

## **PERIPHERAL AREAS IN GEOGRAPHICAL CONCEPTS AND THE CONTEXT OF POLAND'S REGIONAL DIVERSITY**

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

Nothing in the social and scientific debate about peripheral areas inspires such interest as metropolitan areas. In the transition period, dynamic and effective transformation of large cities and their immediate surroundings (e.g. suburbia) is more interesting. In contrast to the post-socialist countries undergoing transformation, geographical interpretation of peripheries in the Anglo-American literature is a lot more 'gracious' in the assessment of their cultural significance, seeing a lot of non-economic values in them (see Bunce 1994).

The gradual change in thinking about peripheries is not merely a result of changes to their nature (e.g. functional, physiognomic). To a large extent, the methodological approach changed as a result of the 'cultural turn' in human geography. Z. Rykiel (2011, p. 55) indicates that the differences between various interpretations of peripheries are not only factual but also methodological. Traditionally, human geography has focused on the objects, while sociology did on states.

The socialisation of human geography, which has been going on in recent years, is evoking a greater interest in mental states. In sociology, more and more often the territorial aspect of the functioning of the society is taken into account. **The aim of this paper** is therefore to attempt to compare ways of presenting peripheries in traditional (functional and structural) and new (cultural) concepts of geographical research. This analysis is supplemented with the examples of representations of differences in the core-periphery in geographical literature and related sciences, especially spatial planning.

## 2. PERIPHERIES IN THE FUNCTIONAL CONCEPTS

Functionalism assumes the objectivity of structures, i.e. it prefers static, systematising and synchronous interpretations (Suliborski 2001). In the functional interpretations, the way of thinking about the research problem is primarily utilitarian in character, i.e. the main elements of the research are the methods and interpretations of the measurement results based on statistical information from databases or first-hand directories (empirical scientism).

One of the most important effects of geographical studies according to this model are distribution (range) maps of population and economic phenomena (classification and regionalisation methods). Most of the work based on functional research program interprets the changes in the concentration of specific goods or resources (mainly economic) on the basis of the allocation of space for development areas (cores) and those stagnating or lagging behind in terms of these processes (peripheries). Space is usually portrayed in the 'Euclidean' dimensions (maps, spatial models).

One of the most important concepts in the history of geographical thought explaining the variation in the distribution of human activity is the **central place theory**. The basic assumptions of the central place theory can be applied to the process of formation of the cores and peripheries in economic development. In this theory, settlement units are divided into those that play central functions, i.e. central places, and those that do not play such functions.

Centrality or the lack of it creates the division of areas of economic domination – cores, and their subordinate zones – peripheries. The specificity of the central functions of the settlement unit is to offer goods to the people living in the periphery. The movement of people in the economic space to meet the demand for certain goods requires a larger organisational effort from the residents of peripheries because of the time and cost of commuting to the central facilities. The functional diversity of settlement units is largely reflected in the administrative structure of states and their regions.

### **Case 1. Historical heritage as the reason for peripheralisation of Poland's space**

**Thesis: The reasons for the differences in the level of development of various regions of Poland are historical factors, including the crucial role played by the former political divisions.**

A key role is attributed to the partitions of Poland (1795–1918), and thus the fact that its different regions belonged to the countries with different levels of social and economic development. In the spatial structure models, developed after World War II,

the differences between investment level in the western and eastern regions are exposed, and are an expression of a civilizational gap ('between Russia and Germany'). **According to this approach, the peripheries include Poland's eastern regions**, less industrialised, less urbanised and less infrastructure-invested. These areas are often referred to as 'Poland B' or 'eastern wall', which has a pejorative connotation.

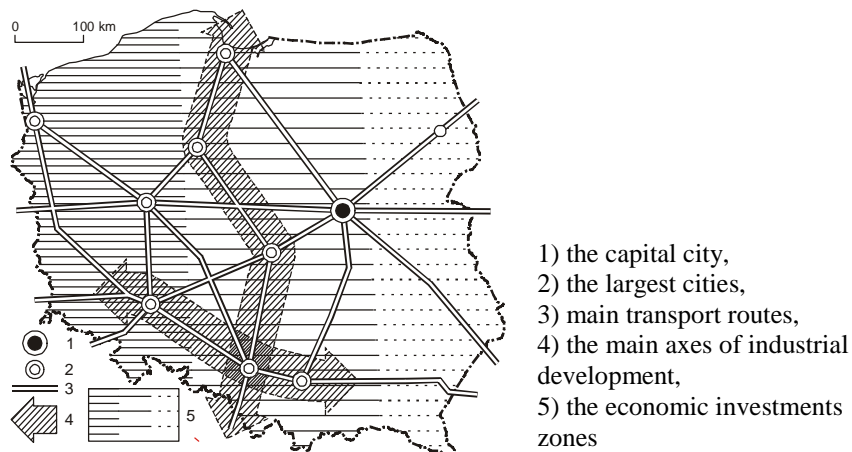


Fig. 1. Model of spatial structure of Poland in 1950  
Source: after K. Dziewoński and B. Malisz (1978, p. 26)

Another example of the functional theory is the **economic base theory**, which focuses on the mechanism of economic growth. Its basic idea is the division of the activities performed by the population of settlement units into two groups, i.e. exogenous (answering the external demand) and endogenous (answering the internal demand). Exogenous features form the economic base – activities which are a source of income for the territories (cf. Suliborski 2010). The concept of economic base sees the reasons for the increase of the settlement units in the export, which also leads to the integration of regional and national settlement systems (specialisation of settlements).

The economic base theory was developed primarily for the urban areas, and its interpretations and empirical verifications were carried out in the analysis of urban settlement systems. The economic base theory (developed in the mature form in the 1940s) refers to the specificity of social and territorial division of labour of the industrial era, and at the same time the classification of towns and villages by their functional criteria (agricultural functions in villages and non-agricultural functions in cities).

Peripheries used to be primarily identified with the agricultural hinterland of regions, while the cores were mostly large industrialised cities. The exchange of

goods between the peripheries (mainly rural areas) and the cores (urban areas) leads to urban centres getting wealthier at the expense of the peripheries. The main reason is the nature of the goods produced in both areas. Urban areas offer goods that are highly processed (capital-intensive), and thus of a higher value, while the peripheral areas compete by offering their agricultural produce with a relatively low degree of processing (time-consuming).

In the long run, the exchange of goods between the core and periphery leads to income differences (standard of living) and all other consequences (rural-urban migration, rural depopulation, impoverishment, economic and cultural degradation). This process determines the peripherality of the areas located away from large cities as well as their functional and political subordination.

### Case 2. Industry as the reason for peripheralisation of Poland's space

**Thesis. The reason for the differences in the level of development of the various regions of Poland are factors related to the location of industrial investment.**

A key role in social and economic changes was played by a shift of resources from agriculture (non-socialised) to the state-managed industry. This change was ideological in its nature and was associated with the political objectives of the socialist state. In the centrally planned economy, industrialisation was considered a factor of economic growth and increasing living standards, and thus it was considered social modernisation in accordance with the guidelines of the central government (to control the society shaped by the Soviet model – ‘homo sovieticus’). **In this approach, the peripheries are areas outside the so-called triangle of industrialisation and high population density, i.e. the regions of the north-eastern, eastern and north-western Poland.**

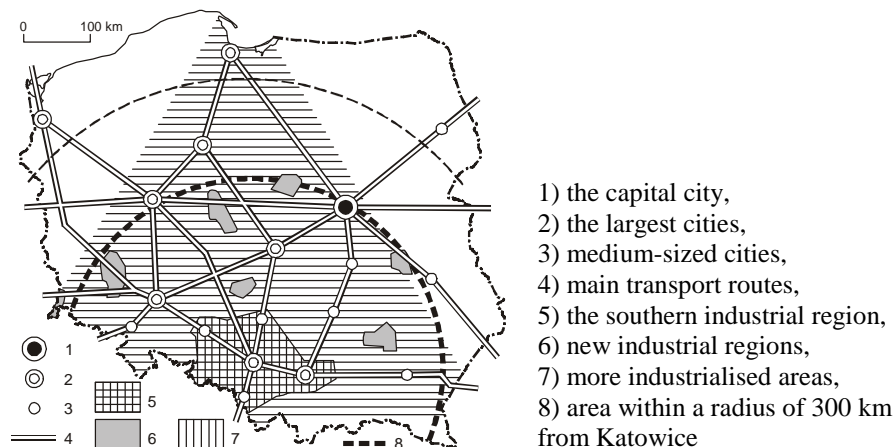


Fig. 2. Model of spatial structure of the country in 1970  
Source: after K. Dziewoński and B. Malisz (1978, p. 32)

### 3. PERIPHERIES IN THE CONCEPTS OF SPATIAL POLARISATION

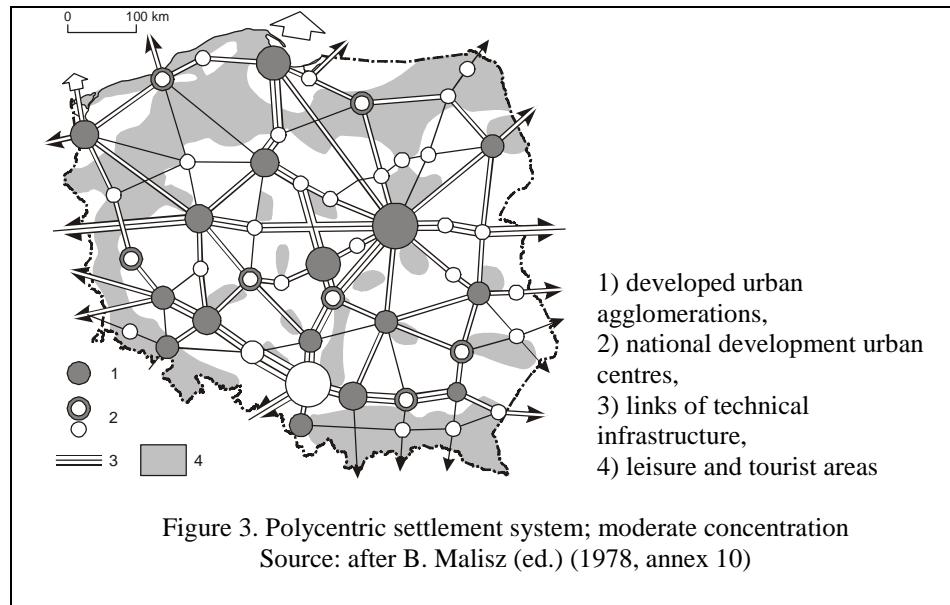
In social sciences, including human geography, one of the most important theories explaining the diversity of spatial structure is the concept of the polarised development or the nodal regions. The basic assumptions of the geographical concept of the core–periphery are based on observation of changes in the spatial structures of countries and regions in the period of industrialisation, and largely related to the economic characteristics of the variability of territorial systems (Rykiel 1991). When formulating the main theses of the core–periphery concept, J. Friedman (1968) pointed to the factors associated with early industrialisation, which in his opinion determined the occurrence of innovation centres and the maintenance of their competitive advantage, as well as the ensuing economic dominance over the rest of the area, i.e. the peripheries (Grzeszczak 1999, Grosse 2002). The core–periphery concept is one of the most widely used models of socio-economic development in the description of the spatial diversity of positions of power and subordination, not only economic, but also political and cultural.

The core–periphery concept explained the differences in social and economic development of the territories of the industrial age. Looking at the geographical location of the development process, especially in big cities, and based on the dominant (leading) industries at a given stage of economic transformation, places the periphery as areas dominated by urban centres – sources of diffusion of innovation and development incentives.

#### **Case 3. Urbanisation as the reason for peripheralisation of Poland's space**

**Thesis. The reasons for the differences in the level of development of the various regions of Poland are the factors associated with the development of urban centres.**

The most important factor of social and economic change is the growth of urban areas and the diffusion of urban forms of spatial planning along the main routes of road and railway infrastructure. This concept is based on paying particular attention to the urbanisation process, which is a source of social diversity – from agrarian to urban society. Urbanisation is regarded a specific kind of social modernisation, the source of which is the urban lifestyle. **In this approach, the periphery means the further surroundings of agglomerations, whose main function is to provide rest and recreation for the city dwellers.**



#### 4. PERIPHERIES IN THE URBANISATION CONCEPT

The urbanisation concept is one of the most frequently used to explain the variability of social and economic spatial structures at the national and regional levels. Urbanisation was most often considered in connection with the industrialisation processes taking place in cities (Rakowski 1980). In urban studies, peripheries were presented as an area that is subject to certain structural changes according to an urban pattern (demographic, economic, cultural, spatial).

Urbanisation of the peripheries, as an expression of an idea of social progress, was based on the valuation of changes characteristic of the core and the periphery. The interpretation of urban phenomena served for presenting the periphery as underdeveloped areas, lagging behind the social and economic changes taking place in mass society. In this concept, the city is a model for the development of the peripheries. Urbanisation is in this sense a version of the modernisation theory, which assumes the transfer and diffusion of socio-economic patterns of development, for some reason considered desirable.

## 5. PERIPHERIES IN THE SOCIAL AND CULTURAL CONCEPTS

Contemporary theories of human geography have lots of connections with social sciences. The emergence of social geography and, most of all, cultural geography, which interpret the space as more than just economic value, was the basis to challenge the research model of objective reality, and thus move away from purely physical (geometric) way of presenting space in favour of its relational side (Gregory 1994).

Social geography is not only interested in the formation of marginal zones and the mechanisms of growth of social disparities, but is also engaged in critical assessment of the processes leading to the formation of inequalities (e.g. Harvey 1989, Soja 1996). This approach no longer evaluates space in terms of the 'cores = growth' and 'peripheries = stagnation'. An alternative look at the division of core-peripheries emphasises the concept of 'peripherality' as the state of social identity and the values that are associated with it.

Peripherality is a feature of the social community, and regionalism and localism mean cultural separateness shaped over a long period of time. Periphery is a 'long-term' structure, a repository and a source of conservative ideas. Cultural concepts interpret the peripheries as a specific lifestyle and a type of social identity. Periphery cannot be interpreted in terms of economic backwardness, the problem area or the area of cultural degradation.

Peripherality primarily means cultural potential, social and territorial roots, a set of traditional values derived from a sense of local and/or regional community (Wójcik 2009, Zarycki 2007). Periphery is a part of the national and regional identity, which, although located on the sidelines of the main currents of economic change and mass culture, carries a strong message based on a specific vision of social development (tradition), and more and more often longing expressed by part of the society for a 'local' way of life (Phillips 2005, Grzeszczak 2010).

### **Case 4. Globalisation as the reason for peripheralisation of Poland's space**

**Thesis: The reason for the differences in the level of development of the various regions of Poland are the factors associated with the globalisation process – the integration of certain areas in the global circulation of people, goods, capital and information.**

The main reason for the peripheralisation of some of Poland's space is the poor integration of some of Poland's regions in the processes of globalisation. The most important source of variability in the Poland's space are the processes of EU

integration and the associated processes of metropolisation, i.e. the development of functions concentrated primarily in large cities, which provide connectivity to Europe's space (European Union) and the world.

Important factors determining the divisions in Poland's space include the availability of fast transport infrastructure (highways, airports) and wireless communication (the Internet). **Periphery, in this case, is more difficult to determine in the spatial sense. Territorial development has a mosaic character** and defies the rules of division into cores=large cities and peripheries=countryside, especially since the former mono-functional industrial centres, including large post-industrial cities, undergo peripheralisation.

The processes of centralisation and peripheralisation depend largely on social activity, creativity of local and regional authorities (social capital) and political factors, which include, for example, decisions about the direction of the flow of funds from the EU programs. An example of a special program concerned with the peripheral areas is the Operational Program for the Development of Eastern Poland (see [www.polskawschodnia.gov.pl](http://www.polskawschodnia.gov.pl)). This program is designed to accelerate levelling of standard of living for the population of eastern Poland.

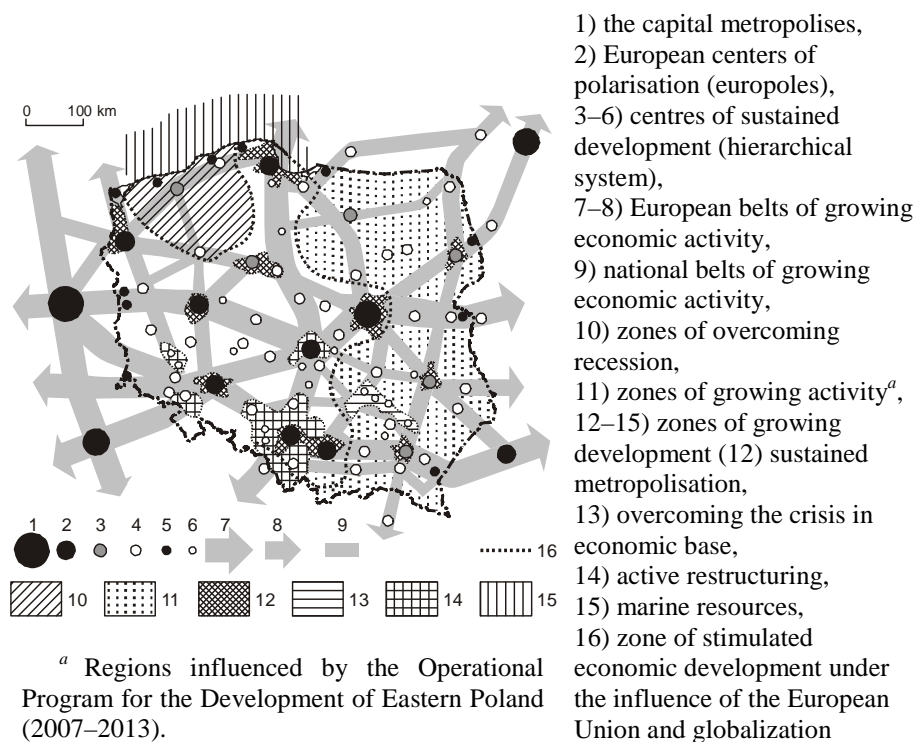


Fig. 4. The concept of spatial development Policy of the country.

Sustainable development model

Source: J. Kołodziejski (1997, p. 73)



## 6. CONCLUSION

The overview of key traditional and new research concepts in the context of peripheral areas presents a wide variety of ways to explain the structures and processes that shape their character. In its practical dimension, the analysis of research approaches is to draw attention to the prevailing presentation of the peripheries in the Polish specialist literature, i.e. the functional model. The new research approaches 'liberate' the peripheries of a stereotypical way in which they are described as backward areas, lagging behind the changes taking place in the centre, degraded economically and culturally. These concepts highlight the multi-dimensionality of space and, above all, pay attention to the existence of the hidden structures (mental structures) and non-economic forms of capital (especially cultural capital).

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