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Contemporary borders of Eastern Poland on historical maps

Introduction

The term *Eastern Poland* has been widely used by plentiful researchers, spatial planners, politicians and by the media and has been usually intuitively understood properly. However, each time it sounds, a reflection concerning its real spatial extent should be made, for it has not been set in an undisputed way. Depending on diverse factors, first of all on the adopted aims of a given debate, boundaries of Eastern Poland are drawn in many different manners. Some of the perspectives are based on economic variables and their spatial diversification, other ones exploit political rationale, also statistical, geographical or cultural purposes may stay behind the delimitation of Eastern Poland.

The main goal of the hereby paper is a confrontation of Eastern Poland concept based on administrative division of the country with historical delimitations that are visible on political maps of Poland from the past. Among questions raised, the adherence of Mazowieckie Province¹ to Eastern Poland seems to be the most important.

Eastern Poland – the perspective of the goals

The exist abundant criteria of delimitation of any spatial units that have not been predefined, unlike states or administrative units with usually precisely fixed borders. Eastern Poland is one of such undefined units, therefore plentiful delimitation criteria may be applied in this case². From geographical point of view Eastern Poland may be distinguished on the map of the country as a region. Therefore, regionalization criteria and understanding of a region itself may be set as starting point of the discussion. However, even within geographical analysis there is not a single approach. Region may be understood first as a research tool that

¹ Mazowieckie Province is one of the administrative units of the first order in Poland. Provinces are also called *voivodships* (from Polish name: województwa).

² In many countries a line of regional division focuses researchers' attention. E.g., for Hungarian case related to Polish one see A. Schmidt, *Counties or regions? Some remarks to the question of regional development in Hungary and Poland*. [In:] *Europa XXI. 14. Core and peripheral regions in central and eastern Europe*, eds T. Komornicki, K. Czapiewski, Warszawa 2006, p. 153-164.

brings about a foundation of spatial analysis and then analytical-explorative regionalization lets distinguish regions as a result of applying various criteria. Region may also be used as a tool of operation so as to enable spatial organization of a state (practical regionalization) or be treated as *objectively* existing being that forms an object of research (structural regionalization)³. The latest perspective is interestingly developed by Dumolard: “regions exist independently from researchers; they should discover, not create them”⁴.

Although most geographers recommend structural regionalization as the most legitimate, pointing to spatial isolation or individuality of physiographic character of particular regions as the most important criteria of regional delimitation, on other scientific grounds these measures are marginalized or even rejected. Economic perspective adopts economic distinctiveness as the most important measure, sociological analyses expose social capital as one of the leading criteria⁵, ethnographers are interested first of all in ethnic separateness of areas in question, statistical purposes justify creation of units that enable efficient collection and comparability of regional data, while historians emphasize the common past as fundamental basis of delimitation⁶. However, quite often political criteria hidden behind administrative division of the country prevail, because these are political prerequisites that decide about regional structure of the country. Later on, they influence its socio-economic reality. In case of Poland it is clearly visible in the EU-funded program *The Development of Eastern Poland*⁷, addressed to selected first-level administrative units. The provinces that were labeled *Eastern* for the purposes of this program are as follows: Podkarpackie, Lubelskie, Podlaskie, Warmińsko-Mazurskie and Świętokrzyskie (see fig.1).

From geographical point of view this selection does not necessarily seem to be appropriate. If the geometrical centre of Poland, located in the village of Piątek, is connected with the most distant locations in the “corners” of the country territory, then only Lubelskie Province in its whole extent falls within eastern sector of the country, while Warmińsko-Mazurskie stays beyond and three remaining provinces belong only partly to the East. What is worthwhile, most of Mazowieckie Province and a part of Łódzkie Province in this geometrical delimitation belong to the East. However, in case of a development debate, where

³ Z. Chojnicki, T. Czyż, *Region i regionalizacja w geografii*. [In:] *Region, regionalizm. Pojęcia, i rzeczywistość*, ed. K. Handke, Sławistyczny Ośrodek Wydawniczy, Warszawa, p. 15.

⁴ P. Dumolard, *Le concept de la region: ambiquities, paradoxes ou contradictions?*, Reims 1980, p. 41-42. [After:] Z. Chojnicki, T. Czyż, *op. cit.*, p. 21, transl. WJ.

⁵ K. Janc, *Human and social capital in Poland – spatial diversity and relations*. [In:] *Europa XXI. 14. op. cit.*, p. 39-56.

⁶ R. Szul, *Some problems of regionalisms in contemporary Europe with special reference to Eastern Europe*. [In:] *Regional question in Europe. Question regionale en Europe*, eds G. Gorzelak, B. Jałowiecki, Warszawa 1993, p. 343-368.

⁷ Program Operacyjny *Rozwój Polski Wschodniej*

the East and the West are almost synonymous with the less and the better developed part of the country, a division of Poland into four parts loses ground to the benefit of two-element division. In this case, the meridian of 19°08'E is the line of separation and all five provinces mentioned above accompanied by Mazowieckie and Małopolskie Provinces belong to the East (see fig.1).

Fig.1. Eastern Poland as seen from various perspectives: [1] *The Development of Eastern Poland*; [2] division of Poland into four parts based on geometrical central point; [3] geographical division into two parts based on central meridian.

Source: own elaboration

Such a geometrical approach does not meet the need of regional analysis that aims at creation of foundation for comparative analysis of *Tripple Mezzogiorno* regions: Southern Italy, Eastern Germany and Eastern Poland^{8, 9}. The German case seems to be very clear: state border of pre-unification times separates the country into two parts: better and less developed. At the same time the division line and the names of both parts are in accordance with geographical understanding of space. In Italy similar measures are adopted and also South means South. A brief look at the map of Poland reveals, that apart from five provinces labeled Eastern, a significant part of the geographical East in Poland has not been included into Eastern Poland. Especially the easternmost part of Mazowieckie Province, almost bordering Belarus, remained a part of the second element of the duality of Poland, therefore a part of the West (see fig.1). Not only geographical, but also economic, social and cultural preconditions prompt to raising objections to this concept. However, it still remains unclear, whether there exist historical prerequisites that would justify exclusion of Mazowieckie Province from Eastern Poland or not.

Before detailed investigation of historical belonging of Mazowieckie Province is conducted, it seems reasonable to stipulate, that historical variable is closely intertwined with other variables and it is not intended to disrupt these ties. On the contrary, exposing such interconnections is expected to support legitimacy of the analysis. Interdependence of

⁸ Spatial polarization is observed in most, if not all European countries. For an exemplary analysis of the Czech Republic see M. Marada, P. Chromy, V. Jancak, T. Havlicek, *Space polarisation and peripheral regions in Czechia*. [In:] *Europa XXI. 15. Regional periphery in central and eastern Europe*, eds T. Komornicki, K. Czapiewski, Warszawa 2006, p.29-34.

⁹ The European Union has also its core and peripheral areas; see S. Kusar, *CONSPACE Region – a counter balance to spatial polarization in the European Union*. [In:] *Europa XXI. 14, op. cit.*, p. 219-231; see also T. Siwek, *Czech Silesia: a periphery of the Czech State*. [In:] *Europa XXI. 15, op. cit.*, p. 145-150.

historical preconditions and regional policy is visible in the pattern of administrative division of Poland into provinces after 1918, which clearly followed partition-time location of borders. A reform of this division, that was planned in mid-twenties and was never implemented, was based on historical borders of pre-partition time^{10,11}. This effort was driven by conviction that regional development differences should be wiped out. However, inter-war period was too short to enable successful eradication of partition-time differences in level of economic development of Poland, so also after 1945 similar trials were undertaken. The dynamics in industrialization measured with the use of percentage increase of number of employed in 1975 related to 1946 in many eastern provinces exceeded 1000, while in the western part of Poland was usually smaller than 375%¹². Despite these efforts, till now diversification of economic activity in Poland to a significant extent follows late 18th century patterns¹³. Also geographical variable has a say in historical analysis. Wherever the borders of present Eastern Poland are placed, during much of the history of Poland these areas clearly formed western part of the country (see fig.2).

Fig.2. Present Eastern Poland on the map of Poland A.D. 1630.

Source: own elaboration

Mazowieckie Province as a part of Eastern Poland?

Mazowieckie is the largest and the most populous province in Poland. In its present borders it exists since 1999, when a reform of administrative regime of the country was introduced. As many researches point out, the division into 16 provinces and also the course of particular province borders is an effect of political encounter, not a result of scientific analysis heading for discovery of *objective* regions based on their internal socio-economic interconnections^{14,15,16}. At least southern edge of Mazowieckie Province with Radom and

¹⁰ A. Kowalczyk, *Dotychczasowe doświadczenia i aktualny stan prac badawczych nad reform podziału Polski na regiony*. [In:] G. Gorzelak, B. Jałowiecki (eds), *Czy Polska będzie państwem regionalnym?* Studia Regionalne i Lokalne, Europejski Instytut Rozwoju Regionalnego i Lokalnego, Warszawa 1993, p. 104-107.

¹¹ S. Alexandrowicz, *Różne pojęcia historii regionalnej i możliwości jej uprawiania*. [In:] *Region, regionalizm. Pojęcia i rzeczywistość*, ed. K. Handke, Sławistyczny Ośrodek Wydawniczy, Warszawa 1993, p.38.

¹² B. Kortus, *Wstęp do geografii przemysłu*, PWN, Warszawa 1986, p. 64.

¹³ B. Jałowiecki, *Oblicza polskich regionów*, Studia Regionalne i Lokalne, Europejski Instytut Rozwoju Regionalnego i Lokalnego, Warszawa 1996, p. 9.

¹⁴ G. Gorzelak, *Regionalizm i regionalizacja w Polsce na tle europejskim*. [In:] G. Gorzelak, B. Jałowiecki (eds.), *op. cit.*, p. 66.

¹⁵ A. Miszczuk, *Regionalizacja administracyjna III Rzeczypospolitej. Koncepcje teoretyczne a rzeczywistość*. Wydawnictwo UMCS, Lublin 2003, p. 7-10.

eastern part of it wedging between two neighboring provinces, Lubelskie and Podlaskie, seem not to be natural parts of Mazowieckie. Detailed examination of persistence of province borders in Poland reveals, that only north-western part of Mazowieckie border has its roots in history, while south-western and southern border hardly existed in the past (see fig.3). It confirms that Mazowieckie in its present territorial shape is an artificial upgrowth.

Fig.3. Persistence of present province borders over ten centuries of the history of Poland¹⁷.

Source: own elaboration

In-depth analysis of changes of Polish territory over ten centuries, since the very beginning of Polish statehood until now, provides additional information concerning location of Mazowieckie Province on the map of the country. During most of the time until mid-14th century vast majority of the area of present Mazowieckie Province was located in the eastern part of Poland. Since late 14th till late 16th century consecutive documents tightening union between the Kingdom of Poland and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania were signed, therefore the effective jurisdiction of common head of the state was extended to both countries that finally formed a semi-federal state with real union after the Union of Lublin in 1569. Present area of Mazowieckie Province was located in the western part of this large state. However, deep past of Piast dynasty has minuscule significance for present-day reality and consideration of what is Eastern Poland, when compared with modern history. For that reason further consideration will be limited to a period of last two hundred years, starting from late 18th century.

The three partitions in 1772, 1793 and 1795 torn Poland apart among three powers of Russia, Prussia and Austria. Most of present Mazowieckie Province with Warsaw city became

¹⁶ W. Janicki, K. Łucjan, *Przebieg granic regionów historycznych, a współczesne granice administracyjne w Polsce*. [In:] *Geografia historyczna jako determinanta rozwoju nauk humanistycznych*, ed. M. Kulesza, PWSZ im. Witelona w Legnicy, Legnica 2009, p. 111.

¹⁷ The map has been developed as a result of overlapping 21 historical maps representing the whole of the statehood of Poland since 990 to 1993 and comparing them with the present administrative division of Poland. Eleven periods of the history of Poland were recognized: first kings of the Piast dynasty (990, 1025, 1040), beginning of fragmentation period (1138), trials of reunification (mid-13th century), latest Piast dynasty kings (1320, 1370), republic of nobility (mid-15th century), Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth (1600), partitions (1772, 1793, 1795), the Napoleonic period and the Congress Poland (1807, 1809, 1815, 1830), interwar Poland (1930), People's Republic (1944, 1951, 1960, 1975). Sources: *Atlas historyczny Polski*, 1996, eds W.Czapliński, T.Ładogórski, PPWK, Warszawa-Wrocław; *Atlas historyczny do 1815 roku*, 2004, eds J.Tazbir, S.Kryciński, Wydawnictwo Demart; *Atlas historyczny 1815-1939*, 2000, eds J.Tazbir, S.Kryciński, Wydawnictwo Demart; *Kleiner Atlas zur deutschen Territorial Geschichte*, 1991, B.Jähmig, L.Biewer, Kulturstiftung der deutschen Vertriebenen; *Diercke Schul-Atlas 1900*, Braunschweig, George Westermann; *Andrees Neuer Allgemeiner und Österreichisch-Ungarischer Handatlas*, 1904, A.Scobel, Verlag von Moritz Perles, Wien. For further details see W. Janicki, K. Łucjan, *op. cit.*, p.114-115.

a part of Prussian Kingdom with remaining, south-eastern part that was occupied by Habsburg Empire. The extent of Russian rule followed Bug River, so present state border of Poland (see fig.4). Though, shortly after, with Napoleon conquests and his final fall, the Kingdom of Poland was created in 1815. It was known as Congress Poland and subordinated to Russia. Congress Poland borders, despite gradual decline of its autonomy, formally lasted without significant changes until World War I and the Mazowieckie was the heart of its territory. Partition time has immensely influenced the present economic and social situation of Poland. Among the main reasons, differences between industrialization of Prussia and two other powers and their development policy should be recalled. To date it is clearly visible e.g. in density of railroads in Poland. Hence, the whole of Congress Poland and areas occupied by Austrians may be considered underdeveloped and present Mazowieckie was a part of this territory.

Fig.4. Eastern Provinces of Poland on the background of the changing extent of Poland over centuries since 990 to 2010.

Source: own elaboration

After World War I Poland reappeared on the political map of Europe. On its territory huge developmental differences were visible. It is enough to say, that in most of former Prussia-occupied areas illiteracy level was kept below 5%, while on most post-Russian territory it exceeded 40%, with central Polesie Region where it exceeded 55%¹⁸. This and many other indicators enabled creation of two symbolic Polands: *A-Poland*, with about half of the population and vast majority of industrial production representing overall development, and *B-Poland*, underdeveloped, eastern part of the country (see fig.5). The division line separated nine eastern provinces from seven remaining ones and only northeastern- and easternmost part of present Mazowieckie belonged to B-Poland (see fig.4).

Fig.5. A-Poland and B-Poland in numbers (in 1925).

Source: Wielki Atlas Historyczny, Wyd. Demart, Warszawa, 2005. simplified. Numbers are rounded estimates.

¹⁸ D. Granoszevska-Babiańska, D. Ostapowicz, S. Suchodolski, *Historia. Dzieje społeczeństwa i gospodarki. Cz. I. Nowa Era*, Warszawa 2003, s.49.

World War II shifted Poland westwards. Compared with inter-war period, Poland lost its easternmost, most underdeveloped parts, while annexed western, formerly German territories characterized by relatively high level of development. The overall spatial gradient of affluence and economic development level did not change: the East was still the least and the West was the best developed part of the country. Hereafter the clock turned back – the area of present Mazowieckie Province becomes again a part of the East, like in Piast dynasty times. Although still in the same place in space, over centuries the present area of Mazowieckie Province wandered on the map of Poland. Depending on present external shape and location of the state, it was located either in the eastern, central or western part of Poland.

Conclusions

The name of Eastern Poland is usually used as synonymous to B-Poland or less developed part of the country, when compared with Western Poland. Drawing unambiguously a separation line between these two parts of Poland on the basis of the detailed examination of historical maps is not possible, especially when present province borders are expected to be used for this purpose. It seems clear, that these borders do not correspond to the historical borders of what may be called Eastern Poland. Even if the analysis is restricted to modern times, Mazowieckie shifts from the West (in the beginning of partition time), then to the East of Congress Poland, then again to the West of inter-war Poland, and finally to the East of present-day country.

However, the most influential period for the present economic diversification of Poland seems to be partition time, and especially the borders of Congress Poland are still clearly visible in socio-economic reality of Poland. North-western part of Mazowieckie border is one of the strongest relict borders in Poland¹⁹. Both these days and at present Mazowieckie is located in the eastern part of the country, so including it into *Eastern Poland* seems legitimate. Economic variables that expose high position of Mazowieckie Province on the regional map of Poland are misleading, because there exists large disparity between the city and agglomeration of Warsaw, being one of the strongest growth centers in Poland, and the remaining part of Mazowieckie Province. Exclusion of Warsaw from Mazowieckie seems to open new analytical possibilities – division into Eastern Poland, Western Poland and the city of Warsaw smoothly combines historical background, its socio-cultural consequences and economic diversification of Poland. To some extent it reminds the case of Belgium, where

¹⁹ M. Barwiński, *The electoral space of Poland – political, historical, social and cultural conditions*. [In:] T. Siwek, V. Baar (eds), *Globalisation and its impact on localities*, Ostrawa 2008, p. 63.

Flanders, Wallonia and the capital region of Brussels constitute three main units of the country, serving for the purpose of administrative, economic, statistical and historical analyses.

Summary

Eastern Poland has found its meaning in collective mind as a term used to describe five provinces (voivodships) that gain additional development incentives from European Union funds (*The Development of Eastern Poland*). This approach seems to be disputable, first of all because of geographical reasons. History does not support it, either – present administrative borders of provinces in Poland are not grounded in their past and only a fraction of their course follows their historical location. Many prerequisites support incorporation of additional parts of Poland into a notion of *Eastern Poland*, and Mazowieckie Province seems to be the most legitimate candidate. Detailed investigation of historical maps of Poland reveals, that at least northeastern- and easternmost part of present Mazowieckie Province historically belongs to Eastern Poland. However, if provinces are regarded basic units of division, than including the whole of Mazowieckie Province into Eastern Poland seems to much better reflect geographical and historical variables than the present approach. The conceptual problem of relatively high economic advancement of Mazowieckie, opposite to five other provinces, may be solved with exclusion of the city of Warsaw from Eastern Poland and creation of another analytical unit. A division into Eastern Poland, Western Poland and the city of Warsaw smoothly combines historical background, its socio-cultural consequences and economic diversification of Poland and may further serve for economic, statistical and historical analyses.