

Regional Imaginaries

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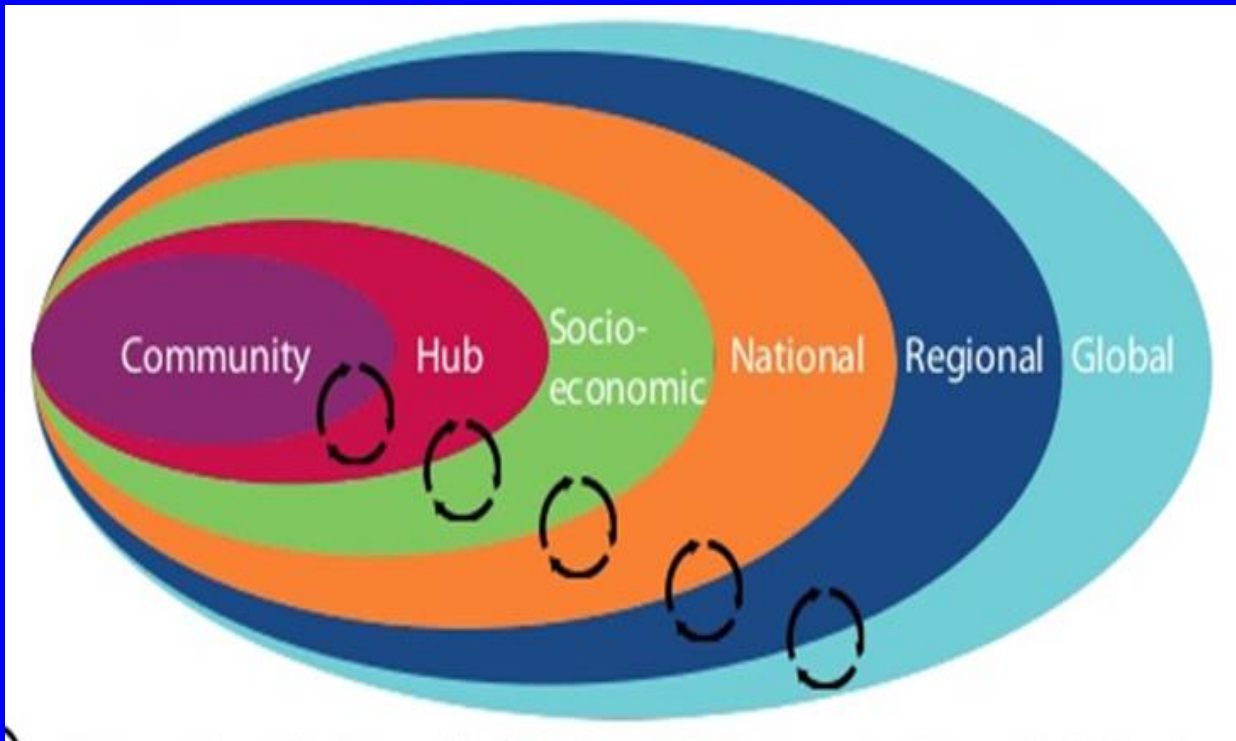
The ‘region’?

- “There is no such thing as a single, uniquely defined ‘region’ which manifests a full spectrum of city-regional relationships”

(Duncan, 1960:402)

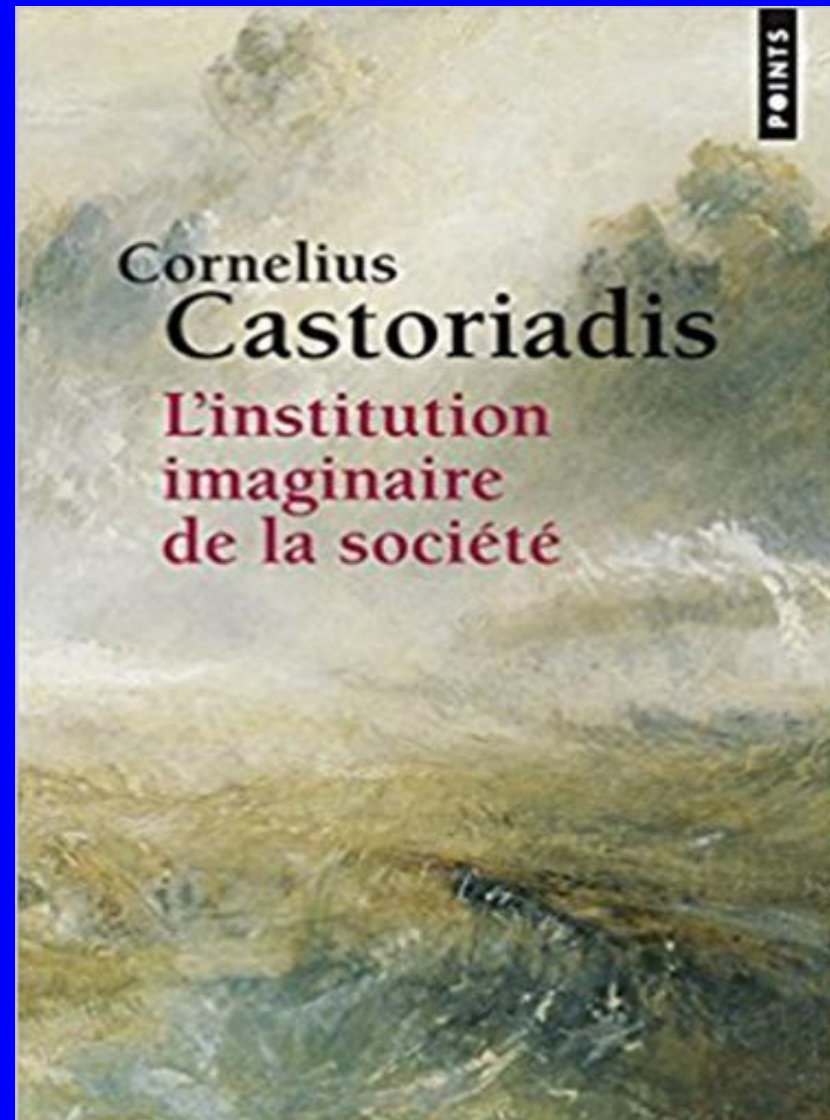
Relational space

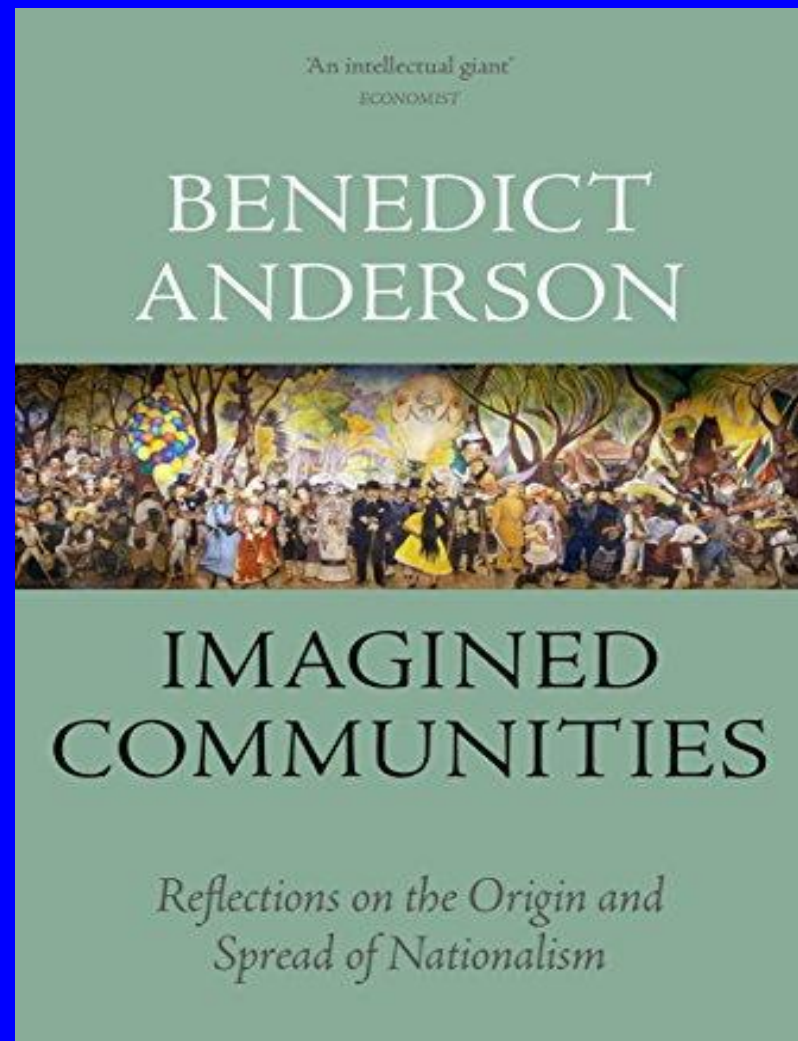
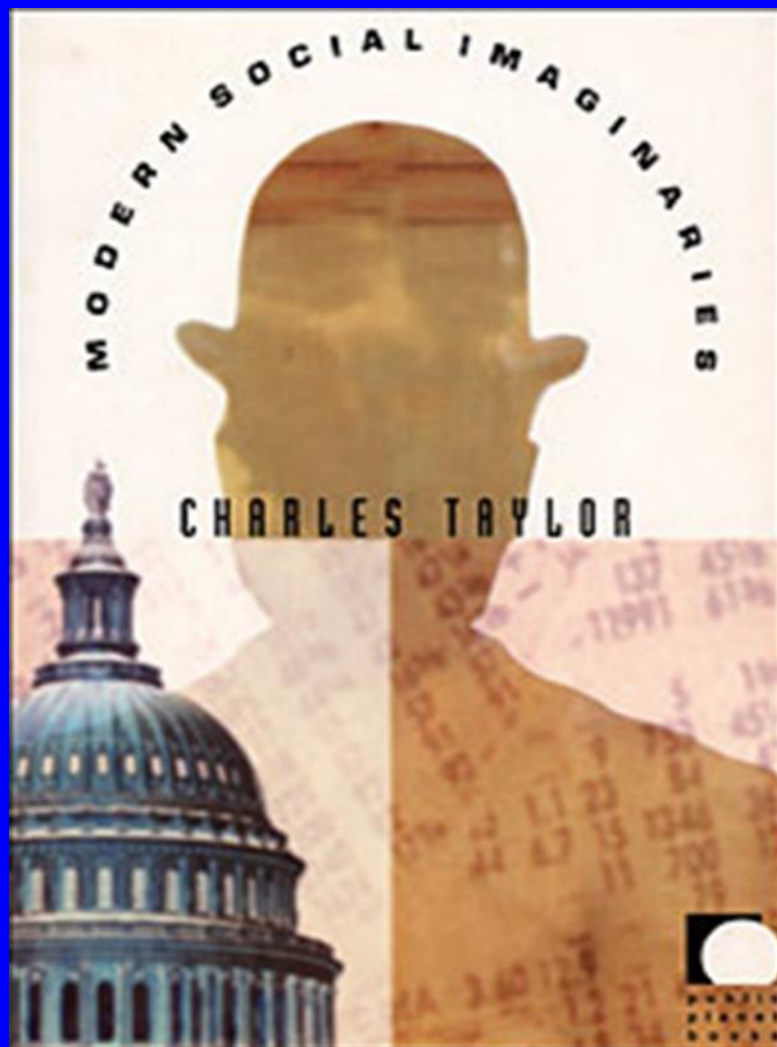
- Socially and culturally produced with fluid and contingent boundaries and open to political contestations.
- Multiple and competing **imaginaries** of the 'region'.

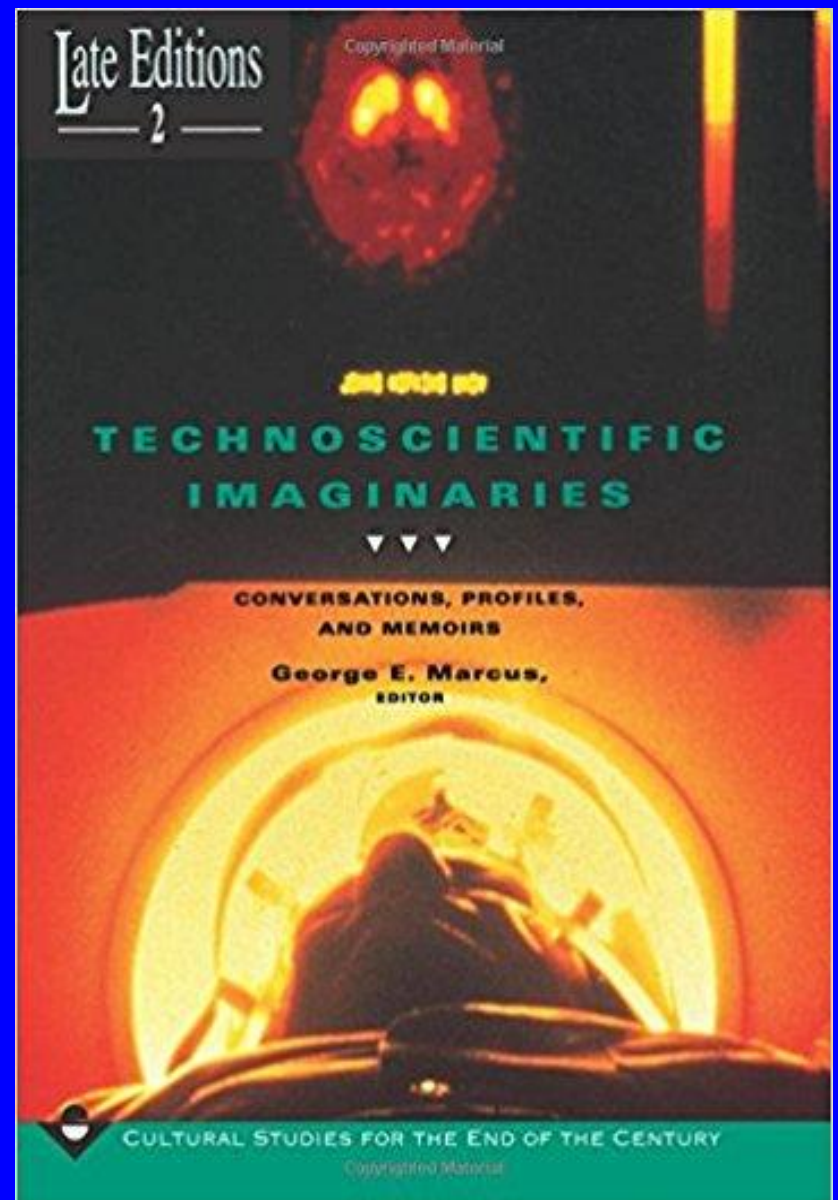
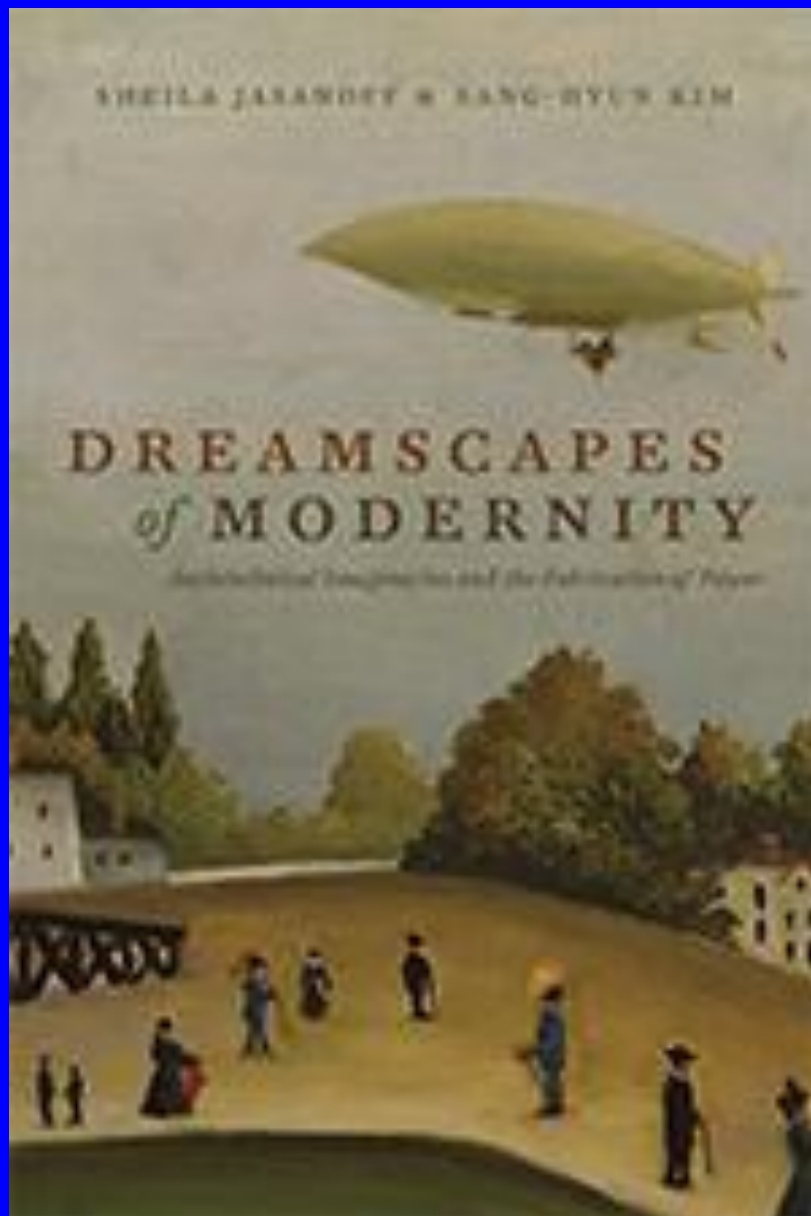


- “It is impossible to understand what human history has been or what it is now outside of the category of the **imaginary**”

Castoriadis, 1975: 101







“The struggle over geography is not only about soldiers and cannons, but also about ideas, forms, images & imaginings”.

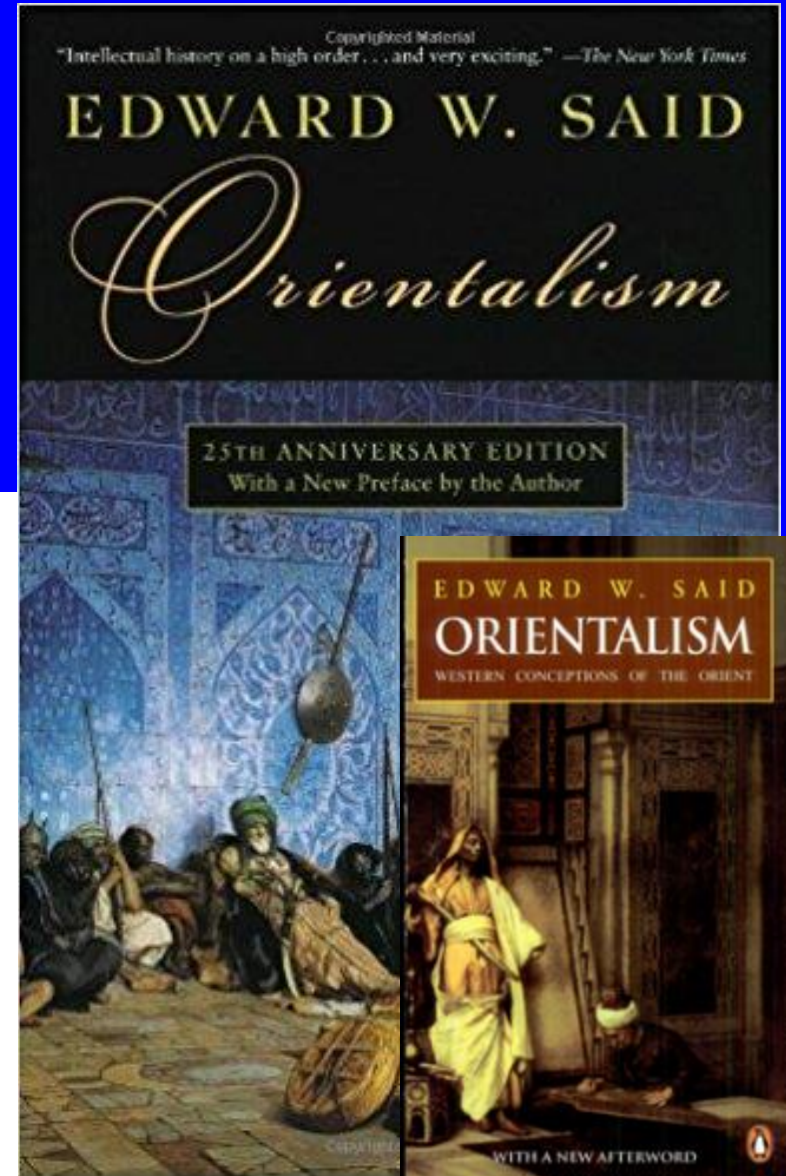
Said, 1993:7

Imagination and spatial imaginaries: a conceptual framework

Simin Davoudi

Introduction

We often think we know what a ‘smart city’, a ‘global city’, a ‘resilient city’, a ‘world city’ or a ‘post-industrial city’ looks like even if we have never lived in or visited one. Labels such as these perform a specific spatial imaginary and over time become the taken-for-granted representations of cities. Constructed and circulated through images, discourses and practices, they generate far-reaching claims on our social and political lives. In planning, spatial imaginaries such as these are often adopted and enacted as unproblematic representations of places of yesterday, today and tomorrow.



Regional imaginaries

- Are deeply held, collective understanding of what and where the region is;
- Are produced through political strategies, institutional framing, evidence gathering, social values and everyday routines and habits;
- They give sense to our spatial practices and are enacted and performed by those very practices.
- Are propagates by maps, models, texts, etc.

(adapted from Davoudi, 2018:98)

- ‘Region’ remains an important spatial reference for planning,
- But, what constitutes a regional space has been subject to diverse and conflicting imaginaries.

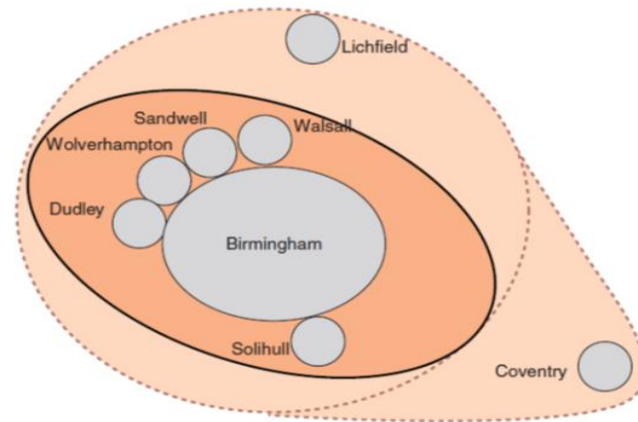
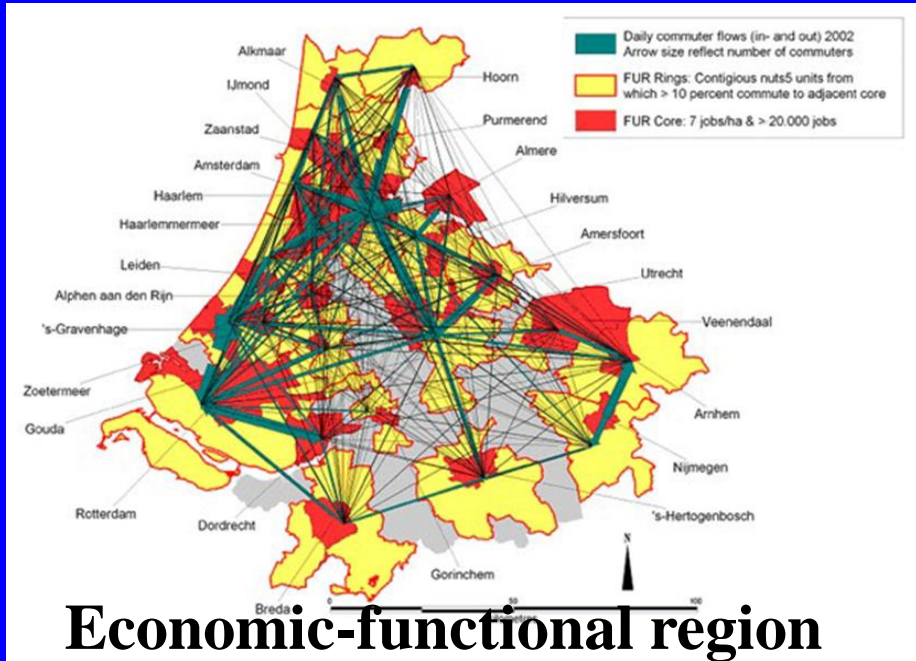
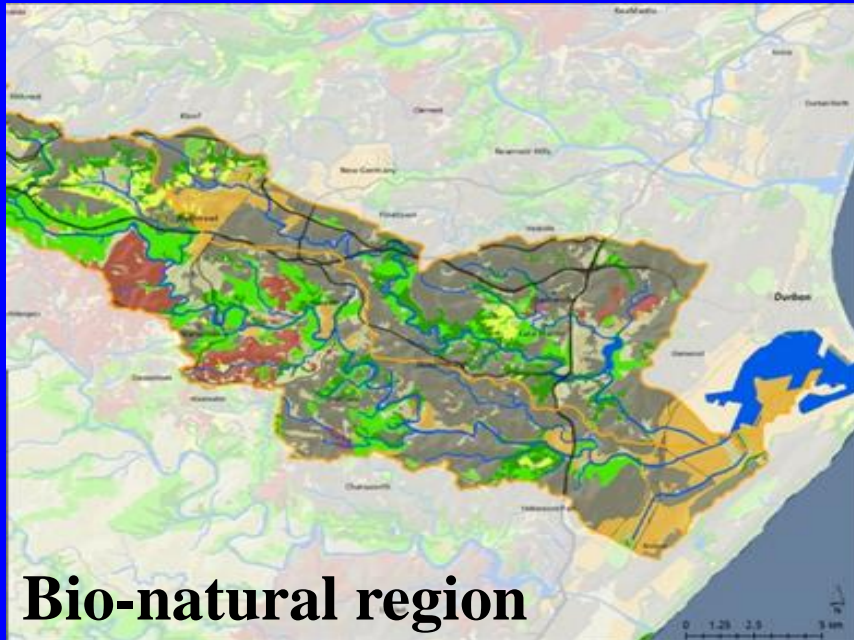
An aerial photograph of the Chicago region, showing a dense network of roads and highways in shades of blue and green, with a large body of water (Lake Michigan) visible on the right side. The image is a reproduction of a map or photograph from the early 20th century.

Burnham's **birds-eye view** of Chicago region

- Regional space has been ‘institutionalised, demarcated, contested and restructured at varying scales and at particular historical moments’

(Jones and MacLeod, 2004: 447)

Types of regional imaginaries



Focus of the paper

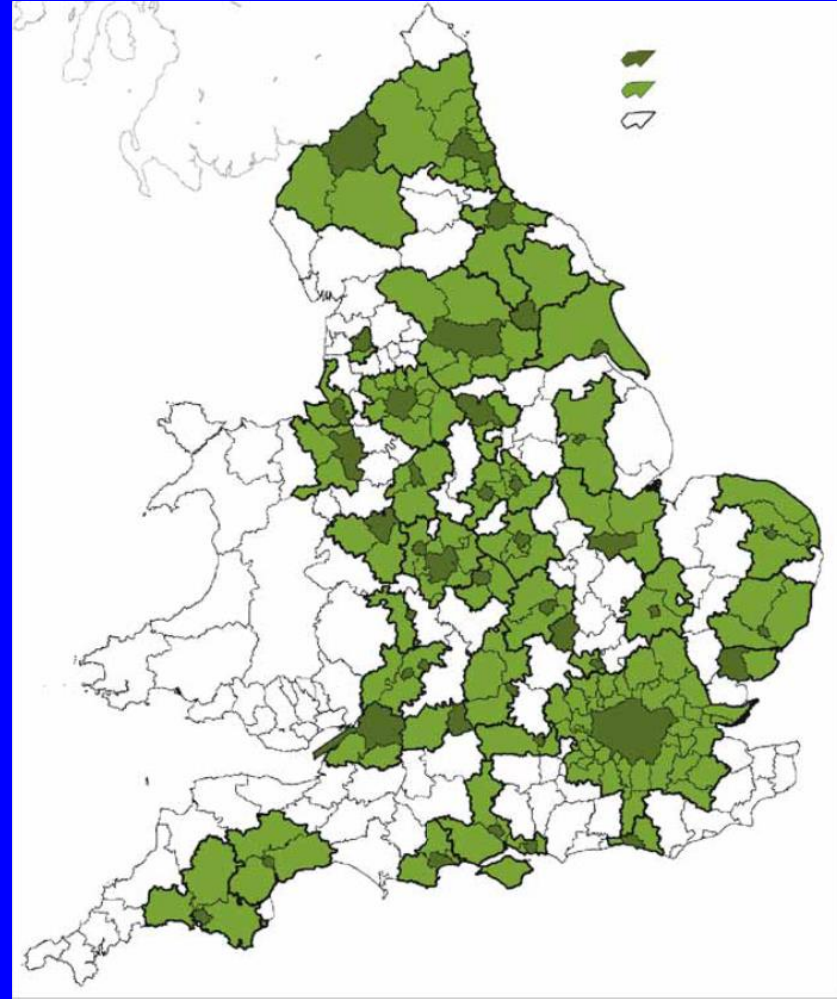
- How and why regional imaginaries are constructed, embedded and perpetuated in institutional practices?
- What forms of knowledge and rationalities are used to legitimate them?
- What role is played by regional science and studies?
- What are the implications for planning regional futures?

Economic-functional regional imaginary

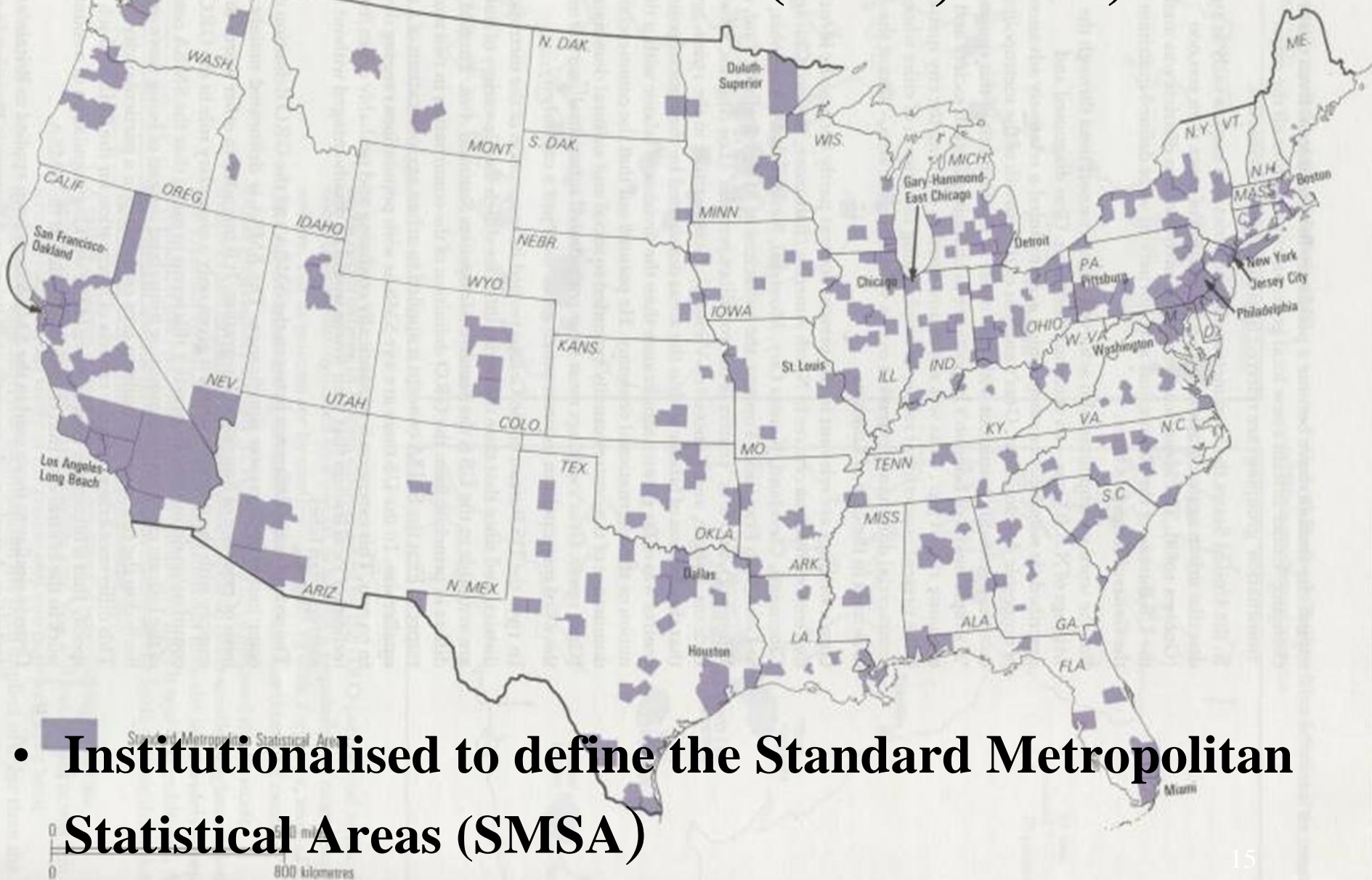
- Portray the region as a functional economic space
- Privileges economic flows over numerous other relations
- Is given epistemic legitimacy by scientific methods of constructing the:
 - **Functional Urban Region (FUR)**

FUR

- Invokes the region as a self-contained and coherent economic zone
- Defined and mapped through the calculation of daily commuting data.
- FUR was coined by Berry et al. in 1968



FURs in America (Gras, 1922)



- Institutionalised to define the Standard Metropolitan Statistical Areas (SMSA)

CENTRAL
PLACES

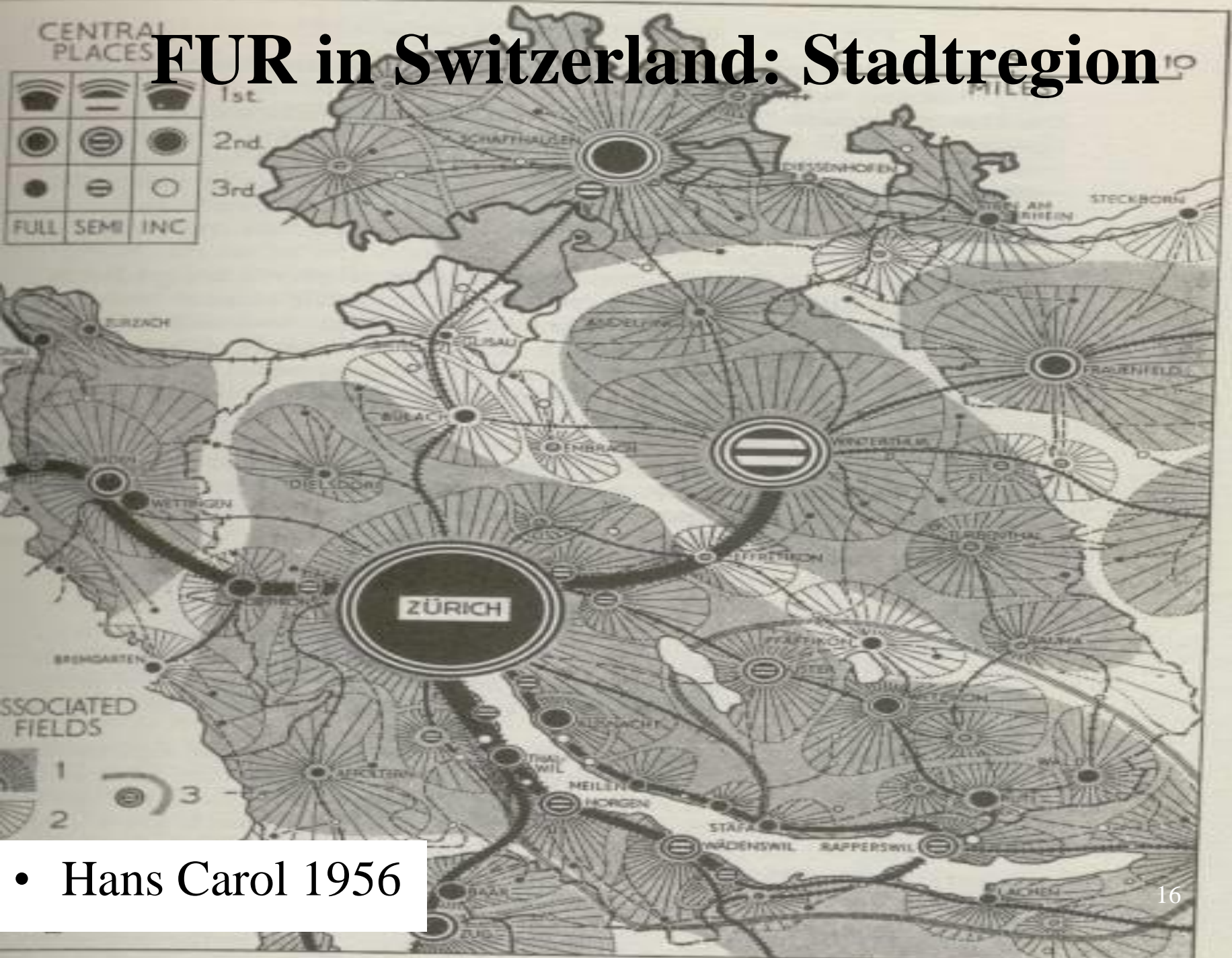
FULL	SEMI	INC

1st.

2nd.

3rd.

FUR in Switzerland: Stadtregion

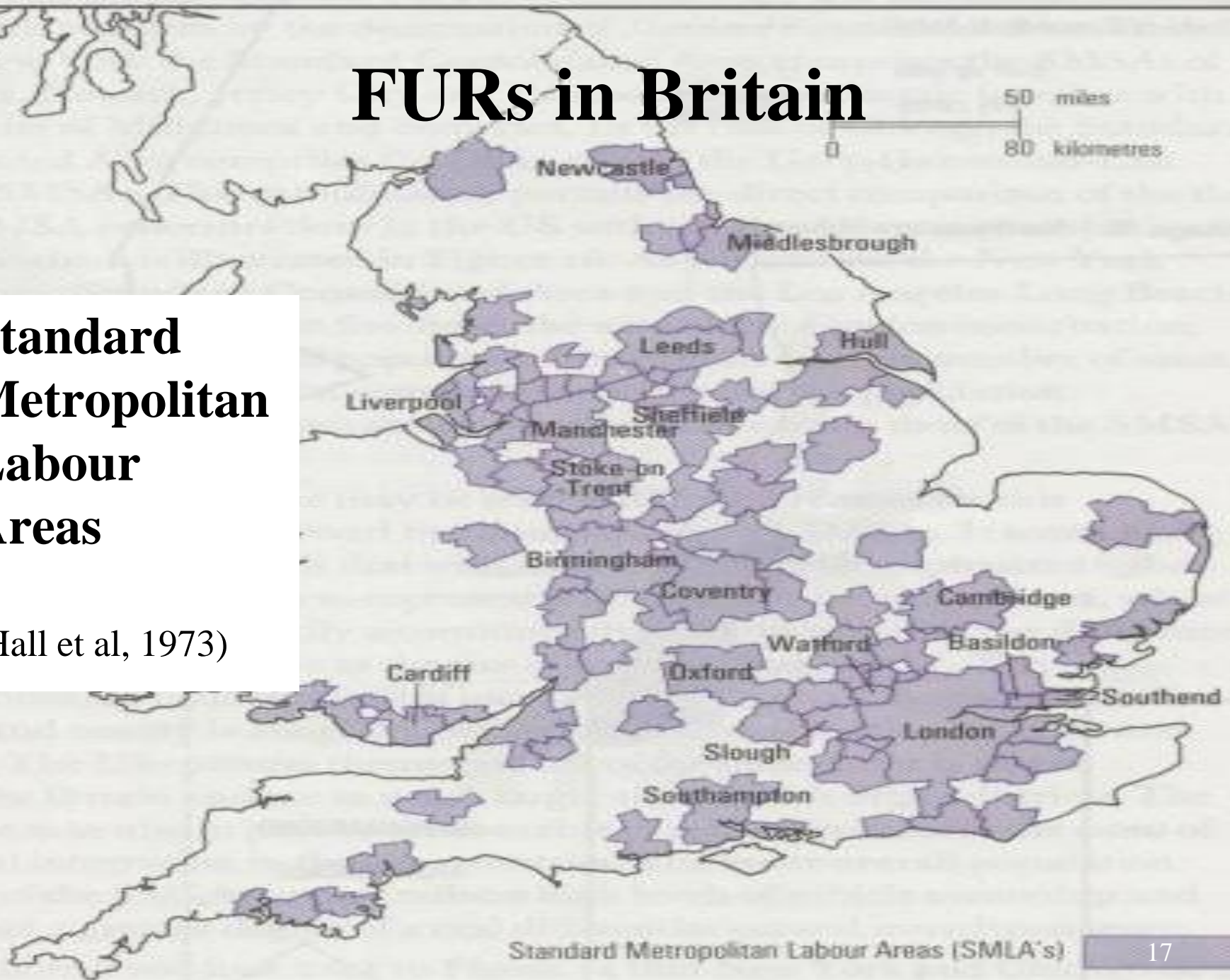


- Hans Carol 1956

FURs in Britain

Standard Metropolitan Labour Areas

(Hall et al, 1973)

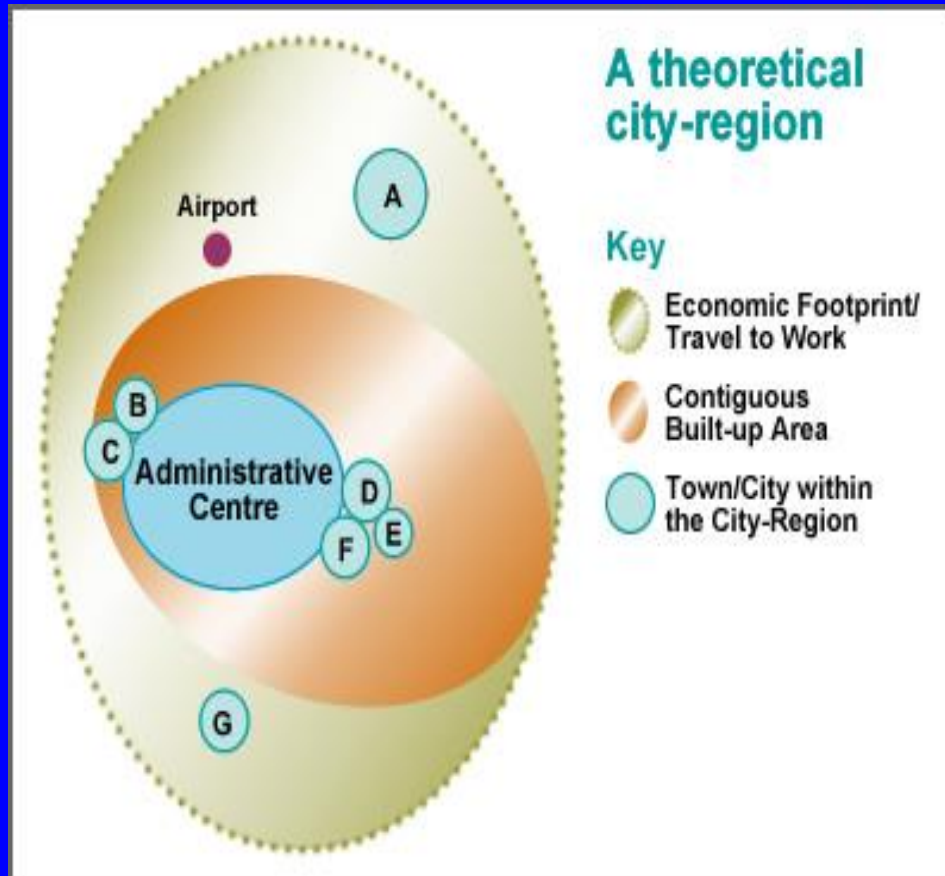


Europe of FURs

This map illustrates the distribution of FURs (Fur-bearing animals) across Europe. The map is color-coded by region, with a legend in the top right corner. The legend includes: Greenland, Iceland, Finland, Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Germany, Poland, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Austria, Hungary, Switzerland, Italy, France, Spain, Portugal, Greece, Turkey, Bulgaria, Romania, and Ukraine. The map also shows the distribution of FURs in the UK, Ireland, and the Baltic states. A note in the bottom right corner states: "This map does not necessarily reflect the opinion of the ESPON Monitoring Committee".

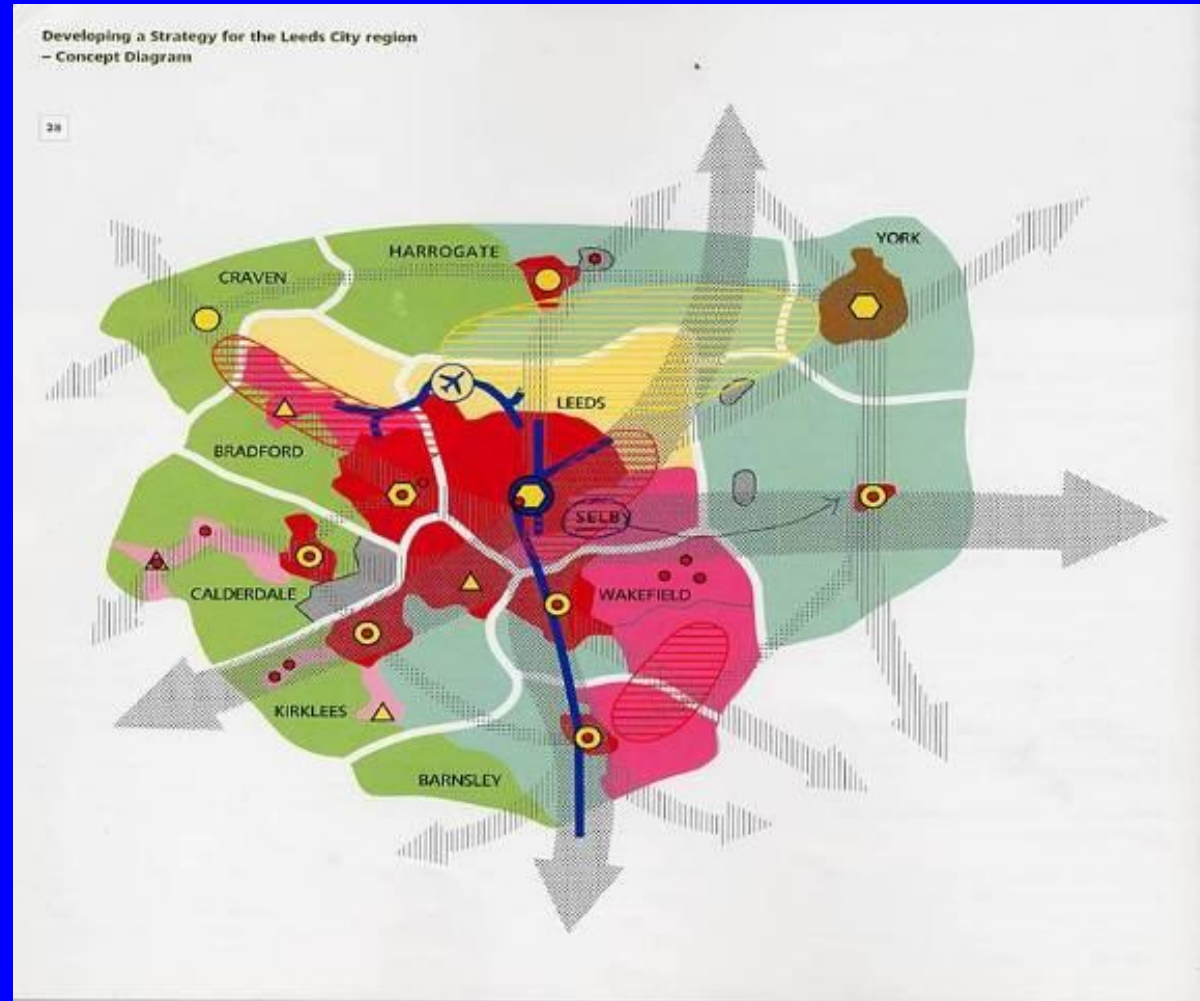
Dominant method of defining FURs is: **top-down, urban centric, economically-driven**

- Starts from a pre-determined set of 'core cities'
- Moves out to assign areas to the core on the basis of their levels of commuting
- Determine the outcome by defining thresholds and cut off points

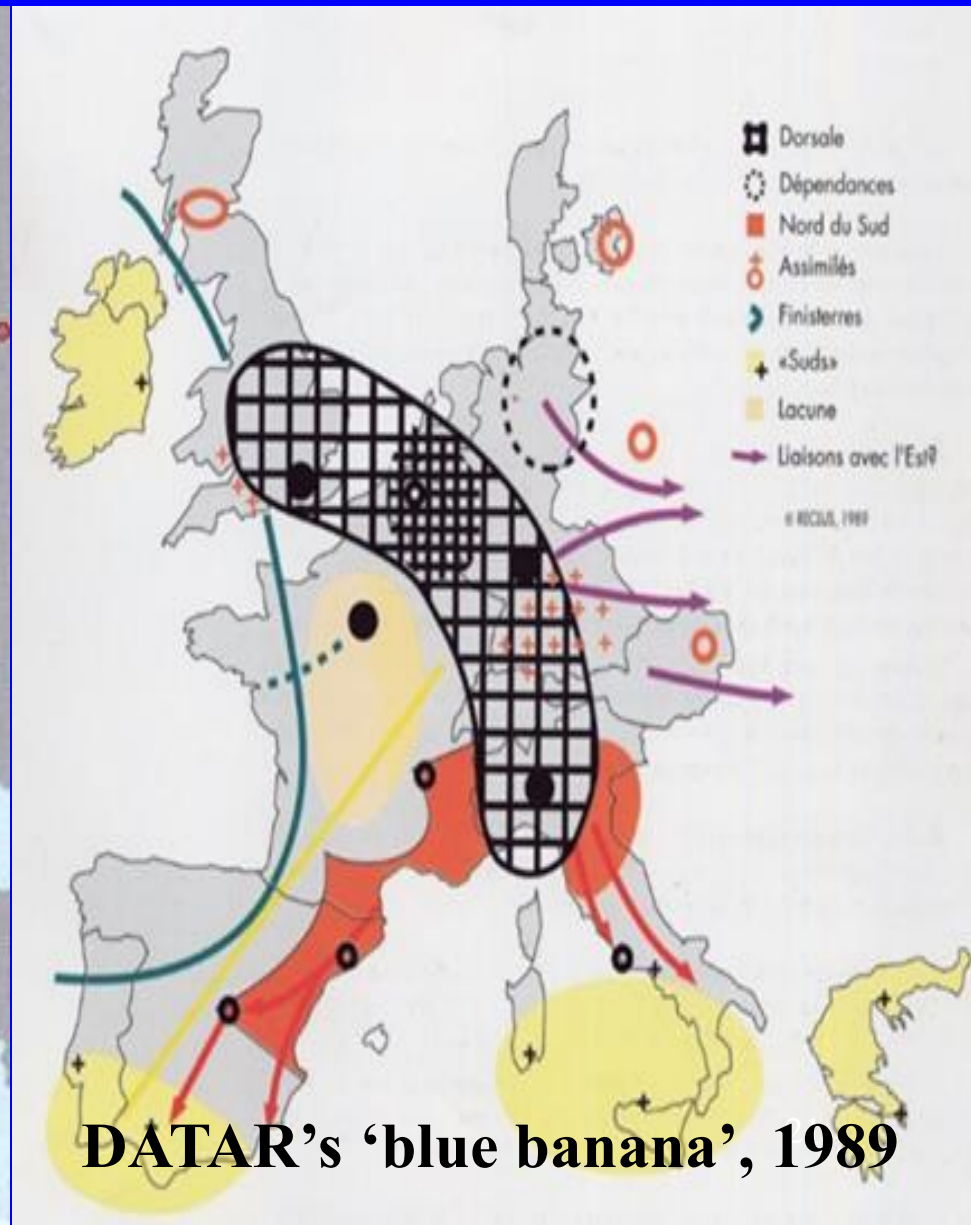


City of York becomes the hinterland of Leeds

- With implications for:
- Spatial planning
- Investment decisions
- Development of place- identity



Core-periphery imaginaries of Europe



- **Economic-functional region has provided capitalism with its most enduring ‘spatial fix’**
- “Capitalism cannot do without its spatial fixes.”

(Harvey, 2000:54)

- The political-economic dilemma of neoliberalism:
 - Facilitating the free flow of capital across space
 - Capturing its returns in particular places

Why do certain imaginaries persist?

- Epistemic legitimacy:
 - Power “both prescribes what is to be done and codifies what is to be known.” (Davoudi, 2015:10)
- The neoliberal belief in the ‘**ripple out**’ effect:
 - “*competitive cities create prosperous regions through a potential chain reaction*”.

(ODPM, 2003:6)

- Fixing essentializes the economic imaginary of the region and excludes alternative imaginaries.
- The evidence-based legitimation turns it into an **article of faith**:
 - determining the scale with which regional planning, jurisdictional boundaries, and lines of accountability should co-align.
 - Influencing regional planning futures

For further details & references see:

- Davoudi, S. (2018) Imagination and Spatial Imaginaries, *Town Planning Review*, 89(2): 97-
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