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## Theories of regional and local development - abridged review

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## **THEORIES OF REGIONAL AND LOCAL DEVELOPMENT – ABRIDGED REVIEW**

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### **INTRODUCTION**

The more fluid national state borders become under the influence of globalisation shaping the world system, the more importance gains the role and position of regions. The currently common tendency in Europe to regionalise the role of national space and to “create” regions signals and emphasises the importance of regional (and local) socio-economic systems, not only in the European regions (Castells, 2000; Domański, Marciniak, 2003; Kukliński, 2003; Parysek, 1997).

The differentiation and separation of regions are long-term processes, strongly determined by the stability of their context. This testifies to the essential need for ongoing observation and record of socio-economic reality on the regional or local scale as the basis for predicting future development, especially in the context of the European discourse of endogenous development. The numerous voices regarding the regions’ new tasks, the role of regionalism, and the form of regional policy can more and more frequently appear in the global-local relation.

The neo-regionalist ideology as a reaction to the effects of the contact between local and global processes gave rise to a new regionalism in Europe which directly addresses the questions of state functioning and influence, socio-economic development, and cultural and identity problems as factors in economic development. There is a tendency to re-define the concept of regionalism so as to expose the social and economic rules of a given territory and to relegate folk accents into the background.

Hence, the region is not treated as a territorial or historical unit, or a cultural niche, but it aspires to the role of a functionally alternative structure (a social

field) which may take over some state roles and which may function in the world economy as a semi-independent unit while retaining an identity redefined from the regional identity of the inhabitants of the little homeland into a pragmatic identity of the region, which can be translated into economic acts and marketing attractiveness for investors and which can create a new image of the region.

Such development conditions of regions should be related to two theoretical approaches:

1. the classic concept of regional development,
2. the concept of endogenous regional development.

This paper offers an overview of the above concepts; a survey of the known, frequently applied theories and concepts is followed by the presentation of the more recent trends used to describe the current conditions.

## CLASSICAL THEORIES OF REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT

**The concept of economic base** is the most popular among the theories. It explains the development of a region by dividing the economy into two types of activity (egzogenous and endogenous) and by determining the causal relations occurring in the process of the development of a region (Isard, 1965). According to the theory, the egzogenous (export) activities are fundamental and constitute the economic basis of the region as the demand for goods and services stimulates the region's economic development and shapes its role and distinctive features in the social and spatial division of labour (Jerczyński, 1977; Maik, 1997; Matczak, Szymańska, 1997).

Sectors of economy and companies involved in export activities initiate a multiplication mechanism among cooperating companies and related sectors active in the domestic market. Therefore, the egzogenous sector stimulates other internal elements of the regional economy, the so called endogenous sector, strictly related to the basic (egzogenous) one. Malecki (1997) states that the recommendations for local government based on this theory propose actions attracting investors competitive in domestic and international markets that operate in the economy or service sectors supporting technological modernisation. Malizia and Feser (1999) emphasise the primary importance of supporting export activities of regional producers. This becomes a matter of dispute as some researchers think that regionalised specialisation should be increased and the branch representative of a given region should be supported. However, this option is dangerous for traditional regions where the declining heavy industry dominates. Other specialists assume it is necessary to diversify the egzogenous base and to develop new economic sectors (Malecki, 1997).

The simplicity of the assumptions of the theory of the economic base has influenced its popularity, but it has also led to criticism questioning the possibility to describe the development of a region using a model with only few variables (Wróbel, 1980). Additionally, it should be noted that the concept does not form a homogenous theoretical system as it has been simultaneously developed in many countries; therefore, according to Dziewoński (1967), it is rather a mixture of various ideas whose interdependencies are difficult to explain.

**The new theory of trade** valorizes the role of export activities in regional development and explains the mechanisms of benefits in the global economy coming from trade between countries at different stages of development. Answers are sought in the specialisation of production in various regions concerning their time and capital consumption. Hence, regions rich in capital, export capital consuming products, while regions rich in labour force export time-consuming products.

Malizia and Feser (1999) stress that potential trade exchange between such regions is more advantageous for the capital consuming ones. Therefore, local governments in poorer regions should support not only export and free international trade, but also their infrastructural and institutional investments (especially financial institutions) and specialised education (Szajnowska-Wysocka, Kulesza, 2007).

**The basic product theory**, which explains long-term factors of economic growth, refers to the concept of economic base. According to the theory, regional development is achieved through gradual specialisation of selected products, competitive on the foreign markets. The profits from product specialization are achieved thanks to improving the organization of production and lowering the cost of economic transactions (Landes, 2000).

The tasks that this theory envisages for all administrative authorities involve strengthening the specialisation trend, investing in infrastructure (telecommunication, transport), supporting financial and consulting institutions, and providing services for business and education (Grosse, 2002).

The economic, political and social actions of regional authorities are strongly influenced by the orders and suggestions formulated on the basis of geographical regional development (different scales: global, national, regional and local), pointing to the economic benefits coming from the spatial concentration of economic activities.

One of the well-known economic theories is **the concept of growth poles** by F. Perroux. Originally the concept was more economic than spatial as it assumed that economic growth was stimulated by the most developed sectors and branches of industry and by specific enterprises which constitute a kind of growth poles of the whole economy. These poles are characterised by a significantly high

rate of economic development and numerous cooperative connections, as well as the strongest position in world markets. They generate development of economy and make weaker enterprises depend on them (Grzeszczak, 1989).

A growth pole and its relations with the environment create a spatial system called the polarised system. The application of the concept and further research led to its usage to explain the spatial polarisation of regional development, where highly developed regions are the growth poles treated as reference points for the environment. Sectors and branches innovative and competitive in foreign markets are located there. In this way metropolitan areas are created or strengthened; as the growth poles of the region, they dominate over weaker centres and regions. They become competitive for peripheral regions and make them dependent on their economic policy.

Perroux emphasises that the task of local authorities in the polarised system is to create new growth poles and to strengthen the relations (new investments in communication and transport) between metropolis and the region in order to intensify diffusion and stimulation of economic growth (Malizia, Feser, 1999).

Polarised regional development has been also discussed by Hirschman (1958) and Myrdal (1958). According to the former, regional development is irregular and concentrated in the so called geographic centres, from which a diffusion wave of developmental impulses gradually spreads onto the surrounding area. Myrdal (1958), on the other hand, assumes that irregular economic growth is the result of long-term historical, cultural and economic conditions. Hence, developed regions become more progressive as a result of the accumulation effect and poor ones remain passive (Szajnowska-Wysocka, Kulesza 2007).

**The core and peripheries model**, which assumes dichotomy of both regions, is even more popular among economic theories. The centre with capital, authority and knowledge potential, and high cultural standards dominates over the peripheral regions not only in the technological but also in the political and cultural spheres. The peripheries are hierarchically subordinated to the centre in technological, economic, political, cultural and service terms. The relations between the core and the peripheries are neither balanced nor equal.

The core and peripheries models appeared in economic literature at the same time as the polarised concepts (the theory of growth poles). The main difference between them concerns the economic category of the points of reference. The authors of the core and peripheries models referred to disproportions in development on a global scale (concerning especially poorly developed regions), while the authors of the polarised concepts concentrated on differences in development of highly developed regions (Dutkowski, 1994; Rykiel, 1997; Szul, 1988).

The approach proposed by Friedmann suggests that the flow of technological and cultural innovations, controlled by the centre, is the main factor contributing

to disproportions in development. Core regions are defined as economic centres with the greatest potential for change and they are located in places of strong influence, while development is treated as an innovative process (production and services provided by the most competitive enterprises), located in large metropolitan centres. (Friedmann, Alonso, 1964). The centres dominate the peripheries (Friedmann J., Alonso W., 1964).

Followers of Friedman's ideas continue discussing the process of centres formation. They believe it to be very dynamic because it is determined by innovation trends (new technologies and industrial branches). Hence, the dialectics of the relation between centre and peripheries demonstrates that in a historical context at a specific stage of development of civilisation, the centres may be downgraded to the peripheral role. This concerns especially the centres based on heavy industry, like for example the region of Silesia which, previously the core of national economy, currently, as a traditional centre with structural dysfunction, is becoming a periphery (Szajnowska-Wysocka, 1999a, 2005). Also, in favourable conditions, peripheries may gradually take on the features of an economic centre and in the distance from the centre may acquire a transitional, semi-peripheral (borderland) character. The problem was analysed by K. Heffner (2003) who emphasised that the system with leading regions (centres) and slower developing peripheries is dynamic and cannot be treated as something given and unchangeable.

Moreover, attention should be paid to the geographical relativity of the concepts of centre and periphery, which makes their identification dependent on the spatial scale. What appears as a periphery on the national scale, may be seen as the centre in the local or regional scale, and vice versa: a national centre may be the periphery of world economy. Modern economy is a system of complementary structural components such as: core – world centre, semi-peripheries and peripheries.

The applications of **the concepts of regional innovation networks** are documented in professional literature. The most popular ones are those based on the experience from network organisation in Silicon Valley in California and in the Italian industrial regions called the "Third Italy". The Italian experience and the results of the research group GREMI (Groupe de Recherche Européen Surles Milieux Innovateurs) reflect the dynamic model of an innovative environment, emphasising the role of local environments as generators of innovative behaviour. Particular regions and enterprises must be open to radical changes, they should be ready for the new process of "creative forgetting" about uncompetitive products and technologies, to participate in a cumulative process of creative "learning". Modernisation of fixed capital alone is not sufficient to stimulate development. Innovation directed at acquiring new production skills is also necessary.

Organised local environments have turned out to be an effective form of economic adaptation to global changes. Small Italian enterprises managed to survive in the global competitive market (they resisted the great international corporations) because the local environment created their strategic role in international markets and close relations between production, technology, finance, exchange and promotion cycles (Domański, Marciniak, 2003).

**The theory of production cycle** needs to be mentioned here as it combines economic development with the process of new products manufacturing, their improvement and standardisation of production. According to this theory, regional development is stimulated by technological innovativeness or creative series of goods and services. The theory assumes economic polarisation between developed and underdeveloped countries. Obviously high quality goods, services and standards are created in the former countries and then they are transferred to the latter ones. The degree to which peripheries depend on developed regions (centres) increases when production of standard products is located in their area. On the other hand, technologically advanced components are rarely produced in the peripheries.

The majority of economists treat technological innovativeness as a basic factor of region's economic development as technological development stimulates economic efficiency, functional modernisation and competitive domination in international markets. Hence, knowledge, technological and technical progress become a factor of regional development (Szajnowska-Wysocka, Kulesza, 2007).

**The theory of flexible production** should be discussed here as well. The basis of the theory was created by A. Marshall who formulated the concept of industrial district as a separated area where specialised production units are located and whose economic structure is based on small and medium-sized enterprises producing for regional market. These are firms operating with local capital, local decisions, and long-term infraregional cooperation. A characteristic feature of industrial district is the mobility of its work-force; the workers are connected with the region rather than with their firm. The producers are supported by high-standard service institutions (especially financial) adjusted to specialised regional production.

On the basis of the above theories, research on the industrial districts of the so-called Third Italy was begun in the 1980s. An Italian scientist, G. Becattani, defined them as enclaves of growth, specialised in leading activity based on small and medium, complementary and closely cooperating family companies. The "network" of cooperation was based on social norms originating from strong historical traditions (Pietrzyk, 2000).

**The concepts of regional (local) innovation networks** (territorial production systems) are related to the above concept. The research group GREMI studied

the influence of local environment on the innovativeness of economic activities; the group assumed that it is determined by a proper institutional structure and network of information and cooperation. GREMI introduced the concept of a “local innovative environment” as an innovation incubator and a “knowledge machine”. They were defined as a net of complex informal, social relations in a given territory, determined by its local identity, culture and tradition. Such a unit strengthens the process of group learning, i.e. an integrated process of producing and spreading information. In this context, the term “learning region” was introduced in the 1990s as a model for group and institutional “learning” used to analyse the phenomena of competitiveness and economic growth of such areas as Silicon Valley, Medical Alley in Minneapolis, Cambridge, space industry in Toulouse (Olejniczak, 2003).

Almost concurrently with the concepts of innovative environments, **the theory of industry clusters** was introduced in the early 1990s by Porter (1990) and Krugman (1991). Krugman used the theory as the basis for the model of the New Trade Theory.

The concept was developed by Porter (1990), who treated industrial clusters as a tool to investigate the competitive advantage in contemporary global economy. He saw the appropriate location of the economic activity as its main factor. Faced with the location paradox: produce locally, sell globally, enterprises concentrate their activity in industrial clusters and form there a network of cooperation and competition. His model of economic development had to fulfil four conditions: production factors, demand, related and co-existing sectors, economic strategy.

According to Porter (2001), industrial clusters are “geographical concentrations of interconnected companies with close supply links, specialist suppliers, service providers, and related industries and institutions (e.g. universities, standardising units and branch associations)” (p. 246). Hence, clusters appear to be a system of integrated enterprises and institutions. The value of a cluster does not comprise the sum of the values of particular elements only but it also takes “added value”. Then, the cluster initiates numerous processes which increase the competitiveness of the location.

At first, Porter (2001) treated the cluster theory as a tool to analyse industry in whole countries (Sweden, Switzerland, the United States), then, when gaining more research experience, he used it to analyse given regions and towns (in New Jersey, in California, at the German-Swiss border). It should be noted that the concept of industrial clusters is stable but not static, as it concerns a development cycle with its beginning, evolutionary growth and decline (Porter, 2001; Olejniczak, 2003; Szajnowska-Wysocka, Kulesza, 2007).

To sum up the theory of industrial clusters, one should emphasize its similarities to Italian industrial districts, French meso-système or Marshall’s industrial

districts. However, significant differences also appear. The clusters differ from industrial regions by their range, i.e. they include even several branches or types of industry, whereas industrial regions one branch or type. The French meso-systèmes are also narrower than the clusters as they cover nets of companies or institutions gathered around one particular product, while the clusters relate to a dozen or so of chains of production. What most differentiates industrial clusters from similar concepts is the factor of competitiveness at every level: local (between cluster companies), national (the whole cluster) and global.

To conclude the brief review of the evolving theories of dependent development, it is necessary to consider the relation between centre and periphery in the context of globalisation and its vision of global order. One should mention the old vision of Fukuyama (1992), which became widely known due to its “end of history” slogan. Even before Fukuyama, the future development of civilisation had been described as, for example, the “third wave” by A. Toffler or D. Bell’s post-industrial society, but for these authors American economy and society were the global point of reference. In the historical moment of F. Fukuyama, when the division of the world had changed, the diffusion of the Western civilisation as the global vision of the triumph of universal ideology, its economy and culture seemed simple. According to his assumption, the general development of civilisation had one aim: the final global state, market-oriented capitalist system, seen as an evolutionary process of modernisation of all societies – a uni-polar world (“the end of history”).

F. Fukuyama’s globalisation paradigm, dominating in the 1990s, was confronted with the pluralistic paradigm of Huntington (1997) who stated that the contemporary requirement of multicultural relations led to the creation of a global, multi-polar world order determined by many powers (the USA, Japan, Russia, China, India) coming from various civilisations. Huntington S. (1997) adopts a critical position with regard to new universal civilization created by globalization as an extension of the Western civilization. He states that, instead of cultural homogenization, we witness the appearance of a growing number of cultural differences which used to be repressed by the power of the West at a time when the conflicts were mostly ideological, not cultural. Currently, with the old conflicts gone, the cultural separateness of the West and “the rest of the world” becomes more visible. According to Huntington (1997), the author of “The Clash of Civilizations”, Western civilisation will never become universal as the Western social systems (capitalism and liberal democracy) are based on cultural codes. The lack of such codes in other civilizations makes it impossible for them to develop Western, universal patterns (Szajnowska-Wysocka, Kulesza, 2007).

The contemporary world as a mosaic of various epochs occurring concurrently in the global space is significantly diversified, hence the vision of a world state

remains a nostalgic longing for a just international order. We witness the birth of the vision in the face of the global catastrophes of the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century and the simultaneous actions of UNESCO aiming at a unified world civilization.

The centre/periphery paradigm continues to function not only in the centre of world economy, but also in its peripheries due to a specialised, mobile, international metropolitan class, which, regardless of race, religion and language, operates on the international labour market. This social group, according to Martin and Schumann's (1999) "a 20:80 society" formula, comprises 1/5 of the society which develops world integration, while the remaining 4/5 are the redundant, ineffective masses, less useful than intelligent technologies.

According to the Tofflers (1993) the world is divided (with respect to global modernisation dynamics) into: 1) the world of the metropolitan class integrated in "info-sphere" and "megacorps", 2) the static world of the declining industrial epoch ("industrial rust belt"). The above-mentioned authors predict conflict not between civilisations (like Huntington), but between dynamic and static cultures, in which the former will combat the latter in a specific "war substitute". By analogy, global and local zones can be distinguished in every country (region). The former will integrate with the international market, while the latter will remain in civilisation regress.

## CONCEPTS OF ENDOGENOUS DEVELOPMENT

Let us turn now to the concepts of endogenous development. As the assumptions of modernisation and dependence paradigm were tested in European, Latin American and African research, and as the myth of universal modernity held by optimistic „modernists" and the pessimism of „dependists" demonstrated in orthodox theories were passing into oblivion, there appeared in the last decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century new concepts of alternative development which stressed the importance of social development, the growth of human capital, the role of local communities and their activities in regional development. They were an answer to the shortcomings of the classic theories of development and to the fact that, as subsequent research revealed, technological changes alone turned out to be an insufficient explanation of economic growth. Therefore, the concepts of endogenous development are an attempt at correcting the theories by proposing models in which long-term growth effects are endogenous variables of the model, based on assumptions related to investment in human and technical capital. Economic growth is variously endogenized, either through competitive accumulation of capital or through investment in human capital and exchange of information between companies. Therefore, generating knowledge, innovation,

learning by exchanging knowledge between companies, towns and regions become a particularly important part of national and local government policies.

It should be noted that endogenous development is not related to a specific spatial scale, and therefore it cannot be treated as synonymous with local development. A characteristic feature of endogenous development is economic growth based on creation, increase and usage of internal resources at every spatial level: local, regional, national and even multinational groups. Especially regions and towns of high concentration of production create conditions for innovation and knowledge flow between enterprises in the process of people's "learning" in the same industrial sector. Such diffusion of knowledge and new innovative ideas within a region or a town becomes a kind of local industry protection against external competition (Domański, Marciniak, 2003; Łoboda, 1983).

"Endogenous" theorists do not search for references to other theories (economic, social, political) in their concepts because, according to the "separate development path" rule, their visions are based on their own potential for spatial, economic and social development, on communal tradition and civic maturity.

Economic policy is a very important factor in endogenous development and its role is particularly significant nowadays when regional economy becomes more and more endogenous (Klasik, Kuźnik, 1993; Markowski, 1999). This determines the role of economic policy as it raises questions as to the possible combination of national and regional policy. The answers to these questions lead to civilizational premises since development in modern economy at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century is propelled more successfully and efficiently by endogenous processes of self-adaptation and self-organisation.

Liszewski (1995) wonders whether policy projects aiming at limiting the growth of agglomerations or their de-concentration will not produce the dilemma whether it is possible to improve life standards at the cost of economic effectiveness?

Commenting on the discussions of the above mentioned problems by specialists, Domański and Marciniak (2003) point to some possible answers, emphasizing the fact that competition in modern economy is not local or national, but global, and that markets are dynamic, which demands dynamic adaptations and a wide range of flexibility. The evolution of new economy involves a growing influence of information technology not only in technical infrastructure, but also in services. They are propelled locally by qualified employees, public administration, scientific institutions and business organisations. The evolution concerns also technical infrastructure, where "soft" infrastructure becomes more important (science, education, institutional structures).

When state borders become more fluid due to globalisation influencing the world system, locality becomes more significant and important in all spheres

and spatial relations: political, economic, cultural, rural and urban. According to Ganne (1985) „locality surrounds us”. However, both processes (local and global) are complementary as local development is not an alternative to increasing globalisation, but its complement. Although there are many opponents to globalisation, adversaries of “little homelands” (a village, a town, a region) do not encounter any resistance.

Renaissance of locality is a fact. It is an effect of the crisis of industrial civilization; therefore, Jałowicki B. (1988) wonders whether the valorization (material and social) of locality is the proper way to combat the amassed problems of contemporary civilization? Fascinated by the achievements of the last half-century, we do not know the local, small, and peripheral.

Despite numerous attempts, “locality”, similarly to “world system”, proves difficult to define. Nurek (1986) writes that already in 1955 George H. J. recorded ninety-five definitions of local communities. Without going into the problems with definition, but considering the concept as crucial for modern social, economic, geographic and political sciences, its constitutive features should be emphasised. That is, local community occupies a specific place, self-created in the long process of mutual adaptation among man and environment (acquisition of space).

According to Lisowski (2003) the social space created by a society is a concept integrating ecological and cultural space into one unit where man acts as an active creator of the surrounding environment and not simply as a passive receiver. The ordering of the elements of physical space is the result, not the cause of human activity as the latter is goal-oriented.

It should be noted that social space appears in two forms: abstract (the space of networks) and concrete (place). The vision of total unification is hard to accept for geographers sensitive to spatial diversification. Hence, modernization relates to the socio-economic micro-scale (regions, local systems) rather than to the macro-scale (a country, the world). Therefore, concrete space is modified or re-structured by globalization. It has not been unified; rather, it is unified as spatial diversification petrifies local and regional political and economic autonomy and cultural identity. Most people inhabit concrete space.

The duality of space recollects the model of coexistence in two categories of space, the so called Carter and Jones’s (1989) **model of cultural pluralism**, which concerns ethnic minorities in towns, proposing a model where the minority functions simultaneously in identitarian and universal dimensions.

Another way of presenting the confrontation between abstract and concrete space is provided by **the concept of “globalisation”** where the units from abstract space (international corporations) have to adapt to local conditions and local communities are forced to increase their attractiveness (Lisowski, 2003).

The interaction between concrete and abstract space is also reflected in **the concept of “locality” (a local system)** – Jałowiecki (1988). **The theory of actors in the net**, which became popular in the 1990s, is more frequently applied in geography. In this theory, the social world is presented as a diverse network of relations and influences between different subjects – actors (entrepreneurs, local government) and objects (enterprises, communes, towns, economic regions).

Local development profited from **the concept of self-organising space**. Derived from thermodynamics, the concept was applied in natural and social sciences. It explains the mechanism of transforming a complex system from one structure to another or from one order to a different one (Prigogine, Stengers, 1990).

The processes of spatial self-organisation can transform local spatial structures in accordance with social goals, but it is possible only in the case of rational organisation of socio-economic structures, which are very inertial. Therefore, the results of spatial self-organisation can be noticed only after a long period of time (Parysek, 1997; Szajnowska-Wysocka, 1999b).

In the context of local development the **concept of “path dependence”** appears interesting as it allows to explain those development processes which do not follow the theoretical regularities of most cases. The approach is based on a historical (evolutionary) interpretation of a region’s development features, as some regions formed in the early industrialisation period could be stuck on the path. These are traditional regions (e.g. Upper Silesia), where the lack of complete restructuring hinders regional development. Recognizing the degree to which endogenous development depends on the path is of significant practical value for local and regional policy (Domański, 2004).

With respect to alternative development (endogenous on regional and local scale) attention should be paid to the neo-regional wave, gaining importance since the 1980s, which positions at the forefront the new region’s development discourse as an institution producing and petrifying social space treated as a social field of a new generation (P. Bourdieu’s terminology, 2001). The discourse establishes the institutional framework for a new social order in constituting social and economic subjects and their ways of mobilizing and revalorizing the endogenous regional resources.

The universal voices regarding the new tasks of regions, the role of regionalism and the forms of regional policy (a tendency to regionalise a “unified” national space and to “create” regions) more and more frequently address the context of the local-global relation. The reaction to the growing dynamism of space (global flow, globalization, virtual borders), where the established spatial structures undergo fragmentarization, become transparent and permeable, as if opposes the processes of internal diversification, closure and reorganisation of space and production of

“differences” as identity (Castells M., 2000). The mixture of global and local themes resembles the systemic co-appearance of the phenomena of globalization and social mobilization and revalorization of local resources, in particular the co-appearance of the phenomena of globalization and social discourse. Such trends lead to the reorganization of significant space both functionally and emotionally, where the network of internal connections filters the flow of ideas, people, capital, goods, advantages and threats posed by all-encompassing globalization.

It is not a matter of a simple isolation of the globalized world and a return to the traditional order, but of a production of a new social structure which will become a systemic property (an added value). The system to be produced will allow for the coexistence of the possibility of “anchorage” in safe space and the necessity to pragmatize global challenges and to link it to the new world order (Szajnowska-Wysocka A., Kulesza M., 2007).

Hence, the region is not treated as a territorial unit of the country, a historical or cultural niche, but aspires to the role of a functionally alternative structure (a social field), capable of taking over some state capacities and of semi-independent functioning in the world economy while retaining its identity re-defined from regional into pragmatic regional identity – an identity which can be translated into economic and marketing actions and investment attractiveness, and which can create a new image of the region.

The seemingly contradictory reference to the specificity of a territory (a region, an agglomeration, a town) and endogenous factors, i.e. an infrastructure that is “soft” and highly institutionalized (as human capital, social capital, entrepreneurial culture, organisational and institutional proficiency, investment attractiveness) has been strongly marked in regions’ development discourse, especially in the context of the Europeanization of traditional and peripheral regions, where a chance to „escape forward” through reorganisation of local resources (economic and social) and a change of the image has appeared (Gąsior-Niemiec, 2004).

Thus, development discourse, treated as a continuum of constant changes (appearing consequentially), creates an alternative path for the development of a region, an agglomeration, a centre or a commune, where the revalorization of the place (territory) and community (regional, urban and local) requires the potential for self-development, i.e. possibilities and abilities of self-organization, innovation potential and good economic conditions. Kaleta A. (1996) proposes the following indicators of the potential for development: living conditions, political engagement, territorial identity and social ties (the constitutive factor, but also the most difficult to quantify without the use of indirect indicators, such as local press, election attendance etc.).

Currently, European regions may become a stage for a socio-technical experiment. Its goal is to create and institutionalise the region as a self-regulating

socio-economic field, which will be included in global processes while preserving its own unique “brand” of marketing and self-governing resources, and which will participate in the national space on the basis of a contract.

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