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SOME PROBLEMS OF REGIONAL STUDIES IN POLAND

According to the general tendency to evaluate the economic and political situation in our country, in October 1980 the Committee for Space Economy and Regional Planning of the Polish Academy of Sciences started preparing a diagnosis of the state of space economy in Poland. Its preliminary results were published in the Bulletin of the Committee (Vols 111, 116—120 and 123). The latter includes about 20 papers analysing a wide variety of problems of space economy and regional studies — from the evaluation and exploitation of natural resources to the spatial organization of the State administration.

This volume will certainly become a reference point for the Polish regional studies. It will provide new research subjects, inspire considerations and a critical analysis of established attitudes and opinions, as well as stimulate reflections. This paper has also been inspired by that volume. The author's aim is not to summarize the Bulletin Vol. 123 but to consider some of the problems of regional studies in Poland discussed in the Bulletin, a leading publication of the Polish regional studies.

Special attention will be paid to five problems: the relations between science and reality; the role of subjective and objective causes of the socio-economic crisis in Poland and three kinds of reform in Poland: the economic reform, the political reform and the reform of the administrative division.

SCIENCE AND REALITY

All social sciences, including those dealing with space, must determine their relation to the objective reality, especially the intensity and kind of this relation. In other words, they must answer two questions: (a) should reality be ignored and "pure science" developed or should it be treated as a base and inspiration for research, and (b) should reality

be interpreted or shaped. The answer is essential for the purpose, methodology, readers of the work, etc.

As far as the Polish regional studies are concerned, the answers to the above questions seem obvious (although sometimes they produce paradoxical effects which will be discussed further on): reality is treated as a reference point, a base and inspiration for research work whose primary objective is the shaping (i.e. improvement) of reality. Knowledge is only a means. Such is the meaning of the "diagnosis of the state of space economy in Poland". A doctor diagnoses an illness in order to choose the best method to cure it and not out of curiosity. Similarly, the aim of the diagnosis of the state of space economy in Poland is to find proper economic and socio-political reforms.

This situation is dictated mainly by the socio-economic crisis to which our country has come. The crisis is not a suitable time for purely methodological and semantic discussions or for seeking refined research on our ill economy. The situation is quite paradoxical: the socio-economic crisis gives an impulse to the progress in science. This refers primarily to economics but also to other disciplines including regional studies.

The character of the Polish regional studies is determined by the present conditions under which they are developed and by the previous tendencies. As far as the methodology and approaches to various problems are concerned, the studies are characterized by three features: (1) methodological simplicity, (2) "literary" descriptions, (3) "global" approach to economic and social problems.

The methodological simplicity consists in avoiding refined quantitative methods. It results from the distrust of complicated mathematical methods which apparently give precise answers but their application requires numerous unrealistic and simplifying assumptions. The refined mathematical methods give precise answers about non-existent phenomena. The lesser evil in this situation is a less precise answer about an existing fact. Hence, the publications on regional studies contain very few mathematical formulas.

The methodological simplicity is closely related to the "literary" character of presentation which makes the publications concerning regional studies comprehensible to every man. This is connected with the purpose, i.e. shaping of reality, and thus the ideas and suggestions must reach the general public, especially decision-makers of various levels (the so-called First Thousand) who are usually not specialists in regional studies. The literary character of description and the applied qualitative methods make the analyses, theses, etc., declarative and gen-

eral. For this reason the representatives of economic practice complain that the conclusions of the diagnosis of the state of space economy are not suitable for implementation (see the opinion of Andrzej Pyszkowski from the Planning Commission of the Cabinet expressed at the meeting of the Committee of Space Economy nad Regional Planning held on January 1st, 1983 (Pyszkowski, 1983). The situation is paradoxical because the method and description were imposed by the desire to shape reality (we are not going to discuss whether science should provide results which may be directly applied or function as inspiration).

The "global" approach is a tendency to analyse particular problems in a global way, i.e. on the national scale with no or little attention paid to their spatial differentiation. Likewise, the conclusions drawn from the analyses refer more to the changes in the organization of the national economy and the State as a whole than to its particular territorial units. The fact results from the way the economy and the State used to function. The sectoral system dominates over the spatial system and thus the spatial characterization of many processes is secondary, resultant as compared to the sectoral characterization. That state produces numerous negative effects like high transport-consumption, space-consumption, wrong locations, etc. The improvement of spatial relations may be achieved only through the changes in the functioning of the sectoral system, i.e. through global changes.

The above remarks lead to another paradox: the specialists in regional studies and space economy are (or think they are) forced to enter the field of general economy and abstract from real space.

THE CAUSES OF THE CRISIS. THE ROLE OF SUBJECTIVE AND OBJECTIVE FACTORS

The evaluation of the state of space economy in Poland presented in the Diagnosis is decidedly negative. The crisis of space economy is said to be parallel to the economic crisis. The authors discuss such symptoms of the crisis as: wasteful exploitation of resources, devastation of the natural environment, the crisis of agriculture, urbanization, social and technical infrastructure, and the difficulties following wrong locations, the administrative division of the country, etc.

Thus a question arises about the reasons for the crisis. According to the general opinion synthetically expressed by the chairman of the group preparing the Diagnosis, Prof. A. Kukliński, the main causes of the crisis lie in the method of industrialization used in our country. The method consisted in the domination of industry over other sectors, es-

pecially agriculture and "unproductive" sectors, and within industry — in the domination of heavy industry over light industry.

The problem of the causes of the crisis may be put in another way: what was the share of subjective and objective reasons of the crisis? Except for Professor Jerzy Kołodziejski the problem has not been explicitly considered although it is implicitly included in the discussed papers. This remark refers to the content of the *Biuletyn KPŻK* (vol. 123). A. Kukliński, for instance, in other publications distinguishes between the subjective and objective reasons.

In the opinions about the reasons for the crisis subjective interpretations prevail. They have found their fullest expression in S. Komorowski's paper (1983). According to these interpretations, the crisis was caused by improper decisions, wrong strategy, poor economic knowledge of decision-makers, the conflicts inside the Establishment and the game of particular group interests detrimental to the economy as a whole. Even the negative elements in the attitudes of the society, which was excluded from making important decisions, are considered to be a result of the mistakes in the Establishment's policy.

There are several reasons for the domination of the subjective interpretations: first, it is a reaction to the voluntarism in the past economic policy which overestimated will and underestimated objective conditions; second, it results from the belief in the possibility to improve the situation provided the mistakes are corrected and no new mistakes are made (the emphasis put on the objective, independent conditions would mean that the crisis was inevitable and thus may not be overcome until the conditions are changed); third, the method of explaining the difficulties by objective conditions was discredited in the seventies.

There are also careful opinions. Thus J. Kołodziejski analyses conflict situations resulting from the limited supply of space with definite features. J. Goryński (1982) discusses man's everyday behaviour at work and at home and its influence on the shape of space. Although the behaviour of an individual is a subjective phenomenon, the attitudes which dominate in the society are an objective problem. This aspect has also been noticed by W. Pietraszewski (1982), who warns of the "conspirational interpretation" of the causes of the crisis.

THE ECONOMIC REFORM

The present economic reform in Poland introduces a greater autonomy of enterprises and increased role of economic factors (profit, price, etc.). The opinions of the economists about the reform are generally positive (there is some doubt however, concerning the rate at which it

is introduced). The opinions of the specialists in space economy and regional studies are ambivalent. A foreign reader will find some reflections on the role of the economic reform for space economy in Poland in the paper by A. Kukliński (1983).

On the one hand the new economic mechanism gives a chance to rationalize the management of space and distance as they are given a measurable economic price and the role of the category of price in the behaviour of enterprises is increased. On the other hand there is a danger that autonomous enterprises, which aim at current profit, will devastate the natural environment, e.g. by making economies on purification devices.

The objections to the reform may not be treated as an attempt at stopping it as there is no alternative to it now. The objections indicate the necessity to improve the reform and to find instruments of achieving the goals of space economy. The reform may be paradoxically defended by reminding that the previous economic mechanism, in which enterprises were not guided by a short-term profit, was also disastrous for space economy and gave low productivity in the whole economy so there is nothing to be regretted.

Investigations should be undertaken on the influence of the reform on the economies of particular regions because the authors of the reform aimed at increasing the efficiency of national economy as a whole paying little attention to its regional implications.

THE POLITICAL REFORM (TERRITORIAL SELF-GOVERNMENT)

The problem of the political reform is much less defined than the economic reform for this reason one problem of the political reform will be discussed below namely, a territorial self-government.

At present special legal documents are being prepared with the purpose of animating or establishing territorial self-government. Its idea is very popular among Polish regionalists. A real, strong self-government is considered to be a counterbalance to strong and autonomous enterprises. It is supposed to protect from the devastation of the environment and worsened living conditions caused by enterprises. Moreover, the territorial self-government should release the energy of local society to the advantage of economy and the whole society. The idea of territorial self-government is often supported by positive examples of highly developed Western countries.

The above positive opinion about territorial self-government may seem to be one-sided. Its aim is certainly to draw the attention of the society and decision-makers to the problem which outside regional stud-

ies is treated as less remarkable than the economic reform and workers' self-government.

Nevertheless, the duty of regionalists is to analyse objectively all questions connected with the territorial self-government. One of them refers to the conditions of the efficient functioning of self-government. The proper functioning may be achieved by three things: willingness, abilities and possibilities, i.e. the willingness of the local society to control their affairs and bear the consequences of their decisions; the ability to control the affairs and the means (e.g. financial) necessary to realize the decisions.

The Polish regional studies have not conducted such investigations. They would show for instance, that the population's abilities of self-governing are regionally differentiated. They would also prove that because of various hierarchies of values the territorial self-government would not always be treated as an advocate of the protection of environment. The local society would care more about new places of work and higher income brought by the construction of a new factory than about clean air. A great deal depends on the population's wealth (the wealthier the people the more they care about clean air). Hence the comparisons with richer Western countries have a limited value.

An important problem is the impact of territorial self-government on the integrity of economy and society. It would be interesting to study the case of Yugoslavia and to find out the extent to which its difficulties (e.g. the spatial disintegration of market, regional separatism, etc.) result from territorial autonomy.

Another essential problem to be investigated is the relation between the level of the economic development and the efficiency of the territorial self-government's functioning: is there a feedback or are they mutually dependent? These problems will certainly arouse interest of the Polish regional studies.

THE REFORM OF THE ADMINISTRATIVE DIVISION OF POLAND

The political reform is closely related to the reform of the administrative division of Poland. This subject is also discussed in the above-mentioned paper by A. Kukliński (1983b). In the years 1972—1975 Poland reformed its administrative division. The reform consisted in the transition from three-level to two-level division. The number of the basic units was reduced while the number of higher-level units (voivodships) was increased (from 17 to 49).

The first opinions about the new division of our country were positive. They emphasized the greater spatial accessibility of offices and the new voivodship borders as being more suitable for new economic relations.

Now, negative opinions prevail. Both the very principle of the two-level division and the shape of voivodship borders are criticized. Strange enough, the same voivodships which used to be examples of positive changes in their borders are now considered to be cases of negative changes. This refers mainly to the so-called urban voivodships or new voivodships established by uniting the areas previously belonging to various voivodships. In the first case the borders were delimited according to the range of the agglomeration. Some time ago that was a fully accepted solution because the authorities of the voivodship had a better possibility to solve problems typical of an urban agglomeration. Now the solution is criticized for cutting the city-voivodships from their food supplying zones. In the other case the borders were delimited according to the range of an industrial district regardless of the voivodships to which its particular parts had belonged. That solution was praised at the beginning as all the existing problems and relations were controlled by the regional authorities. These solutions are criticized today because areas belonging to various voivodships constituted a whole full of local conflicts (the typical example is the Tarnobrzeg voivodship consisting of parts of three voivodships which had never formed one administrative unit and for more than one hundred years belonged to different countries, namely, Austria and Russia).

At present Polish regionalists are discussing the usefulness of the new reform. Within the Diagnosis there are two papers dealing with that problem.

J. Kruczała (1983) focuses on the present shape (after 1975) of voivodship borders. He concludes that the reform deepened the differences between real and administrative regions. These differences made the efficient management of the State and economy a difficult task and brought the country to the social and economic crisis. W. Pańko (1983) analyses the problem of the number of levels in the administrative division of the country. He states that as far as the efficient functioning of the State administration is concerned a three-level division is most efficient. With respect to the functioning of democratic representative institutions a two-level division would be the best. Thus the reform introduced in 1975 would be useful if it were followed by democratic changes in the functioning of the State, while in reality the role of

apparently more competent bureaucracy increased. From the above it follows that the territorial division of our country may not be treated as a problem in itself but as resulting from the organization of the State.

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