



Leibniz Institute for Regional Geography

# 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

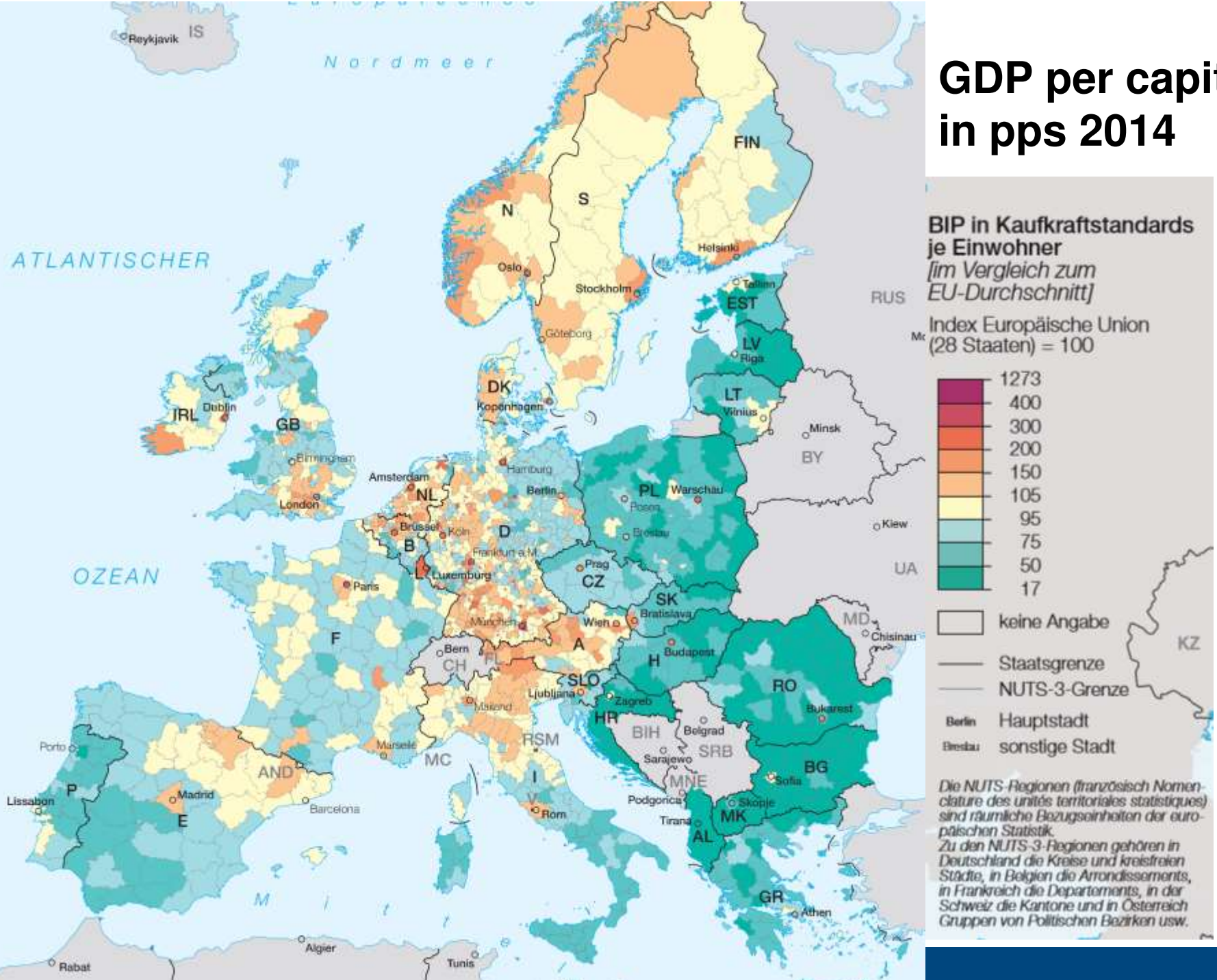
observations in spatial development

source:

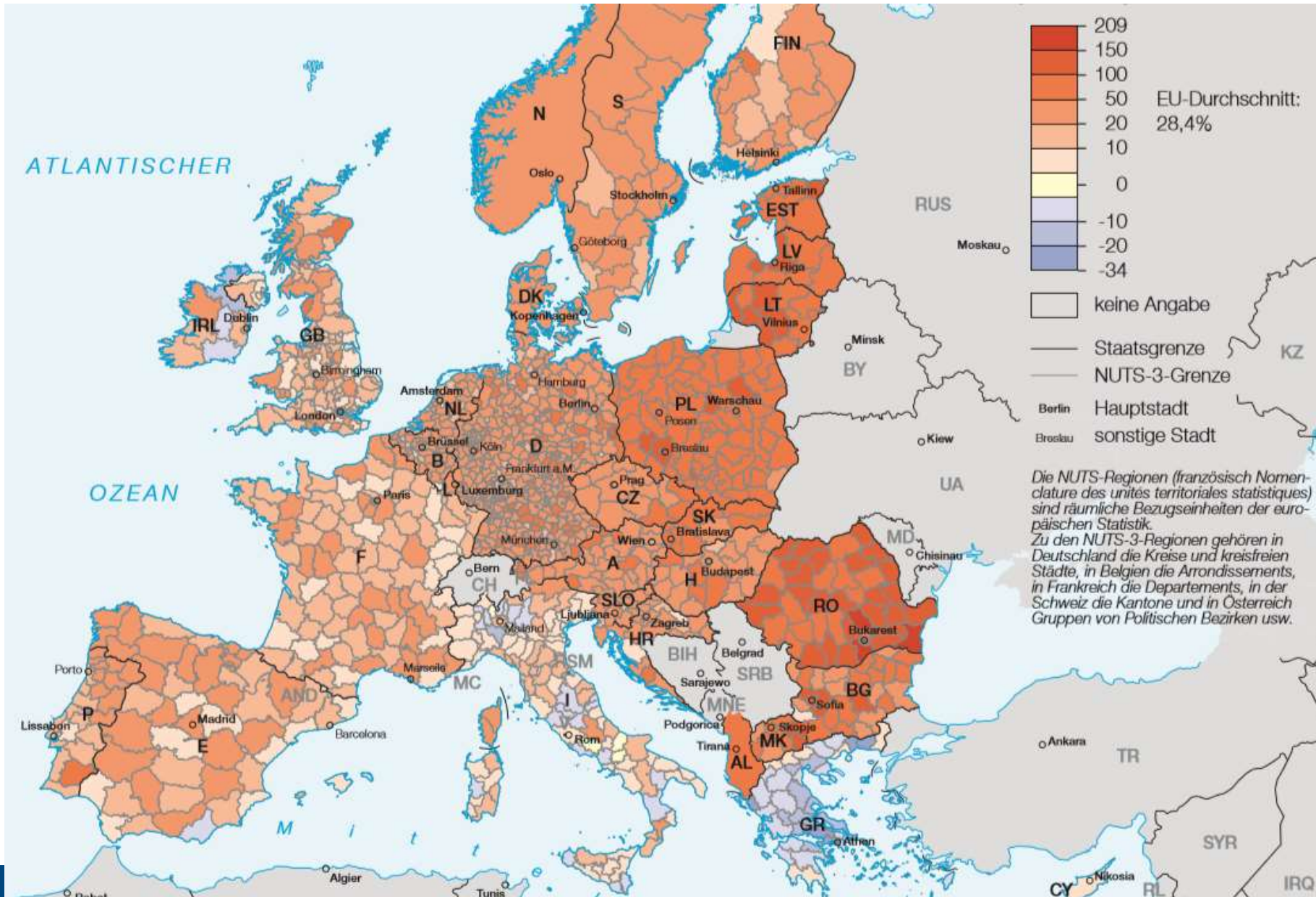
RegPol<sup>2</sup>: Socio-economic and Political Responses to Regional Polarisation (FP7)



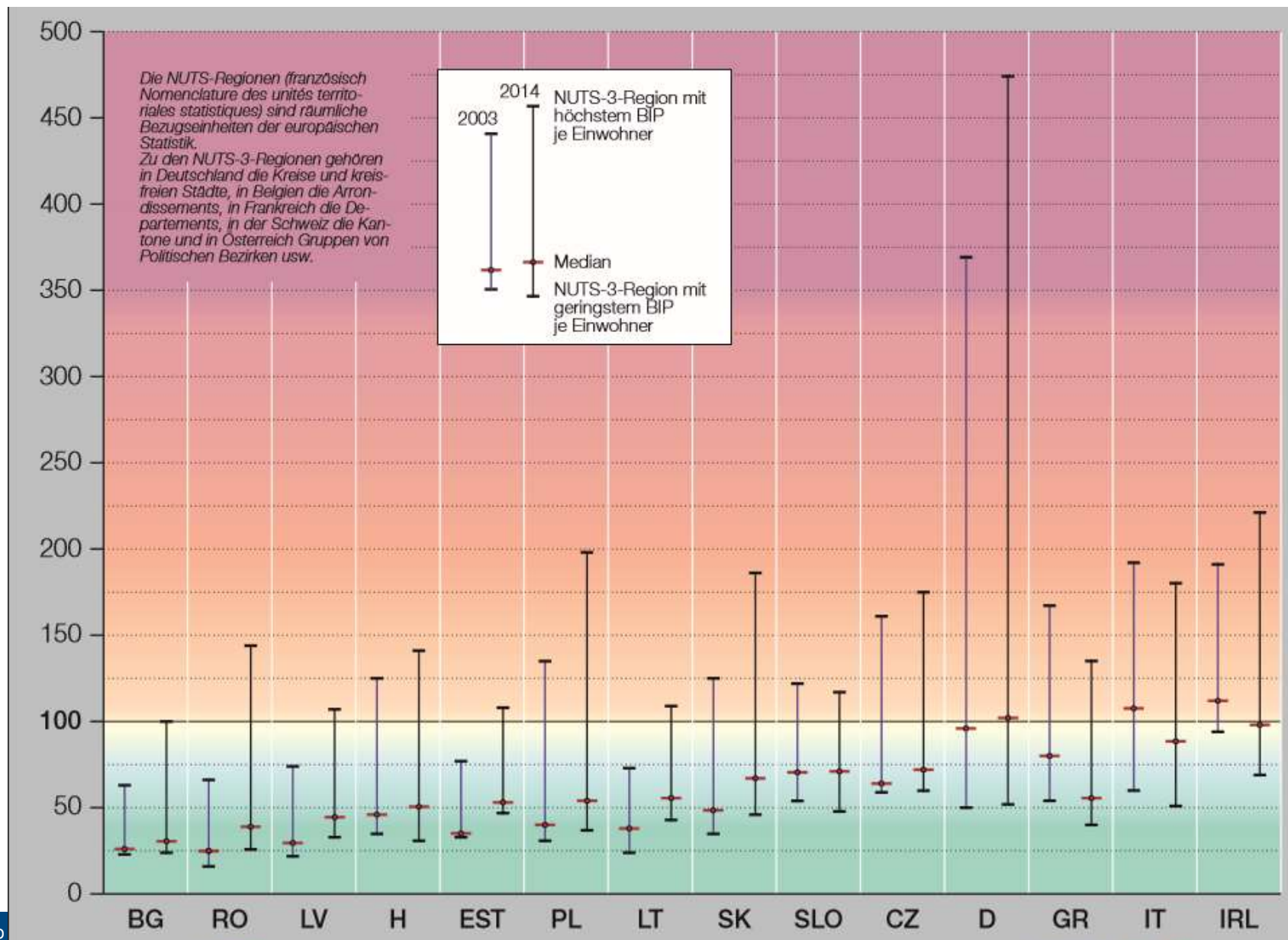
# GDP per capita in pps 2014



# GDP per capita 2014 compared to 2003

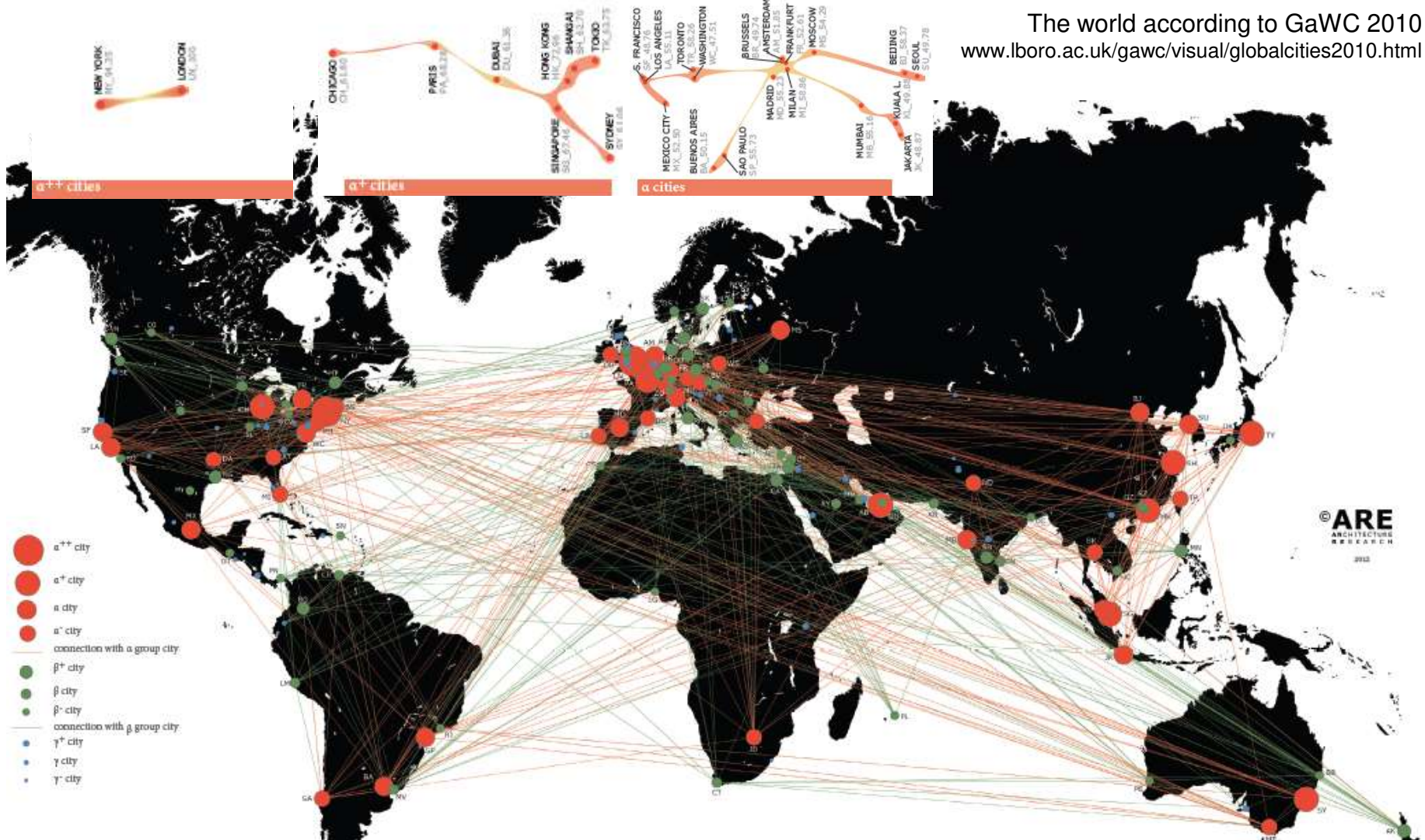


# Regional GDP per capita in PPS 2003 and 2014 in CEE



# globalisation challenges: speedy internationalisation, global integration, new forms of peripheries?

The world according to GaWC 2010  
[www.lboro.ac.uk/gawc/visual/globalcities2010.html](http://www.lboro.ac.uk/gawc/visual/globalcities2010.html)

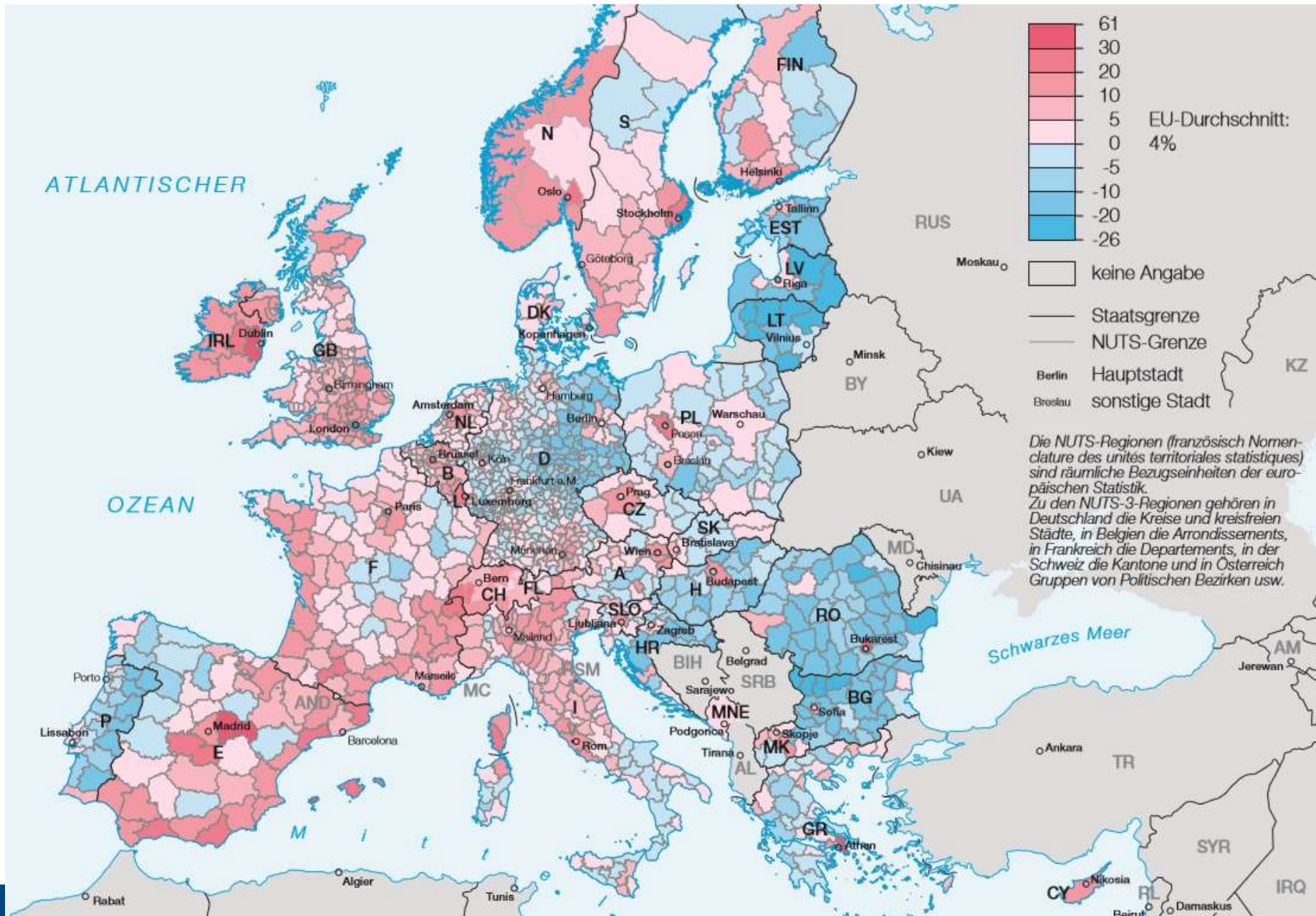


# Understanding economic development: regional disparities

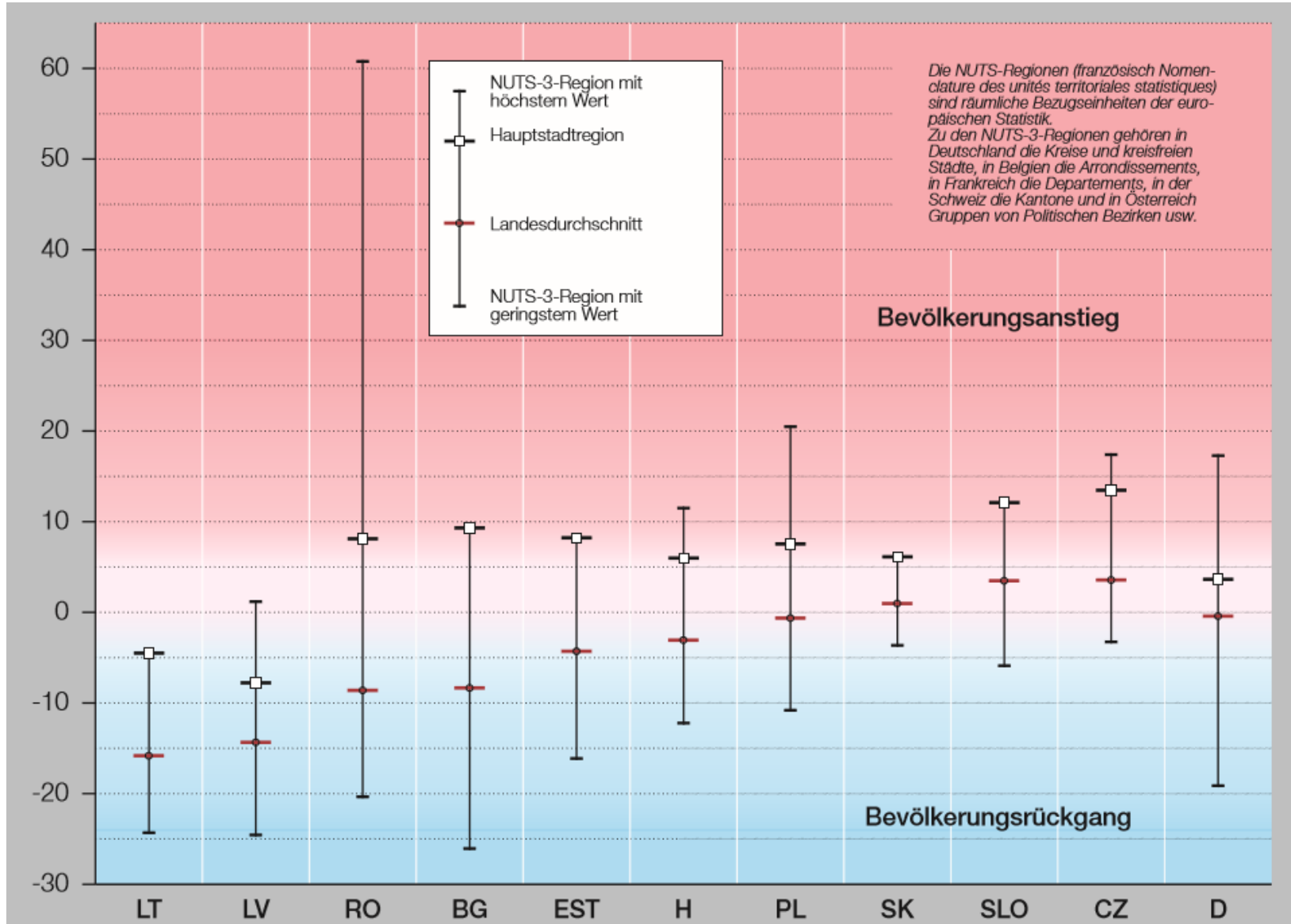
- uneven ec. development
  - national level cohesion with regional level increase of disparities
  - BUT difficulties in and limitations to measuring
  - GDP per capita in pps only one potential indicator
  - dominance of economic understanding and measurement (gap-approach)
    - no way for alternative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

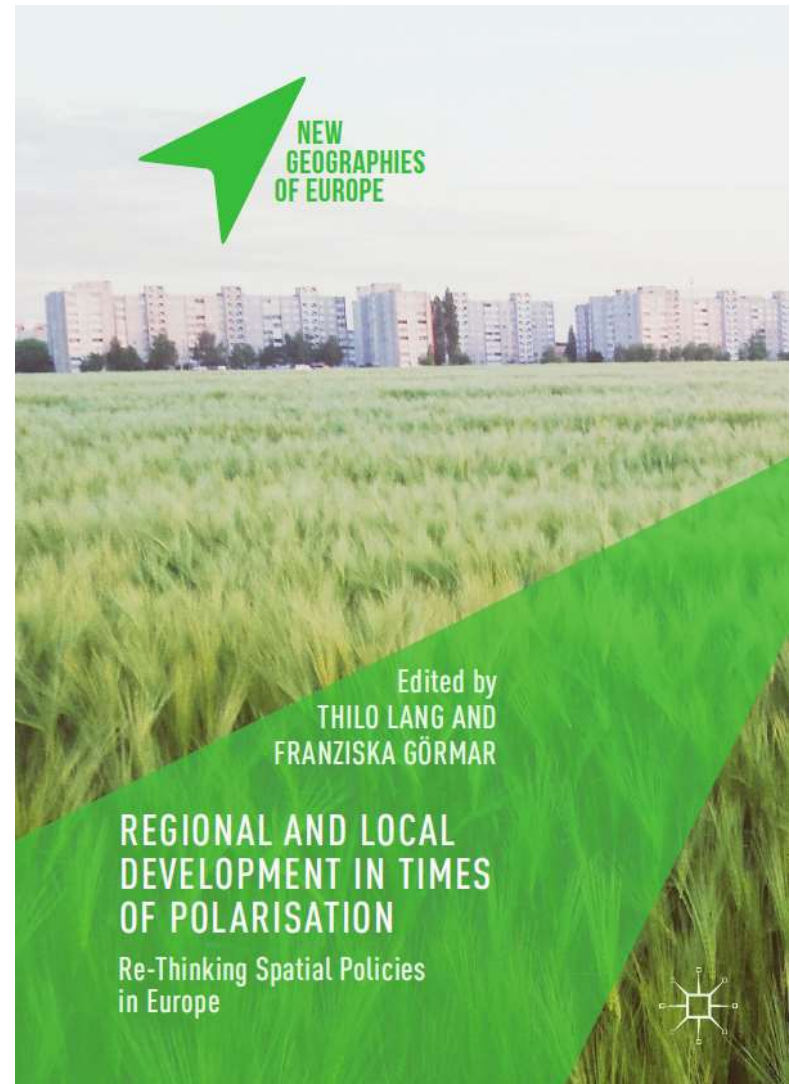
- peripheralisation and centralisation as (relative)
  - economic slowdown or growth
  - (relative) loss or gain of importance (e.g. population, jobs)
  - systemic (dis-)integration (e.g. infrastructure)
  - loss or gain of power and growing (in)dependence
  - socio-structural development and their perception 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



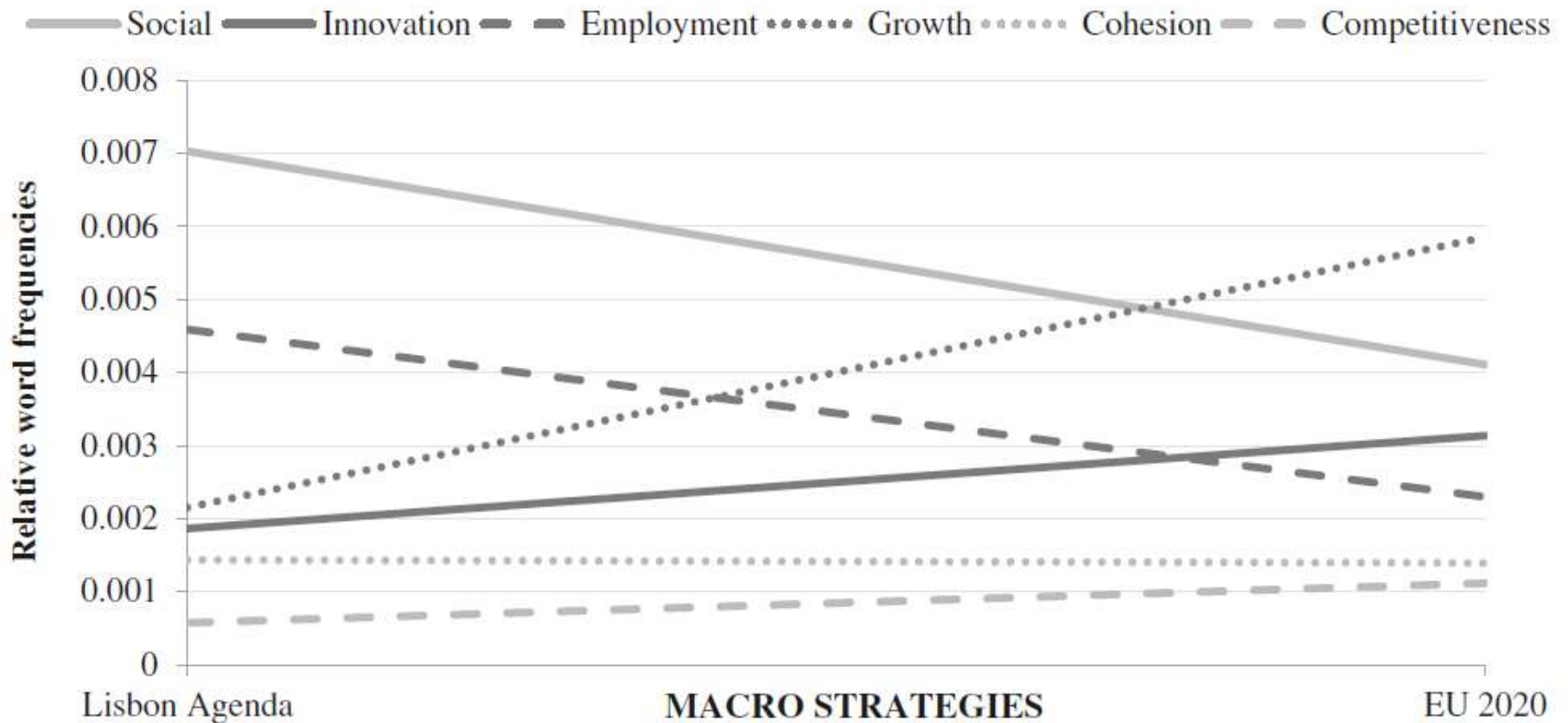
# Understanding and Politicising Core-Periphery-Relations – some theoretical thoughts

- 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 focussing 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
  - responsabilisation 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

Pike et al. 2007, *Regional Studies*, Vol. 41.9, pp. 1253–1269 and 2017, *Regional Studies*, 51:1, 46-57

# 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



# LEIBNIZ-INSTITUT FÜR LÄNDERKUNDE

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- 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