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Critique of the Concept of Development and Regional Studies

At the end of the 20th century the concept of development as a synonym of modernisation and progress came under heavy criticism, together with its various forms such as Europeanisation. It has been criticised for treating development as a teleological, uniform, linear, normalising and instrumental process. Such an approach is frequently underpinned by the concept of dichotomous division of space. Post-development criticism includes various ideologies, such as conservative anti-modernism, neo-liberal rejection of state interventionism and leftist cultural relativism. The author claims that the main weaknesses of the development concept stem from unfounded generalisations with respect to the object, time and space in which such processes are observed. Such weaknesses can be overcome without adopting radically post-modernist positions, rejecting any valuation of regional development trajectories. Regional studies may treat development as an open process, not necessarily leading to predetermined outcomes and not always following the paths taken by the more developed regions. There exist different development paths that are nonlinear processes, in which endogenous factors, such as activity of local actors, play a significant role.

Contemporary regional studies focus more heavily on regional processes than on regional characteristics. They deal with the processes of shaping ('producing') and transforming regions in different social, economic and political dimensions. In the debate on such topics, the notion of *development* plays a special role.

Development is an ambiguous concept. With regard to regions, we mainly speak of economic or socio-economic development, which can be understood as a certain immanent process on the one hand, and on the other – as a purposeful activity of public authorities (Cowen, Shenton 1996).

The way of looking at development is an indication of understanding broader structures and socio-economic processes in the context of space, and of the very essence of the region. It therefore would be useful to consider the restrictions and weaknesses which are inherent in the notion of socio-economic development of countries and regions, which was popular in the second half of the 20th century and which came under such fierce criticism towards the end of that century.

This paper does not seek to provide a systematic overview of different approaches to development, but is intended as a critical reflection on selected

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and common characteristics of such approaches. We will initially concentrate on the weaknesses and constraints of understanding development in such categories as progress and modernisation, and will later focus on its specific variety, which is treating transformation processes in the post-Socialist Europe as Europeanisation. An analysis of such approaches indicates that they are frequently rooted in the idea of a dichotomous division of space in different geographic scales – from international to inter-regional. In this context, the relationships between general, mainly global processes and the specific traits of regions and local systems are of particular importance, especially when examined from the perspective of various theoretical concepts, including the path dependence theory. This will include a discussion about the relations between regularities and development factors in various geographic scales. Finally, the author addresses the question whether the concept of development which avoids the main weaknesses of the modernist approach and at the same time avoids the pitfalls of its post-modernist criticism, is at all possible.

Development as progress and modernisation

Seen most generally, development denotes a long-term process of changes having a certain direction. However, in the social sciences of the past few decades, and in the popular form disseminated by the mass media, socio-economic development is seen much more narrowly, as a process of changes following which a country or a region attains a state that is superior to the former one. In most general terms, this includes economic growth, that is real (independent of price changes) income increase, structural changes and improved living conditions of inhabitants.

The modernist understanding of development stems from the notion of progress dating back to the concept of progress in the Enlightenment period. The impact of the nineteenth century evolutionism on the perception of development is manifested in its close attachment to the organicistic notion of growth. According to it, countries and regions, just as living organisms, are to advance from simpler forms or states to more complex ones. One can find many associations between the concept of development understood as progress with teleological views on history and science. Social and economic changes leading to such development imply approaching some ideal state and are reflected in many theoretical concepts as ones which are inevitable and irreversible, owing to natural or economic (Marxism) factors, technological progress and growth of knowledge. Although the popularity of universal theories of social development would increasingly wane in the decades closing the 20th century, their perception of development did not disappear.[1] It can be said therefore that the major feature of the perception of development prevailing

[1] For a broad discussion of the modernisation theory see Szczepański (1990) and Krzysztofek, Szczepański (2002).

nearly throughout the whole 20th century was regarding it as a process of changes which were teleological, uniform, linear, normalising and instrumental (technical) in character.

The powerful appeal of looking at development as a uniform historical process is undoubtedly due to the fact that it entails the image of the world as a certain harmonised, ordered whole, governed by regularities which apply to all its constituent parts. This order can express itself in the linear character of development, where the subsequent stages inevitably mean changes for the better. As a result, development in fact involves normalisation – it aims to lead the features of different regions to a state which is the most desirable (optimal). From the perspective of state or regional authorities, activities promoting development are a task of a technical nature, and involve a rational selection of relevant measures (methods of actions) to achieve the desired goal (intended state). This intended state is determined by the qualities of regions regarded as well-developed. Therefore, in geographical terms, development means assuming the features of well-developed regions.

This kind of approach to development can be found in various forms in theories informed by Keynesian, neo-Classicistic, Marxist and institutional thought in economy after World War II. The notion of development as a linear inevitability is easily visible in Rostov's popular theory, according to which national economies undergo five stages of development, and in Bell's concept of post-industrial society. In addition, many such developmental features can be found in contemporary analyses of globalisation processes.

Development as Europeanisation

The approach to the process of socio-economic transformation in Central and Eastern Europe after the collapse of the socialist system can be seen as a peculiar version of development understood as modernisation. The process of post-socialist transformation is frequently reduced to an assimilation of the patterns which evolved in Western Europe. The inhabitants of the eastern and central part of the continent can be simply regarded as underdeveloped societies, which proved unable to produce modern ideas, economies and political institutions. This would imply that they should attempt at closing the gap by imitating the features which can be encountered in Western Europe.

This in turn leads to a peculiar understanding of the EU enlargement process eastward. Firstly, this is an act that normalises the area characterised by economic and political chaos. Secondly, the new members are in the position of applicants or petitioners, which justifies the adoption of values and views of modern Europeans from the core EU countries, who may see themselves as benefactors and educators for the 'new Europeans'. Therefore development in post-socialist Europe is tantamount to the process of their 'Europeanisation', involving the assimilation of features which are characteristic of Western Europe, and rejecting other features. The term 'European'

has become a synonym of post-socialist modernisation and progress, a qualifier which distinguishes processes, phenomena, persons and places (countries, regions, cities) which are positively valued, from those negatively valued.

In this perspective, the legacy of less developed regions is of no relevance for the inhabitants of more developed regions. From the point of view of the neo-liberal faith in universal market mechanisms, the unique features of regions are quite unimportant, whereas the economic development of post-socialist countries and regions is but a technical exercise to efficiently introduce institutions and arrangements embraced by Western Europe. It is a matter of controversy whether the post-socialist transformation is something unprecedented in history and cannot be compared to other processes of speedy and radical socio-economic changes in the past. Those who favour the view on the unique nature of this transformation are eager to see a greater variety of factors and developmental paths, but just as their opponents in this debate, they frequently hold the conviction that development modelled on Western Europe does have a purposeful and normalising quality. For the traditional Left, abandoning the idea to build an alternative society to capitalism may be equivalent to abandoning the path of development (progress), a historical error bound to produce catastrophic consequences. In this approach, development would mean embracing West European progressive political ideas.

Analysis of English and American studies on the development of Central and Eastern European countries and regions in the transformation period reveals many oversimplifications and distortions: an excessive focus on macroeconomic and political factors and an insufficient focus on social and cultural ones, and on exogenous rather than endogenous factors; devoting a great deal of attention to huge, mainly foreign corporations, and neglecting small and medium-sized national businesses; ignoring the role of local governments and community initiatives; treating the state as a monolith and not as a set of institutions having different competencies and policies; seeing development in the short--term and frequently ahistorical perspective; ignoring the earlier processes (Domański 2001).

The gist of the interpretation of post-socialist transformation processes as a 'return to Europe' is the idea of 'catching up'. It should be noted at this point that a similar idea, though in a different form, played an enormous part in the ideology and economic practice of the socialist system. It was manifested by declarations to catch up or even overcome the well-developed capitalist countries in the production of different goods, mainly industrial.

Europeanisation of Poland and its regions can be seen as a way of understanding development as modernisation – a process of a teleological, normalising, harmonising and technical nature, intended to make these regions similar to those in Western Europe. Such characteristics, mainly striving towards a single ultimate intended state and the linearity of development as a process of transition from socialism to market economy reflect – in the opinion of its critics – the transition indicators used in EBRD reports, where

the maximum value is to express the existence of a fully operational market economy (Smith 2002). The so-called Copenhagen criteria established by the European Commission in 1993 for the candidate countries can be seen as having normalising features.

Looking at contemporary changes in Central and Eastern Europe as Europeanisation can be seen as a manifestation of Eurocentrism, an attitude with a long tradition which assumes that the cultural, political and economic characteristics of Europe represent a universal model which ought to be embraced by the whole world. In the past, Eurocentrism was an ingredient of colonialism, a vehicle which carried European development patterns to other areas of the world. In the several past decades, this view equalled the universal model of development with the 'first' World, the West, and recently the North, comprising North America and excluding Central and Eastern Europe.

Dichotomous view of geographic space

The way of thinking about development in terms of modernisation and progress is usually coloured by a simplified, frequently dichotomous, perception of space. It refers to popular ideas of the spatial differentiation of phenomena and socio-economic processes in terms of the core (centre) and periphery. Such a tendency can be observed in any geographic scale.

On an international scale, the basic division runs between a group of well-developed and poorly developed countries. In Europe, the latter would be epitomised by post-socialist countries. Let us look at some ways that they are perceived, and their consequences.

The societies living east of the Iron Curtain were isolated from the western part of the continent in a variety of ways. For the residents of the latter, they were the obscure 'others'. Their absence or lack of significance were noticeable in many historic and geographic works which dealt – in their authors' opinion – with Europe, the West or the world as a whole.[2] This reinforced the perception of Central and Eastern Europe as a political, economic and cultural periphery and was reflected in many concepts and categorisations (Domański 2004a).

Post-socialist economies are regarded as emerging markets. This means that turmoil in one country can frequently lead to the flight of capital from all the countries included in this high-risk group (Sidaway, Pryke 2000). One of the consequences of a peripheral status is strong dependency on international ratings; their lowering can have far-reaching implications for the attitudes of the financial markets to a given country – the cost of being counted as an economic periphery can then become quite substantial.

The metaphor used in the interpretation of regional development in Central and Eastern Europe in the 1990s was the phrase 'cathedrals in the desert',

[2] See for instance *History of Western Civilization* (McNeill 1986), *A World in Crisis?* (Johnston, Taylor 1989) or *Europe: A History of Its People* (Duroselle 1990).

first used by Grabher (1994) in reference to certain German industry sectors in the first years following the reunification of Germany. They are intended to express the contrast between enclaves of growth, usually based on foreign inward capital investments and the economy of the region characterised by a growing 'erosion' of the economic base, as well as social and institutional potential. Such enclaves tend to lack any stronger links with the region as such (e.g. Hardy 1998). Such a metaphor represents an image of an all-embracing post-socialist 'desert' where success can only be on a local scale. Central and Eastern European regions have little to contribute to the global economy other than new markets, raw materials and cheap labour. Such an opinion can be found both among the critics of neo-liberal economy and its dedicated followers.

Areas west of Berlin and Vienna are not only a cultural but also a political periphery. Mackinder's notion of *shatterbelt* from the early 20th century is still found in many European geography textbooks (e.g. Poulsen 1997) and can serve as a manifestation of perceiving Central and Eastern Europe as a region of chaos and a threat for European stability. Such a categorisation has deeper cultural roots. The features of the European periphery can be summed up as occurrence of anachronistic attitudes and behaviours as well as ethnic and religious conflicts.

Interpretations of development in an intra-regional scale also like to refer to opposite geographic categories. In Poland, the opposition of urban and rural areas has a particularly long-established tradition; it was especially well visible under socialism, when it had an additional ideological foundation. The city was a quintessence of modernity, an epitome of the core in terms of space and of the future in terms of time. At the opposite end, there was the country, which represented the past, peripherality and backwardness. This dichotomy and the related manner of portraying development was perpetrated by school textbooks, starting from the traditional Falski's primer to geography textbooks. This was due to putting an equation mark between urbanisation and industrialisation, a sign of technological, economic and social progress. In this context, Bauman's (1995) opinion should be recalled, who referred to socialism as the 'ultimate rampart of modernity'.

Generally speaking, the perception of spatial diversity in dichotomous categories is a constituent part of a broader vision of reality based on pairs of opposite, evaluative situations which carry implied values, such as: new versus old, modern (progressive) versus traditional (backward), developed versus underdeveloped, industrial versus agricultural, post-industrial versus industrial, etc. The deterministic nature of such a vision represents its important feature and includes such attributes as inevitability, lack of alternatives and an over-simplified picture of development mechanisms. Countries, regions and local systems which are considered as developed are treated in the social and political discourse as models of future development for the remaining areas and regarded as benchmarks for an assessment (valuation) of phenomena, societies and

political actions. Contribution to development understood in such a manner is a mission, on a national and international scale.

Regional development theories and location theories differ in the views on the invariability (permanence) and causes of spatial inequalities, including the chances of achieving the status of a developed region by undeveloped regions, e.g. Myrdal's cumulative causality theory and the product life cycle theory are characterised by a certain pessimism in this respect, unlike the growth poles theory.[3] In regional studies, we can observe to varying degrees the features typical of the modernist approach to development, such as assimilation to developed regions, teleologicality and instrumentality, and, less frequently, a linear approach.

The problem does not lie in the fact that distinguishing regions at a higher or lower level of development, or the centre and the periphery, is erroneous or aimless, but in avoiding the fallacy of treating such analytical categories as physical entities which either explain or provide a general pattern for development processes. Therefore, the point is not that some regions or countries are or are not – using the dichotomous approach – a peripheral part of national or European economy but that:

1) such a statement of fact has very small explanatory power;
2) in reality, there is a wealth of different types of regions and development paths, which are interlinked by complex relationships and interdependencies.

General processes and the specific nature of regions and local systems

One of the pertinent issues and controversies in regional studies is the significance of the specific nature of particular regions in relation to general processes taking place on a broader scale. Until the first half of the 20th century, a lot of emphasis was placed on the uniqueness of regions. This was based on the conviction that the essence of geographic research is studying spatial diversity – seeking and comparing differences between individual regions. Subsequent development of qualitative spatial analysis meant a shift of emphasis towards looking at similarities between regions. According to its critics, development understood as modernisation assumes that the modernised regions do not have their own history, culture, etc. and that, basically, these distinct features do not significantly affect the region's development, which is governed by general laws. Contemporarily, attention is focused on globalisation processes, which – according to popular approaches – are responsible for the uniformisation of space. Place is expected to lose its significance in a world characterised by a free flow of ideas, people and information which removes the barriers between the specific fragments of space. The activity of huge

[3] It is the factors and mechanisms explaining development that determine the moral assessment of a low level of regional development – opinion to what extent this underdevelopment is human fault.

multi-national corporations which act as a driver for development is sometimes contrasted with the weakness of regions and local systems which are passive victims and have to suffer the consequences of such corporate operations.

In the critique of the concept of development, a lot of attention is devoted to ignoring or underestimating the significance of regional and local aspects. It is emphasised that general processes tend to take various forms and produce different results in different regions. In this context, the notion of regional embeddedness of the foreign corporations' investments via different economic (such as domestic suppliers' networks), social (such as contacts with staff, authorities and other partners) linkages is quite important. Furthermore, the regional characteristics influence the progress of general processes. For instance, huge corporations tend to change their ways of operation so to adapt them to the features of the new locations in Central and Eastern Europe (Domański 2004b). In the conditions of increasing mobility, the economic success of a region largely depends on its capacity to attract and retain both people and capital, which is metaphorically referred to as 'stickiness' of regions and localities. Also, the influence of endogenous factors promoting regional development is emphasised, such as the local pool of knowledge, expertise and skills (Gorzelak, Jałowiecki 2000; Camagni 2002); of a wealth of interactions between businesses and other entities which cannot be transplanted elsewhere (Storper's untraded interdependencies), of bonds of trust and social participation. The role of local and regional activity is also stressed, which is contrasted with treating the inhabitants of regions and municipalities as objects of development, controlled by impersonal global processes or top-down activities of the state, companies or international institutions.

In this context, it is interesting to attempt a look from the perspective of local development trajectories, and not general processes. The concept of path dependence is currently gaining in popularity; it helps explain development processes which elude regularities based on many cases and described by theory. Such an approach is a form of historical (evolutionary) explanation and focuses on the emergence and evolution of those of the region's features which shape its future development. This refers to 'residual' situations in which historic events which are specific, unforeseen and impossible to generalise are regarded as important factors which serve to explain later deterministic developmental processes (mechanisms) (Isaac 1997; Mahoney 2000). The concentration of economic activity in some regions is not an inescapable consequence of the earlier conditions, i.e. it would also be possible in a different location and cannot be anticipated by any general theory. However, when it happens as a result of apparently insignificant, specific historic events, agglomeration processes ensure further growth of such regions. That is to say that their initial advantage can be reinforced by external economies of scale resulting from increasing revenues (e.g. Krugman 1995). On the other hand, the development of regions, such as those which were formed during the early industrialisation period, can mean confinement to a specific path, when the

mechanisms which were set in motion many years earlier reproduce old economic, social and institutional structures, thus hindering the desirable changes on the regional trajectory.[4] The identification of the degree of path dependence in the region's development has a major practical significance because it helps to define the scope for action of the public authorities in the field of local and regional policies.

At this point, we should pay attention to the interpretation of the region as a specific fragment of space (a kind of place). Today, we can observe a tendency to perceive the world in terms of relations, especially networks of relations, rather than places. Latour, a French intellectualist (1993, p. 370), expressed this metaphorically when he said that the complexity of the world cannot be captured 'in terms of levels, layers, territories or spheres'; we should rather look at the world as a 'fibrous, filamentous (...) and hairlike' entity. This is also reflected in a different contemporary understanding of place than in the past. Place was traditionally perceived as a certain distinct point or territory which had specific attributes and 'contained' certain objects and events. Today, metaphors which render the essence of the place are 'hubs' or switching points in a network of relations on different geographic scales (Castree 2003). This is represented by the notion of a hub region. In terms of their internal structure, hub regions contain both the distinction and the centre – periphery relation. On a broader plane, the city which is the regional centre is a place where local and regional phenomena and economic, political and cultural processes meet and interact with diverse supra-regional processes (including global ones), thereby transforming both the place itself and those wider processes.

For instance, metropolises are hubs where vertical linkages meet with higher-level metropolises on the European and global scale, horizontal linkages – with other regional metropolises, and top-bottom ones – with the cities and towns of the hinterland. They are the place where regions are incorporated in global processes and relationships. Another major role of the metropolis is to transmit development stimuli stemming from their international linkages to the surrounding regions. As Dicken (2003) put it, globalisation is first and foremost a change of relationships between different geographic scales.

Development and geographic scale

Contemporary pressure on the region as a hub in a wide network of relations implies an analysis of development both as an outcome and a cause of changes in such relations, which can be encountered in different geographic scales: international, national, regional and local. This in turn means a need to correctly identify the scale on which the constituent development processes occur and on which the factors which determine them operate.

[4] An interesting interpretation of the development of localities within the Upper Silesian conurbation based on the path dependence theory can be found in the work by Gwosdz (2004).

An error that is quite common in the studies of socio-economic development is the lack of reflection on the geographic scale in which the reviewed processes and phenomena are set. This can result in an unjustified transition from processes and regularities in one scale to another, while for an effective transition of this kind it is necessary to show the mechanisms which connect phenomena and processes in different scales. The difficulties this entails can be illustrated by several popular theories and approaches.

The theory of economic base was formulated with reference to cities, i.e. to a local scale, whereas the pole theory focuses on the intra-regional scale, namely on the impact of a dynamic centre (city) on the surrounding region. However, attempts to use such approaches in relation to entire regions are not always accompanied by a deeper reflection on the differences and similarities between processes occurring at this level in relation to mechanisms outlined in the general theory. Although Rostov's theory was developed specifically on the basis of national economies, we can find its applications in interpretations of regional development. Conversely, while the concept of social capital (1995) popularised by Putnam (1995) referred to his studies on some regions in Italy, it is used with regard to entire countries. Some approaches are criticised for their failure to distinguish the location processes in economic activity and their reasons on an international and inter-regional scale and for treating the former as an exceptional example of the latter. Ietto-Gillies (2002) claimed that this was a feature of models in Krugman's new trade theory. Also, there is an observable lack of accord in the interpretation of how clusters are formed on the local, regional and national scale; this is partly due to the use of this notion in different geographic scales by Porter himself (cf. Olejniczak 2003). Currently, it is popular to connect economic development of regions and cities with international competitiveness, but, as Camagni pointed out (2002), in the discussion on territorial competitiveness the local, regional and national scales are sometimes confused, even though the concept of competitiveness has a completely different meaning when used with regard to countries.[5] It can hardly be overlooked that to a large extent the modernist understanding of development has penetrated into analysis and interpretation of regional development from theories constructed for entire countries rather than regions.

Generally speaking, an important issue that should be taken into consideration in the explanation of regional development processes concerns the scale on which particular factors stimulating or hindering development operate and the interrelationships which occur between development processes on the local, regional, national and international scales. A shortage of theoretical concepts in the latter sphere is particularly well visible. It is also important to identify mechanisms of spatial concentration on different geographic scales and the role they play in self-sustainable development and petrification of regional

[5] Krugman (1996) goes as far as to question the usefulness of the concept of countries' competitiveness.

disparities. Determining the scale on which development processes and the factors underlying them operate is of critical importance for regional and local policies.

Visions and traps of 'post-development'

The end of the 20th and the beginning of the 21st centuries is marked by a fierce criticism of the concept of development prevailing in the previous decades. It is criticised for flattening the diversity of regions and development processes and for attempts to normalise the latter, by treating them as linear and teleological – progressing towards predetermined outcomes. As a result of an instrumental approach, territorial communities have become an object, and not a subject of development. This applies in particular to the residents of poorly developed regions who are passive observers of development which is either progressing or subject to objectivised rules. Devoid of the possibility to decide about the conditions of their own lives, they have become subject to social control on the part of the state, international organisations or huge corporations.

This criticism applies both to development understood as a certain social and economic process and to one understood as a challenge for the public authorities and their intentional activities. Development in the former meaning was based on objective mechanisms which were often interpreted in a deterministic way but which gave it a progressive aura. Such an approach can be found not only in Marxist theories, but, in a different form, also in neo-liberal theories, with their confidence in the power of market regulatory mechanisms. The strongest protest, however, which is voiced by the advocates of neo-liberal economy and by many representatives of the new Left, arises from understanding development as an intentional project involving an intervention of public authorities. Such a top-to-bottom and normalising project can destroy the indigenous potential of poorly developed regions.

The neo-liberal right is basically anti-intentional and does not treat social or spatial inequalities as condemnable *per se*. Intentional, planned development is perceived as ineffective, one that undermines personal responsibility, resourcefulness and self-reliance, tends to produce catastrophic economic and social consequences in the long run. Although the post-modernist Left considers any pressure on development as a form of imperialism, it questions any strategy based on the common features of humanity and large-scale projects. In the dispute between universalism (Aristotle's essentialism) and particularism, the post-modernist Left would definitely subscribe to the latter. In this approach, development is perceived as a failed modernist project. Many years ago, Brookfield (1975) defined modernisation as an abstraction, a 'convenient myth', which defies tangible social change processes.

While there existed earlier theories which sought the reasons for the underdevelopment of regions in their relations with developed regions (such as

Myrdal's theory of cumulative causality, dependence theory), the post-modernist approach formulated a thesis that underdevelopment and backwardness are merely results of the adopted definitions, of a certain way of conceptualising development itself. Underdevelopment and backwardness were reduced to concepts which were coined and created by a peculiar European or Euro-American concept of development. In the wake of criticism, the 'death of development' was heralded, to be replaced by a 'post-development' era (cf. Lal 1985; Krasnodębski 1991; Sachs 1992; Escobar 1995; Crush 1995; Rahnema, Bawtree 1997; Hart 2001).

The reaction to the above flaws in the concept of development was to emphasise the variety of the regions' developmental experiences and highlight the significance of all things local and regional, as opposed to global forces and processes, to encourage local participation and call for a retreat from goals and solutions imposed by central authorities. There is a visible pressure on the mobilisation of the endogenous potential in poorly developed regions, while for several decades the majority of theories had assumed that state assistance and top-down initiatives were most effective (Grosse 2002). It is pointed out that there are huge reserves of knowledge and skills in the communities of the 'underdeveloped regions'; their sense of ownership, different forms of local and regional activity instead of passivity caused by dependence from external assistance, capital and technology.[6] Zarycki (2000) dubbed as post-modernist such approaches which attached considerable importance to historical explanations and which to a larger extent focused on the regions' peculiarities than on general social structures; on cultural, and not rational, explanation of social behaviours, and on a positive impact of diversity rather than internal cohesion of regions.

As we can see, there is a whole gamut of alternatives for the modernist concept of development, since post-development criticism includes dissimilar perspectives, ranging from Fukuyama, Escobar and Foucault to ecofeminism, and embraces such different tendencies as the conservative anti-modernism, neo-liberal opposition to state interventionism and Leftist cultural relativism.

A question must be posed on where the criticism of the modernist concept of development and proposals put forward by post-modernism can lead us. The relatively least radical is the position of the advocates of neo-liberal economy who reject the idea of development, which is top-to-bottom controlled by the state or international institutions, but not necessarily so the idea of development as a universal and linear immanent process. From the point of view of conservative theories, all these attributes can be challenged. At the same time, this proposition offers a romanticising approach to what is regional/local or traditional. These qualities can also be ascribed to post-modernist

[6] Some post-modernist approaches show similarities with the radical development concepts from the past, mainly the dependence theory from the 1960s, which ascribed great importance to factors which are external from the state or region, and highlighted the issue of cultural identity and autonomy (sovereignty), which, according to some, gives such approaches a nationalist tinge.

criticism offered by post-Marxists, which can lead to rejecting the valuation of the regions' development trajectories and of regional policies. By assumption, there are no unequivocal alternatives which could apply to many regions, but many development narratives exist concurrently.[7]

Rejecting the concept of development in the meaning discussed above also entails the disappearance of underdeveloped and backward regions from the discourse. As a result of renouncing a particular form of conceptualisation, or a theory, however, no objective attributes of regions will disappear, no basic social needs will be satisfied. A practical effect of the post-modernist rejection of the concept of development so as to embrace diversity or traditional business activities instead can be continued marginalisation of many regions. A question can be asked whether transformation into an 'open-air museum' can bring any profits to the inhabitants of underdeveloped regions.

Conclusions

A question must be posed whether a concept of development which is free from the main flaws of the modernist approach and at the same time does not follow the path which is recommended by post-modernist critics who propose to exclude any valuation of the regions' development, is at all possible.

We can set off by indicating the origins of the criticised weaknesses of the concept of development. A thesis can be posed that these mainly lie in over-generalisation and treating certain analytical categories as physical entities. Therefore, it is possible to overcome many of these imperfections or interpretation errors without assuming the radical post-modernist stance. To do so, one must give up the belief that:

1) the world is divided into two or several groups of regions or countries which have a physical existence and overall represent a high or low level of development (whereas in fact these are only simplifying categories of analysis);

2) development is a necessity, either as an inevitable process of changes resulting from immanent attributes (mechanisms) of reality or as a challenge (goal) for public authorities and their activities;

3) development is tantamount to progress, which means that it is by definition a process which must be positively valuated;

4) regional development processes can be reduced to one dominant development path which involves moving to the subsequent 'higher' stages, represented by the regions which have developed earlier;

[7] Watts (2000, p. 171) ends his discussion on the concept of development by concluding that development as a narrative carries the threat of replacing reflection on regularities in economic, social and political processes by 'a naive attitude of sitting round the bonfire and telling stories' (this comment could in fact be addressed to many post-modernist approaches). At the same time, the traditional post-Marxist Left is defending the concept of development and criticises aversion to the state, accepting capitalism as the sole social system in contemporary world, fascination with localism, new social movements and social capital (Corbridge 1998; Blaikie 2000; Hart 2001, 2002).

5) development is an all-encompassing phenomenon, which means that it affects the entirety of economic and social features;[8] as a result, every assimilation of a given region's features to those of the regions considered as developed is a positive phenomenon ('progress'), while retaining traditional features, different than those of the developed regions, means 'backwardness' and 'underdevelopment';

6) the development of regions is fostered by single types of economic activity whose role is universal in geographical terms, such as the belief in high-tech industries, whereas the development of most regions, also in well-developed countries, is frequently based on other sectors, including the traditional ones;

7) factors affecting development are also universal in geographical terms and can be useful in explaining the development of many different regions;

8) factors which are important nationally are also important regionally and locally, just as locally significant factors are also significant at the regional level, etc.

Generally speaking, we must be aware of the pitfalls of overt objective (development pertains to all the spheres of socio-economic life), temporal (there is one dominant model, a development path) and geographical ('horizontal universalisation of attributes and factors promoting the development of many regions, and 'vertical' insensitivity to the geographic scale) generalisations. Such generalisations frequently occur not explicitly but as unreflective abstractions, which can lead to a lack of coherence between empirical studies and their theoretical interpretations. For instance, empirical research can point to a diversity or even discrepancy concerning the experience of transformation, and a multitude of development paths in post-socialist national, regional and local economies, which are a sum of different processes involving positive changes and their destruction. The very essence of such processes cannot be simply rendered by the notion of development as progress, modernisation or Europeanisation.[9] Similarly, researchers share an awareness of a huge diversity between developed regions, which, however, does not discourage them from frequently comparing the development of 'backward' regions with a generalised model of a developed region. All the discussed distortions of the interpretation of development carry quite practical consequences for economic and social policies.

The process of development is open in character and does not progress in the direction of a pre-determined, more or less acknowledged ultimate state,

[8] Such a view, encountered in the concept of post-industrial society, was long criticised by Giddens (1973), for instance.

[9] In this context, Rykiel (2000) draws attention to underestimating differences in the development potential of the Polish regions following EU accession, which cannot be simply reduced to the division into well and poorly developed regions. An extensive study by Komornicki (2003) proves that the entirety of socio-economic relations between the Polish regions and Western Europe is much more complicated than it could be anticipated from a simple dichotomy between eastern and western Poland, peripheral and metropolitan regions, etc.

especially one defined on the basis of simplified, dichotomous categories of the region. We should avoid any belief in any real division of socio-economic space into the centre and the periphery. Understanding development as normalisation – assimilation to a certain state or region regarded as more developed, is both theoretically and practically dubious. Different models and development paths can coexist, and the development of particular regions at the same time can be based on a different combination of factors, which means that it does not involve passing through the same stages. We should abandon the idea of seeking a single factor (set of factors) which would explain development, because such a longing for universalisation is both ahistoric and aspatial. This is due to the fact that different economic activities shape different factors (we must beware of the danger to overestimate the role of certain activities which are thought to dynamise development at a given time and in a given place) and from specific attributes of regions. Also, development does not have to be linear or irreversible in character. The belief that a region which surpasses another region with regard to one specific attribute will outclass them or serve as a paragon for them in another is absolutely unfounded. We should not forget that development processes are autonomous on the national, regional and local scale. This means that it can be dangerous to transfer regularities from one level to another without the necessary studies or interpretations of the way in which the processes occurring in different geographic scales are connected. Therefore, the subject of the discussion should not only be the effectiveness of the adopted measures but also the goals of development. What matters is the temporal scale of development that we are looking at. There seems to be popular accord that while long-term perspective is most desirable, in reality the focus is on the observation of changes over short intervals.

A total rejection of the concept of development questions the possibility of making comparisons and assessments of regions; it can be catastrophic in the practical sense, too. It is possible to maintain the concept of development for long-lasting, directed changes and make use of development patterns of other regions while avoiding the trap of over-generalisation and uniformisation. Such an approach testifies to the sensitivity of contemporary regional studies to endogenous development factors, the activity of local and regional actors and social participation, which make the region's inhabitants not only objects, but also subjects of development.

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