Challenging Core-Periphery-Relations from a CEE perspective

Or:
New Avenues for Regional Development in Times of Polarisation?
Overview

▪ Background trends and interpretation
  – some empirical observations about uneven spatial and economic development in CEE and beyond
  – defining current spatial trends as a form of regional polarisation

▪ Regional development as political process
  – recent shifts in regional policy
  – how should regional development policies challenge the changing core-periphery relations?
  – some (theoretical) thoughts about regional development

▪ Conclusions and policy implications
  – room for new approaches to regional development?
Background
observations in spatial development

source:
RegPol²: Socio-economic and Political Responses to Regional Polarisation (FP7)
GDP per capita in pps 2014
GDP per capita 2014 compared to 2003
Regional GDP per capita in PPS 2003 and 2014 in CEE
globalisation challenges: speedy internationalisation, global integration, new forms of peripheries?

The world according to GaWC 2010
www.lboro.ac.uk/gawc/visual/globalcities2010.html
Understanding economic development: regional disparities

- uneven ec. development
  - national level cohesion with regional level increase of disparities
  - BUT difficulties in and limitations to measuring
  - GDP per capita in pps only one potential indicator
  - dominance of economic understanding and measurement (gap-approach)
    → no way for alternative paths of development

- EU regional policy as main source promoting cohesion
  - based on GDP indicators
  - BUT post GDP debate
Population development 2016/2003
Population development 2003-2016
Understanding demographic development

- severe general and ongoing demographic decline due to growing surplus of deaths (at national level)
  - with some signs for slightly recovering birth rates
- ongoing (and selective) out-migration mainly towards Western Europe
  - with some tendencies of return migration
- ongoing brain drain from rural regions and concentration of population in capital/metropolitan areas
  - with some CEE countries strengthening polycentricity
- minimal immigration
  - with some exceptions (e.g. immigrants from Ukraine to Poland)
Making sense of multiple forms of uneven development

- **hypotheses**
  - globalisation and demographic change in a post-industrial world as metaforces leading to multiple forms of socio-spatial polarisation
  - socio-spatial polarisation at regional level is caused through a *social process* of the formation of cores and peripheries at multiple scales

- **Socio-spatial polarisation**
  - refers to uneven regional development due to processes of centralisation and peripheralisation at multiple scales.
  - As a dynamic process, polarisation includes economic, demographic, cultural, political and discursive processes of space-making, i.e. the production of core and peripheral regions.
Conceptualising peripheralisation and centralisation

- peripheralisation and centralisation as (relative)
  - economic slowdown or growth
  - (relative) loss or gain of importance (e.g. population, jobs)
  - systemic (dis-)integration (e.g. infrastructure)
  - loss or gain of power and growing (in)dependence
  - socio-structural development and their perception and labeling
  - the perceived disadvantage of one region interrelates with perceived advantages of other regions

- peripheralisation and centralisation
  - are mutually interdependent
  - embedded in regional, national and global relations
  - not the result of a natural order but a dynamic notion
Beyond economic and demographic development

- **Self-reinforcing nature of polarisation**
  - further growth of core regions
  - ongoing stagnation or decline of peripheral regions

- **Role of discourse**
  - positive or negative labelling of (types of) regions
  - projections of personal futures into particular (urban/metropolitan) spaces

- **Role of regional policy**
  - e.g. through the support of growth-poles
  - e.g. through austerity measures
  - e.g. through focus on global competitiveness
  - e.g. through the demise of distributive policies
Policy responses to socio-spatial polarisation?

Regional Development as political process
Understanding and Politizising Core-Periphery-Relations – some theoretical thoughts

- uneven regional development and regional polarisation
  - as integral part of capitalist societies (e.g. David Harvey) – but not as natural order
  - core-periphery relations as part of longer term economic development (e.g. Myrdal, Hirschman)
  - multi-scalar relations are relevant (including post-colonial perspectives) (Frank, Wallerstein, Said)

- interpretations and policy responses
  - centre as societal core and centre of power (shaping public opinion, distribution of resources) relating to ideas of cultural hegemony (Gramsci)
  - relevance of the state (and their mediating power) rather increasing than decreasing (Swyngedouw, Brenner)
  - issues of spatial justice (Soja, Marcuse)
Policy Background

- **New patterns of regional disparities in CEE**
  - Socio-economic spatial polarisation between metropolised core regions and remaining parts of CEE countries
  - increasing social, economic and discursive peripheralisation of a growing number of regions throughout the EU
  - negative consequences of centralisation to core regions
  - despite territorial cohesion policies, regional inequalities within national states increased during recent years

- **Current policy debates**
  - in the light of EU-level and national cohesion policies
  - in the context of academic debates about spatial justice
  - opposition to currently dominant ‘neoliberal’ policies focussing on competitiveness and growth
Fig. 1  Trend analysis of policy concepts in the Lisbon Agenda and the Europe 2020 strategy (Source:Own elaboration based on Sinclair and Rockwell 2017)

Source: Telle et al. in Lang/ Görmar 2019, p. 158
Neoliberal shifts in EU cohesion policies

- EU priority shift in the strategic documents
  - from ‘social issues’ and ‘employment’ to (global) ‘competitiveness’ and ‘innovation’
  - current trend to favour growth and innovation and subordinate social cohesion and employment
  - debate around distributive/ growth-based regional policies

- Cohesion policy is focusing today mainly on growth
  - most likely furthering regional inequalities and
  - supporting the re-organisation of state power

- Conditions hindering innovative and experimental solutions
  - lacking infrastructures and personal capacities,
  - inflexible, centralised decision-making
  - limited influence of regional institutions due to strong monitoring regimes
A political economy critique to mainstream approaches of regional development

- hegemonic and normative positions shape reg. development
  - centralised blueprints for regional development (EU funds OPs) linked to mainstream paradigms (such as regional innovation systems, regional clusters, creative class)
  - e.g. structurally weak rural areas are supposed to have less innovation capacities than big cities and agglomerations

- regions are made responsible for success or failure of their development
  - responsibilisation effective e.g. through place-based approach of the EU and monitoring obligations

- regional development not as holistic and societal approach
  - dominance of economic understanding and measurement
  - little room for alternative paths of development
Objectives of regional and local development

- ‘What kind of local and regional development and for whom?’
  - understandings of 'development' beyond economic growth
  - acknowledging diverse (spatial) potentials of development beyond agglomeration
  - promote alternative types of development
  - integrate social, ecological, political and cultural concerns in approaches to development

- Contribution to territorial cohesion, balanced spatial development and spatial justice
  - addressing uneven social and spatial development
  - providing good living conditions and wellbeing in different spatial settings

Territorial Cohesion and regional policy in CEE

- patterns of institutional re-organisation
  - decentralisation (transition-phase) and regionalisation (pre-accession) providing different opportunities for institutional development
  - re-centralisation (post-accession) as a result of neoliberalising reforms to EU Regional Policy and the shift to economic performance objectives
    - institutional capacities to implement regional policy are related to stability which has been lacking in CEE

- policy makers were favouring market-led reforms as sharp contrast to the state-led planning experiences of socialism
  - need to discuss more openly about normative foundations of development and potential alternatives
Avenues for changing regional policies?

Conclusions and policy recommendations
Conclusions

- **CEE currently characterised by**
  - furthering spatial polarisation in multiple dimensions and at multiple scales
  - polarisation is reinforced by cognitive stigmatisation or favouring resulting from images
  - regional policies driven by the paradigm of competitiveness and growth

- **polarisation approach re-directs research interest to**
  - societal processes leading to the creation/reproduction of peripheries and cores instead of structural forces and determinants in particular regions
  - with particular policy implications to balance current societal (and political) meta-trends
Challenges

- regional policy paradox
  - vs. overestimation of the relevance of regional policy
- fixed regimes of ERDF
  - blueprint contents and monitoring
  - time horizons for change
- dominant/hegemonial paradigms of regional development
  - leaving little room for experimentation and policy innovation
- often lacking organisational stability and capacity
  - in particular in peripheralised regions
Policy implications I

- re-connect cohesion policy to cohesion
  - with wider participation in the policy design stage
- increase participation of local and regional actors within national/regional policy-making processes
  - more room for local solutions and innovation
  - reduce the required documentation and bureaucratic procedures related to funding applications for local actors
- national level engagement for supportive infrastructures at regional and local levels
  - creating supportive environments for locally based development
Policy implications II

- increase professional capacities at the local level
  - allow for training and educational activities within every project financed by the European Union
  - prioritise initiatives and projects that utilise local resources

- Promote policy-making and programming at the local level
  - counterbalance hierarchic policy making in EU and national-level authorities
  - offer local communities the possibility to design and propose projects or programmes for implementation
  - allow larger flexibility in fund usage at the local level (e.g. through participative budgeting)
  - accept for consideration (alternative) projects and proposals that go beyond the established frameworks
Contact:
Thilo Lang, Leibniz-Institut für Länderkunde
T_Lang@IfL-Leipzig.de

further reading:
Lang/ Görmar: Regional and Local Development in Times of Polarisation, Palgrave 2019
open access