

Regional Spaces, Creativity and Sustainable Cities

Introduction

This paper deals with regional spaces and more specifically with the discernment and designation of viable regional spaces as places to receive, to give form to, initiatives of economic creativity. Reference is made to "convivial regions" of the planet and in doing so is the follow through of papers presented by the author at the 2003 (Ref.1) and 2004 (Ref.2) ISoCaRP congresses. It is a theoretical approach, based on various experiences during the past 40 years (with particular reference to regional policies in France), also to personal research in France, Egypt and Australia (Ref.3) and research done within the Association Inter-Régionale Terre et Cité. This Congress is an occasion to relate the theme of regional spaces to that of the Creative Economy in general and more specifically to Session 1 dealing with Strategies.

The point of departure is an assumption, even a conviction based on previous work, that this scale of reality of environment and of human activity is of particular interest for our time.

Two criteria, among others, are that the regional territory should enable both ecological and social responsibility. This implies reasonable accessibility for all of the population, from the centre to rural and conservation areas, as also from peripheral areas to the service centre.

One could enter into such a claim by observing the regions of the world where people live in large concentrations and by analysing their harmony with the surrounding territory. There are so far some 300 sites with more than 1 million inhabitants. What is the quality of life there and do such human settlements have positive or negative influences on other parts of the world?

A glance at the world map reveals that there is extreme imbalance in the overall pattern of urbanisation. With liberation that has come through new technologies, are there alternatives to the present tendency to develop vast agglomerations that show signs of crisis in sustainability? There exists, then, great potential for creativity.

Although one might consider the diverse forms of information and communications technology (ICT) as being leaders in technological innovation, a policy of creation of regions at the scale of humans gathering together in their physical reality can widen the spectrum of creativity, so as to include all aspects of a new diversified pattern of economic activity. Creation of spaces and creation of the economy thus go together in a wider sense.

The methodology referred to in earlier work includes:

- . Accepting the validity of a preferable range of dimensions for a convivial region, paying attention to factors of climate, environment, resources, population density, accessibility, cultural identity, interference between neighbouring regional centres...
- . Discerning of reference centres which might or might not be the existing dominant agglomeration within a desirable region
- . Definition and negotiation concerning administrative and political regional boundaries, enabling clear options for governance and sustainability
- . Recognition of the articulation of a region by existing local authorities, neighbouring regions and by other levels of government
- . Assuming life and growth as a regional entity on the world scene.

This study theme - seeking to open out into a potential strategy - could be seen as an

alternative to extrapolation of a few megacities that are developing according to the tendency that is in place of "always more". We are led to believe that development is linked to resources, but look at most of the large cities and we'll realise that few are linked to on-the-spot natural resources. They are at transport nodes, seats of political power, centres of commercial strength, so many factors that need to be understood, enabling adjustments to be made in these fields and then proposals to be formulated in ways to include human well-being, social responsibility, harmony with the environment. New technologies give the possibility of responses to all of these requirements, and should be implemented if we really wish and intend to liberate ourselves from the snowball effect that is at work.

1- Regional Spaces

Let us observe some key characteristics of regional spaces.

1.1 Climate

One can appreciate how significant cities have been developed within the broad categories of climatic conditions: Alta, within the polar circle near the northern extremity of Norway; Biskra, south of the Atlas mountains on the edge of the world's greatest desert; Jakarta, a vast agglomeration situated on a small river between coast and volcanic mountains in tropical Java; Buenos Aires, queen city of the Plata estuary and gateway to the vast plains of Argentina... The character of each has been marked by the prevailing climatic conditions and, whatever the climate, each has links with, draws life from and has responsibility for a surrounding territory.

1.2 Diverse geographical considerations

While predominant geographical considerations might include an ocean port, river, plateau, mountains... is there not, through new technologies, new freedom for unleashing unlimited scope for creativity? While by nature ICT seems to promise total flexibility in the use of space, there remains, however, the need for centres of conception, of production and also of maintenance in this field.

Recent technological changes in most forms of transport would also seem to give greater choice in the use of space. Choice of itineraries can be a determining influence in the designation of particular points on the map, thanks to policies of concerted coordination of the various modes. Such points of exchange possess reinforced potential as centres for economic activity, administrative and political autonomy as well as cultural vitality.

New building technologies open up vast possibilities of climate control within urban spaces. While this could have wide implications for the built environment, the characteristics of the natural environment at a regional scale do not vary accordingly. Need for harmony between the two retains all of its significance.

1.3 Quality of environment / quality of life

What is the relationship between quality of natural or built environment and quality of life? Is an evaluation possible?

This is a burning question that must remain for the present without a clear answer, as it seems to touch on some of the foundations of human existence. One has the gut feeling that there is an important link, and points of view converge, but it is difficult to assess, to measure. Each year in France there are publications giving tables with scores as to which are the best cities or the best regions in which to live. They are based on various criteria that seek to

give the impression that the results are objective, but there is a high content of subjective appreciation, whether it be on the part of those living in the particular place or those carrying out the enquiry.

If a natural environment is lacking in attributes, then man has the instinct to make his own environment and to adapt his economic, social, political and cultural activities in spite of outside influences. Instinct certainly, although it is more or less easy to achieve results in time. If the natural environment is favorable, then the built environment is less important in achieving a satisfying result. On the contrary, if the natural environment is lacking in appreciable qualities, then the stimulation is there to create a more personalised "heaven on earth".

What we are now obliged to take into account is the effect that human activity at any one place has on the surrounding environment. Also, our culture has taught us that the human group is more and more interdependent, hence a pressing obligation of responsibility in both of these fields, if we are to attain a sentiment of well-being and a will to project our lives into the future.

Unfortunately there is a serious lack of clear information at the right scale. We are faced with alarming information about the tropical rainforest, or about the intolerable pollution in Paris, or in Los Angeles, but how many of us have real figures concerning the ecological footprint of the region in which we live? Do we have valid information about our precise place in the cosmos, to be transmitted to the next generation, confident that expressions such as "sustainable" do have real and operational meaning?

1.4 Some examples within the bioregions of Far North Queensland

During preparation of this text it was found to be desirable to refer to some examples as an illustration of aspects that are being addressed. It was apparent that the overall region of Far North Queensland in north-eastern Australia was an interesting example, with sufficient variety of situations to respond to this need. Also, a great deal of work has been done there in the study of natural resources (Ref.4), needs of ethnic minorities and environmental protection. Within the overall land area four bioregions have been distinguished, while the adjoining marine areas have also been studied and protection measures taken.

For this presentation, the objective is less to have the illusion of solving all of the problems inherent in these examples than to point out some of the questions that need to be addressed and to illustrate an approach. Faced with some pressure for urbanisation, potential centres of reference have been identified and study boundaries adopted. The accessibility circles indicated in the attached schema (Fig.1) enable comparison with examples elsewhere. (smaller circle=2000 km², larger circle 32 000 km²).

The schema will be referred to in several parts of the following text. The first mentions made below are limited to identification and some basic information. Surface areas indicated are approximations made for the purpose of this demonstration.

Normanton is one of the service centres for the Gulf of Carpentaria. The study region adopted has an area of some 65 000 km². Situated near the boundary between the two Gulf bioregions, it is a strategic point within the whole of the Flinders / Einasleigh river basin system and has indirect access to the ocean via the town of Karumba at a distance of 30km.

Einasleigh is situated within the Northern Gulf bioregion, at a strategic point within the upper reaches of the Einasleigh river and adjacent catchment areas. The study region adopted has an area of 35 000 km².

Cairns is the key city of the Wet Tropics bioregion. For the purposes of this presentation, reference is being made to a point on the Atherton Tableland, 50 km west of the port city, The name of “Cairns-Mount-Abbot” is used so as to distinguish this from “Cairns-Harbour”. The study region has an area of approximately 40 000 km².

Dunbar is situated to the north-west of the Northern Gulf bioregion. It is strategically located within the lower reaches of the Mitchell river basin and the study region adopted has an area of 60 000 km².

Laura, in the bioregion of Cape York, is situated on the main north-south communications axis of the peninsula. The study region adopted has an area of 35 000 km².

“*Archer*”, for the purposes of this presentation, is the name given to a reference point north of the Archer River. The study region has an area of 65 000 km²

Bamaga is the contact point for the Torres Strait islands with continental Australia. The study area is approximately 13 000 km², but is closely related to some 57 000 km² of ocean including reef and islands lying between Australia and Papua-New-Guinea.

Each of these examples are referred to in section 2.4 below.

2- Creativity

It is extremely welcome that the organisers of this Congress have taken the initiative to address the “making of spaces” in such a way as to match the inventiveness of technologies, with the resultant economic change. It gives us as planners an opportunity to take stock and to apprehend what we have or have not created within a similar time span. But let us not fall into the illusion that all creativity has begun today.

2.1 Founding events and options for governance

Founding events related to water, food, presence of raw materials , defence... have had their importance throughout history as motors for indigenous human settlements, but there is ample evidence of disappearance as well as creation of cities.

On a different register, more recent foundations, both small and large, have been based on options for governance as well as on the more traditional factors. These include colonial settlements (Sydney, Bahia Salvador, Mumbai...), as well as foundations aimed at bringing together recently created political entities (Delhi, Brasilia, Abuja...). This latter family of cities is often criticised as being “artificial” or simply “new”, so considered as lacking a “soul”. Although maturation takes time, all cities have been created with a motive and it is for us to appreciate if new technologies and new economies justify new human settlements that are in keeping with the newfound liberty of creation anywhere in the world.

Whether spontaneous or concerted action is involved, it is important that efforts are made in sites where the resultant city is most likely to succeed and, whatever the situation chosen, there exists in any population profound need for recognisable and acceptable signs that express the meaning of the place and participation in events marking the collective memory. The quality of a regional environment is a plus to what is fundamental.

Is not a first requirement that of clear and agreed policy concerning the role for an embryonic creation followed by negotiation for the definition of medium or long-term boundaries for assuming specific responsibilities? Adequate infrastructure enabling relationships with the wider world should then follow. Even highly ambitious programmes such as the UN

Millennium Project cannot succeed without such basic reflection, decision and materialisation.

2.2 Economic initiatives and cultural vitality

To what extent could global economic energies be deliberately channelled through concerted provision of regional spaces for new activities, or otherwise, should global economic forces alone decide when and where initiatives are to be taken? Growth might be desirable, but can policies of creative economies avoid provoking exorbitant growth within specific sites, with related difficult living conditions, while casting long shadows over other highly desirable locations?

New initiatives in terms of well located spaces have their role to play in changing the overall pattern of urbanisation. Although ancient urban centres tend to favour cultural activity, can new spaces also stimulate cultural vitality, essential to the well-being of populations?

There seem to be more questions than answers, but these are key questions to be asked and answers found in the process of making spaces for the creative economy that is driven by technological innovation. However all initiatives within various levels of government need to be adjusted to local cultural traditions with their varying capacity to welcome creativity and to follow through at a local or regional scale. There need to be signs of emulation and of durable results.

2.3 Imagination

Within a given population, while imagination is undoubtedly a vital attribute in imagining the economy, it is also essential in imagining urban, rural and conservational spaces. Extrapolation alone within existing tendencies will not do. Although principles of economic innovation might originate from particularly creative clusters, their application in the creation of new spaces inevitably concerns people experiencing an intimate relationship with a specific site. While ICT might be a significant motor at the planetary scale, application into a multitude of spaces invokes a chicken and egg situation in which new creativity is stimulated. We need to be looking at some three thousand significant regional spaces in a great variety of situations that exist throughout the world.

2.4 The examples revisited: what prospects?

Let us concentrate for a moment on the case of Far North Queensland (Fig.1) and take the risk of a creative approach, keeping in mind that similar approaches could well be engaged for numerous examples elsewhere.

The spaces are there already, with an active albeit limited economic activity. Five of the seven study regions have recognisable although summary urban nuclei. For the other two, careful consideration is justified in order to test long-term solutions for problems that will not just go away. In fact they are destined to become more and more difficult to deal with as time goes by and as population increases occur. The “making” of spaces at this scale implies need for balanced development in harmony with the natural resources, accompanied by the creation of a new economic pattern. In esquissing possibilities it would be premature to assess real capacity or possible rate of increase of population. An incremental approach would be more adapted to the terrain.

The overall peninsula has been the subject for some highly sophisticated studies, concerning questions of natural resources and environment, with designation of extensive conservation areas (Ref.4). Should the creative economy here concern only environmental aspects, or

should a creative approach envisage a broad-based agricultural, industrial, commercial and service economy? For this exercise, reference points and demonstration boundaries have been adopted. At present there is limited population pressure, although there are interesting cultural questions due to the diversity of ethnic origins of the population present

Normanton

This is one of those spots on the map that seem to suggest that human activity is inevitable. Situated 300 km downstream from the headwaters of the Norman River, it is 30 km inland from the Gulf, giving easy access to ocean resources and transport while not having the disadvantages of the ocean shore. The possibility of urban development within a full 2000 km² circle would enable optimum expansion of the nucleus town. It is a town that is called upon to cope with extremes of climate, living with the rivers in the dry season and in the wet. Could one dream of a nucleus of people gathered together, having a regional government, access to an ocean port, health and education services including the beginnings of a university, a chamber of commerce and industry, an agriculture and environment authority, a water basin authority... all that is able to take part in the creation of a regional civilisation in the full sense of the word, living in harmony with the natural environment? Such could not come only from Brisbane at 1500 km to the south, nor Canberra and even less from New York, London or Tokyo! There is an environment to respect, infrastructure to be laid, a built environment to build, relations with outside world to ensure, all of this on behalf of a responsible population rooted down in this particular part of the world, learning to live in harmony with each other as a microcosm of life on the planet.

Einasleigh

With the interest of its highland geography, some spectacular scenery and some unique geological sites (Undara Crater and the lava tunnels), this study region is an occasion to demonstrate the difficulties of choice of itineraries for essential transport services. Having no direct access to ocean transport, the town of Einasleigh was connected by a now partly used narrow gauge railway to Cairns. The recently constructed development road has, for practical reasons, been built at a distance of some 60 km to the east, with the result that the potential region lacks clear polarisation. This could be rectified in time, as indicated in the accompanying schema, but in the meantime clear options for governance and siting of services would need to be taken.

Cairns

While Cairns is the undisputed predominant city within the whole of Far North Queensland and principal point of access and of management for the world renowned Great Barrier Reef, the city nevertheless occupies a relatively restricted site between the precious reef and the equally remarkable rainforests and mountain ranges to the west. This situation creates already some acute problems of accessibility that will become more and more inconvenient as the city grows within its existing dominant morphology. Good arguments could be put forward for the creation of a complementary regional urban centre on the watershed of the plateau at a distance of 50 km from the existing city (Ref.5). This is indicated on the accompanying schema as "Cairns-Mount-Abbot" and its success would depend on the provision of an adequate rail link by tunnel with the harbour city. There would be advantages in locating the future main international airport in the vicinity of the new centre, thus providing for better access to all of the hinterland, as well as avoiding the ecological risk characterised by the present international airport on the sea shore. Cairns and its environs have already ensured their place on the world scene, with the capacity to integrate all innovations in economic activity. The difficulty will probably be to wilfully share its development with the other regions of the overall FNQ area.

Dunbar

This is the embryo of a town centrally located on undulating land downstream from any Cairns plateau development. Ocean access is feasible at a distance of 100 km. The study

region indicated includes the vast Staaten River National Park. With low population density, this would seem to be one of the least endowed of the potential regions presented here, but it is interesting to compare population capacity with comparable entities in other parts of the world. What initiatives in terms of creative economy could be taken? Let's keep in mind that ICT enables an instantaneous and continuous relationship with anywhere else in the world.

Laura

Also the mere embryo of a human settlement, Laura, situated on the north-south communications axis, is 130 km from the estuary of the northward flowing Normanby River, a sufficient distance to avoid any risk of reef pollution. The port town of Cooktown is a distance of 90 km to the east. This study region includes the Lakefield National Park as well as 250 km of coastline adjacent to the reef. With such resources it is not difficult to imagine the reality of a convivial region based on the creation of a sound, diversified service economy and regional institutions.

"Archer"

Of the seven examples, this is probably the most challenging as it is the place of encounter, "par excellence", between policies of development and conservation, between international mining interests and Aboriginal culture. The reference point indicated has been an attempt to discern a potentially workable meeting place for all such interests. Situated near the main north-south communications and transport axis, a short distance from the branch road to the Weipa bauxite mining area, it has nevertheless avoided too great a proximity to the national parks of the Archer River basin. Elements of prime consideration are the extensive lands with Aboriginal Title along both the western and the eastern coastlines. These are joined by the Archer Bend and Rokeby-Croll Creek National Parks, as well as some 250 km of reef along the eastern shore, to give a unique character to the study region. A new service town, destined to become the capital of a convivial region, could be envisaged as the place to meet, with a maximum of autonomy, and to work through all of the inherent problems of the environs.

Bamaga

On a map this small town with its immediate environs looks surprisingly like Singapore about 200 years ago. Situated on the navigation route between South-East Asia and the South Pacific it is the natural point of conversation among people from West Irian, Papua-New-Guinea and Australia, the latter including both on-the-spot Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island cultural groups with their extensive land ownership and specific needs. Surely a free port area has already been envisaged in such a dynamic location for exchange in the most innovative fields of modern technology. The impressive Jardine River National Park is expression of concern for conservation of the natural environment, while at the same time being motor for an existing tourist sector of local economic activity.

So much for the examples of this part of the world. Debate could continue for a long time, but the real question being posed by a provocative presentation of these examples is "would a similar approach open up new prospects for other parts of the world"?

3- Sustainable Cities

The long term strategy of making spaces for what is new must surely include ensuring the sustainability of the overall city. It is not something apart, something in itself. This section is concerned by cities within regional spaces, cities with breathing space and space for taking responsibly on a long term basis.

3.1 Responsibility

To ensure sustainability new components of the economy should facilitate ecological and social responsibility at all stages of development. Their eruption on the scene should not be a “feu de paille”, a passing event to excite interest and then disappear. Present society is wary of short term actions of which extreme cases are represented by factory ships, delocalisations, massive take-overs of local industries... The new elements need to be inscribed into the local culture and to participate in responsibilities of environmental and social nature. Many of the ills of the planet would not exist if they were to be treated at this scale.

3.2 Harmony

Human settlements, both old and new, need to achieve harmony with their regional site in order to survive through time. For example, thorough knowledge of overall water resources has taken on new importance. Careful water management as a newly generalised problem requires the affectation of adequate human resources in order to find long term solutions. Such an element implies an added category to what can be considered as the new economy. Instead of being bombarded mainly with passionately exciting weather information about far away places, there also needs to be adequate information concerning the accessible surroundings, so enabling an urban population to live in real harmony with the earth.

3.3 Perseverance

Sound governance, favouring suitable siting for new components of the economy, is essential in creating, consolidating and sustaining the resultant spaces that are to be compatible with human dignity. Innovation will tend to come from private sector initiatives and will be profit-based for a short or medium-term life cycle. Sustainability implies engagement and vigilance with continuity of effort by the whole of the population, acting through the form of government that they have chosen. The materialisation of spaces will result from a happy encounter between the thrust of the creativity of new technologies and the availability and will of the public authorities to welcome and to give form. Whatever the commercial uncertainties, it is for the public authorities to ensure continuity of policy on adapted infrastructure, beyond the life of medium-term political mandates.

If local government does not have the weight or the initiative to intervene then it could well be the role of higher levels of government to take initiatives during formative phases. Turbulent political situations will obviously hinder substantial results in this domain.

3.4 Sustainable cities within the world context

For the purposes of this paper, the above title implies sustainable cities at the heart of convivial regions. Working out from the examples mentioned in the first and second chapters, is it possible to become more conscious of possible resonance at a world scale? In such a case, how can we “cultivate” all of the potential for the making of spaces of this nature?

The cases of Normanton, Einasleigh, “Cairns-Mount-Abbot”, Dunbar, Laura, “Archer” and Bamaga are privileged in the sense that a considerable amount of work on environmental aspects has been carried out over a period of several years in Far North Queensland and that they lie within a country possessing high tech industries. However the absence of strong demographic pressure could allow complacency. As a dry continent, Australia, in general, has reason to be cautious about extreme fluctuation in climatic conditions and also about the unknown consequences of global warming. The National Heritage Trust has defined 56 Natural Resource Management regions and these have official status “for the purposes of determining natural resource management and sustainable agriculture priorities” (Ref.4). The definition of bioregions has obliged to work to some extent across the existing state bound-

aries that have existed since the colonial period, and in order to deal with major issues, such as river basin management, such a practice is inevitable. Other important factors, such as infrastructure itineraries, will also need to refer to ad hoc groupings, to the extent that one could imagine national and also well-defined regional entities as being the basis of governance for the future.

Now what about other sub-continentals? We could presume that there are greater urgencies where higher population pressure exists.

A similar approach to West Africa, concerning 17 countries and 250 million inhabitants would seem to indicate the feasibility of from 80 to 90 such cities and regions. In South Asia including 7 countries, once again 80 to 90 such entities would bring relief to the more than 1000 million inhabitants that cannot possibly gather together in the few major urban centres that exist. In the European Union, if we were to talk about viable regions, one could distinguish about 95, many of which could vie in significance with the existing prestigious highly populated entities. The eternal bilateral struggle between Paris and London would be out of date.

However, in all of these examples we must realise that we are not dealing with federated states but nations, so that in principle, all aspects of a process of definition, affectation and materialisation would be more complicated than for the Australian examples.

And the three thousand or so others? It's time that we had a close look at spaces of such potential throughout the world!

Conclusion

One can note that each one of the examples has its specific character. Each one has its own potential - potential that is intimately linked to the qualities of each. Once the process of discernment carried out, recognition (from within and by neighbouring regions and broader levels of government) is essential, then designation of regional status and of the chosen centre of coordination. Follow through policies of investment, both public and private would then become essential and although this would seem to be controllable for the public sector (if long-term policy were to be clear and well anchored into procedures of government at the various levels concerned), for the private sector, problems are evident. Powerful commercial interests are at present capable of sweeping aside government at all scales! Could there exist mechanisms for channelling such energies through regional structures?

A pre-condition for the creation of a meaningful pattern of economic development is the provision for a network of relatively autonomous regional spaces where people can hope to live in harmony with their environment and with each other. Recent technological advances, notably in ICT, transport, building and agriculture, render possible the establishment of sustainable cities within such regions in new situations in many parts of the world.

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