

This PDF includes a chapter from the following book:

# **Megalopolis**

## **The Urbanized Northeastern Seaboard of the United States**

© 1961 MIT

### **License Terms:**

Made available under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International Public License

<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>

### **OA Funding Provided By:**

National Endowment for the Humanities/Andrew W. Mellon Foundation Humanities Open Book Program.

The title-level DOI for this work is:

[doi:10.7551/mitpress/4537.001.0001](https://doi.org/10.7551/mitpress/4537.001.0001)

## PART THREE

# EARNING A LIVING INTENSELY

---

The preceding chapters of this study have been concerned mainly with the historical processes by which Megalopolis has become such a huge concentration of people, economic power, and activities, and then with the present uses of the land over its vast area. In other words, we have tried to describe the genesis and present structure of Megalopolis. The sketching of the dynamics of past growth gave little opportunity to deal with the economic foundations on which the present prosperity of this region rests, although the formula of the “economic hinge” helps to make clear the general principles of the regional economy and its great emphasis on large-scale commercial business. Now comes an analysis of the ways, industrial and commercial, by which the Megalopolitan people make their living.

The modes of life described in connection with the uses of land suggest

a rather intensified economy, yielding high profits widely redistributed through the region and probably beyond it. Our study of the use of farmland and woodland<sup>1</sup> indicated that these nonurban and traditional activities, although earning financial profits for a few people, do not represent on the whole a basic element in the money-making system that allows Megalopolis to live as it does. In fact, the very organization of Megalopolitan agriculture and forestry suggests an entire dependence on special kinds of benefits stemming from the suburban character of the locale, from the immediate proximity to the densely urbanized districts with all their needs and resources.

Megalopolis earns its living on small patches of territory, the total ground acreage of which represents only a small fraction (possibly by 1960 one twentieth) of the region's total area, which itself extends over only 1.8 per cent of the land area of the continental United States. *Thus the places of work that earn the living of a little more than one fifth of the American nation, and that the richest fifth, occupy less than one thousandth of the country's area.* This means a dense concentration indeed of industrial, commercial, and administrative activities, for this space was the locus in 1950 of 22.8 per cent of the nation's labor force and 21.2 per cent of the population. In 1954 it accounted for 28 per cent of the nation's wholesale-trade payroll; 32.6 per cent of the merchant wholesalers' sales; 31.2 per cent of the selected-services-trades payroll and 32.8 per cent of their receipts; 26.4 per cent of the total value added by manufacturers in the United States; and 24.2 per cent of the retail-trade payroll. In 1956 its banks held 37 per cent of the deposits in all American banks, and its financial institutions handled well over half of all financial transactions in the country. This impressive concentration means that the intensity of all activities in the region is greater than the national average. Even by American standards, and certainly in terms of international averages, we are justified in speaking here of *intense living and working* on a very small acreage.

The size of the spaces devoted to these business or manufacturing activities is such as to make it difficult to examine them as one of the components in the pattern of land use. As a matter of fact, some of the important white-collar activities in this system are carried out in space officially defined by zoning as in residential use. The money-making activities, insofar as they provide the means of living, spending, and saving for the population, affect much more than land use alone. We must study them now for themselves, their size, their diversity, and their trends, not only

<sup>1</sup> See above, Chapters 6 and 7.

in location but in general evolution as well. We may thus better understand what is now happening and what the prospects are for the future.

Historically, the commercial activities of the great seaports in this region laid down the true foundations of local prosperity and urban growth, and, in more general fashion, of the region's role in the world. Today commercial and financial establishments again employ more people than do manufacturing establishments, and personnel of the latter is in good part occupied in administrative, financial, trading, and research functions, so that employment in manufactures directly engaged in production represents only a minority (probably close to one fourth) of all the jobs in Megalopolis. Nevertheless, manufacturing has played such an essential role in the building up of this region's wealth and in its urbanization<sup>2</sup> that we may well examine it first when reviewing the economic activities.

For at least 150 years, as a result of the Industrial Revolution, urban densities resulted essentially from the gathering in cities of factory workers and their families. Never would Megalopolis have grown and consolidated as it did through the first half of the twentieth century had it not attracted and developed so many manufactures. The recent tendency for industrial plants to move out to other, less crowded sections and the relative drop in Megalopolis' share in American manufacturing have caused a great deal of concern in the region as to its future. We shall therefore devote the next chapter to the present condition and distribution of manufactures in Megalopolis.

Future growth in employment, so necessary to maintain the whole area's momentum, would seem, however, to depend less and less on manufacturing. All the modern economic evolution, spurred on by recent technological advances, points to the decisive and increasing role of commerce and of the white-collar occupations. These two categories of activities will be examined after the survey of manufactures.

Both manufacturing and commerce in Megalopolis are greatly dependent on the region's retaining its role as the nation's economic hinge. This poses the problem of transportation, both in terms of the networks linking the region to the outside and in terms of the facilities for transportation and communication within the region. A hinge between sea lanes on the one hand and inland waterways, railroads, and highways on the other is built around an exceptionally intricate network of railroads and roads. Can Megalopolis retain its role as an essential hub in an era of planes and pipelines, of telephone, radio, and television, when the lines separating land, sea, and air seem to lose their ancient significance? We shall exam-

<sup>2</sup> For the historical development see Chapters 3 and 4 above.

ine this entanglement of problems in the following chapters, but without letting it obscure the more immediate and possibly greater threat offered by the worsening metropolitan traffic within the region.

In the contemporary economic evolution of the metropolis in general, and in Megalopolis especially, the growing emphasis placed on commercial and administrative functions and on white-collar occupations is bringing about a redevelopment of the "downtown." However, the capacity of the old areas of business concentration to manage and accommodate the rising tide of the expanding "office industry" is being questioned, chiefly because of the hardships faced by traffic to and through the business districts. Other problems, however, are the costs of servicing such a concentration, and the increasingly unpleasant consequences of such crowding in terms of pollution of the natural environment and worsening of the social environment. This last threat may become the greatest of all if it is allowed to develop and to deepen, and unpleasant conditions for working and living may hasten the trend toward decentralization or deconcentration already evident for many stages of industrial production. If such decentralization should increase in the white-collar occupations, as seems technologically feasible already, although not yet managerially desirable, all the modern metropolitan structures would be deeply shattered, and the suburbs might suffer as well as the central cores. Urban life is founded on the advantages of living and working together in a society that is highly diversified but can function as one well-organized community. The survival of the multi-million society of Megalopolis as a going concern could be threatened if to waste of space and materials, which on the whole is profitable, were added waste of human resources.