Post-Industrial Society*, but also did it with greater perceptiveness. Gottmann did not only show – A decade before the publication of Bell's book – that the leading role was being assumed by non-material production, which was revolutionary at the turn of the 1960s, he also demonstrated the dramatic structural shifts in the spatial organisation of society dubbed "post-industrial" by Bell (following his logic, one can call the industrial society "post-agrarian"). Re-urbanisation is taking place, the boundary between the urban and rural areas is blurred, since the rural population lives an urban lifestyle, has no bearing on the agricultural production, and works in intellectual fields and sometimes manufacturing.

Gottmann demonstrated the "pulsing" nature of this process – decades later, we are observing the degradation of historical city centres followed by their reconstruction. Industrial decentralisation is accompanied by increasing concentration of services, especially hi-tech ones. The author of *Megalopolis* did not have any illusions as to the harmony of the future society. He stressed the inevitable heightening of social tensions and growing fragmentation against the background of consumption unification. He also predicted new problems in territorial organisation, whose solution would be more complicated than it was in the industrial society.

Prof. Burgel analysed the economic planning failures in both France and the USSR in the 1960-70s accounted for by the inability to grasp the new reality and its challenges. In 1961, the USSR adopted the new CPSU programme setting the goal to catch up with the USA in terms of agricultural and manufacturing output, while the USA entered the phase of post-industrial development. It is doubtful that the prominent sociologist, the author of *Global City*, Saskia Sassen read Gottmann's book, otherwise she would know that many of her revolutionary findings had been published several decades earlier.

An analysis of the modern urbanistic trends was the focus of Tadeusz Strykiewicz's (Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań) presentation "The 'compression' of Central and Eastern European cities." The speaker believes that negative demographic trends are one of the most serious threats to the development of cities and regions in the 21st century. The continuous population decline is accompanied in many cities by a crisis in dominant sectors, primarily traditional heavy industries. The "compression" process is manifested in many forms. Similarities in symptoms do not mean the possibility of using the same methods for treating these chronic social

disorders. In Central European countries, institutional factors play a pivotal role alongside demographic trends. Therefore, the decline of many cities is a result of the painful transition from a planned to a market economy. The speaker analysed the connection between the "compression" of cities and institutional transformations in certain countries.

Of a considerable "worldview" significance was the presentation "collective rationality and collective prescience" made by Pospelov (Computing Centre of the Russian Academy of Sciences). The mathematical models developed by the speaker and his colleagues made it possible to make interesting conclusions about the rationality/irrationality of consumer behaviour. The behaviour of an individual household is not rational. However, the behaviour of all clients of a shop corresponds to the utility function. Some of the findings are very surprising. The consumer behaviour of a large city's population is not rational, but that of a country's population is. At the moment, it is difficult to interpret the conclusions made by Pospelov et al. However, they inspire to look for the germs of a new reality in the study. As Baikov (1870-1946), a Fellow of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR responded to officials asking him about the expected research results, "Only unexpected results are of value in science."

The roundtable "Geographical forecasting and prescience: Upholding Gottmann's traditions" (chaired by Kuznetsova) welcomed the participants to share impressions about the presentations and following discussions. It was stressed that all presentations were discussed very thoroughly and friendly. Guy Burgel's and Luca Muscara (University of Molise) presented an exciting and comprehensive overview of Gottmann's life and work. His pioneering ideas made it possible to see urbanisation trends of the mid-20th century in a new light. These trends were shaped by new urban planning solutions and transport development, which gave rise to a new settlement and lifestyle type, changed the perception of the world, and created avant-garde aesthetics. The means to interpret urban lifestyle were also affected. It was stressed that the key methodological problem is that the study objects – cities, districts, etc. – are very dynamic, constantly changing from the diffusion to compression state and back. This depends not only on the location in space, but also on the general context of public development and inclusion into the processes of forging new economic and geopolitical alliances.

Following Gottmann's tradition, it is necessary to revise traditional approaches to such central problems of human geography as the agglomeration effect, zoning, geopolitical situation, institutional environment, human capital, etc. Gottmann provided us with basic research samples, which augmented profound knowledge of cultural history with economic and statistical analytical methods making it possible to recreate a comprehensive picture of current changes. Forecasting should be based on such comprehensive research.

An audacious and interesting novelty was holding lectures for IKBFU's professors and students in the framework of the Socratic Readings. The lectures were delivered by most of Russian-

speaking conference participants (international speakers were not involved in this interesting and important process due to the need to provide translation). Probably, not everything went as planned. For, instance, open lecture overlapped with scientific presentations. Nevertheless, it was a brilliant idea, which will requires slight

improvements in the future. This holds true for the 11th Socratic Readings in general: The first international experience, despite all complications, can be considered a success. In future, the Socratic Readings can be held both in the traditional and international format. The most important element is ideas.