

## **The "Convivial Region" : a fundamental entity within the world pattern of development**

*Is the world village what we had imagined? Although we can instantaneously communicate across the planet, intermediate scales in human relationships and in perception of space remain. Also, are our own bodies to be considered as a hinderance or as a help in determining the quality of life? The "Convivial Region" now assumes its full significance.*

### **1- Introduction.**

Is the world village already a reality? Telecommunications technology has enabled us to experience certain aspects of this phenomenon. However, the planet is faced with a new set of obligations in order to prepare for an increase in overall population in the near future - this in spite of being limited in dimensions and made vulnerable by disorderly exploitation,

Equally important lesser scales of spatial reality overlap and adjust to new situations : while nations disintegrate or group together, other entities of a macro-ecological nature, such as river basins, manifest their importance requiring new forms of governance. But during such transitions it is the existing nations and the numerous conflicts that usually steal the limelight of the world media.

Does there exist an entity based on the human person perceived as a physical reality? Trends in city development would seem to answer yes. The rapidly increasing number of cities of more than 1 million inhabitants is witness to this.

Although urban space is relatively new, compared to the spaces of our agricultural and nomadic roots, it can be considered as an opportunity for humanity, if we take care to accomplish spatial quality at the scale of corporal accessibility. However clear options concerning regional living spaces have become necessary so as to welcome the several billion more inhabitants expected during the next decades.

This paper deals with such regional spaces within the world context.

The term "convivial region" has been considered to be appropriate in referring to the place where people can best live together in proximity and at the same time assume their responsibilities as world citizens. The name used is a useful gallicism, full of meaning (Note1)

So firstly, let's look at the two key words :

- The sense of "region" used here has emerged from research work, carried out by the author during the past 15 years, concerning the urban region (Ref.1). Recent work with a group of planners in France has gone further into the notion of responsibility and balance between urban man and his immediately accessible environment (Note 2).

- "Convivial" and "Conviviality" in French language dictionaries go beyond the meaning of "taste for joyful meetings or meals together" and of "agreeable characteristics of a material or object" to that of "capacity of a society to favour tolerance and reciprocal exchanges between the persons concerned ; a pattern of favourable relationships between members of a group" (Ref.2). So it concerns the quality of life in being together and also the notion of material support that makes happiness possible.

A predominantly urban area with its adjacent agricultural or natural region, considered as the "Convivial Region", assumes particular interest for the future world development pattern.

## **2- Perception and practice of the various scales of our living spaces.**

It is important to situate this notion of region within the spectrum of spaces as they are perceived and experienced by each human person. The accompanying table is an attempt to systematise these scales and to indicate some of the transitions that are taking place (Fig.1).

Primary spaces, originally related to the gathering of food and then to basic agricultural activity, persist. In urban terms they are important for the appreciation of local identity and also in relation to the limited personal mobility of those at both extremities of the age groups.

Wider urban or rural spaces are appropriated by the adult population on a daily basis, pushing the application of transport technologies to the limits of feasibility. The result is the large agglomerations that have developed during the past 200 years.

A more recent phenomenon is the region of economic and leisure activities within which a predominantly urban population has considerable impact beyond the specifically urban environment. When also taking into account the need for suitable location of high level services, such as airports and universities, this scale of human settlement is tending to replace the notion of "city".

While the "megalopolis" has drawn considerable attention during the past decades, it can be seen that these conurbations remain polycentric in their internal structures. On the American eastern seaboard, Washington is not Boston and in north-western Europe, Amsterdam is neither Dusseldorf nor Brussels !

The larger nations and the remains of empires are finding it necessary to decentralise into component regions, while in the opposite direction the smaller nations are grouping together into sub-continental structures, examples of these being Europe and South-East Asia.

Debates concerning macro-ecological entities are becoming more and more passionate, often led by those living outside the entities themselves. The evolution of the Amazon basin inflames world public opinion, while the problems of the Sahel go well beyond the possibility of action of the nations involved. Sharing of the waters of the Nile and of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers must surely be negotiated and decided among all of the consumers, while the water and oil resources of the Caspian and Aral basins concern many nations.

In a world of galloping globalisation we could sometimes get the impression that a single power system for the planet is imminent or is already being imposed. However, is the present situation not more analagous to the Hanseatic cities of the Baltic Sea in the 16th century, when commercial enterprises and strong cities tended to overshadow the nations in which they were installed.

Imbalances in the planetary ecology would seem to be obvious to all, but we are far from resolving the tensions between short term economic interests and sustainable global options.

A mention of infinite space might seem to go beyond the subject of this congress, but no, urban man is in urgent need of rediscovering harmony with the universe. In our rural past, this was part of daily life for all, but there is now the risk that the extraordinary increase in knowledge among the astrophysicists will be ignored by those imprisoned in their urban shell.

Of the 280 cities with a population of more than one million inhabitants, 20 of these each attain more than 10 million inhabitants (Ref.3). These figures are inevitably approximate as they depend on projections between each census, but even more so on the choice of circumscriptions that are used for the counts. Nor do they give valuable information on the impact of these populations on the regions concerned. For example, many of the 10 million Parisians grouped together in the administrative region of Ile de France spill over beyond that boundary on a daily basis and even more so on a weekly basis (Fig.4 / Note 4). However the 16 million inhabitants of Mumbai (Fig.5 / Note 5) tend to be concentrated on a small peninsula between the ocean and the bay, often alienated from the state for which the city is the capital. Each figure hides a regional reality.

Whatever the degree of connection to the Internet or whatever the role of the city in relation to a wider territory - for water and food, industrial raw materials, commerce, services or governmental functions - the reality of living together in close proximity is essentially similar. How can this reality of human existence best be grasped and all possible provision made to improve the well being of each person? The region, considered in a prospective manner as a home territory for its inhabitants, deserves adequate attention.

What then are some of the basic criteria for a reflection on the convivial region? The following considerations would seem to be among those to be taken into account :

- # the human person
- # space to sleep, stand and move
- # sufficient clean water and food
- # conservation and/or amelioration of biodiversity
- # energy : a maximum of renewable energy on the spot
- # possibility or existence of sustainable human settlements within the region
- # mobility of the population within the region, for the mass and not just for a privileged few
- # possibility of transport links with other regions, by water, rail, road and air, with specific uses for each type of transport
- # access to and sharing of the global supply of raw materials
- # clarification and perfecting of agreed planetary principles of governance
- # initiatives, healthy competition and mutual help

### **3- "Site target" : a tool for analysis and comparison.**

A convenient series of circles has been used (Ref.1) to enable rapid site appreciation and also comparison between sites and settlements. Site potential has been a major concern.

At first glance the circles can be appreciated simply as units of measure. The dimensions are indicated in the accompanying diagram (Fig.2). However, applied to specific regional sites, they can be used as tools for appreciation and analysis of distances, areas, morphology, dispersal or concentration of urbanisation, totals as well as densities of population...(Note 3). See also key to thumbnail diagrams (Fig.3)

The accompanying diagrams of Paris and Mumbai are fairly explicit (Figs.4, 5 / Notes 4, 5) in enabling immediate comparison of essential elements.

Systematic compilation of information then facilitates more detailed comparison of different regions. The examples of London and "Peaklands" (Figs.6, 7 / Notes 6, 7), within demonstration boundaries, each with about 20 million inhabitants, are similar in area and population, but are they equal in opportunities?

The systematic use of a single tool does not infer adoption of a standard region, but it enables clear measurement and appreciation in relation to given references. As shown in part 4 of this paper, the specific qualities, advantages and disadvantages of each region can be grasped more readily. Better appreciation is valuable in discerning viable entities. In Spain, the contrast between Castilla-Leon and Asturias is evident (Figs. 8, 9 / Notes 8, 9), but both are constitutionally accepted regions

While the Internet has provided a quantity of more comparable mapping data throughout the world, other problems remain evident when reflecting on convivial regions : similar indications for boundaries can have very different connotations on the ground ; choice of names for new entities can have profound significance ; strictly comparable statistics are difficult to achieve...

In practice, the site target has proved to be an interesting tool for appreciation of regions in different parts of the wider development pattern.

#### **4- Examples of convivial regions.**

With accent on graphics rather than on texts (Note 10), several categories of cities or places in their surrounding regions can be observed so as to demonstrate various characteristics and can be observed in continuity with the cases already mentioned. (Note 11). Why so many examples? They are presented so as to help the reader develop a reflex of analysis and of comparison with other personally familiar regions in any part of the world, recognising common bonds and also specific characteristics. It should be noted that for this paper the statistics from different sources are presented as being approximate and the notion of "demonstration region" is used where needed.

What could these entities become were there a more important role for local initiatives and adapted governance? Division into several categories might help our reflection.

Firstly it is interesting to recognise selected regions that already exist within official boundaries, an example being Rhone-Alpes (France), a promising entity created in the 1960's and including the cities of Lyon, Grenoble, Chambéry, Annecy and St. Etienne (Fig. 10 / Note 12)

The case of Gauteng (Johannesburg-Pretoria) is interesting as a recent creation, destined to be at the heart of the new South Africa. (Fig.11 / Note 13). Nordrhein-Westfalen (Fig.12 / Note 14 ) is comparable in having also assumed national governmental functions during several decades as well as experiencing massive exploitation of its natural resources. However, for this latter example the experience of official regional government is anchored back into history.

The following three examples : Latvia (Fig.13 / Note 15), Slovenia (Fig.14 / Note 16) and El Salvador (Fig.15 / Note 17) are all sovereign states and members of the United Nations. Other regions show evidence of wanting to follow their example !

Among the cases of vocation for concerted development, or even the creation, of core cities, the case of Laura (Fig.16 / Note 18) seeks to draw attention to the considerable potential of numerous places throughout the world. It is in radical contrast with the situation in the state of Kerala in Southern India (Fig.17 / Note 19). "Gebel Thebes", a theoretical exercise situated in Upper Egypt (Ref.1) illustrates the potential of strategically placed desert land where the impact of any human settlement could be predominantly positive for the local environment (Fig.18 / Note 20).

Bangalore, capital of the state of Karnataka could be considered as a city which, with Mysore, is in need of definition of a regional boundary (Fig.19 / Note 21)

Sydney reigns over a state of some 800 000 km<sup>2</sup> but tends to ignore that its natural setting is limited to a relatively small coastal valley with correspondingly limited water resources (Fig.20 / Note 22). It is in need of responsible boundaries, within an adequate state program, as well as improved balance in its internal structure. It can be compared with cities such as Dakar and Bahia Salvador.

Then there is the special category of the "mastodons" : cities and regions of more than 10 million inhabitants. These are typical of the giants that seem to cause some of the most serious problems of pollution, domination, excessive energy consumption, sub-standard social conditions... Can their "footprint" be clearly understood, and can their contribution to imbalance in the planetary system be calculated and corrected in time? Examples include Manila (Fig.21 / Note 23) and Cairo (Fig.22 / Note 24)) See also Paris, Mumbai, London and Nordrhein-Westfalen (Figs.4, 5, 6, 12)

## **5- Discerning viable regions**

The experience of several nations in the domain of reform of territorial entities can be interesting to observe :

- France. It was a bloody revolution that swept aside the traditional provincial boundaries, replacing them with highly rational boundaries ("departements") that were considered valid for more than 150 years. In the 1960's, the need for reform led to regrouping of these entities into 22 program regions, within eight of which the capital was declared a "métropole d'équilibre", thus ensuring a reduction of pressure on the nation's capital, Paris. Now with elected assemblies they have become relatively autonomous but are generally too small to enter into the lively international competition that prevails. Further change would seem to be not only conceptually and administratively difficult but also politically hazardous.
- Egypt has remained with a system of centralised government and relatively small governorates. It has not benefited from reforms equivalent to those introduced in France. A combination of massive population increase and hesitation in the development of desert lands, this in spite of official policies, has jeopardised the limited existing agricultural resources. What are the perspectives in terms of regional definition and development?
- USA. The boundaries of the new states that were progressively added to the federation tended to be defined on the drawing board rather than with detailed reference to either natural or cultural elements on the ground. Any future reform would seem to be very difficult indeed, except within the larger states, such as California or Texas, in the case of policies of devolution, .
- Australia. The state boundaries established during the colonial period ignored, as in the previous example, the existing cultural boundaries of the established population. However, as the political entities are very large, they do lend themselves to a better definition of regions should devolution be adopted.
- India is of particular interest in that the state boundaries were decided on predominately human criteria, whether political or cultural. However, any attempt to envisage new regional boundaries shows that it is difficult to introduce natural and built environmental criteria, in spite of dire need in numerous situations.
- Both Portugal and South Africa have shown recently that reform of component administrative and political boundaries is possible in democracies, although neither example was specifically related to the notion of convivial region as such.

In all attempts to envisage new regional entities, it is essential for the interested parties to apply flexibility, with ponderation of the various criteria, in the search for sustainable and dynamic solutions with a positive attitude towards the future. Natural, cultural and political factors, as well as respect for achieved development, should be taken into account.

## **6- Intrinsic value and significance of the convivial region.**

Based on principles of the development and well being of the human person, within a context of ecological balance and responsible application of technological innovation, the convivial region could become a relatively stable reference in a world of profound change. Although excessive tendencies towards autarchy might imply blunt refusal to evolve within wider positive trends, a relative autonomy could on the other hand liberate energies for dealing appropriately with larger scale problems as they present themselves.

In ecological terms, a sustainable environment attained at a regional scale will avoid imbalances at sub-continental and planetary scales. It is only a regional population that can master questions of water and energy consumption, recycling of basic materials, choice of means of transport...

The social factor of sustainability with its cultural overtones can best be dealt with at this regional scale, where local character can flourish in close relationship with a specific territory, so avoiding global uniformity.

In the field of economics, regional initiatives could prove to be attractive to even the greediest of multinational corporations, while a recognised principle of regional management within the world economic machine could ensure more humane decision making. This is also the right scale to favour the apprenticeship in sharing, whatever the fluctuations in the economy might be. However, sufficient weight and diversity of activity is necessary in order to absorb the chock of rapid transformations in a given sector - and also to take part in the overall competition. However, the role of political will in relation to market tendencies is central. There is surely a question of channeling energy through the regions rather than dominating them and imposing uniformity.

Although governance at a regional scale supposes some degree of devolution of many existing national and state entities, it is here that members of the community, working within an overall framework of agreed principles, can hope to get to know each other and to act for the benefit of all. It is at this scale that the principles of democracy could have the best possibility of being maintained and developed.

Finally, it is for the individual or group to appreciate the quality of life attained when living in a well conceived accessible environment...taking into account each of the urban, rural and natural dimensions.

## **7- Conclusion**

Within our Congress, it is hoped that this contribution will be considered as being complementary to other approaches.

Even if there will be only one stockmarket, one president, one publicity billboard, one cinema... nothing can do away with the originality of each convivial region, enabling each of us to assume identity and to enjoy authenticity in our daily and weekly lives.

Lawrence Durrell once proclaimed that "... as a particular vinyard will always give you a special wine with discernable characteristics, so a Spain, an Italy or a Greece will always give you the same type of culture - will express itself through the human being just as it does through its wild flowers... Yes, human beings are expressions of their landscape... not enough attention is paid to the sense of place..." (Note 25)

The convivial region could well be the basic building block for articulating - favourably - the future development pattern for the planet.

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## **References :**

- Ref.1- TWITCHETT William, 1997, "Le Site Urbain : Potentialités", VILLENEUVE D'ASCQ, Septentrion  
Ref.2- LAROUSSE, 1990, PARIS, Librairie Larousse  
Ref.3- OXFORD UNIVERSITY, 2000, Oxford Atlas, Oxford University Press

## **List of illustrations :**

(Thumbnail diagrams by the author WT)

- |                                   |                             |
|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Fig.1- Scale of collective spaces | Fig.2- Site target          |
| Fig.3- Key to graphics            | Fig.4- Paris                |
| Fig.5- Mumbai                     | Fig.6- London               |
| Fig.7- "Peaklands"                | Fig.8- Castilla-Léon        |
| Fig.9- Asturias                   | Fig.10- Rhone-Alpes         |
| Fig.11- Gauteng                   | Fig.12- Nordrhein-Westfalen |
| Fig.13- Latvia                    | Fig.14- Slovenia            |
| Fig.15- El Salvador               | Fig.16- Laura               |
| Fig.17- Kerala                    | Fig.18- "Gebel Thebes"      |
| Fig.19- Bangalore-Mysore          | Fig.20- Sydney-Parramatta   |
| Fig.21- Manila-Quezon             | Fig.22- Cairo               |

## Notes :

- 1- Adjective proposed by Philippe Vaillant, member of Isocarp, during a "Terre & Cité" symposium in August 2002 and immediately integrated into a group project.
- 2- Group "Terre & Cité", ARRAS, France.
- 3- "Site Target" - examples of utilisation :  
Circle "a" : **125** km<sup>2</sup>. A population density of 10 000 p/km<sup>2</sup> (or 100 p/Ha) signifies a population of one and a quarter million inhabitants. Paris "intra-muros" had attained a population of 3 million in a comparable area, but has now fallen to 1.8 million. Dense public transport services at this scale are feasible.  
Circle "b" : **2 000** km<sup>2</sup>. A population of 2 million within this circle would imply a population density of 1000 p/km<sup>2</sup> . A density of 5 000 p/km<sup>2</sup> implies 10 million inhabitants, a figure that is being attained more and more frequently in world cities. An elaborate system of suburban public transport can become feasible.  
Circle "c" : **32 000** km<sup>2</sup>. Reference radius of approximately 100km implies the feasibility of personal or public transport on a regular, although not usually daily, basis. A population density of 100 p/km<sup>2</sup> (France 107) would imply a region of 3.2 million inhabitants.
- 4- Paris. The official region of Ile de France has an area of 12 000 km<sup>2</sup> with a population of 10 million. The "demonstration region" presented here concerns a population of approximately 14 million inhabitants, englobing Ile de France and several neighbouring entities, particularly those concerning easy accessibility, also vital water resources.
- 5- Mumbai. Note the natural "boundary" imposed by the proximity of the watershed, an important factor when considering the sustainability of massive human presence.
- 6- London. The region indicated covers two statistical regions, although not having substantial administrative or political existence. Area 39 800 km<sup>2</sup> with a population of 19.7 million. Note the small dimensions of the central water catchment.
- 7- "Peaklands". A demonstration region, without administrative or political existence, but grouping four statistical regions which include the major agglomerations of Liverpool, Manchester, Leeds, Sheffield, Nottingham and Birmingham. Population 20.6 million inhabitants. The approximate area is directly readable on the diagram.
- 8- Castilla-Leon. Area 94 200 km<sup>2</sup>. Population 2,6 million. No direct access to ocean transport. Grouping of notable cities such as Valladolid, Burgos, Leon and Salamanca.
- 9- Asturias. Area 10 600 km<sup>2</sup>. Population 1.1 million. One can remark a particularly mountainous terrain and that a distinct historical background has been taken into account.
- 10- Let us be influenced by a French military leader who, during a battle of boundaries, once proclaimed something like this : "A small sketch is worth as much as a long speech"
- 11- To facilitate presentation and reproduction, the diagrams and notes are grouped on pages distinct from the main text.
- 12- Rhone-Alpes. One of the more successful regions resulting from the 1960's French policy of "Regions de programme" and of "Métropoles d'Equilibre". Area 43 700 km<sup>2</sup>. Population 5.5 million. Semi autonomous status with an elected assembly.
- 13- Gauteng (Johannesburg-Pretoria). Area 17 000 km<sup>2</sup>. Population 8 million . One of the new provinces in South Africa created within the new constitution marking the end of apartheid. Limited geographical area grouping major national political (Pretoria) and commercial institutions on the site of mineral wealth (Johannesburg). Overspill to poorly structured neighbouring provinces would seem to be inevitable.
- 14- Nordrhein-Westfalen. Area 34 100 km<sup>2</sup>. Population 18 million. "Land" created after the second world war. Site of recent major reconversion of all spheres of the economy and of the urban fabric. Autonomous entity within a federal constitution.
- 15- Latvia. Area 64 500km<sup>2</sup>. Population 2.4 million. A national entity in transition between its attachment to the USSR and to the EU. Highly centralised structure requiring attention to ensure accessibility for the peripheral areas if unity is to be maintained.
- 16- Slovenia. Compact independent nation issue of the disintegration of Yugoslavia. Adhesion to the European Union imminent. Note territorial imbrication with the Italian port of Trieste. Area 20 300 km<sup>2</sup>. Population 2 million.
- 17- El Salvador. Area 21 000 km<sup>2</sup>. Population 6.2 million. Independent nation enjoying relative peace after a long and disastrous civil war.

**18-** Laura. A "demonstration region" with a population of several thousand inhabitants on the north-eastern coast of Australia, featuring small settlements and Aboriginal sites. Any policy of development would require efforts to provide strategically located regional services and careful conservation of a sensitive environment.

**19-** Kerala. Attention is drawn to Alwaye, a strategically located existing town within the state of Kerala, India. Area 38 900 km<sup>2</sup>. Estimated population of more than 30 million. Dispersed urbanisation in the highly sensitive ecosystem of coastal lakes and marshlands, an excentric siting of the state capital as well as attraction to Mangalore in the state of Karnataka to the north, would seem to suggest a need for the search for a new equilibrium in order to ensure a sustainable future.

**20-** "Gebel Thebes". A theoretical approach to a unique site in Upper Egypt. Present population concerned is from 2.5 to 3 million according to reference boundaries used. Water supply is similar to that of Cairo. This site could accomodate a substantial city if technically adapted to the specific climatic conditions.

**21-** Bangalore-Mysore. A dynamic high-tech city of some 4 million inhabitants with an extensive "front garden". Is there need for clearer definition of a region with adapted governance, complementary to that of the state.

**22-** Sydney-Parramatta. Population 3.7 million. The dynamic metropole of the South-West Pacific, in need of adaptation to a relatively restricted regional setting.

**23-** Manila-Quezon. Population of the main agglomeration 10.8 million. One of the giants on the world scene also in a relatively restricted immediate setting. Is there not a clear call for better balance between development here and in other strategic points of the archipelago?

**24-** Cairo. A "demonstration region" presented with a theoretical boundary having neither administrative nor political significance. Population approximately 24 million, so being comparable to other major urban regions of the world. Apparent need to accept the principle of desert land developlent. Also need for new balance with other regions within the national territory and beyond.

**25-** An indirect quotation, trusting that any lack of precision should not betray the spirit.



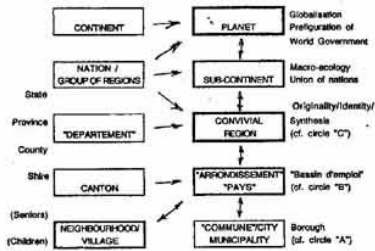


FIG. 1 - SCALE OF SPACES ENGAGED COLLECTIVELY (eg. France)

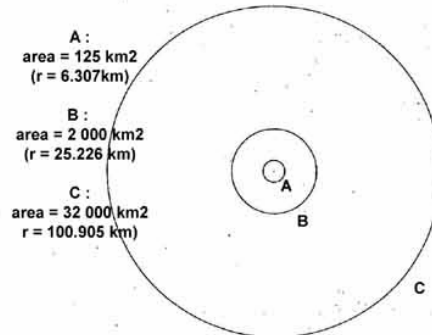


Fig. 2 - "SITE TARGET"

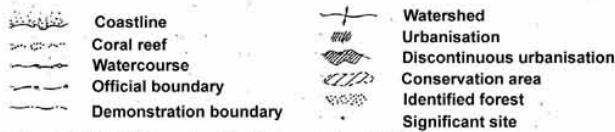


Fig. 3 - KEY (Thumbnail diagrams by WT)

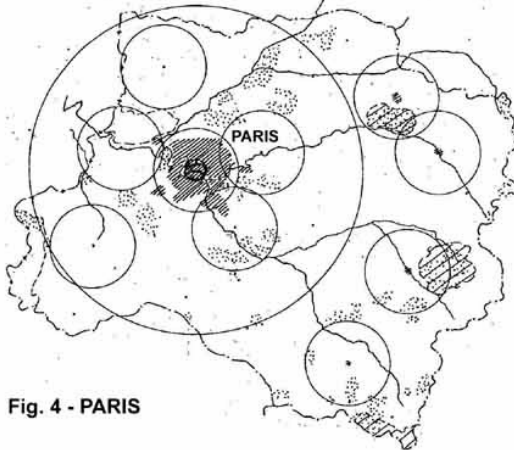


Fig. 4 - PARIS

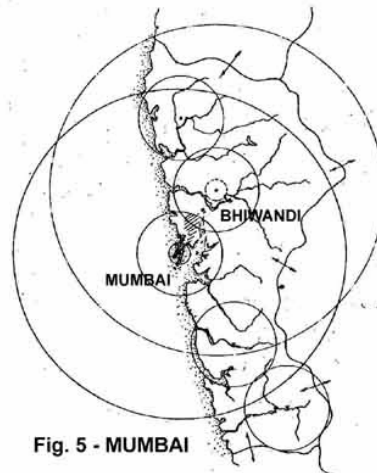


Fig. 5 - MUMBAI

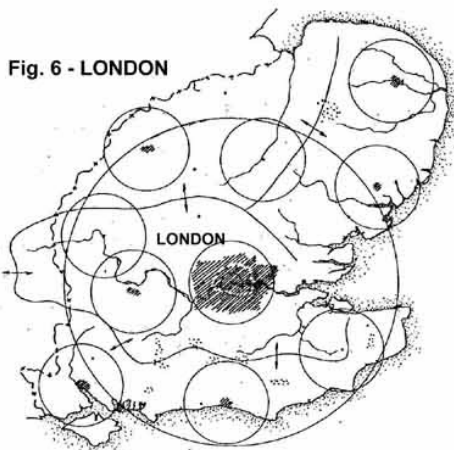


Fig. 6 - LONDON

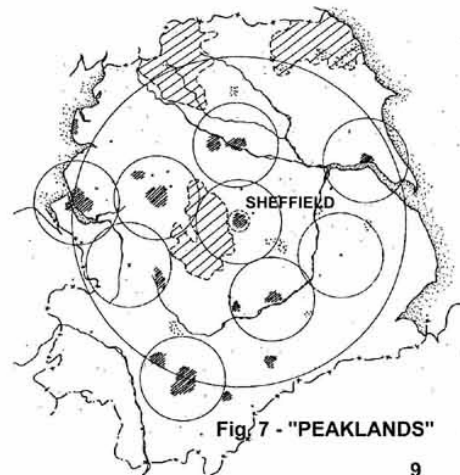


Fig. 7 - "PEAKLANDS"

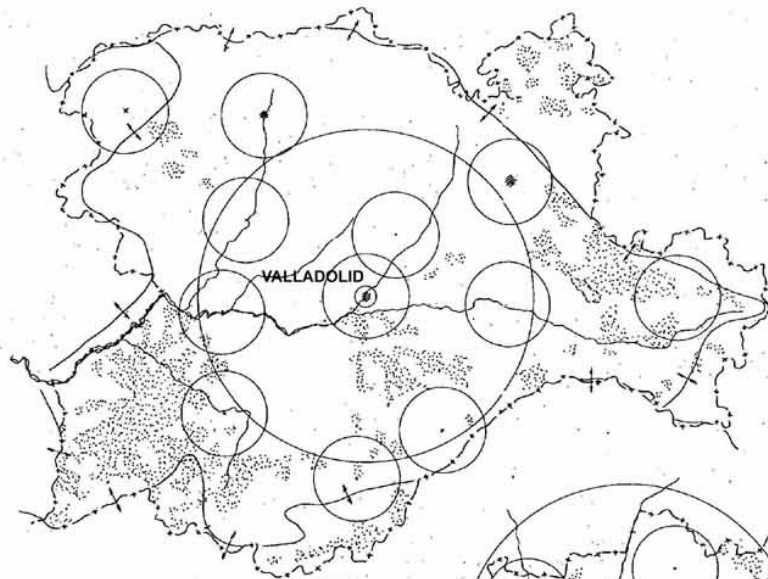


Fig. 8 - CASTILLA-LEON

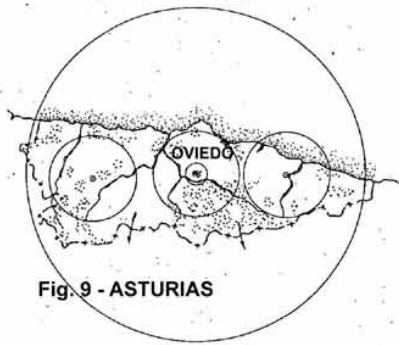


Fig. 9 - ASTURIAS

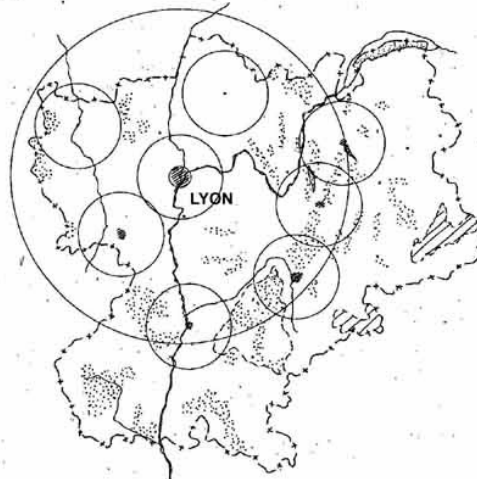


Fig. 10 - RHONE-ALPES



Fig. 11 - GAUTENG

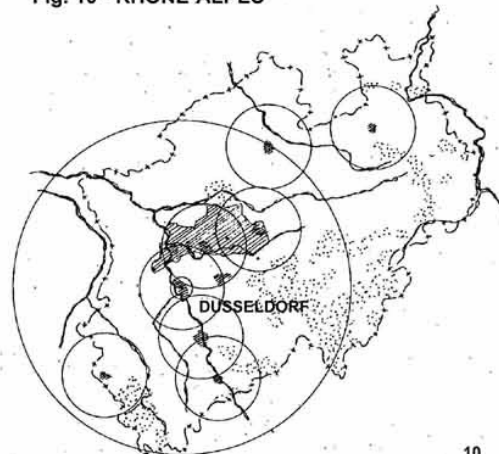


Fig. 12 - NORDRHEIN-WESTFALEN

Fig. 13 - LATVIA

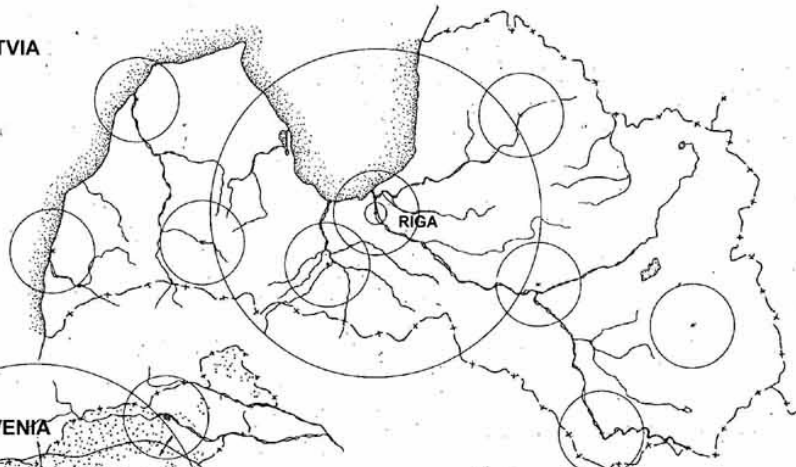


Fig. 14 - SLOVENIA



Fig. 15 - EL SALVADOR

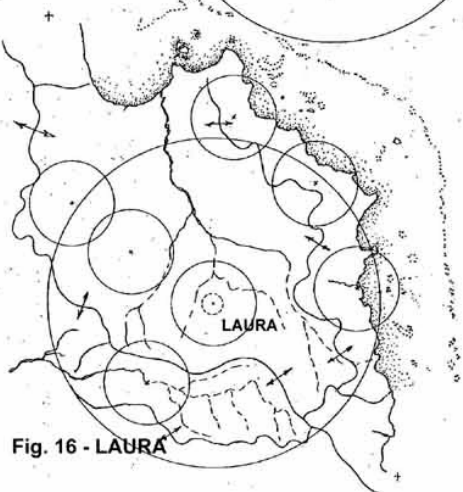
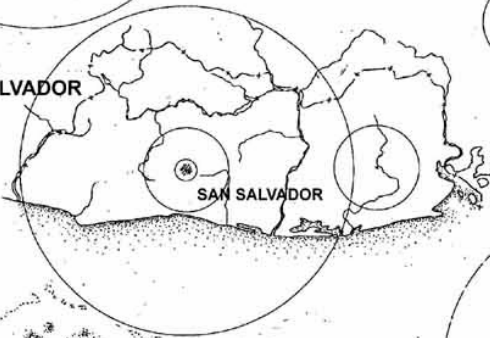
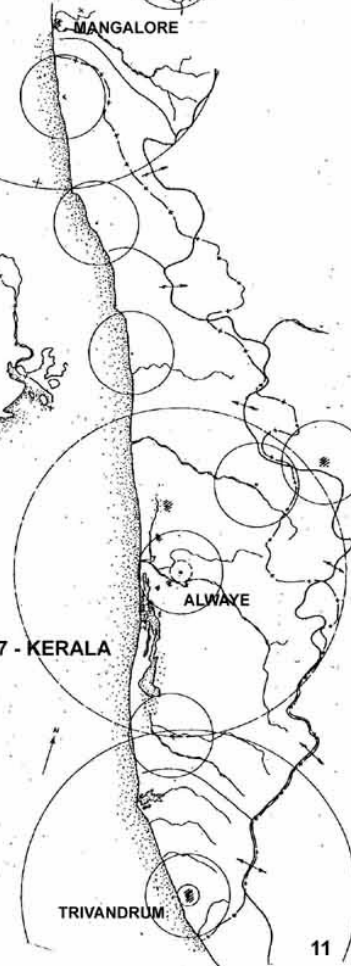


Fig. 16 - LAURA

Fig. 17 - KERALA



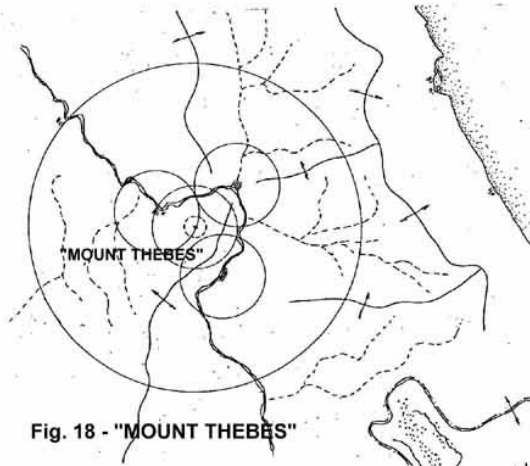


Fig. 18 - "MOUNT THEBES"

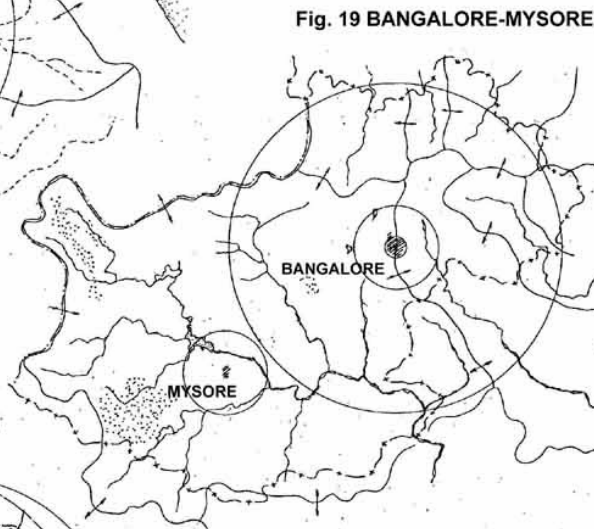


Fig. 19 BANGALORE-MYSORE

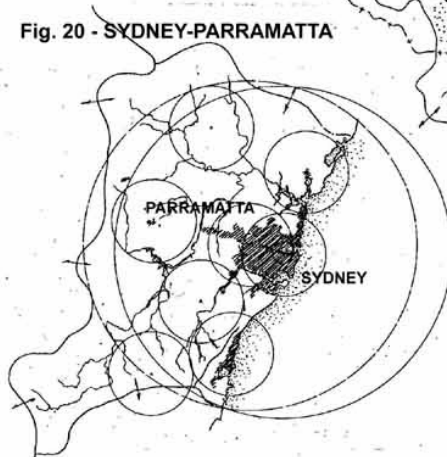


Fig. 20 - SYDNEY-PARRAMATTA

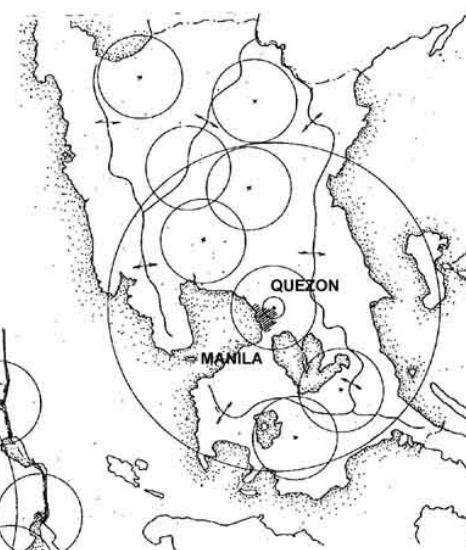


Fig. 21 - MANILA-QUEZON

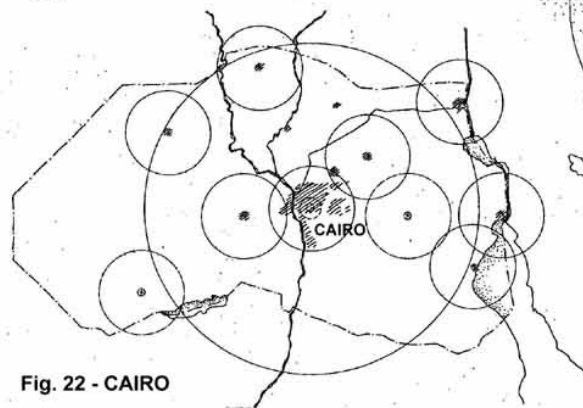


Fig. 22 - CAIRO