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1

Understanding New Geographies of Central and Eastern Europe

*PoSCoPP: Research Group Production of Space in the Context of Polarization and Peripheralization (collective authors)*¹

1. Introduction

This book arises from empirical observations of recent spatial changes in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) and from our engagements with current shifts in geographical thinking that prompt us to reconsider how we research and explain them. Both the complexity of changes in CEE geographies and the paradigmatic shifts in geographical research raise questions about the ways we register, survey and conceptualize spatial phenomena, such as the emergence, persistence and transformation of spatial disparity and socio-spatial inequality in and beyond CEE.

The volume engages with the concepts of polarization and peripheralization to grasp these phenomena, which have become highly pronounced in CEE over the last two decades. In doing so, we want to direct attention towards the different methodological and conceptual perspectives through which we understand processes of spatial differentiation and their connections to wider inequalities. We suggest understanding peripheralization and polarization as analytical concepts that facilitate process-based relational understandings of spatial differentiation and supplement structural research approaches. Although our focus lies on the regional scale, we suggest a multi-level conceptualization of the phenomena under observation. As the relation of core and periphery is immanent to the concept, peripheralization implies processes of centralization and thus forms of socio-spatial polarization at various scales. Such forms of polarization are intrinsically connected to discourse which places higher value on particular regions and developments and thereby devalues others. Some authors define regional peripheralization as the growing dependence of disadvantaged regions on the centre (e.g. Komlosy 1988, Bernt and Liebmann 2013); hence, it is not only the simultaneity of a number of features constituting the formation of peripheries, such as distance, economic weakness and lack of political power (cf. Blowers and Leroy 1994), but is often also the dynamic formation of core and

2 *Understanding Geographies of Polarization and Peripheralization*

peripheral regions overlapping at different spatial scales (regional, national, European and global). This multi-faceted, multi-level understanding of peripheralization and polarization has the potential to define novel starting points for research on current regional development issues in CEE. Applying these conceptual notions allows a process-based, relational understanding of up-to-date forms of spatial differentiation in CEE and offers opportunities for spatial research circumventing dichotomous ideas of urban and rural, of central and peripheral, of 'leading' and 'lagging' or growing and declining, which tend to determine our methodological, theoretical and normative approaches to regional studies.

Up until recently, spatial development in CEE has mainly been researched through the lenses of post-socialist transformation and modernization. Within this introductory chapter, we aim to suggest additional conceptual approaches useful for grasping spatial processes and their contextual groundings. We further argue that adopting these approaches enables new comparative perspectives to similar phenomena in other parts of Europe and the world. This is particularly true since the 2007/2008 economic, financial and national debt crisis has shown similar economic, social and spatial impacts as well as political forms of response across Europe as a whole.

In the following section, we have collected various empirical snapshots which we understand as showing increasing socio-spatial polarization in CEE. This is based on statistical analyses of core indicators as well as a literature review of spatially relevant social, political and economic processes in the past 20 years indicating the emergence of new forms of spatial differentiation. In Section 3, we review a number of conceptual and theoretical approaches to regional polarization and peripheralization and propose a relational perspective for grasping their contemporary complexity. The final section of this Introduction gives an overview of the issues and themes discussed by individual contributors to the book.

2. Polarization and peripheralization in Central and Eastern Europe

In CEE, focusing on processes of polarization and peripheralization provides an important starting point for critical analyses of the assumptions on which the Washington Consensus of the early 1990s was built, such as the claim that radical privatization and the swift introduction of unimpeded market economies would right the wrongs of state socialism most effectively and would (eventually) deliver prosperity to, if not all, then at least a majority of people. What we have witnessed since is a much more diverse and problematic picture. While in terms of gross domestic product (GDP) growth, many parts of the macro-region – in particular the capital regions – have indeed embarked on an upward trajectory after the initial crisis of the early 1990s (Lang 2011), the success of market reforms in improving living standards

and ensuring a more even spread of wealth among wider populations has been limited (Heyns 2005, Alber et al. 2007, Smith et al. 2008, Smith and Timár 2010, Stenning et al. 2010). Analysts of the causes, effects and dynamics of spatial development in CEE have pointed to a pronounced increase in socio-economic disparities between regions, places and populations, in CEE in particular (EC 2010). While differences in national rates of GDP growth have been decreasing for some years, regional economic and social disparities *within* CEE countries have grown considerably (Schürmann and Talaat 2008).

Looking at forms of peripheralization at a global scale, it is notable that CEE regions play a negligible role when world city hierarchies are analysed, such as by the 'Globalization and World Cities Research Network' (GaWC) focusing on financial services and globalization indicators. Following Friedmann's (1986) and Sassen's work on the world or global city (1991), a number of authors have argued that worldwide economic activities have become concentrated in a small number of city-regions. In the globalized economy, only a few global cities and metropolitan regions are said to be the 'control points of the global economic system' (Beaverstock et al. 2000). One could argue that CEE cities and their functional regions are being peripheralized by the dominance of world cities in the global economy. European and national policies add a further dimension to this, as they frequently copy the model of the global city in regional policies by focusing on the promotion of growth in metropolitan areas (Brenner 2009). This has been witnessed particularly in the aftermath of the most recent economic crisis, as decision-makers have been led to concentrate scarce resources on supporting development in larger cities, hoping that disadvantaged areas will profit from core-periphery spillover effects. Such policies, however, carry a major risk of further increasing socio-spatial polarizations and the peripheralization of disadvantaged areas (for example due to disinvestment in transport infrastructures or centralization of service provision). It is in this context that metropolitan regions attract economic and political interest to the disadvantage of the rest of the country. In addition, in CEE, prevailing negative experiences from the period of centrally planned economies have led to a sceptical perception of public sector interventions and to a general turn towards neoliberal policies during the transition period (Bohle 2006, Dragos Aligicia and Evans 2009).²

Paralleling the concentration of economic activity in metropolitan areas and further exacerbating problems of deepening polarization and peripheralization are current demographic developments (Filipov and Dorbritz 2003, Steinführer and Haase 2007). CEE population is increasingly concentrated in a diminishing number of prosperous areas, particularly the capital regions, in contrast to a growing number of regions suffering population decline. Thereby, intraregional and interregional migration patterns overlap with international migration on the basis of age selectivity,

stratified labour mobility and an overall decline of birth rates, which is particularly sharp in CEE. The decrease in population has been particularly pronounced in structurally disadvantaged rural and deindustrialized regions as well as many inner-city and high-rise, edge-of-city areas (Tsenkova 2006, Steinführer and Haase 2007).

These demographic developments combine with other processes of social differentiation to produce highly uneven social geographies at regional, sub-regional, intra-urban and micro-geographic scales that intersect but do not necessarily overlap. While, on a local level, the rapid growth of gated communities and of smaller enclaves of redeveloped, expensive housing in post-socialist cities shows an ongoing attempt at carving out, demarcating and safeguarding privileged spaces of wealth in otherwise disadvantaged regions and places (Hirt 2012, Smigiel 2013, Kovács and Hegedűs 2014), other regions, places and groups of people have, however, become radically disadvantaged and displaced (Hörschelmann and van Hoven 2003, Smith and Rochovská 2007). This affects particularly rural and deindustrialized regions such as rural parts of eastern Slovakia and its small towns (Michálek 2004), high-rise estates that were built along the perimeters of many socialist cities in the 1970s and 1980s, and inner-city pockets of low-quality housing that have not become redeveloped (Nedović-Budić et al. 2006, Tsenkova 2006, Steinführer and Haase 2007). Processes such as migration for work, homelessness and discrimination against cultural minorities are further leading to forms of peripheralization that no longer map onto specific regions, cities or urban quarters but that are, nonetheless, often a result of, and a contributing factor to, socio-economic and spatial disparities in Europe (cf. Smith 2007, O'Neill 2010).

The empirical observations summarized above show that various processes lead to and interlink with socio-spatial polarization and peripheralization at different intersecting scales. Also apparent, however, is the need to look critically at our approaches to researching these phenomena and processes and to consider how and why different insights are produced from different perspectives. Thus, while helpful for the identification and assessment of the scope and reach of polarization and peripheralization as *phenomena*, conventional indicators such as rates of inward investment, GDP growth, availability of key infrastructures and services, distance from metropolitan centres, or poor accessibility rarely capture the wide range of causes and dimensions of polarization and peripheralization as *processes* that intersect with other aspects of inequality, uneven development and power, and that breach conventional territorial boundaries. There is a need, therefore, to ask more carefully what our descriptions and analyses are based on and which aspects, practices and spaces we perceive and explain differently from different perspectives.

These considerations lead us to review, in the next section, a number of conceptual perspectives that have been developed over several decades to

grasp the complexity of polarization and peripheralization processes. Instead of seeking to develop a one-size-fits-all model for how to research the topic, we conclude this review by proposing a relational approach which requires the application of diverse methodological and conceptual perspectives as well as reflexivity on the performativities of these perspectives themselves, that is, their effects on what we are able to observe, how we understand it and how our research intervenes in the processes under investigation (Paasi 2010, 2013).

3. Conceptual perspectives

The analysis of spatial disparities has been at the centre of regional science for more than 50 years. It is thus not surprising that aspects of polarization and peripheralization have been considered in many areas of economic and social geography as well as in related disciplines such as economics and spatial planning. While, in this section, we aim to give a short overview of concepts and explanatory frameworks that have played an important role in the debate, the choice of approaches presented is necessarily selective and does not cover the literature as a whole. Nevertheless, our review demonstrates that issues of regional polarization and peripheralization have been approached from a range of perspectives, considering different scales and their intersections as well as diverse factors and effects. It also confirms that, as Paasi (1995 and 2010) has explained, research on the production of regions requires attention to numerous factors, relations, discursive constructions, agencies and materialities that constitute a spatial entity as an assemblage that, while never completely stable, has nonetheless acquired a certain durability.

a. Modelling and explaining processes of spatial polarization and peripheralization

Early regional development theories did not pay attention to processes of spatial polarization and peripheralization. Rather, neoclassical approaches (for example Solow 1956, Borts and Stein 1964) argued that regions with different factor endowments due to unrestricted movements of factors and commodities as well as flexible prices would gradually converge over time. While neoclassical theory thus expects an external shock to bring about forces that will bring an unbalanced spatial system to a (new) equilibrium, *polarization theorists* since the 1950s have argued that spatial disequilibria lead to circular cumulative effects that finally result in a state of spatial polarization. In the model developed by Myrdal (1957), such cumulative processes may be initially triggered by changes in interdependent economic factors, such as demand or income, and may occur within a single country and/or between different ones. According to Myrdal, the extent of interregional and

international imbalances depends on the type and the intensity of the centripetal backwash effects and the centrifugal spread effects. While backwash effects refer to negative changes that occur as a corollary of the expansion of a centre (for example selective outmigration from agrarian areas to growing centres), spread effects denote positive effects triggered by growing centres but affecting other regions (for example the spread of technical know-how). Under certain conditions, the latter effects may stimulate development in lagging regions without challenging the growth of the centres. Myrdal (1957), however, expects backwash effects to typically prevail over spread effects, and therefore suggests government intervention to reduce disparities in income. Though being 'criticized for its qualitative nature and lack of econometric substance' (Haggett 1972: 398), Myrdal's model endowed the debate with new impetus: it directs attention to problems of deepening differentiation and it focuses on micro-causalities in situations of increasing interregional contrast (in terms of income, investment, migration and so on). Moreover, Myrdal already addressed the importance of socio-cultural categorization and stigmatization in processes of socio-spatial differentiation and marginalization (Myrdal 1944). Since then, it has become almost a commonplace to understand centre and periphery in their reciprocal conditionality deriving from the nature of relation between two established/establishing poles that are rooted in discursive (communicative) conditions and social structures.

Hirschman (1958), in a different, albeit somewhat similar, approach, distinguishes positive trickling-down and negative polarization effects. In his model, polarization effects initially exceed the trickling-down effects. However, he also expects economic and political counter-balancing forces to arise, aiming at reducing interregional and international income disparities. As a consequence, trickling-down effects will gradually reinforce and finally exceed the polarization effects, thus bringing about a spatial equilibrium. Even though the models by Myrdal (1957) and Hirschman (1958) have major shortcomings (for example the fact that the generation of cumulative processes remains external to the models as well as a lack of a formal framework), the idea of polarized spatial development gained strong interest in the scientific community. In fact, in the aftermath of the publication of these basic works, numerous approaches were designed that further developed the original ideas. According to the idea of spatial growth poles (Boudeville 1966, Lasuén 1969), for example, growth impulses from big cities will be transferred along the system of central places (Christaller 1933, Lösch 1944), which itself is interpreted as an outcome of past processes of adoption of innovations. As put forward by Lasuén (1969), less dynamic regions (for example rural areas) face difficulties in absorbing innovations spreading from the centres and thus find it more difficult to keep up with development. Urban regions, by contrast, are seen to be in a position to easily absorb innovations and to spread them to their peripheries.

Another approach to polarization and peripheralization, put forward by Richardson (1980), seeks to combine the neoclassical ideas with the polarization approaches. Richardson (1980) argues that spatial development is characterized by a stage of polarization, before a turning point ('polarization reversal') is reached and a process of reversed polarization sets in (Bähr and Wehrhahn 1995). According to his concept, the industrial growth process of a country, due to a scarcity of investments, initially affects only a limited number of regions. Internal and external economies, as well as immigration of labour from other regions, will lead to a spatial concentration of economic activities, thus generating centre–periphery relations in terms of significant disparities in regional per capita income. In the further process of development, central regions, that is, the centres and their hinterlands, exhibit strong growth rates, resulting in great numbers of immigrants that exceed the number of locally available jobs. As a result of these agglomeration disadvantages, processes of intraregional decentralization (for example establishment of new firms in satellite cities due to high production costs in the centres) will gradually transform the central region. At an advanced stage, subcentres will emerge at certain locations in the periphery. While the latter are characterized by agglomeration economies, increasing disadvantages in the central regions will result in a deviation of the investment flows (for example through relocations or the establishment of branches) to the subcentres. This process will be accompanied by outmigration of labour from the centres to the subcentres, resulting in an interregional decentralization of economic activities. At subsequent development stages, processes of intraregional decentralization will also occur in the catchment areas of the subcentres. In total, these processes of intra- and interregional decentralization will result in a stable, urban hierarchy as well as harmonization of per capita incomes (Schätzl 2003).

Another widely noticed and more recent centre–periphery model has been offered in the framework of the *New Economic Geography* by Krugman (1991). Similarly to Hirschman (1958), Krugman (1991) views spatial structures as being shaped by centripetal and centrifugal forces. Whether the former or the latter prevail depends on transport costs, economies of scale and the industry's share in income. If a location is characterized by low transport costs, scale, high economies of scale and a high share of industry in the overall income, industrial production will concentrate in this particular region.³ In general, Krugman develops a formalized model which affirms the earlier (albeit non-formalized) polarization approaches.

The fact that capitalism is characterized by disparate spatial developments is also common to more recent theoretical approaches of uneven development that are inspired by early Marxist theorists and explicitly focus on spatial aspects. The approaches which have been developed in this context do not make up a homogeneous framework, but share a particular focus on power structures and their critique (Wissen and Naumann 2008). By far the

most influential approach of uneven development was developed by Harvey (2001 and 1982), who views capitalism as being characterized by a 'capital surplus absorption problem' (Harvey 2010: 2), that is, a tendency to create 'a surplus of capital relative to opportunities to employ that capital' (Harvey 1982: 192). Harvey identifies different forms of capital mobility that may help to spatially fix these crises, at least for a limited period of time. As a by-product of this 'spatial fix', new spaces are being produced that may also result in the creation of core-periphery relations and accompanying dependency relations, for example when productive capital, for example firms, relocates from unprofitable locations to more profitable areas.

Another approach towards polarization and peripheralization has emerged in the context of *dependency theory/world system theory*. Large parts of the conceptual ideas, though explicitly developed with a focus on different countries, can be applied to the regional scale as well. The basic idea of these models can be summed up in four main hypotheses (Schätzl 2003: 194): (1) fundamental interregional structural differences can result in the emergence of centres and areas which depend on them; (2) centres and peripheries form a closed spatial system; (3) centres and peripheries are characterized by dependency relations; (4) in order to overcome the dependency relations, peripheral areas have to achieve attributes of the centres. Evolution and revolution are viewed as apt strategies for reaching this aim. An early centre-periphery model was developed by Prebish (1959). His model is based on the assumption that there are structural differences in terms of income elasticity of demand as well as in technical progress and its spread between developed and developing countries. These differences result in a deterioration of the terms of trades of the periphery and a transfer of real income from the periphery to the centres. This result is remarkable, since it strongly contrasts with the classical and neoclassical trade theory. Another approach has been offered by Friedmann (1973). According to his model, the relations between centres and peripheries are characterized by four features: (1) peripheries are characterized by institutions installed by the centre, which makes them dependent on the latter; (2) centres consolidate their domination through reinforcing mechanisms of polarization. These so-called feedback mechanisms involve different types of effects (domination, information, psychological, modernization, linkage and production effects); (3) as a result of this domination, innovations developed in the centres will be introduced in the peripheries, thereby further intensifying the information flows in the dependent areas; (4) as a result, conflicts may occur, which can be met by local or national elites, who, for example, take measures of limited decentralization. Furthermore, elites are in a position to accelerate the spread effects, thus contributing to shared decision-making powers between old and new centres. As a consequence, the dependency relations between centres and their peripheries will gradually disappear. According to Friedman, however, such reconciliation of interests can only be expected in highly developed countries such as the US or Germany (Schätzl 2003).

Focusing on different spatial, scalar and social logics of differentiation, a couple of empirical studies have aimed at identifying relations between centre and periphery systematically, typologically and comparatively (Rokkan 1980, Vorauer 1997, Schürmann and Talaat 2000). One of the most elaborated analyses in terms of statistical underpinning was undertaken by Rokkan, Urwin, Aarebrot, Malabe and Sande (Rokkan et al. 1987), who integrate economic, political and cultural conditions in a quantitative approach of so-called territorial systems. They assume that 'territory building' is based on three capacities of centres that 'can be minimally defined as *privileged locations* within a territory' (Rokkan et al. 1987: 25): 'military-administrative, economic and cultural' (ibid.: 41). These 'types of territory extension' (ibid.) lead to 'three distinctive forms of peripheralization: by *military conquest and administrative subjection*; through *economic dependency* and through *cultural subordination*' (ibid., emphasis original). Though processes may overlap, they do not necessarily bring about a single and coherent pattern but different types of peripheries: some suffering from all three types of peripheralization and others that, for instance, managed to escape from economic deprivation. Given the opportunities of computational modelling and processing of large volumes of data, spatio-temporal comparisons as they were blueprinted by Rokkan and his colleagues (Rokkan et al. 1987) seemed to allow a systematic approach towards territorial differentiation and structural dependency.

b. Problematizing socio-spatial categories and dichotomizations

Though many of the scholars named above underline the necessity to investigate the relation between 'centres' and 'peripheries' at various spatial scales, there are remarkable differences in defining and locating this relation, as well as the driving forces behind the emergence and persistence of 'centres' and 'peripheries'. By transferring post-colonialist approaches to the regional level, some researchers have drawn attention to the fact that hierarchy and dependency are not only established in terms of 'outer relations' and as a result of an increasingly globalized world, but are also internally produced and reproduced. This phenomenon is addressed as 'internal peripheries' (Nolte 1996), 'internal colony/periphery' (Hechter 1975, Walls 1978) and, more recently, 'internal orientalism' (Jansson 2003).

In addition to recognizing that the formation and persistence of 'core' and 'peripheral' regions play out at different, intersecting scales, recently a more relational understanding of spatial disparities has emerged in regional studies that mainly aims at detecting concrete processes that lead to social and economic disparities. As the relation between centre and periphery is immanent to the concept, peripheralization always also implies processes of centralization and thus forms of socio-spatial polarization: the logic and dynamics of spatial centralization determine the peripheralization of other spaces by attracting populations, economic productivity and infrastructural functions to the disadvantage of other regions (Keim 2006). Polarization

is enhanced by national discourses which place higher value on particular regions and developments and thereby devalue others.

Recent critical scholarship has further emphasized the important role of geographical imaginations, discourses and diverse socio-spatial practices in producing, as well as contesting, the marginalization of certain places, regions and populations (Cresswell 1996, Massey 2009, Shields 2013). It has been recognized that terms such as ‘polarization’ and ‘peripheralization’, ‘centre’ and ‘periphery’ are themselves markers of socio-spatial realities commonly used to *describe* these realities, and that semantics are never mere representations of reality but are actively involved in shaping and explaining reality. Many scholars in geography and cognate disciplines have been arguing for a closer and critical examination of the ways in which knowledge productions in research and politics are informed by spatial and social categories and terms (see Schoenberger 1998, Clark 2001). Spatial semantics, as vague and ambiguous as they may be (Miggelbrink and Redepenning 2004: 582), often represent societies as spatially ordered and divided into discrete units and, thereby, partake in *producing* those very orders and divisions (Rose and Gregson 2000, Marston and Jones 2005).

John Agnew brought these problems to the attention of geographical scholars as early as 1982, in his critique of three methodological reductions that he argued were inherent in *spatial(ized)* research. First, identifying certain spaces as centre or periphery leads to reifying spatial categories instead of reconstructing social, political and economic relations of domination and dependency that produce certain spaces. Second (as an effect of reified spaces), once spatial categories are identified, causal effects are all too often ascribed to them: spatial patterns that echo a multitude of decisions and events (investment, migration, death and birth...) and that are based on manageable statistical categories and procedures, on methods of measurement and so on, are (mis)understood as offering *explanation*. Agnew calls this moment of explanatory in-distinguishability ‘pattern-process-inference’. Third, focusing on fixed and bounded spaces restricts analytical capacity to only one scale of social action instead of taking into account scalar interference. As a consequence, again, explanation tends to take a dichotomized form: cause and effect are located *inside* or *outside* a/the centre and its periphery.

Agnew’s arguments connect strongly to other critiques of knowledge construction. Post-colonial and feminist scholars have pointed out, in particular, that hierarchical logics underpin distinctions in the status of knowledge produced by different agents from different locations. These scholars have sought to challenge such problematic constructions by examining how relations of power and knowledge change when dominant perspectives are provincialized (Kuus 2004, Timár 2004, Stenning and Hörschelmann 2008). For the topic of peripheralization, this is a particularly significant issue, as the coincidence of marginalized knowledges with socio-spatial

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