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PROFESSOR'S MAREK KOTER SCIENTIFIC WAY FROM CARTOGRAPHY TO POLITICAL GEOGRAPHY

Professor Marek Mieczysław Koter was born on the 1st of July 1937 in Łask. His father, Marian Koter, a veteran of the Silesian Uprisings, during the Second World War was a member of the resistance movement, for which he was persecuted by the communist authorities. His mother, Janina Bartuzel, was a librarian. The atmosphere of the family home, patriotic ideas and predilection for books inherited from parents, have greatly influenced Professor's intellectual development and future life choices. His early years spent in a small town and first-hand experience of its multicultural atmosphere left lasting impression on his personality.

After completing his primary and secondary schooling in Łask, in 1954 Marek Koter entered the University of Łódź where he studied geography. After three years he moved to Wrocław to continue his studies in the specialization of cartography. Two years of studies completed at the University of Wrocław largely defined the pathway of his scholarly career. He had a chance to study geography under some prominent scholars e.g. Józef Wąsowicz (cartography) and Bolesław Olszewicz (historical geography), representing the so-called Lviv school of geography established in the interwar period by Professor Eugeniusz Romer.

Marek Koter's Master's dissertation on the 'Analysis of the Łódź town-plans', submitted and defended at the University of Wrocław, provided him the opportunity to unite the interest in cartography with his historical passion. Thus, geographico-historical study of urban settlements with extensive application of cartographic methodology was Professor's first field of research.

After graduation in 1959, Marek Koter was offered a position of teaching assistant at the Department of Economic Geography, University of Łódź, founded by Professor Ludwik Straszewicz.

During the early years of work in the University of Łódź Marek Koter pursued his interest in cartography and historical geography. One of his

major achievements is cartographic reconstruction of landed estates in the Łódź area at the end of the feudal period, which has provided the basis for analyses of the urban layout of the 19th century Łódź. Subsequently, his interest in cartography waned, nevertheless all his works, including those from later periods, were marked with outstanding cartographic quality.

Since the early 1960s, Marek Koter was increasingly drawn to the study of urban morphology. Researches in this field not only yielded consecutive scientific degrees, but also gained him high and well-earned position in Polish and international science. This research line was also represented by his doctoral thesis on the 'Origin of the spatial pattern of the industrial Łódź' defended in 1967 at the University of Łódź.

Morphological researches conducted by Marek Koter were mostly focused on the city of Łódź. He produced two series of studies on this area. He has pioneered in Poland comprehensive studies on the genesis of industrial urban layout, using both town-plan analysis and the Conzenian burgrave cycle method, adapted for this purpose. He has also introduced some new theoretic and methodological notions e.g. urban stratigraphy, index monuments and urbo-morphology.

In recognition of his extensive scientific attainment, after submitting the habilitation dissertation entitled 'Morphogenesis of a big city on the example of Łódź', Marek Koter has been granted the degree of docent (assistant professor).

In the mid-1970s Professor Koter once again re-oriented his scientific pathway, without abandoning his hitherto field of interest. The shift was instigated by the book 'Introduction to the political geography' published in 1971 by Józef Barbag. It paved the way for reintroduction of political geography, banned during the postwar period, into the curricula of geographical studies in Poland. Professor Koter started lecturing on this subject at the University of Łódź, thus continuing the interest in political geography incited by discussions with Professor Józef Wąsowicz during the studies in Wrocław. This eminent human geographer and cartographer, student and assistant of Eugeniusz Romer, was among the founders of Polish political geography at the John Casimir University in Lviv at the beginning of the 20th century.

Professor Koter not only delivered lectures on political geography, but embarked on much more ambitious and somewhat risky enterprise. Taking advantage of restructuring scientific institutions that took place in 1981, he founded the Department of Political Geography and Economic Regional Geography within the Institute of Economic Geography and Spatial Organization. It was the first academic unit in the Eastern Bloc countries, and possible also in Europe, offering courses in the specialization of political geography.

Political geography became the second major research line, apart from historical geography, pursued by Professor Koter, especially after 1989 when censorship was abolished.

Politico-geographic contributions of Professor Koter were mainly focused on borders and borderlands, ethnic and national minorities, transborder co-operation and political regions.

To restore Polish political geography after 40 years of inexistence it was necessary to redefine several terms that acquired new meanings in the contemporary world. Therefore some writings of Professor Koter were devoted to systematization and classification of national minorities (1993, 1994) and borderland peoples (1990). A noteworthy achievement of Professor Koter was introduction of the Polish term 'kresy' – in sense of a vast frontier area – into the international terminology (1997, 2001).

Investigations on the spatial growth of Łask – his home town – and extensive studies over urban structures of Łódź provided him the opportunity to unite his two major research fields. It resulted in works on multicultural heritage of cities, combining morphological researches (historical geography) with studies on national and religious minorities (political geography) and their historical role in urban development.

Marek Koter has made many contributions to the field of political region (1993, 1994), which in the 1990s became a vital practical issue in connection with plans of new administrative division of Poland (1994). Professor Koter got involved in the nationwide discussion, publicized his opinion and carried out field investigations aiming at delimitation of new administrative units. These works were concentrated on defining the extent of the Łódź Voivodship, division into districts and self-government communities (1991). Professor Koter's expertise in historico-morphological studies became particularly instrumental in working on the division of Łódź urban space.

At the beginning of the 1990s Professor Koter, who had already been an internationally acknowledged authority in the field of political geography and urban morphology, made further professional advancements: in 1990 he was appointed associate professor and in 1992 obtained the degree of a full professor.

In 1988 Professor Koter initiated international conferences on political geography, organized by the Department of Political Geography of the University of Łódź. Held every two years, usually in places related to the conference topics, these events became internationally renowned. Traditionally referred to as 'Łódź conferences', they are mentioned in foreign textbooks on political geography as a valuable contribution of Eastern Bloc countries to this branch of knowledge. The conferences are formally sponsored by the Commission on Political Geography of the International Geographical Union

and are listed among events announced by the Political Geography Specialty Group of the Association of American Geographers.

International recognition has been also gained by the periodical *Region and Regionalism* published in English by the Department of Political Geography.

Professor Koter has raised a new generation of scholars: he was thesis promoter of five doctoral students (three in political geography, one in historical geography, one in social geography). Increase in staff allowed for subdivision of the department: creation of the Division of Political Geography as a separate unit led Professor Koter to concentrate on historical geography.

It can be asserted that during the last 25 years of his professional life, Professor Koter succeeded in his efforts to establish the Polish school of political geography in Łódź. Boasting international recognition, this academic centre stimulates development of this discipline in Poland and produces new generations of political geographers. It can be regarded as a continuation of splendid traditions of Polish political geography stemming from the Lviv school founded in the interwar period.

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