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**ACHIEVEMENTS OF THE DEPARTMENT
OF POLITICAL GEOGRAPHY
AND REGIONAL STUDIES, UNIVERSITY OF ŁÓDŹ,
IN THE FIELD OF POLITICAL GEOGRAPHY**

Established in 1945, Łódź academic centre boasts considerable and pioneer achievements in the field of Polish political geography. After the Second World War, the Łódź scholar involved in political geography was Professor Stanisław Gorzuchowski. In 1947 his works became evidence against him in a court trial. He was sentenced to prison, where he soon died. That particular event was a sign of the attitude which the new communist authorities in Poland assumed towards research into political geography.

In the political situation of that time, by the 1960s, political geography problems had only occasionally appeared in the research conducted in the Łódź centre by Professors Jan Dylík and Ludwik Straszewicz. It was at the Institute of Geography, University of Łódź, that the first post-war doctoral thesis on political geography was defended in 1964. The thesis, entitled *The Shaping of Political Borders and the Integration and Disintegration of Countries in 1900–1962*, was written by Józef Barbag and supervised by Jan Dylík. It was printed in its extended version under the title *The Outline of Political Geography* (Barbag, 1971) and became the first post-war student course book on general political geography (Sobczykński, 2006). Together with the course book, political geography returned after 30 years to university curricula at geographical departments. However, permission for teaching political geography at universities did not mean that any scientific research in that field was allowed.

Since mid-1970s lectures on political geography at the Faculty of Biology and Earth Sciences, University of Łódź have been given by Professor Marek Koter. He was a student of Józef Wąsowicz, a researcher who originally came from the pre-war Lvov school of political geography and after Second World War moved to the Wrocław centre. Professor Koter continues then the

best traditions of Polish political geography stemming from the school of Eugeniusz Romer.

It was Professor Koter's initiative to isolate on 1st October 1981 the Department of Political and Regional Economic Geography as part of the Institute of Economic Geography and Space Organization at the University of Łódź (Koter, 1995d; Sobczyński, 2003d). The role of the Łódź centre in the revival of political geography in Poland was noted in both Polish (Eberhardt, 2004, p. 286; Kosmala, 2003, p. 24–26) and foreign literature (Kolosov and Mironenko, 2001, p. 259).

For the whole decade of the 1980s the Department was the only centre in the communist countries of Central and Eastern Europe, apart from the University in Ljubljana (Slovenia), which conducted regular studies in the field of political geography, and first of all the only school that held classes on this subject for full-time, extramural and post-graduate students.

In the first ten years detailed research was focused on the contemporary and historical states and administrative borders, the problems of national and religious minorities, as well as on the regions of international tensions and conflicts (Sobczyński, 2006). The territorial scope of studies comprised Poland (especially central Poland), Central and Eastern Europe, the countries of the former USSR and the countries of the former socialist block, although many aspects concerned the whole world (Koter, Kulesza and Sobczyński, 1999). The Department received university grants for the following political geography researches: *The political geography of the former USSR*; *Social and settlement problems of Łódź and the Łódź region in the aspect of the new territorial organization of the country*; *The problems of national and religious minorities of Central and Eastern Europe in the aspect of united Europe*. Individual projects included the following: *The problems of borders, territorial divisions and regionalisms in Central and Eastern Europe*, *Political geography of Poland*, *Changing functions of political borders*, *The Atlas of global political changes in the 20th century*.

The second decade brought further extension of research subjects. Among the significant achievements of that period we find research into electoral geography (mainly that of large cities, on the example of Łódź), studies of the national structure of the Caucasus region, the religious and ethnic structure of Podlasie, and the post-war experience of Jews in Poland. New subjects also included euroregional problems and transborder co-operation. The Department actively participated in the discussion of a new administrative division of Poland. Another field of interest was the geography of war.

Professor M. Koter, though a precursor of political geography, continued his interest in historical geography, first of all the morphology and morphogenesis of cities, in which subjects he was a pioneer in Poland as well. He

became more involved in political geography in the early 1990s, by publishing synthesis works, unknown before in Polish science literature. They concerned both the geography of borders and borderlands, and the ethnic and national minorities. Particularly significant works by Professor M. Koter seem to be those in which he clarified terminology and classified a variety of political and geographical phenomena and processes taking place in Poland and all over the world. We should mention here especially works on the geography of borders and borderlands (Koter, 1990c, 1999a; Koter and Kulesza 2001), as well as transborder co-operation (Koter, 1994c; Koter M. and Koter D., 2002). Another area to which M. Koter devoted a lot of his attention was the systematization and typology of national minorities (Koter, 1990a, b, 1993a, 1994a; Koter and Kulesza 2003). Combining his interest in borders, borderlands and national minorities, Professor Koter started to systematize the problems of borderland population (Koter, 1995a, b, c, 1998a, 2003). A particular achievement was the introduction of a specifically Polish term of '*kresy*' into the world geographical-political literature. It denotes a particular type of frontier featuring some specific political, social and economic characteristics (Koter, 1997a, 2001). *Kresy* is characterized by geographical distinctness, peripheral situation, difficult accessibility, isolation, scarce population and low urbanization, social and economic retardation, dependence on other regions, multiculturalism, a particular sense of frontier ethos, special legal regulations and political instability.

Another important Polish achievement was establishing the notion of a political region (Koter, 1993b; Koter and Suliborski, 1994).

Political changes in Poland in the early 1990s were conducive to a discussion on the theory of the state's administrative divisions. Professor Koter actively took part in this debate, suggesting that the country's administration should be based on historical-political regions (Sobczyński and Jakóbczyk-Gryszkiewicz, 2003). For obvious reasons a lot of attention was devoted to the spatial shape and historical-political conditions of the new Voivodship with its capital in Łódź (Koter, 1996a, b, 1997b, 1998b, 1999b; Koter, Liszewski and Suliborski, 1996).

The introduction of local governments led to a new division of the urban space of Łódź. It turned out to be necessary to introduce other units (smaller than districts), where the inhabitants chose housing estate councils. Using his abundant experience in the field of historical geography, Professor Koter and his team prepared a project for the division of Łódź into estates according to the morphogenetic structure of the city. The project was approved by the City Council (Koter, Araszkiewicz, Kunka and Łukowska, 1991; Koter, 1994b). Unfortunately, for political reasons, in 2001 new city authorities introduced changes in this division by aggregating the units, but they at least

formally asked for the opinion of the author of the original project (Koter, 2000).

Creating the Łódź school of political geography, Professor M. Koter gathered around him a small but energetic team of young colleagues, who consequently developed research into political, historical and regional economic geography (mainly the problems of urban functions), as well as cultural geography. Apart from the head of the Department, the team usually consisted of 2–3 persons.

Marek Sobczyński studied borders in the geographical-political and geographical-historical aspects (Sobczyński, 1984, 1986, 1988, 1993a, b), as well as borderlands (1998, 2003a) and national minorities (Sobczyński, 1996b, 1998, 2000c, 2001d; Sobczyński and Grabowska, 1993). He also worked on transborder co-operation (Sobczyński, 1995, 1996c, 1998, 2001b, 2005b), integration and disintegration of countries (Sobczyński, 2001a, 2005a; Rykała and Sobczyński, 2003), as well as regional political geography (Sobczyński, 1997b, c, 1999c; Sobczyński and Barwiński, 2003). M. Sobczyński was also interested in inner divisions of Poland and introduced the notion of an administrative landscape into literature (Sobczyński, 1994a, b, 1996a, 1997a, d, 1999e, 2006; Sobczyński and Kulesza, 2006). Later, in democratic Poland, he also dealt with new disciplines such as electoral geography (Sobczyński, 1999a, b, d, 2000a, d, 2003b; Brozda and Sobczyński, 2000) and geography of war (Sobczyński, 2001c, 2002a, b, 2003c; Sobczyński and Barwiński, 2006).

Tomasz Kunka studied geography of borders (Kunka and Kulesza, 1994) and national minorities (Kunka, 1992), Anna Araszkievicz – global colonialism and decolonization (Araszkievicz, 1986, 1988; Araszkievicz and Michalski, 1989).

Marek Barwiński devoted his efforts mainly to the study of national minorities in Poland. Initially he focused on the Lemkos minority (Barwiński, 1998a, b, 1999b, 2001b, d, 2002b, 2003), then on the ethnic-religious variety of Podlasie region (Barwiński, 2001a, c, e, 2004a, 2005b). In his further studies M. Barwiński made an attempt to synthesize the problems of ethnic borderlands (Barwiński, 1999a, 2002a, 2004b, 2005a, c). He was also interested in the administrative division of Central Poland (Barwiński and Rochmińska, 1999) and war geography (Barwiński, 2004c; Sobczyński and Barwiński, 2006).

Andrzej Rykała focused his researches on religious minorities. His primary interest was the Orthodox minority (Rykała, 1999); later on he went further into the problems of Jews (Rykała, 2001a, b, c, d, 2002, 2003a, b, 2005b, 2006a, b; Rykała and Kulesza, 2002). A. Rykała also investigated the problem of Polish lands in the process of European integration (Rykała and

Sobczyński, 2003) and got involved in synthesizing the ethnic-religious problems (Rykała, 2004a, b).

An important achievement at the Department is the publication of the book *Kompendium wiedzy o geografii politycznej i geopolityce (Compendium of Political Geography and Geopolitics)*, which popularizes political geography. The terminology was inspired by the Bulgarian political geographer co-operating with the University of Łódź, Marin Bachvarov (Bachvarov and Suliborski, 2002).

Political geography was also studied by Zbigniew Rykiel from Warsaw and Krystian Heffner from Opole, temporarily associated with the Department and, incidentally, by Andrzej Suliborski, mainly as regards the administrative division of the country (Suliborski, 1994, 1997, 1999) and European integration (1995).

In 1988 in Łódź and Wieluń, the Department organized an international conference on *Boundaries and frontiers – social, political and economic problems*, the first one in the post-communist countries. It started a series of conferences on political geography, organized under the supervision of Professor M. Koter regularly every two years. Due to their importance and popularity, they became known in world political geography as ‘Łódź conferences’, although except the first and the tenth one, they were always held out of Łódź, in places related to the main topic of the sessions.

The following international conferences have been organized by the Department so far: 1990 – Białowieża, *Minority problems with borderlands*; 1992 – Książę Młyny, *Inner borders, region and regionalism*; 1994 – Szczedrzyk–Ostrava (The Czech Republic, in co-operation with the Silesian Institute in Opole and University in Ostrava), *Region and Regionalism. Social and political aspects*; 1996 – Wisła–Jablunkov (The Czech Republic, in co-operation with the same institutions), *Borderlands and transborder regions – geographical, social and political problems*; 1998 – Krynica Morska (in co-operation with the Silesian Institute and Gdańsk University), *Multicultural regions and cities*; 2000 – Bogatynia–Gorlitz (Germany; in co-operation with the Silesian Institute and Institut für Länderkunde in Leipzig), *Changing role of border areas and regional policies*; 2002 – Krynica–Bardejov (Slovakia; in co-operation with the Silesian Institute and University of Presov), *Role of ethnic minorities in the border regions*; 2004 – Wigry–Vištitis (Lithuania; in co-operation with the Silesian Institute and the Institute of Geology and Geography in Vilnius), *Role of the borderlands in the united Europe*.

There have been two attempts to fill the time between consecutive ‘Łódź’ conferences, and two smaller, but also international conferences have been organized: one in 1993 in Soczewka, called *Geopolitical and Social Problems of the Former Socialist Countries*, and in 1995 in Wieżyca on

Integration of Minority Groups: Theory and Practice. Currently there is an idea to organize conferences on historical geography in the years between the political geography conferences.

On 1st January 1992 the Department was renamed as the Department of Political Geography and Regional Studies, University of Łódź.

In 1994 the Department together with the Silesian Institute in Opole started to publish a periodical devoted to political and historical geography and regionalism, entitled *Region and Regionalism*. Till now seven issues (in nine volumes) have been published. The editors are Marek Koter, Krystian Heffner and Marek Sobczyński.

At the Faculty about 60 students have obtained the master's degree in political geography and five PhD theses have been submitted (M. Sobczyński, A. Rykała, E. Klima, A. Rochmińska, M. Barwiński), as well as one post-doctoral one (M. Sobczyński).

In the years 1981–2006, the following persons worked at the Faculty of Political Geography and Regional Studies, University of Łódź: the head of the Faculty Professor Marek Koter and associate professor Marek Sobczyński, associate professor Andrzej Suliborski, Anna Araszkiwicz M.A., and at different periods: Professor Krystian Heffner, associate professor Mariusz Kulesza, associate professor Krystyna Rembowska, associate professor Zbigniew Rykiel, associate professor Alicja Szajnowska-Wysocka, Dr. Marek Barwiński, Dr. Wojciech Michalski, Dr. Andrzej Rykała, Dr. Jan Witold Suliga, Dr. Danuta Walkiewicz, Dr. Marcin Wójcik, Magdalena Baranowska M.A., Elwira Grabowska-Stefko M.A., Zdzisław Groblewski M.A., Sławomir Jaroszczak M.A., Janusz Jaworowski M.A., Paweł Kotkowski M.A., Tomasz Kunka M.A., Wojciech Leitloff M.A., Anna Sobczak-Zajda M.A., Justyna Wojtkiewicz M.A., Małgorzata Ziarnowska M.A., and Marek Zięba M.A. The following persons were post-graduate students at the Faculty: Dr. Ewa Klima, Dr. Anita Kulawiak, Dr. Marika Pirveli, Dr. Agnieszka Rochmińska, Dr. Michał Jasnosz, and Dr. Paweł Pol.

Due to fast development of the academic team, it was possible to divide the Department. This happened on 12th December 2002. The Chair, still headed by Professor Marek Koter, was divided into three departments according to three separate orientations. The other two departments are: the Department of Historical Geography and Cultural Heritage and the Department of Social and Regional Studies. The study of and teaching political geography was taken over by the Department of Political Geography, headed by M. Sobczyński. Three persons there conduct research and other three are doing post-graduate studies.

The Faculty of Political Geography and Regional Studies at the University of Łódź is considered to be the biggest research centre, with the largest

group of researchers involved in this field. It boasts the largest number of publications on the subject and one of its employees (M. Sobczyński) is a member of the Steering Committee of the Commission on Political Geography of the International Geographical Union.

It can be said that over the last 25 years Professor Marek Koter has managed to create in Łódź the Polish school of political geography, stimulating the development of this science in Poland, educating new political geographers every year and enjoying certain international esteem. The Łódź political geography centre draws on the beautiful tradition of Polish political geography developing in the interwar period in Lvov, Cracow, Poznan and Warsaw.

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