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La France, la Pologne et l'Europe : l'expérience du XIV^{ème} Congrès International de Géographie (Varsovie, 1934)

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France, Poland and Europe: the experience of the XIVth International Geographical Congress, Warsaw 1934

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Past and present

- 1 Together with nine other states, Poland was admitted to membership of the European Union on 1 May 2004 and has now returned emphatically to the “community” of Europe. Seventy years earlier, she hosted the XIVth International Geographical Congress (IGC) that enabled foreign geographers to visit her capital and regions, and to learn first-hand about the quality of Polish scholarship. This article focuses on the activities of French visitors on that occasion, tracing their participation both in the lecture hall and on field excursions. Of course, academic life does not function in isolation from economic and political conditions; these must be recognised as the harsh context within which the scholarly preoccupations of the world’s geographers were expressed in the height of summer in 1934.
- 2 On 28 October 1929, “Black Friday”, the American Stock Exchange collapsed, triggering a sustained economic crisis from which no part of the world could be immune. Two years later, in an atmosphere of galloping unemployment and mounting poverty, France hosted the XIIIth IGC in Paris and her geographers led excursions in a variety of regions to demonstrate the quality of French scholarship and to show selected parts of the Hexagon to foreign delegates (Clout, 2005). Occurring at the same time as the Exposition Coloniale, the Paris IGC was recognised to be a great success, indeed a “model” of organisation,

efficiency and hospitality that subsequent host nations would seek to emulate. High points were the suite of presentations on erosion surfaces and on rural settlements (orchestrated by Emmanuel de Martonne and Albert Demangeon respectively), and the excursions in which *docteurs* trained at the Sorbonne or the Institut de Géographie Alpine (Grenoble) demonstrated the arguments of their theses in the field. At the conclusion of the Congress it was agreed that Poland would host the XIVth IGC at Warsaw in August 1934. This decision honoured the re-appearance of the Polish state on the political map of Europe at the conclusion of the Great War, and acknowledged the quality of the work of Polish geographers.

- 3 As Neil Smith emphasises: “The location of the 1934 Congress in Warsaw was a matter of no small irony and difficulty” since the Polish hosts (especially Eugeniusz Romer) were keen to include Soviet geographers and IGU President Isaiah Bowman, who had played a major advisory role in the territorial reconfiguration of east-central Europe after World War I, was anxious to ensure German attendance (Smith, 2003, p. 280). Bowman was recognised as a hero by Poland for having established her western boundary deep in what had been German territory, as well as ensuring that the Danzig/ Gdansk “corridor” linked that free city to Poland and cut off East Prussia from the main body of Germany. Quite simply: “to be in Poland, for German geographers, was to confront directly the ignominy of lost *Lebensraum*” (ibid.). After being instructed to boycott the Paris IGC by the Nazis, some fifty German geographers would travel to Warsaw in 1934, a number equalled by the British delegation and twice as large as that from the USA.
- 4 During the 1920s links between Poland and France had been strengthened by agreements for labour migration to the restored coal-mining settlements of the Pas-de-Calais, and to various agricultural regions. By 1936, 425,000 Poles would be resident in France (and Polish geographer, Jerzy Loth, estimated approximately 600,000). During the early 1930s, both the economic and the political scenes had darkened. Unemployment continued to mount, rising steeply in France during 1934, and industrial output plummeted after its remarkable recovery in the 1920s. Political instability was expressed through a succession of administrations, with five governments of radical or republican-socialist leadership holding power in France between December 1932 and February 1934 (Jackson, 1988). Right- and left-wing demonstrators took to the streets of Paris, with the capital experiencing its bloodiest night of political violence since the Commune of 1871. Burning barricades were erected in the city on the night of 6 February 1934, police and their horses were attacked, and shots were fired with fifteen deaths resulting and 1,435 people being wounded. On 9 February clashes involving communist demonstrators led to six deaths and a hundred cases of injury. Calls for a general strike of 12 February met with outstanding success, as workers demonstrated class solidarity and proclaimed opposition to the rising fascist tide at home and abroad, especially – but certainly not exclusively – in their nearest eastern neighbour across the Rhine. On 27 July French socialists and communists agreed on a pact for joint action.
- 5 In January 1933 Hitler had been appointed Chancellor of the German Reich, consolidating his position as Führer in the following year. Concentration camps started to be erected, Jewish businesses were boycotted, and political parties other than the Nazis were suppressed. The “night of the long knives” of 30 June 1934 eliminated hundreds of Hitler’s actual and potential opponents. Further east in Poland, Marshal Jozef Piłsudski had seized power in a military coup in May 1930 and would retain his leading role in a right-wing government until his death in 1935 (serving, in fact, as minister of defence).

Parliamentary responsibilities were gradually phased out, nonetheless Poland's economic situation remained more stable than in many other parts of Europe, and her cultural and intellectual life flourished. Early in 1934 Hitler signed a non-aggression pact with Poland, and a trade agreement followed. These facts that surely encouraged German scholars to attend the Warsaw IGC, compared with only half a dozen who had ignored the boycott and participated in Paris three years earlier. In such a turbulent context of political change and tension throughout Europe, and against a backdrop of overt class conflict at home, the French delegates boarded their trains in Paris, crossed the span of German territory west to east, and reached the Polish capital in August 1934. Over a hundred had registered their intention to attend but, for whatever reasons, rather fewer did so. Poland's new relationship with Germany drove Piłsudski to abstain from a Franco-British pact with Russia that would be proposed in the following month. Poland's political, but not cultural, relations with France continued to deteriorate.

The International Geographical Congress at Warsaw

- 6 Headed by de Martonne, eighty French participants registered for the IGC held at the Warsaw Polytechnic School between 22 and 31 August, under the presidency of Dr. Isaiah Bowman. That large figure included academics and their spouses, schoolteachers and representatives of institutions, such as French railway companies and the French government in Indo-China, West Africa and Equatorial Africa. Professor Eugeniusz Romer (Lwow) was the "leading spirit" of the Polish organizing committee, and the indefatigable Professor Stanislas Pawłowski served as secretary (Anon., 1934, p. 341). After their masterly demonstration of scholarship three years previously, French geographers understandably played a less prominent role in Warsaw (Clout, 2005). The French delegation was large but was greatly outnumbered by the 367 Polish geographers who attended (Cholley, 1935, p. 28). Having paid tribute to the late William Morris Davis, who had died in California on 5 February 1934 aged 83, de Martonne summarised progress in denudation chronology across Europe and reported on the state of geomorphological mapping in various parts of the continent. Detailed papers from Henri Baulig (Plateau Central), André Meynier (Massif Central), André Cholley (Charolais, Mâconnais), Pierre George (Bas-Rhône) and Daniel Faucher (Ariège) complemented his presentation. De Martonne took advantage of the occasion to include a map drawn from the continuing work of Aimé Perpillou on the physiography of the Limousin that would be published in full in 1940. Remarkable papers by Polish and east European geographers paralleled French contributions, with de Martonne's influence in Romania being particularly apparent. The *Commission de l'habitat rural* that Demangeon had led so effectively in Paris presented further work on the morphology, concentration/ dispersion, and historical evolution of rural settlement in several parts of France (André Allix on the Lyonnais; André Cholley on the Valois and Haute-Tarentaise; Théodore Lefebvre on the Charente; Louis Papy on the Vendée). However, these papers lacked something of the lustre of their 1931 counterparts. By contrast, contributions from Polish geographers were remarkably strong and demonstrated how much excellent, detailed work had been accomplished on rural settlement in many parts of the country. S. Pawłowski and J. Czekalski (Poznan) synthesised the results of thirty workers based in Poznan, Krakow and Lwow, with individual papers presenting work from Pomerania, Great Poland, the north-east, Silesia,

the south-east, the south-west, and the eastern provinces. Once again, the excursions gave ample opportunity for rural research to be presented in the field.

- 7 French geographers made less impact in other sections of activity at the IGC. Their contributions to the infant branches of urban geography and industrial geography were poorly developed. Daniel Faucher and Jacques Weulersse delivered descriptive accounts of Toulouse and Antioch, and André Libault reviewed the economic geography of electricity generation. These papers lacked the incipient quantitative approaches being adopted by Polish geographers, especially those based at Lwow, as they discussed settlement regularities, embraced quantitative indices and mapped economic activities in their quest to define economic regions and to explore “laws” of industrial location that were being proposed in Germany and in the Baltic states. Equally, there was nothing to compare with S.H. Beaver’s definition of five “functional influences” on the siting of manufacturing, or with the innovative work encompassed in the great Land Use Survey of Britain that was directed by L. Dudley Stamp and presented at Warsaw by E.C. Willatts (all three from the London School of Economics). Meynier’s work on bus services in the Massif Central hinted at their potential for delimiting hinterlands, whereas a paper by J. Paczosa (Lwow) demonstrated how recently-installed bus services had worked to “shrink space” in Poland, using isochrones to identify spatial anomalies. The hexagonal diagrams prepared by A. Zierhoffer (Lwow) to summarise settlement systems were especially interesting.
- 8 Professional surveyors discussed recent French cartographic work at home and in the colonies (e.g. Colonel de Fontanges of the Service Géographique de l’Armée who delivered four papers). A highlight was the presentation of the earliest sheets of the great *Atlas de France* by de Martonne on behalf of the Comité National. Under the rubric of “geographical education”, Meynier discussed the objectives of student excursions (using examples of teaching in the field by members of the Institut de Géographie, Paris), and Lefebvre analysed the intellectual strengths and weaknesses of adopting a comparative approach in geographical teaching. Ernest Bénévent delivered no fewer than four papers on aspects of climatic variation (in France, the Azores, Africa, and India), and Lefebvre offered a reasoned classification of climates. Four communications by Abel Briquet on Quaternary deposits in parts of northern France, south-east England, and the Netherlands were read by de Martonne, who also presented Jean Dresch’s interpretation of nivation features in the Atlas mountains. Veteran geographer, Pierre Camena d’Almeida (aged 69), who had visited Poland at the end of the Great War, delivered a curious paper on the origin of lakes near Poznan (Camena d’Almeida, 1923). André Allix and Maurice Pardé, both *protégés* of Blanchard, discussed, respectively the glaciers and topography of western Spitzbergen, and methods for classifying watercourses with respect to runoff. Faucher reported Jean Sermet’s work on the coastal morphology of Catalonia, and Robert Capot-Rey delivered a particularly distinctive analysis of changes in settlement and rural life around Verdun following the Great War that had been researched by Simone Brion.
- 9 In short, the range of presentations by French geographers at Warsaw was respectable (and certainly more wide ranging than the very few papers delivered by British or American geographers) but it lacked the cohesion and vigour that had been so much in evidence in Paris three years previously. It might be summarised, perhaps not unkindly, as “more of the same”. Without doubt, Polish geographers demonstrated the quality of their scholarship both with respect to the dual pillars of geomorphology and rural settlement, and to exciting new developments in quantification and isoline mapping.

Polish and French geographers in the field

- 10 Following the successful model of the XIIIth IGC, Polish geographers led excursions to the main regions of their country before and after the meeting in Warsaw, as well as running shorter trips in and around the capital (Table 1). For whatever reasons, relatively few French geographers took advantage of this remarkable opportunity for scholarly guidance in the field that embraced remote environments as well as densely settled ones. Three excursions were held before the main meeting, taking participants to two eastern regions (now no longer part of Poland) and to the south-east of the country (Figure 1).

Table 1. The Polish Excursions.

| | Destination | Date | Leaders | Price (zł) | Participants |
|-------|---------------------|---------------|-----------------------|------------|--------------|
| | | <u>August</u> | | | |
| A1 | Polesia | 14-21 | Lencewicz, Pawłowski | 385 | 15 |
| A2 | Podolia | 3-21 | Zierhoffer, Czyzewski | 400 | 14 |
| A3 | Cracow-Tatra | 14-21 | Smolenski | 320 | 33 |
| | | <u>Sept.</u> | | | |
| B1 | N.E. Poland | 2-6 | Limanovsk | 250 | 13 |
| B2 | Pomerania | 2-8 | Pawłowski | 280 | 26 |
| B3(1) | Łysogor | 2-6 | Lencewicz | 160 | 17 |
| B3(2) | Silesia | 6-9 | Smolenski, Ormicki | 140 | 10 |
| B4 | Vistula valley | 2-7 | Loth | 250 | 6 |
| | | <u>August</u> | | | |
| C1 | Vistula valley | 26 | Lencewicz | | 39 |
| C2 | Vistula dunes | 26 & 29 | Lewinski | | 17 |
| C3 | N.W. Lublin plateau | 26 | Zaborski | | 25 |
| C4 | Warsaw city | 26 | Danysz-Fleszar | | 25 |

- 11 Under the guidance of Professor S. Pawłowski (Poznan) and Professor S. Lencewicz (Warsaw), the marshes and forests of Polesia and Białowieża attracted fifteen foreign geographers from seven countries, including André Allix and Léon Aufrère from France, Mlle M-A.Lefèvre from Belgium, and Dr. Eva Taylor from London. The excursion (A1) was based in two *wagons-lits* and a restaurant car, but the itinerary required leaving this special train and travelling in cars, farmers' carts, and boats, as well as on foot. Geomorphological and hydrological conditions in the Prypec marshes, with their extensive peat bogs and lakes, figured prominently in this field trip that examined the legacy of glaciation and recent attempts to "improve" the wetlands through drainage and reclamation. The final day was devoted to the Białowieża forest and national park where a protected fragment of ancient forest was home to bison, beavers and elk (Lencewicz & Pawłowski, 1934).
- 12 Eva Taylor captured the experience in the following words: "Those who shared in the excitement of a precarious passage through the sand dunes and swamps of Polesia had also a changing geography brought to their notice. The experimental station near Horyn showed what a transformation drainage could effect, and it can only be a matter of time before the Prypec marshes, with their primitive village life, their myriad storks and

waterfowl, their wolves, lynxes, bears, wild boars, and elk, all that makes them a hunting paradise for a great feudal landowning family... will repeat on a giant scale the history of our English Fens. The problem of road making in a country where black ooze alternates with drifting sand was brought home in a very direct fashion to the visitors, who were glad to rest their limbs afforded by the day-long sinuous water approach to Pinsk, in boats hospitably provided by the Polish Navy ... There remain however some pretty problems to solve: the Government Hydrographer, for example, has recently observed an abnormal summer level in the Prypec. Patches of meadow and haystacks are all awash instead of emerged as usual, and this may not be unconnected with the giant works at Dnieprostoi. River systems decline to pay respect to political frontiers" (Taylor *in* Anon., 1934, pp. 418-419).

- 13 Fourteen foreign geographers ventured into Podolia and the eastern Carpathians (now in the Ukraine) on the excursion (A2) led by Professor A. Zierhoffer and J. Czyzewski (both from Lwow). Although physical geography was given pride of place, visits to the railway town of Lwow, industrial settlements and farming communities presented socio-economic features (Zierhoffer & Czyzewski, 1934). Four French geographers (Baulig, Cholley, George, Meynier) with Sorbonne allegiance had the opportunity to visit sites that Polish geographers had investigated in detail as part of their contribution to de Martonne's great project of morphological mapping. Cholley reported that the Podolia-Carpathians excursion "était organisée d'une façon parfaite. L'itinéraire, mûrement étudié, a fait se dérouler devant nous successivement l'étonnante uniformité et la grande richesse de la plaine podolienne, la grandiose vallée du Dneistr, la sauvage beauté des Carpates, la curieuse agglomération de Lwow. Le concours de géologues avertis, la visite de l'Institut géologique des Carpates, trop courte à notre gré, ont permis de satisfaire bien des curiosités. On regrettera, peut-être... de ne s'être pas arrêté assez longtemps aux endroits mêmes (carrières, points de vue) où nos collègues et amis polonais ont trouvé la preuve de leurs conceptions morphogéniques" (Cholley, 1935, p. 29).
- 14 The excursion to the historic city of Krakow and to the high Tatra Mountains (A3) appealed to no fewer than thirty-three foreign delegates, including Robert Capot-Rey and Théodore Lefebvre, and Jean Célérier (based in Morocco) (Lefebvre, 1937). Under the leadership of Professor J. Smolenski (Krakow) and six assistants, the week in the field covered physical and human themes, and on occasions the large party was divided into two groups to deal with glaciation and rural life (Smolenski, 1934). Zakopane served as the base for visiting the High Tatra national park where biogeography and nature conservation were essential themes. French geographers participated in the brief excursions that were organised during the IGC to the terraces and dunes of the Vistula valley (C1, C2), and the north-western part of the Lublin plateau (C3). A walking tour in Warsaw (C4) revealed both poverty and "the destruction that still marked the city's landscape sixteen years after the war" (Smith, 2003, p. 281). President Moscicki had already received participants on the terraces of the former royal palace overlooking the Vistula. "It was here that the Russian governors general had their residence until 1915 when Warsaw was evacuated by the Russian army" (Anon, 1935, p. 142). Indeed, "for Poland a state of war continued until 1921, and up to 1925 the city was still in disrepair" (*ibid.*).
- 15 Following the Congress, five disciples of Blanchard (Bénévent, Blache, Faucher, Gibert, Pardé) were among the thirteen foreigners who explored the glaciated landscapes, rural settlements and towns (Grodno, Vilno) of north-eastern Poland (B1) under the leadership

of Professor M. Limanowski (Vilno). Since long distances were covered, considerable reliance had to be placed on travelling by train into territory that is now predominantly within Lithuania, however recourse was also made to cars and the Stateship “Dwenicki” on the river Niemen. Geographical publications and maps produced by members of the local university were presented to participants, as was customary on each of the various excursions.

- 16 Under the leadership of Professor Pawłowski (Poznan), twenty-eight foreign geographers (including Aufrère, Baulig, and Capot-Rey) visited Pomerania and the tiny section of the Baltic coast under Polish control. Moraines, fluvial terraces, continental dunes, lakes and eskers figured prominently on the excursion (B2), but visits to Poznan, Torun and the new port of Gdynia enabled urban and economic issues to be explored. A British participant noted: “Those who came to Gdynia saw the development of a great new port side by side with the gardens of what aspires to be the Polish Riviera” (Anon., 1934, p. 429). At the end of the trip, Professor Creutzburg invited participants to leave Poland and visit the “free city” of Dantzig.
- 17 French geographers did not take part in the remaining fieldtrips that visited the Hercynian massif of Łysogory (Sainte-Croix) (B3-1); Polish Silesia (Katowice and the coalfield) (B3-2); and the spa towns and industrial centres (notably Lodz) of the middle Vistula valley (B4) (Table 1). Although many French delegates registered for the Warsaw IGC, it is surprising that relatively few participated in the excursions. As *grands maîtres* of the discipline, de Martonne and Demangeon had been especially active in 1931, but neither went on fieldtrips in 1934. They may well have been absorbed with matters of IGC bureaucracy in the capital. De Martonne, of course, had visited Poland on several occasions, travelled widely in the country, and published articles about it as well as writing for the *Géographie Universelle* (de Martonne, 1930; Delfosse, 2001). He played an important role in presenting communications from absent colleagues; by contrast, apart from chairing the *Commission de l’habitat rural*, Demangeon appears to have been largely silent at Warsaw. Raoul Blanchard did not travel to Poland, but his disciples were there in force.
- 18 By contrast with the somewhat muted impression conveyed by French academics in Poland, it is clear that the host community of geographers was large, vigorous and productive, reflecting established traditions in Western Europe (geomorphology, rural settlement) and presenting pioneering quantitative work in industrial, transport and other aspects of economic geography. Given the newness of the Polish state, these accomplishments were all the more remarkable. A British delegate recorded, “on every side there was an ardent ambition to make Poland a first-class state” (Anon, 1934, p. 429). André Cholley declared the Congress to have been “un vif succès. Pour beaucoup d’entre nous, il a été l’occasion, longtemps attendue, de connaître un pays vraiment nouveau et où les problèmes géographiques sont pleins d’intérêt. Il a traduit l’extraordinaire ardeur des milieux géographiques polonais dont on ne saurait jamais assez louer l’activité depuis seize ans. Il a été vivant, exubérant de vitalité” (Cholley, 1935, p.35). Senior Polish geographers were strongly committed to guiding their guests on excursions, with Pawłowski leading two field trips totalling fifteen days, and Lancewicz being out in the field for fourteen days on three different excursions.

The future

- 19 Unfortunately, the academic achievements of the XIVth IGC would be short lived as Poland would soon be invaded, many of its best scholars imprisoned and exterminated, and its territorial configuration redefined. Thus, Pawłowski was shot in the fort of Poznan in January 1940, and placed with 1,700 other Poles in a common grave in Wypałanski forest nearby; Smolenski was arrested with colleagues in a campaign against the University of Krakow, and died 5 January 1940; Lencewicz was killed in Warsaw 1 September 1944; and many other geographers suffered the same fate (Wilczynski, 1992; Leszcynski, 1982; Kondracki, 1981). Territory visited on three of the excursions would be transferred to Lithuania (B1), Belorussia (A1), and the Ukraine (A2). Under very new political conditions and constraints, Polish geography would revive after World War II but scholars were not permitted to take part in the International Geographical Congresses in 1949 or 1952. After a period of exclusive contact with the USSR, Polish geographers would eventually be able to re-establish links with western geographers, as the proceedings of numerous colloquia with French and also with British colleagues bear testimony. Now, with Poland as a full member of the European Union, these academic links will flourish even more strongly. Sadly, Francis W. Carter (1938-2002) and F.E. Ian Hamilton (1937-2003), two British geographers at the School of Slavonic and East European Studies (part of University College London), who devoted much of their careers to keeping those contacts alive, did not survive to celebrate 5 May 2004. They would have loved to have done so.

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ABSTRACTS

The vibrancy of Polish geographical research was amply demonstrated at the Warsaw Congress and on accompanying excursions. Polish work in geomorphology and rural settlement reflected achievements in France, with important Polish innovations in economic geography also evident. By contrast with their dynamism in Paris and in the field in 1931, French geographers were more restrained in their participation in Poland. Accession to the EU in 2004 confirms Poland's re-entry to the "community of Europe", seventy years after the Warsaw Congress.

La vitalité de la recherche géographique en Pologne fut amplement démontrée lors du Congrès de Varsovie et des excursions organisées à cette occasion. Les travaux de recherche menés par les Polonais en géomorphologie et dans le domaine de l'habitat rural étaient à la hauteur des réalisations françaises, la Pologne se distinguant même par d'importantes innovations en géographie économique. Le dynamisme démontré par les géographes français au Congrès de Paris et sur le terrain en 1931 fut cependant moins perceptible trois ans plus tard à Varsovie. L'accession de la Pologne à l'UE en 2004 confirme son retour à la « communauté de l'Europe », soixante-dix ans après le Congrès de Varsovie.

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Mots-clés: excursions, géomorphologie, habitat rural, pratique de la géographie, Congrès de l'UGI, Pologne

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