



HONOURING THE LEGACY OF PROF. KONRAD CZAPIEWSKI: THE *WARSAW REGIONAL FORUM*

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For nearly two decades, from 2004 until the time the COVID-19 pandemic struck, the Institute of Geography and Spatial Organisation at the Polish Academy of Sciences (IGSO PAS) organised and ran a remarkable biennial event known as the *Warsaw Regional Forum* (WRF). This Conference series, an illustrious cornerstone of the Institute's activities, entailed collaboration with esteemed partners, including the Polish Geographical Society, the Committee for Spatial Planning of Poland of the Polish Academy of Sciences, the Committee for Geographical Sciences of the Polish Academy of Sciences, and (during later editions) the Polish Ministry responsible at the given time for spatial planning and regional development – the precise name of which changed down the years. The cooperating unit has always been the same unit currently going by the name of Department of Strategy at the Ministry of Funds and Regional Policy.

The first organisation of the WRF linked up with long-term bilateral agreements signed up by IGSO PAS and the Centre for Regional Studies of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, as well as counterpart institutes of geography of the Slovak and Romanian Academies. Valuable bilateral seminars were organised through this form of cooperation. Over time, the aim of the WRF came to entail a transfer of output to a wider European audience, with this endeavour made possible through the commitment of a group of Institute staff, among whom the most important at the time was Konrad Czapiewski. This despite his still being a graduate student at that point.

The origins of the initiative link up with the enlargement of the European Union to include the Central and Eastern European Countries (CEECs). The fact that this part of the continent was to be brought under and within the EU's Cohesion Policy naturally posed new and substantive challenges when it came to the scientific basis underpinning spatial planning, territorial management and physical development. Reliable evaluation of development programmes and projects, especially new developments of an infrastructural nature, became important, and the WRF then became a place to exchange views on, for example: the scale of territorial disparities and the dynamics they presented, ways of supporting local development based on endogenous assets, project evaluation methods, and new tools by which public intervention might be pursued and achieved territorially. It was during the discussions held that the space within CEECs came to be characterised by reference to such conceptual and theoretical approaches as F. Barca's (2009) place-based approach or the space of flows from M. Castells (1996).

Over the course of nine editions (Table 1), the WRF brought together a diverse assemblage of approximately 800 attendees from 40 countries, with over 400 papers presented. At more or less two-year intervals, this intellectual rendezvous took place in mid-October, finding a stage for itself at the IGSO PAS's seat in Warsaw. However, some editions were also hosted in the conference halls of the Ministry in Poland responsible at the given time for national spatial planning and regional development.

Table 1. List of the *Warsaw Regional Forum* conferences held between 2004 and 2019

Edition	Title
2004	Central and Eastern Europe: Changing spatial patterns of human activity
2005	The core and peripheral regions in Central and Eastern Europe
2007	Contemporary dilemmas of spatial development in Europe
2009	Networking in the European, regional and local space
2011	Functional regions – towards a new paradigm of territorial and cohesion policy
2013	Territorial Capital – concepts, indicators & policy
2015	Territorial uncertainty and vulnerability as a challenge for urban and regional policy
2017	Space of flows
2019	Towards spatial justice – territorial development or marginalisation

The breadth of the research studies presented at the Conferences was awe-inspiring. They traversed a multitude of spatial scales, ranging from the European and national down to the regional and local. While many participants hailed from various Polish institutions, each WRF boasted international attendees making up a quarter of the numbers, or more, with English serving as the common language of discourse. Each Conference convened panel discussions that welcomed experts from various scientific domains, at the behest of the organisers. In its more recent editions, the event introduced the idea of the keynote speech to ensure further enrichment of the intellectual offering. Importantly, the WRF was also a platform for discussion of pivotal national strategic documents, such as the Territorial Agenda of the European Union 2020 and the National Spatial Development Concept 2030, with this fact underscoring the significant role played in shaping the territorial and spatial policies of Poland and Europe.

Consistently, the organisers had as a primary goal to ensure that their event garnered widespread attention and attracted a multitude of scholars from across Europe, especially from East-Central Europe. The diverse group of participants always represented a wide spectrum of scientific fields, even as further attendees were the individuals actually and practically responsible for translating research findings into policies (Czapiewski, 2009). Each WRF's largest group of participants represented the areas of socio-economic geography and the spatial economy (Fig. 1). However, with each further edition, the involvement of other sciences, especially economics, the earth sciences and political science, tended to increase.

A distinguishing hallmark of the WRF was its inclusion of field studies, an integral part of the package extended to participants. Initially, these involved excursions beyond the Warsaw city limits, with overnight stays. However, in later editions, they became full-day explorations of the metropolitan area surrounding the Polish capital: excursions supplying unique opportunities for participants to engage with representatives of institutions deeply involved in local development (Fig. 2). Through these meetings, attendees had the chance to bridge the gap between theory and practice, enriching their theoretical knowledge with hands-on insights into regional and local development. These field trips were planned meticulously to also incorporate visits to tourist draws, ensuring in this way that the experience was further enriched.



Figure 1. The 2017 *Warsaw Regional Forum* on the ‘Space of flows’
(photo: D. Cerić)

The Conference proceedings, including abstracts of all the presented papers and information about the field studies (Fig. 3), were released just prior to each Conference, ensuring that participation proceeded with a tangible resource already in hand. Participants were further encouraged to publish papers in the Institute’s scientific journals, particularly *Europa XXI* – entire issues of which were dedicated to research presented in the WRF context. A vast number of articles in *Europa XXI* stemmed from the intellectual exchanges at these events, reaffirming the enduring impact. Some issues of *Europa XXI* were based directly on the themes of the successive *Warsaw Regional Fora*. These included:

- 12 (2005) Central and Eastern Europe – changing spatial patterns of human activity,
- 14 (2006) Core and peripheral regions in Central and Eastern Europe,
- 33 (2017) Territorial capital – different perspectives.



Figure 2. Field trips during the 2005 and 2017 Warsaw Regional Fora
(photo: K. Czapiewski & D. Cerić)

The WRF was also a place to initiate cooperation, over time bearing fruit in joint project applications and later projects. This was particularly true of ESPON, but also INTERREG projects. Neatly, the results of these and other projects born at one WRF might be discussed at a later one (also in the form of dedicated sessions). Research projects worthy of mention here might be:

1. ESPON TRACC – TTransport ACCESSibility at regional/local scale and patterns in Europe (Spiekermann et al., 2014),
2. ESPON SeGI – Indicators and Perspectives for Services of General Interest in Territorial Cohesion and Development (Świątek et al., 2013),
3. Polish-Slovak INTERREG: INFRAREGTUR – Infrastructural and Organizational Possibilities of Spatial Accessibility Improvement as a Factor for Development of the Polish-Slovak Tourist Regions (Więckowski et al., 2014),

4. ESPON COMPASS – Comparative Analysis of Territorial Governance and Spatial Planning Systems in Europe (Nadin et al., 2018; Komornicki et al., 2018),
5. HORIZON 2020 IMAJINE – Integrative Mechanisms for Addressing Spatial Justice and Territorial Inequalities in Europe (Ulceluse et al., 2020),
6. HORIZON 2020 REPAIR – Resource Management in Peri-urban Areas: Going Beyond Urban Metabolism (Obersteg et al., 2019).



Figure 3. *Europa regina* – the map-like depiction of the European continent as a queen that was popular in the 16th century – served as the cover for every *Warsaw Regional Forum* Book of Abstracts

It's often said that no Conference is complete without passionate individuals willing to invest their time, effort, knowledge, and experience. The WRF can likewise stand as testament to the critical role in organising a successful conference that dedicated people play. Though Konrad Czapiewski never held the official titles of Chair or Scientific Secretary of the Organising Committee, his involvement was profound. At different times, he served as the Forum Secretary and Coordinator of the Conference's field trips. Regardless of his role, Konrad invested himself wholeheartedly in each edition of the WRF. He possessed a unique ability to make all participants, sometimes numbering almost one hundred, feel like part of a close-knit family. His individualised approach was a rare gem at such large gatherings, evident to all who encountered him.

From the initial discussions about organising the next edition to the meticulous follow-through after a Conference concluded, Konrad's passion was undeniable. He relished what he referred to fondly as 'final touches,' which involved the fine-tuning of every aspect of a Conference. He examined every detail of each Conference programme thoroughly, scrutinised venues, vetted partners, and even checked out the restaurants and bars to be frequented during the multi-day event.

The WRF not only brought geographers together in Warsaw, but also provided a platform for people to forge new connections. Many participants might have met for the first time at the beginning of a Conference, but the various programmes encouraging informal networking saw them willing to embark upon collaborations over scientific and applied projects, the co-authoring of articles or reports, or (perhaps most importantly) enduring friendships. Konrad possessed a unique skill when it came to finding and introducing like-minded individuals, fostering connections and collaborations that often extended far beyond the confines of the Conference (Fig. 4).



Figure 4. Konrad Czapiewski on a field inspection for the 2015 Warsaw Regional Forum (photo: D. Cerić)

The last WRF took place in autumn 2019, marking a momentous occasion for the community of socio-economic geographers in the region. After much deliberation and in light of the uncertainties presented by the COVID-19 pandemic, the IGSO PAS decided to forego organising the 2021 edition. Tragically, just a year later, Konrad Czapiewski – the heart and soul of the WRF – died unexpectedly and shockingly at the tender age of 43. This devastating loss occurred at just the time the Organising Committee would have typically assembled to deliberate on the main theme of the forthcoming WRF. In the face of this profound tragedy, the Committee found it difficult to muster the strength to carry on, and regrettably, no 2023 WRF was organised.

In the wake of Konrad's passing, there was an outpouring of requests from regular *Forum* attendees, imploring the organisers to continue with the tradition. Some long-time participants, present from the very inception of the WRF, went on to suggest that it go forward under the honoured name of Konrad Czapiewski. And indeed, while the Conference can never be fully the same without Konrad on its Organising Committee, this means may well represent the most fitting tribute payable to his memory, carrying the torch further, and preserving the legacy of an extraordinary geographical event (Fig. 5).



Figure 5. Konrad Czapiewski at one of the 2021 workshops
(photo: K. Leśniewska-Napierała)

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