

NOTE LIMINAIRE

Le colloque sur les Régions Transfrontalières, organisé par l'Association des Instituts d'Etudes Européennes à l'occasion de son assemblée générale, s'est tenu à Genève les 23 et 24 janvier 1975.

On trouvera ci-après les textes des rapports écrits qui ont été présentés par leurs auteurs, ainsi que des extraits des débats les plus significatifs. (Quelques textes qui ne figurent pas ici, sont réservés pour des publications ultérieures, plus spécialisées.)

Le problème des régions et des frontières a été abordé au cours de quatre séances dans l'ordre suivant :

1ère séance, présidée par Henri Brugmans

Nécessité des Régions — Les Régions et l'Europe;

2ème séance, présidée par Fernand Dehousse

*Problèmes de méthode: la région fonctionnelle
— systématique — d'échanges;*

3ème séance, présidée par Paul Romus

Problèmes économiques, sociaux, écologiques;

4ème séance, présidée par Alexandre Marc

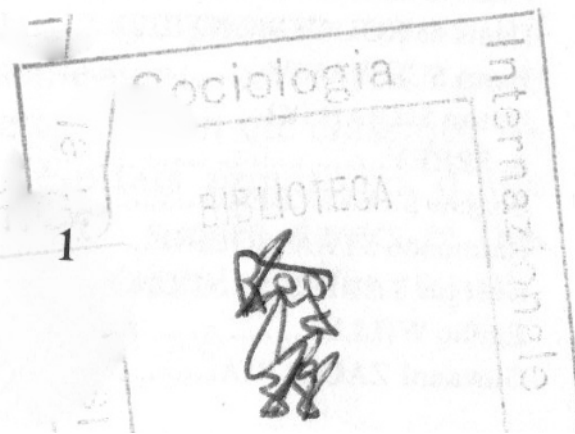
Institutions et attitudes régionales.

La tâche difficile et décisive d'esquisser une synthèse des débats fut assumée par Dusan Sidjanski, en sa qualité de Secrétaire général de l'AIEE.

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THE SYSTEMIC REGION

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1. Introduction

My theme here is «The Systemic Region». What is meant by this is, I think, the systems approach to the problem of regions and frontier regions. I shall first say something about the systems approach in general; then present a conceptual framework, based on that approach, to study the problem of boundaries and frontiers; finally I shall illustrate some findings from research, based on these concepts, which has been recently carried on in the «Alpe-Adria» transfrontier region.

What I cannot do here is the development of a systems-theory of regions and regionalism. The subject is too large to be dealt adequately in this short paper. Many authors have written on this. I have myself written at length on the subject, which seems to me so rich in substance, so complex, so full of potential, so fascinating that it would be painful, to hammer it down to the size required to fit the present circumstances.

Regional science has been called the science of subsystems. A systems approach to regions cannot be developed without reference to that monstrously overdeveloped subject, the theory of the State. Moreover, it is necessary to set modern regional concepts apart from the traditional ones; the latter being of geographical origin, and considering the region as a static, homogeneous, natural unit, the former deriving from political economy and looking at the region as a polarized, dynamic subsystem. It requires a discussion of the differences and commonalities between territorial and non-territorial subsystems, and an inquiry into the larger problems of the spatial properties and physical aspects of socio-political system. The emergence of modern regional systems and regionalist theories cannot be explained without reference to the problems of «aménagement du territoire» on one side, and to federalist doctrines on

the other; so we are drawn into the largest problems of planning and political theories. It seems impossible to abstract subjects of this magnitude to a couple of pages without either falling into flat banalities of common sense or into the irksome technicalities of a formal language, which has not (yet) been stipulated. So I would better drop the subject here, referring you to the literature (1).

2. A note on general systems theory

The systems approach or General Systems Theory is one of the most interesting intellectual developments of the last twenty-five years. It has many illustrious forerunners in classic philosophy (2) or even in modern classics of the social sciences (3); but the beginnings of its contemporary career can be traced to the work of mathematical biologists on one side (Bertalanffy, Rapoport, Schrödinger) and of communication engineers on the other (Shannon, Wiener) (4). It is basically a generalization of cybernetics, and there are still many who contend that General Systems Theory (GST) is nothing else but another name for cybernetics (5).

Quite early GST has spread from the biological and engineering sciences to the social ones, also through the mediation of psychology (6). Nowadays one can hardly think of a scientific discipline that has not been influenced or overtaken by systems concepts; you find them in botanics as in business administration, in aerospace sciences as in molecular biology (7).

This might be seen as just another scientific fad, a passing fashion, like the mechanistic metaphors of the eighteenth century, the organicist analogies of the nineteenth, or the «structuralisme» of our own century.

This is not the place to put forth the arguments in favour of GST, of which there are plenty. I shall only emphasize that among the disciplines which have most enthusiastically adhered to its tenets are psychology, political science and sociology. Of course, also early writers on cybernetics, like Wiener, have indicated its possible applications in the sciences of man (8); but it is mainly with the work of the economist Kenneth Boulding, of political scientists K.W. Deutsch and David Easton, and of sociologist Walter Buckley that cybernetics and GST find their classic expressions in the modern behavioral sciences (9). A host of very important works have been recently written in this perspective; among the most relevant to our subject I should particularly like to

mention the work of Amitai Etzioni, «The Active Society» (1968) and of Alfred Kuhn, «The Logic of Social Systems» (1974).

3. Systems and boundaries

This is the literature we have searched when confronted with the manifold problems of our frontier region. After the Second World War, the towns of Trieste and Gorizia could be retained by Italy only at the cost of their hinterland, which was assigned to Yugoslavia; the frontier between the two states runs through the town of Gorizia and on the outskirts of Trieste (10). This fact had had enormous impact on the daily lives of their citizens, both when the frontier was closed and Italian-Yugoslav relations hostile, and after 1954, when the frontier was opened up and relations improved. The frontier is indeed the basic factor and the basic problem in that area; so we started thinking about it, looking for conceptual and theoretical tools that could sharpen our comprehension of the situation and fire our imagination in the search for solutions. And the first thing we discovered is that it is impossible to build a «sociology of borders» without a general theory of systems; system, environment and boundary are the three main concepts in that theory.

Every system is defined by a boundary, that keeps it distinguished from neighbouring environments and from other systems. «Boundary maintenance» is a function of every complex system (11).

Thus there are as many types of boundaries as types of systems. The study of boundaries is a new approach to the study of complex organisations: the potentialities of this theory have only begun to be explored (12). They seem particularly promising in shattering anthropomorphic, organicist and a-spatial conceptions of social reality (13). Socio-cultural systems, especially when the territorial (ecological, «ekistic») dimension is taken into consideration, and very complex systems that include physical persons, roles, communications, values, norms, energy, behaviour, interactions, etc. Accordingly they have a variety of boundaries.

4. Types and properties of boundaries

The two basic categories of boundaries are:

— the spatial (physical, territorial) boundary, i.e. the line (or rather the zone) that surrounds the physical elements of the system, and
 — the functional (analytical) boundaries, i.e. the value which the variables (states) of the system can assume without «falling out» of the system.

Socio-cultural-territorial systems are surrounded by a wide border zone, which includes:

- (a) the geographical border (i.e. the territory in which most of its elements are included);
- (b) the normative, legal boundary (the line established by international agreements and which circumscribes the area in which the norms of the system can be positively enforced);
- (c) the economic boundary (the area most affected by the productive and distributive activities of the system);
- (d) the military boundary (the area comprised by the defence activities of the system; in the case of super-powers it does not coincide with the normative boundary, but includes far-away areas);
- (e) the cultural boundary (i.e. the area in which the values, language and other cultural traits are diffused);
- (f) the ethnic boundary (the area inhabited by people who identify themselves closely with the culture of the system);
- (g) the psychological boundary (i.e. the area which is most commonly found present in the mental framework, the «iconography» of the members of the system) (14).

An analysis of the «halo» of boundaries surrounding all main socio-political systems, such as, e.g. the Nation-States, and their classification according to the characteristics of this «halo» would provide an interesting complement to the «transactional» approach to international politics and to the «linkage politics» approach. It would also help to destroy the dichotomy between «interior» and «exterior» that has done such harm to the comprehension of international politics (15).

Another, simpler categorisation distinguishes between:

- the objective boundary, which is the line enclosing such things as infrastructure networks, normal paths of personal mobility; it also includes normative, military, economic and ethnic boundaries;
- subjective boundaries, that include most cultural and psychological boundaries.

Almost all boundaries are «zonal». *Natura non facit saltus* — the paths of behaviour and ideas do not stop abruptly at lines, but just

gradually «die out»; the points of minimum density are taken as «breaking points», and their statistical interpolation constitutes the boundary line (16).

The Nation-State, as the most important human (socio-cultural-political-territorial) system, has made national frontiers the most crucial species of the genus boundary «second only to our skin», as Sir G. Vickers stated (17). No wonder that the study of boundaries has so far focused on national frontiers; but it is worth noticing that the study of complex business organizations (18) and of urban systems (19) also uses the «boundary concept»; and recent socio-political theories are paying it increasing attention (20).

A systematic study of boundaries should undoubtedly begin with the gathering of information on structures and sub-systems whose function is to maintain the boundary between the system and its environment, at differing levels of systemic anthropological data on the boundary-maintaining structures and functions in political territorial systems, in different cultures and at different times (21). Most useful would be a systematic analysis of present-day frontiers and boundary-frontiers, along variables such as:

- (i) homogeneity-heterogeneity of the neighbouring border zones,
- (ii) acceptance-contestation of the boundary,
- (iii) hardness-weakness, closure-openness, permeability-impermeability,
- (iv) «blurredness» — «delineatedness» (the degree to which the boundaries of the several sub-systems coincide with the normative ones),
- (v) rigidity-flexibility (the degree to which the localization and the functions of the boundary-maintaining structures respond to variations commanded by the system),
- (vi) importance (the degree to which the persistence of the system depends on the maintenance of a particular boundary).

Such variables might then be aggregated in simple typologies, like the one proposed by Prof. Feliks Gross (22), who parallels six types of political relations between States with six corresponding types of frontiers:

1. Co-operation
2. Remote tension
3. Non-consequential tension

(weak front)

1. Periphery
2. Civilised border
3. Open border

neutrality line

4. Consequential tension
5. Near-critical tension
6. Critical tension-
antagonism

(strong front)

4. Closed border
5. Berlin Wall frontier
6. Sealed frontier

5. A systems paradigm for the study of transactions between frontier regions

What I have said so far can only loosely be labeled of «methodological» interest, and thus properly fitting into the subject matter being debated this afternoon. It is methodological to the extent that also theories and concepts are tools for the analysis of empirical reality. It seemed useful, before going into technical details, to review the broader theoretical approaches and the main conceptual and practical problems, because only in relation to them does the empirical investigation acquire meaning.

As it is well known, the basic methodological and technical difficulty in studying European regionalism and European frontier regions in particular is their *definition*, their *delimitation*.

Few frontier regions in Europe have a very clear territorial configuration and political-administrative «existence».

According to the definition of region pragmatically accepted by the Council of Europe, the region is «the largest territorial unit in each country, directly subjected to the central government, with or without legal personality of its own» (23). One could then talk of co-operation between frontier regions only along the frontiers of States with a regional (or federal) structure, or at least with strong local autonomies. One faces here all the constitutional and administrative problems of defining the various sub-units of the different European States: provinces, counties, departments, planning regions, administrative regions, greater regions, smaller regions, Kreise, cantons, communal consortia, republics,

Länder, economic regions, natural regions, functional regions, etc., that make any discourse on European regionalisation so confused.

The «transactional» approach

In order to avoid the difficulties of this «institutional» approach to the analysis of trans-frontier co-operation, it seems advisable to adopt a simpler «transactional» approach, focusing on transactions (interactions) occurring across the frontiers.

The shift of emphasis from «co-operation» to more neutral «interaction» in border areas seems legitimate because — it lends itself better to an «objective», «behavioural» and «systems» analysis of the phenomenon; — all interactions involve some degree both of co-operation and of competition; and all interactions that are not intentionally conflictual can be called co-operative because they aim to solve problems common to the parties involved.

Main variables

The myriad trans-frontier interactions occurring daily along European frontiers could be analysed according to several typological grids. Among the more important variables are: place, time, actors, type, scope, importance.

1. Place

Place relates more to the area involved in the interaction than to the actual spot where it occurs. So the representatives of two frontier regions meeting at an international conference somewhere would be tabulated among the interactors of their frontier area.

2. Time

The time dimension is important because it is connected with the institutionalisation of the interaction pattern. Age-old contacts between border population usually constitute a fertile bed for the development of trans-frontier activities; while sudden flowering of interaction might be tied to ephemeral circumstances and die out with them. The time dimension is also important because it measures the recurrence (24) of the interacting behaviour, which in turn might indicate its interiorisation

and structuration. But the most important function of this variable is, of course, to show the historical *development* of trans-frontier cooperation, and allow a correlation with other events providing insight into the causes and effects of the phenomenon.

3. *Actors*

The parties in a cross-frontier interaction might range from individuals acting in their personal capacities to official representatives of the State acting in their full powers as "agents of the national system". Along these poles all degrees of "representativeness" are assorted in a continuum; each party acts as a member of a social system of some type; beginning with family reunions, when members of a family divided by a frontier can get together and renew the affective bonds or treat family affairs; to representatives of voluntary associations, sectoral interest groups, professions, clubs, etc., meeting to establish common activities or concerting projects.

Particular attention is usually given to interactions between "public bodies", i.e. representatives of systems, communities and organizations to which the State accords certain special functions and powers. In fact, the meeting of the mayors of two villages can be much less significant than the meeting of other decision-makers not vested by public authority, like the heads of two parties or corporations.

A behavioural interactional analysis does not place undue emphasis on the distinction between "public authorities" and other "system agents". This is the problem of the "weight" or "importance" of the interaction, which will be mentioned below. The "actor" variable simply points to the status and role of the parties involved, according to the usual sociological classifications.

4. *Type*

The *type* of interaction concerns the *medium* of communication; we can distinguish:

- face-to-face communications (meetings, conferences, ceremonies, etc.),
- mass communications (press releases, campaigns, etc.),
- personal communications (by letters or telephone).

It is important to analyse interactions in accordance with this dimension because the building of an adequate communications network in a frontier region is one of the strategic tasks if trans-frontier integration is to be furthered.

5. *Scope*

The scope domain of the interaction is one of the basic variables. It comprises:

- cultural scope (gathering and diffusion of information, ideas, values, patterns of behaviour),
- "expressive" scope (strengthening of effective ties, expressions of goodwill and sympathy, release of tensions, having fun),
- economic scope (purchase, production, sale of goods and services),
- political-administrative scope.

The latter is a very wide category, coterminous with the functions and competence of "public authorities" and, hence, with the degree of intervention of public authorities in social life. In liberal systems, these scopes are limited; the more we approach the socialist or "dirigiste" pole, the greater the powers of public officials. In totalitarian societies, by definition, all scopes are a function of the "political" ones.

6. *Weight or importance*

The importance or weight of an interaction is an index pointing to the range of consequences of that interaction for the frontier area. It is an aggregated index, comprising the number of persons affected, the relevance of the sector (of human activity and thought) affected, the area involved, the timespan over which the consequences endure, etc. It is primarily related to the role and functions (power, competence) of the actors, and to the scope of the interaction; but also to the other dimensions.

6. **Putting the paradigm to work:**

A case study of the emergence of the Alpe-Adria region

The area around the towns of Trieste (pop. 276 000) and Gorizia (45 000) has been for centuries the meeting point of the three main European stocks - German, Latin and Slavic. After the unifying attempts of the Patriarchate of Aquileia (25), this area became the battleground and military frontier between the Hapsburg empire and the Venetian republic. In 1866 Italy succeeded Venice, and in 1918 Yugoslavia succeeded Austria.

The ethnic boundary between the three nations is rather sharp in the countryside, villages being either "Friulani" or Slovene or German; although there are some areas of confusion (e.g. Tarvis). But they do not coincide at all either with "natural" boundaries, i.e. the Alpine watershed line, because Germans and Slovenes have settled the mountain slopes toward Italy. More important, they almost never coincided with political-military boundaries: a sizable Slovene minority lived for five centuries in the Venetian territory (the so called Venetian Slovenia) whereas a corresponding neo-latin Friulian area belonged to the Austrian empire (the Aquileia-Gorizia-Cornons triangle) (26).

The real problem rose with the development of Trieste as the main port of the Empire, and the far-reaching social and political problems usually connected with rapid urban development and regional polarization. The area ceased to be a mere borderland, a periphery, and became economically and strategically vital to Austria and then to its successor state, Yugoslavia. Moreover, the growth of the two towns of Gorizia and Trieste was fuelled by the immigration of Italian but especially of Slovene populations from the countryside, leading to a situation of ethnic heterogeneity, tension and opposing national claims (27).

The victory of 1918 gave Italy the upper hand in incorporating the two towns with all their Slovene hinterland up to the watershed, and all of Istria and Dalmatia. This area was now called "Venezia Giulia". The fascist aggression of 1941 incorporated in it most of Slovenia with the province of Ljubljana. With the fall of Fascism in 1943, the Germans detached Friuli, with the town of Udine, and Venezia Giulia, from Italy, setting them up as the "Adriatisches Küstenland" (28), a vassal state of the Reich. This political unit had basically a strategical function, to secure the communications between Central Europe and the Adriatic sea; but it was officially justified by historical reasons (the old ties of this area with Vienna) and by ethnic ones; distinction of Friulani from Italians, the hostility between Slovenes and Italians, the difficulty to draw an ethnic boundary, in Gorizia and in Trieste; the necessity that ethnic boundaries should not become political-economic boundaries, lest the two towns be strangled, etc.

At the end of the war, Yugoslavia laid her claim not only to every bit of the "national territory" but also to Trieste and Gorizia, on the ground that the towns are a service to the countryside (29).

The opposite historical cultural, and functional objections where

raised by Italy. It took a few years before the Italian-Yugoslav border conflict was solved. In 1947 Gorizia was assigned to Italy, Istria and Dalmatia to Yugoslavia. Trieste was set up as a "Free Territory", provisionally under Allied (Anglo-American) and Yugoslav administration, respectively in "zones" A and B. International difficulties prevented the actual implementation of the mini-state. For a few years, Italian-Yugoslavian relations where acutely hostile, with war rumbles in 1953. Then in 1954 the London Agreement settled the question, giving the B zone (with Koper, Capodistria) over to Yugoslavia, and the A zone, with Trieste, to Italy (30).

The Italian-Yugoslav frontier opened up a little. But it was only with the Italian "economic miracle", with the spread of private cars, that the border traffic at Gorizia and Trieste began to increase exponentially, with Italian citizens rushing to buy food and gasoline, to visit relatives, to enjoy the countryside. Soon after the Yugoslav and especially Slovene economy showed a comparable growth, and the small border trade became more balanced. The frontier opened up almost completely; it is now boasted as the "freest frontier in Europe".

In 1964 the regional reform in Italy brought the Region Friuli-Venezia Giulia, with seat in Trieste, into existence. This gave the local population an important tool for autonomous development. Although formally without any power in matters international, or even trans-frontier, the Region was very active in establishing contacts and cooperation with neighboring Slovenia, Carinthia and Croatia, in the field of cultural exchanges, regional planning, economic harmonization.

The four regions form the Alpe-Adria transfrontier region (also called "Quadrigon"), certainly one of the most complex and difficult in Europe because of the very different linguistic, ideological and political features of its components.

This difficulty however is seen as a challenge rather than a deterrent. One of the responses to this challenge is the development of the ideology of Friuli-Venezia Giulia as a "bridge region", with a distinct "international vocation"; these are now standard phrases in official utterances and to some extent they are embodied as goals of the regional economic planning documents (31).

Another response is the establishment of institutions self-consciously aimed at the development of trans-frontier cooperation, with neighboring regions and nations; and of social-scientific institutes to study, analyse, and "visualize" such cooperation, and to raise the popular

consciousness and concern on this matter. A "Commission for the regional planning in the Alpe-Adria area" is in operation since 1968, and it is about to publish a book in four languages illustrating the regional planning features of Alpe-Adria. In 1968 also the studies of the Institute of International Sociology, Gorizia, have begun. Among the more relevant is a statistical analysis of the yearly, weekly and hourly patterns of border traffic around Gorizia (32). The essential finding here is the exponential growth of the curve from 1963 to 1971, and its flattening thereafter, as if a "ceiling" had been hit. The next step will be the correlation of this curve with variables like car-ownership, price differentials and political climate.

Another piece of research was a standard sociological survey on a 1,500 sample of the populations of the provinces of Trieste and Gorizia, on themes like political allegiance, ethnic identification and conflicts, attitude toward the neighboring region and country, motivation of border crossings, attitude toward the border-maintaining institutions, like the police and the army, opinions and proposals about ways to solve border problems, etc. (33). The data generated by this research, even after factor analysis, are too numerous and disparate to be abstracted here; basically they point to the crucial importance of the ethnic factor, and to the high degree of acceptance of the present "border situation"; the inclination to border changes is negligible, the perception of neighboring Slovenia and Yugoslavia quite amicable, and the outlook to improved cooperation in the future optimistic.

The drawback of this research is its one-sidedness; many efforts notwithstanding, it was not possible to do it, or to have it replicated, on the other side of the border.

More of a "transfronter" nature is a transactional analysis which E. Sussi has been doing, drawing his data mainly from the daily newspaper of the Slovene minority in Italy, the *Primorski Dnevnik* ("the Littoral Daily") and which shall shortly be expanded with other sources, and the data subject to a more complex analysis. Sussi has classified "public transactions" or "events" in the following categories: 1) cultural, 2) sports, 3) informational, 4) recreational, 5) political-mixed, 6) informational-operative, 7) mixed, 8) other. Moreover he has classified the actors in 1) Representatives of regional government or of Central government, 2) Local authorities, 3) Representatives of local parties, trade unions, school authorities or other public authorities, 4) Cultural, music, sports, veterans', religious, and kindred organizations, 5) Private

persons; lecturers, artists, etc. (34).

Among the main findings in this research is the high rate of increase of such transactions in the years studied (1956, 1963, 1970, 1974), the prevalence of homo-ethnic transactions (between members of the same ethnic group divided by the frontier), the active role of such economic bodies as the Chambers of Commerce, and the flattening of the curve in the last few years.

These findings seem the point to an exhaustion of the enthusiasm for trans-frontier cooperation based, as it has been so far, mainly on personal goodwill and initiative, and kept mainly at the cultural-social level. Much more refined and extended analysis has to be done, but it really seems that the regional collectivity has produced as much spontaneous cooperation as it could, under the circumstances; further development of trans-frontier cooperation in the Alpe-Adria can only come through a strengthening of structural ties at the economic level (interdependency of the regional economic systems, deals between business organizations of the four regions, exchange of manpower) and at the political-juridical level (creation of standing and recognized institutions for the promotion of trans-frontier cooperation, recognition of school diplomas, etc.).

Alpe-Adria seems to be approaching the stage in which the enthusiasm for the recovery of peaceful relations is running out, as the "open frontier" is no longer an exciting novelty after years of hostile closure; in which the differences of language, values, and ideology no longer lend the thrill of adventure in the wilderness to every week-end excursion across the border; in which the differences in quality and in price are not such as to make the border-crossing always worthwhile. In other words, Alpe-Adria seems to be losing some of its peculiarities, as a frontier region between widely different national systems, and is getting more homogeneous in itself and in reference to other European frontier regions. But this remains to be tested.

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1. The literature is amply reviewed in this writer's earlier papers on the subject: R. Strassoldo, *From Barrier to Junction. Towards a sociological Theory of Borders*; mimeo, Gorizia 1970, pp. 44; R. Strassoldo and R. Gubert, *The Boundary, an over-view of its current theoretical status*, in R. Strassoldo (ed.), *Boundaries and Regions, explorations in the peace and growth potential of the peripheries*, Gorizia 1973; R. Strassoldo, *Frontier Regions, An Analytical Study*, CEMAT (73) BP 10, Strasbourg 1973 (Mimeo).
2. Bertalanffy is fond of citing Nicholas of Cusa; Wiener cites, among others, Leibniz; Hegel's dialectics is sometimes regarded as a forerunner of the cybernetic 'feedback loop' (cf. Peter K. Schneider, *Die Begründung der Wissenschaften durch Philosophie und Kybernetik*, Kohlhammer, Stuttgart 1966); my own favourite for that role is Democritus' «climamen».
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5. Felix von Cube, *Was Ist Kybernetik*, Bremen 1967; G. Klaus, *Wörterbuch der Kybernetik*, Fischer Bucherei, Frankfurt, 1971.
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