



# PANTA RHEI? SPACE OF FLOWS IN THE ERA OF ANTHROPOCENE AND OUTLOOKS INTO A MULTICOLOURED FUTURE

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**Abstract.** The modern social, economic and communication flows change profoundly the development of spaces, their borders and boundaries, and affect the channels of flow between regions and the national, transnational and global society. The paper offers a reflection about the developments at the top of geographic and social scientific research as well as a reference to the agenda of spatial planning and politics. Therefore this article focuses on theoretical aspects of the “fluid society” but emphasizes also the need to learn from empirical insights and practical issues in the context of Polish-Swiss cooperation projects. It concludes however, that regional spaces under the auspices of modern flows are not unicoloured. That wants to say: they are not passive entities of modernisation, but keep their manifold, multicoloured characteristics – and these characteristics interact in the form of identities, cohesion and the natural backdrop with significant effects on those flows, enabling and steering modernisation strategies, and deciding about successes or failures of investments into traffic, tourism and economies. By that they shape the flows from and into peripheral regions.

**Keywords:** fluid society, regional development, cultural diversity, regional/local identities, social cohesion, regressive turns, progressive strategies, cyclic/transgressive developments.

## Introduction: target, concept, outlook

The principal theme formulated by the Warsaw Regional Forum for the conference of 2017 radiates around the observation about how the flows of capital, information, technology, notions, sounds and symbols shape the spaces of economical and political activities. Building on these assumptions, the conference wants to draw the attention to networks and linkages between such places. However, in this article we want to turn the perspective once more, giving special attention to causes and effects of such flows, as expressed in networks and links: how do places not only react, but actually shape and divert the impetus of flows coming from “outside” and oscillating between them.

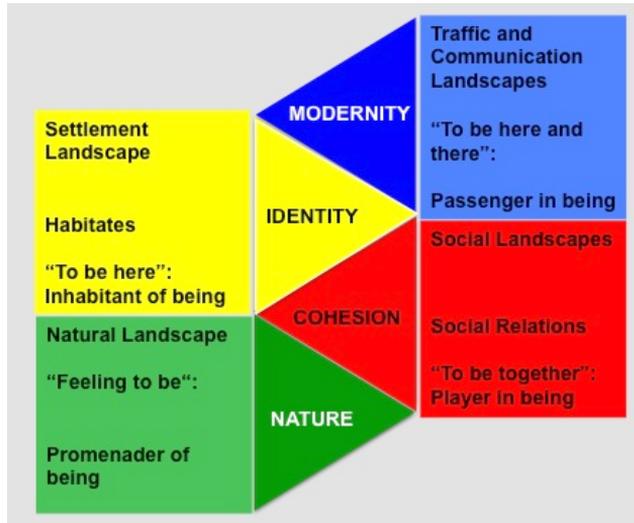


Figure 1. Overview on concept  
Source: Cultur Prospectiv

This approach takes up the current observation about how the “liquid modernity” (Bauman 2000) finds a new opposition and causes strong reactions of a new kind. In our opinion, these reactions are not simple residues of “the past”, as claimed by many models following the modernity paradigm, but actually use and build on all the potentials offered by new technologies, especially communication devices. Therefore the question is, how do new multicoloured facets spring up against the assumed reality of the uniformity of the virtual worlds? And how do these facets express themselves in various contexts, countries, in peripheral regions and active groups in societies? For that we want to propose the combination of two conceptual approaches by which these processes can be identified and illustrated.

The concept focuses on the ontological mode of humans in given spatial surroundings, i.e. specific “landscapes of being”: the traffic, the settlement, the social- and natural landscapes. Within these “layers” or “landscapes of being”, however, the effects of “floating drives” create – for the individual or entire social groups – various valences of existence, or roles of identity. These valences can be described as a spectre of different colours, which oscillate between the landscapes of being: modernity, identity, cohesion and nature (Fig. 1). It is evident that these reactions or responses relating to the various landscapes can be assigned to a scale, ranging from revitalization, organic innovation (between old and new), incremental or radical innovation. The strongest of those floating drivers are active in the traffic/mobility landscapes: technological innovation, the nexus of transport and mobility by IT, IoT or the “smartification” of the world enables and accelerates simultaneous communication on all levels.

We discuss this concept with specific reference to the experiences of recent Polish-Swiss cooperation projects in the south-eastern regions of Poland, funded by the cohesion funds (Ein Bild Polens 2017; Zürcher & Meier 2017). In doing so we want to motivate multicoloured approaches towards space and flows in societies, turning the attention to and enhancing the diversity of local, regional, nationwide and European levels. The trans-European network PRISMA is preparing projects in various municipalities of selected countries<sup>1</sup>.

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## Prologue

The basements of contemporary buildings present themselves very much as the location for complex and confusing cable-systems, serving a virtual connectivity. The underground, the earth has turned into a web of high-speed networks, transporting an ever growing flow of data into the households and to the dashboards of communication systems. Above ground though, the sleek modern design of architecture and settlement landscapes betrays these twisted reality underground. In this contradictive environment of the Anthropocene the ancient inhabitant of the human underground, the mouse, found a new habitat though – incarnated in the technical form of the computer-mouse it still is in touch with human activities and realities.

But once mice and other rodents, the beastly representatives of the biosphere, posed a challenge for buildings, like the ancient storehouse for grain (Fig. 2). The storehouse, the paradise of food, had to be elevated in order to deny access to the potential “flow of mice”. This archaic architecture of elevated “pillars” inspired in turn modern building designs, as in the case of Le Corbusier, who hoped to free architecture from the gravity of environmental constraints by elevation, and to create greener and more open spaces within the modern settlement landscapes (Meier-Dallach 2015).

Such differing motivations behind a similar architectural form may stimulate an another thought about the interrelationship of space and flow: what does it tell us when an archaic form is reappearing and serving a new function and purpose in a changed societal setting?

The fundamental polarity of the two dimensions of space and flow and their historical recurrence is rooted in the history of ideas: Heraklit’s notion of „panta rhei” seems to reassure the modern notion of the fluid society, evoking the inevitable dynamics of a river, washing aside all and every alternative thought about turning or even stopping that mighty flow. Since the Enlightenment it signifies the “revolution” i.e. the utopian view that the world changes steadily, and even jumps



**Figure 2.** The changing meaning of the mouse from the Geocene (right) to the Anthropocene (left)  
Source: Cultur Prospectiv

through radical innovation. Contemporarily this notion culminates in visions about overcoming the constraints of the Geocene. In this view the Earth and cosmos are transpassing from a primordial and natural era – encompassing all geological and bio-organic periods – into the period of the Anthropocene.

Yet, Parmenides claimed: “the globe begins where it ends and starts again from end”. Thus embracing the being (*Sein*) as a totality it signifies an alternative paradigm for development. According to this view, modernity, instead of being a linear progressive stream, follows recursive movements. Before the Enlightenment, the term revolution in fact was in opposition to the notion of linear progression: “nothing new under the sun” (Bollerey 2015). Like the planets pass periodically through the same positions in the cosmos the meaning of revolution in archaic periods and in the Middle Ages signified a circular movement. Even the younger historical concept of the *longue durée* (Braudel 1990) acknowledges circular developments in the long strides of history.

Only much later, and especially in contemporary debates the “river” paradigm of flow became paramount in the public debate, valued as progressive, while the cyclic paradigm is generally associated with a regressive form of being. However, observing the increasing ambiguities of societal concerns around the world about their regional and national settings and destinies we need to become aware of the complex and simultaneous mixtures and interactions of pro- and regressive, linear and recursive developments alike. Possibly this simple dichotomy is wrong altogether. Linear revolutionary modernity (progression) obviously fuses with revolutionary trends (regression). Therefore a “transgressive” paradigm, merging pro- and regressive forces, challenges the linear paradigm of evolutionary developments and all the contemporarily assumed logics and dynamics of space and flow in societies.

On this background our contribution discusses:

- the drivers of flows as well as of its counterforces shaping “modernity” in the sense of the above summarized polarity of two paradigms – linear versus recursive models and/or probably the “zero-model”, where developments seem to be “transgressive”<sup>2</sup>, i.e. neither progressive nor regressive, or a kind of hybrid patterns of modern developments;
- the existential and human character of spaces as cultural landscapes, which are the living spaces of the human beings and fields of specific patterns of emotions and behaving;
- the emergence of multicoloured developments, of diversity, as against of unicoloured uniform regions and local spaces.

## A dramatic contrast: opening versus closing human flows

The linear models and tracks of the modern development paradigm are prioritised, planned and implemented by major political and economic agencies, which aspire to turn this paradigm into a program for a globalising society. Under this paradigm the central factors for innovation are recognised in the efficiency of the mobility and the transport systems, the digitalisation, virtualisation and “smartification” of societies. The effected transport and communication revolutions are launched and propagated as first ranking vectors for creating the future worlds. China is a leader of this “progression” model, promoting the silk-road projects around the continents and at strategic spaces, places and lines. However, not only in China, nearly everywhere around the globe this master-vector is heading the agenda of public issues and investments.

<sup>2</sup> W. Toporów, a specialist in semiotics speculated that in future “a return to the unity of the *Weltbild*” could be probable like in archaic times where the past as well as future were simultaneously the present without history in our sense (Toporów 1977).



**Figure 3.** Space and flows – the modern vector of mobility and the call for new barriers stopping human flows  
Source: ScienceScapes Berlin (wikicommons@copper.ch)

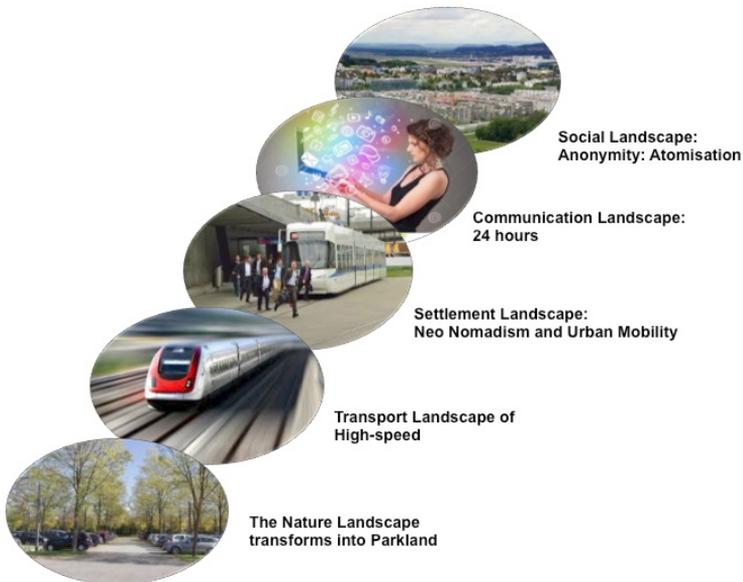
The political priorities of the European Union are expressed in national development programs like “digital” Poland, or in the case of Switzerland in the creation of high-speed transport facilities to promote the nomadic society, whose members primarily commute and migrate between rural and metropolitan areas. The metropolises are designated and profiled as the hubs for development, and are assigned to level out traditional gaps like the contrast between urban-rural or centre-periphery hierarchies. As reference examples for these approaches can be named the mid- and long-term EU concepts for Poland<sup>3</sup>, or the NEAT megaproject – the New European Alpine Transversal in Switzerland<sup>4</sup>. These mega-projects are claiming to open the way to paradise, while at the same time digital and virtual realities are promising to reduce and substitute the necessary flow of the physical human form through traffic systems and across geographical borders (Fig. 3).

But the vector of linear modernization by mobility and virtualisation, the borderless society, is now radically confronted by the uncontrolled flows of people from poorer nations. Rarely in history the vision of the welfare paradise is confronted by such a swell of mass migration of people from the underprivileged parts of the world, risking their lives and migrating under extreme conditions. It is evident that this contrast between hypermodern flows, based on new technologies, and the dramatic human flow from poorer spaces impacts substantially the privileged societies too. The power and the glance of the modern vector, the open paradise, finds a new response in the call for returning to hard borders and new measures to protect the more successful societies of the new global world. It is noteworthy how these issues disturb the public and political *status quo* and stability in the countries of the western and northern hemispheres (Asheim et al. 2005a: 3).

The conflicts and cleavages of this modernisation model are not simply visible in the relationship between the physical movements and the virtual imageries inherent to the flows. Rather the dichotomy between linear and recursive developments is hiding a deeper fault-line, which becomes obvious considering the promotion of linear modernism by the techno-oriented agencies and the chosen procedures by the policy actors. In fact, such procedures bear a top-down style, that is to say that they are not a “natural” consequence of unplanned or spontaneous processes. Such practices are planned and imposed on reluctant contexts and a critical public by using

<sup>3</sup> See the national development strategies 2020 of the Council of Ministers: [https://www.trade.gov.tw/App\\_Ashx/File.ashx?FilePath=../Files/Doc/波蘭2020國家發展綱領\(英文\).pdf](https://www.trade.gov.tw/App_Ashx/File.ashx?FilePath=../Files/Doc/波蘭2020國家發展綱領(英文).pdf).

<sup>4</sup> See NEAT: [https://de.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Neue\\_Eisenbahn-Alpentransversale](https://de.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Neue_Eisenbahn-Alpentransversale).



**Figure 4.** Jumps to hypermodernity: the mobility and digital revolution; breaking points, accelerating Anthropocene  
Source: Cultur Prospectiv

campaigns, coercive measures, specific incentives or hidden “deals”. These top-down approaches follow the logic of a hierarchic management, and are lacking the meaningful and beneficial forms of symmetrical flows. In fact, top-down flows are by nature asymmetric and in opposition to symmetric exchange relations: symmetry would be if the effects of flows from outside, or from a centre to a periphery would prove to be of high value for the addressed region and their inhabitants; or in case when the qualitative and quantitative character of a flow can be negotiated by the actors involved, participating substantially in decision-making processes. By contrasting such an ideal of symmetrical exchanges with the empirically proven effects by linear modernisation it becomes evident how the latter acts predominantly in an asymmetric fashion: symbolic and executive power is frequently used to define and evaluate spatial entities from outside, while urban centres are institutionally privileged *vis-à-vis* the rural areas. The problematic character of flow can be illustrated by the floods of tourists into the old city centres of Europe: because the quantity of inflows disturbs or even destroys the quality of life for the inhabitants of such destinations; well known for this problematic are the cities of Venice, Florence and Barcelona. There, as in other cities and islands arise counter-movements of the inhabitants, aiming at restrictions of such invasions and its disturbing impacts.

But the currently most notorious claim for linear modernity by mobility and virtualisation is the promotion of the borderless society. However, it doesn't need a particular detailed knowledge about complex societal fabrics and their path dependencies to understand, that linking societies of highly contrasting status and trajectories of development through the evocation of massive migratory flows – animated by treacherous incentives of the new communication technologies – leads to a dead end. Therefore, any proposed exchange relation must be ready to answer one crucial question: to what extent are the interests of the public part of their intentions? The refusal

to pose and answer such questions is symptomatic for the elitist mode of dealing with modernity, with their simple call for an unhindered flow of people and goods. These questions cannot be responded by simple claims, for instance for a new balance between richer and poorer societies. Substantial responses have to articulate the meaningful and productive content of virtual and physical flows. In some countries there is a strong trend to discard these questions or to discuss them not in an open public and democratic way. This deficiency disturbs the public atmosphere and the stability, mainly in countries of the western and northern hemisphere.

## The breaking points leading to hypermodern stages

Hence, the analysis of the vector of “linear modernity” needs a more analytic frame and should be regarded in all its local and spatial aspects. In Figure 4 the master-plan for linear modern trends is marked by the vector towards the Anthropocene. Spaces are opened and accessible for the flows of human beings, goods, finances, investments, transport and communicative facilities and infrastructures. In line with this stream a recent conference used the term “Capitalocene” for addressing the strategy to open the frame for basic socioeconomic forces and factors accelerating the global vector (World Society 2015). The innovation and pushing of transport, digital and virtual systems construed in industrial periods mutate into hypermodern patterns. In that way the “new” modernity marks disruptive distances to the pre-modern patterns and also to the industrial modernity of the postwar decades.

We observe such radical innovations to hypermodern situations nearly in all landscapes impacting the life and behaviour of people (Fig. 5). The natural landscape transforms – under the influence of hypermodern mobility – into parks or park-like areas. The settlement and architectural



**Figure 5.** Four landscapes as modalities of being in space: Settlement Landscape (“to be here”: inhabitant), Natural Landscape (“promenader of being”), Social Landscape (“to be together”: player) and Traffic Landscape (“to be here and there”: passenger)

Source: Cultur Prospectiv, ScienceScapes Berlin, Deutsche Bahn

landscape transforms into districts of modern nomads equipped with transport and communicative instruments to be “here and there”, everywhere in any time. The architecture of villages, towns and cities mirror these fluidity and styles of living – the buildings are standardized, designed as “boxes” for poorer people or “lofts” for wealthier persons, but offering mutually a rather temporally restricted use as a location. The disposition to be mobile and reachable by virtual communication is more important than the feeling to be at home and to be anchored in a social landscape, community or neighbourhood (Meier-Dallach 2011; Routledge Handbook of Henri Lefèbre 2018).

## **Whirls and responses – the return of recursive trends**

The linear progressive modernity evokes oppositional faces – the recursive paradigms and options. They can be detected on the various levels of the observational landscapes, as they are triggered by different breaking points.

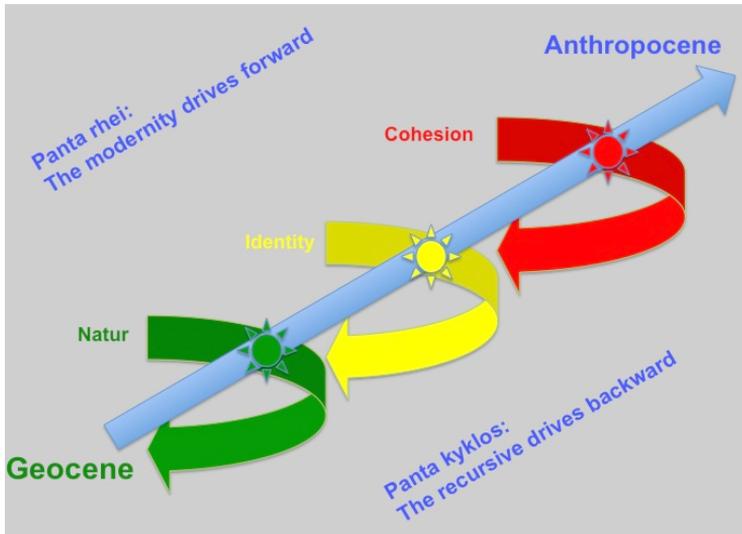
Today, the main source and drivers of the hypermodern trends are technical innovations, especially dominant in transport and communication technologies. Indeed, transport and communication are the main fields for most social innovations. However, these developments are met by recursive forces which generate specific responses and “whirls”, depending on locations and social conditions of places – the linear modern vector (blue) is facing varying counterforces, the recursive vectors (Fig. 6). Such turns and interferences of recursive cycles can be demonstrated especially with regard to the field of values.

But while considering regional counter-effects on the drive of the modern vector it would be too simple to state a plain dichotomy between such “innovative factors”, caused by outside forces like technical development and infrastructural interventions, and local recursive forces, solely slowing down and “breaking” these linear forces of modernisation.

In fact, the still relatively new notions of territorial capital and ideas about geographies of innovation urge a more differentiated evaluation of regional factors and settings. These concepts spark a new sense for the specific local amenities and qualities, which condition the efficiency of economic adaptation of local institutions, for openness and creativity, for attitudes not only versus business opportunities, but to communication in general.

The earlier approaches of these concepts referred to the mere spatial proximity within regions, facilitating spillover effects and helping to concentrate innovative activities. Moving beyond this argumentation of spatial proximity the advanced conceptualisation of the “learning region” addresses the full interaction and cooperation among actors within given regions (Asheim et al. 2005a: 3). According to this understanding, entrepreneurial activity is no longer assumed to be invariant with respect to space, but bound to territorial conditions, which must provide certain qualities for the “organized market to arise” (Capello et al. 2009: 5). Even more pronounced becomes this approach in the notion of the regional innovation system, considering official and unofficial actors, institutions, general qualification levels and stakeholders of all sorts (Asheim et al. 2005b).

These varying conditions for the management of implicit and explicit knowledge creation and transmission could be described as territorial capital, a concept helping to explain the observable “consistent discrepancies between knowledge inputs and economic performance across regional systems” – as for instance higher R&D efforts are not automatically related to regional growth (Capello et al. 2009: 2). Territorial capital is defined by the European Commission (2005) as follows: “Each region has a specific ‘territorial capital’ that is distinct from that of other areas and generates a higher return for specific kinds of investments than for others, since these are bet-



**Figure 6.** The master-plan of progressive linear modernisation, the whirls and the probable recursive cycles  
Source: Cultur Prospectiv

ter suited to the area and use its assets and potential more effectively” (Capello et al. 2009: 7). Indeed, research suggests that “regional policy is not so much effective *per se* but its impact depends on the type and amount of territorial capital possessed by the region. Regions more endowed with territorial capital appear to be more able to take advantage from the policy support of structural funds” (Fratesi & Perucca 2014: 187).

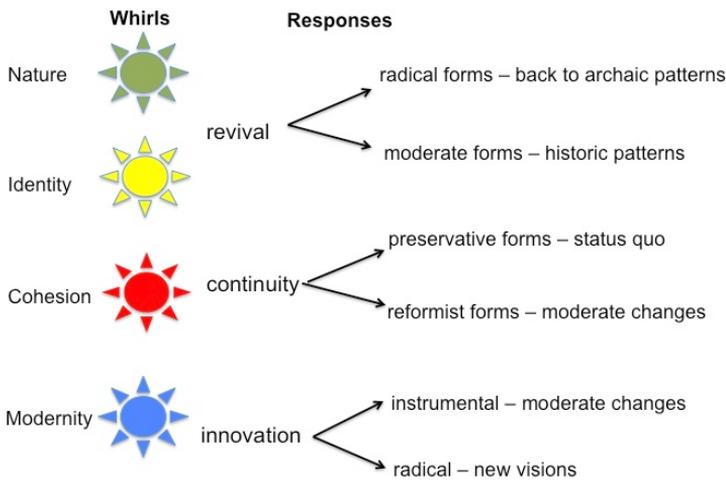
Such understandings have found strong empirical support by the studies of H. Simon about the “hidden champions” among German enterprises, i.e. small and medium companies which are global leaders in their markets (Simon 1996). Based on this empirical evidence H. Simon developed a number of theses about their origins, combining *milieu* innovator theory and an understanding of regional innovation (and production) systems. With the help of H. Simon’s observational indicators it becomes furthermore explainable why such relations favouring “hidden champions” are so strongly locally based: the emergence of path dependencies in building specific social, economic and institutional constellations of regional specialisations and expertise in certain economical fields. H. Simon’s insights moreover turn the attention to the fact that path dependent, historically shaped and conditioned regional qualities are not simple liabilities of the past to be overcome, but actually assets and sources, by which specific qualities and approaches are provided to master a globalised modernity.

Such concepts, developed originally by economic theorists, can be easily adapted and expanded generally to the problem of regions and their relational role between peripheries and centres. Similar to H. Simon’s conclusions about the emergence of “hidden champions” other authors suggest that “intangible, strongly territorialized and un-imitable assets” are decisive for territorial development: especially the role of local trust and the sense of belonging versus mere availability of capital, the potentials of creativity versus the simple presence of a skilled labour force, the importance of connectivity versus pure accessibility, allowing the actors to cooperate under “conditions of uncertainty, or solidarity, mutual assistance, and the co-opting of ideas (...)”<sup>5</sup>.

<sup>5</sup> In this summary of qualities Capello et al. (2009: 6) refer to Camagni & Capello (2008).

Therefore it can be concluded that as much innovative as recursive drives may arise from the socio-cultural sources of societies – and that their actors respond decisively through notions about identities, cohesion, ideals and values. The direction in which such drives actually work their effects in given regional and temporal contexts would have to be identified more precisely in the nature and relations of those regional constellations.

In this context the above mentioned breaking points of the modern vector could be described as laboratory situations, in which different forces of a society are mobilised. In their whirls the various actors, stakeholders, elites and other social groups promote different options and differing values. As a result the linear modern push of the technosphere is not simply blocked and hampered, but rather modified, renewed or re-created by different innovations. In consequence the linear hypermodern modernity of flows is transformed into a multicoloured picture, a “prismatic” space of life, rooted in specific cultures and created through the struggles and interactions by the actors on the different landscape levels.



**Figure 7.** Types of responses to the breaking points and outcomes of the whirls between continuity, revival, innovation  
Source: Cultur Prospectiv

These vectors act individually, but we can identify a scale of responses (Fig. 7). They block, modify or change the linear modernity, creating the multicoloured modernity, a diversity of modern developments. A frequent response is the insistence on “continuity” of given situations and relations in a societal space. The mentality of the “here and now” is defended against the hypermodern dynamics and the predominance of the (blue) linear vector, which strives for opening spaces and promoting multi-cultural trends. Considering the immigrant and refugee question this attitude is very crucial in most societies<sup>6</sup>.

The call for “continuity” ranks first in most whirls, whenever the opinion of the public is recorded: be it with concern for the natural landscape, the group identities in settlements, the cohesion in social landscapes or the value of face-to-face communication. The multicoloured prism confirms

<sup>6</sup> Evidently the new waves of migration flows are ending the “End of History” period (Fukuyama) of global society. There are various studies and publications dealing with these problems – ranging from very existential issues to new geopolitical challenges of borders and spaces.

the prevalent weight of continuity through the central colours and values.

This scheme presents the complex patterns of responses to whirls in different fields of values. It may serve as a guideline for a more detailed description and interpretation. Some examples from the Polish case may illustrate typical expressions for such reactive responses.

Observable is a general status-quo orientation by the majority of non-privileged and modestly living people regarding social concerns (cohesion). Reforms are supported if they promise to improve the life of families and common people, as for instance in Poland the support for families with children. More radical innovations, for instance liberalisation of the job market, are rejected, as are the elites who promote such moves. This polarisation can be found in most peripheries, even in wealthier countries, as for instance in the USA, which was an important factor for the success of Donald Trump.

In Poland the contradiction in the value field of ecology and nature is illustrated by a remarkable polarisation. There is a struggle between those who prefer the preservation of the antic woods of Białowieża, the archaic identity of this world heritage of nature. Oppositional groups and the government articulate and implement an innovation policy for allowing the usage of the forests for additional resources of production; thereby the regional stakeholders underline their interest and right for self-regarding their decisions.

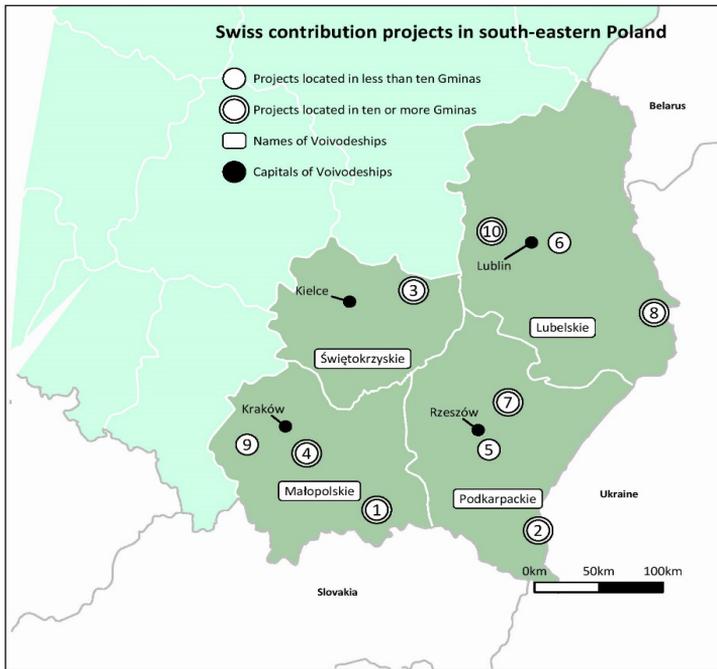
As in other societies, in Poland this particular modernity polarises. Radical innovation is the concern of small parts of the techno-oriented elite, i.e. groups with high educational and scientific resources, present in privileged economic sectors or state agencies. The majority of people agree only to moderate changes and instrumental innovations, which do not threaten to endanger other fields of values and/or the labour markets.

Everywhere, but especially in Poland there are significant trends in favour of continuity; the common identity as Polish man/woman should be preserved and/or moderately changed and adopted to new challenges. The “retrotopia” forms of revival are obvious in specific groups, evoking long-term memories. Radical innovations of identities are only visible in highly educated and internationally mobile groups, but remain marginal compared to other reactive patterns.

## **Multicoloured countryside? Outlook from regional projects**

The previous paragraphs addressed the topic of “spaces of flow” as a framework, for enabling an in-depth understanding of the dynamics of spatial developments. The Polish-Swiss cooperation projects deliver some insights into the interplay of vectors, linear modernity and the recursive trends along the Polish disparities between centres and peripheries.

The Swiss-Polish Cooperation Program (SPCP) selected ten sub-regional development projects as part of the Swiss contribution to the enlargement of the EU in 2004 (Fig. 8). All of them addressed the potential of peripheral sub-regions consisting of several communes (*gminy*). The practical implementation took place between 2011 and 2017, in the four poorest Polish regions (voivodeships) of małopolskie, lubelskie, podkarpackie and świętokrzyskie, all of them in south-eastern Poland. Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation mandated the authors to analyse the experiences and lessons learned with the ten regional development programmes in 2017. In spring 2017 an analysis and evaluation of the regional literature took place, and documents and statistical data measuring a series of indicators in quantitative terms were collected (Ein Bild Polens 2017; Zürcher & Meier 2017).



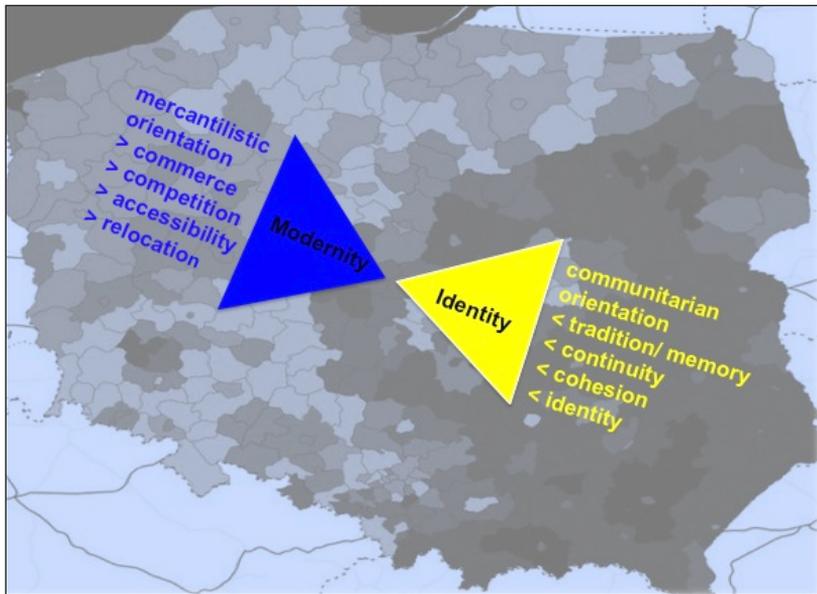
**Figure 8.** Overview on the 10 projects of SPCP in South Eastern Poland  
Source: Cultur Prospectiv

The numerous field interviews with the actors and participants, with focus groups of the municipalities and visits of the five review studies allow to summarise the responses in the form of a qualitative essay, interpreting the results in a frame of “colours of Poland”, situated between central and peripheral experiences. This qualitative assessment uses the concepts mentioned above, interpreting the space of flows as a complex interplay of vectors and forces. This qualitative interpretation is not strictly based on statistical data, but rather a statistically informed assessment of subjective impressions by interviews and local visits with actors and people engaged in the projects.

## How many Polands?

There is an old fashioned debate about the cleavages between Poland A and B (Fig. 9). Generally the economic and political mapping mirrors the divide between the urbanized and mercantile Western Poland against the rural south- and eastern society, i.e. a marginally modernised but multicoloured area. Generally we can observe a shift to communitarian attitudes rooted in needs for cohesion.

Although the dichotomous picture of Poland as a spatial A versus B is too simple, it still reflects some basic facts. In our spatial range of projects the medium line of Gorlice/Nowy Sącz divides the countryside into the more urbanised western countryside and into its east-southern parts. But it is essential to consider that everywhere, also in districts and surroundings of cities and towns, hard deprivations and peripheries are located. But Poland experiences new developments in the countryside as the old industrial complexes in rural areas of the socialist period de-



**Figure 9.** Poland between accelerated modernity by innovation (in the western parts and metropolises) against the regressive countryside, the regions of eastern and south-eastern peripheries articulating continuity, cohesion and identity (the map based on the votes of the last elections for the Law and Justice Party – PiS)  
Source: Cultur Prospectiv

clined. Two essential facts are relevant and are suggesting a more differentiated view (Fig. 10): 1) between metropolises and the rural sites of villages and remote zones the small and medium sized towns function as relevant moderators of flows from the metropolises and cities; 2) the distance of project locations to the next bigger centre impacts the strategies in regard to the whirls and the reactions to them.

This can be seen in the region of Hrubieszów, located in relative distance from Lublin as a vital urban centre. Its project Gotania was set up as the joint cooperation of a “family of communes” – which effectively strengthened cohesion and identity. The reference to the history of the goths created a new and unusual regional identity with effects that partly compensate the relative disadvantage of being in distance to Lublin.

Mełgiew with its project on Jan III Sobieski has chosen a different path. Mełgiew can profit from the leisure potential of Lublin, and has consciously chosen to implement elements of virtual technology in its presentations, linking history with the most advanced display-technology to convince a modern audience.

Dolina Strugu, on the other hand, struggles to find its niche for attracting visitors and clients from the smaller centre of Rzeszów. The proximity facilitates commuting and visiting without staying for longer time periods. This fluidity hampers the creation of interior developing stimuli, as indeed the entire region is the most traditionally oriented among the five regional cases. Being so strongly orientated versus tradition, cohesion and continuity may prove problematic while being so close to potential visitors of probably differing emotional and cohesive orientations.

But being a relative regional centre community, which even comprises a certain industrial context, does not necessarily make things easier, as can be seen in the case of Gorlice/Nowy Sącz. This community is experimenting in very innovative ways with a full array of different development

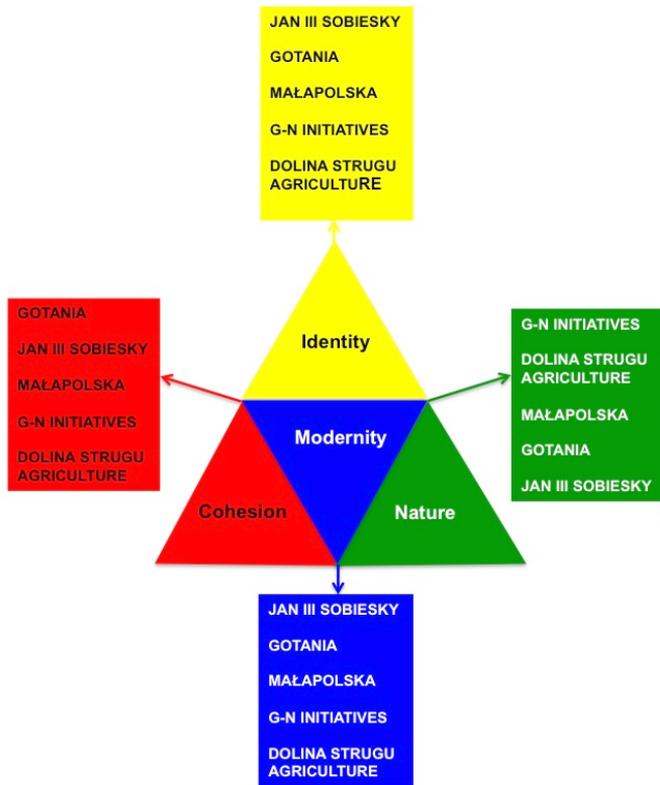


**Figure 10.** The five projects at the peripheries of the regional cleavage between metropolises (Poland A) and rural sites of south-eastern Poland (Poland B)  
Source: Cultur Prospectiv

strategies, including industry as well as developing products relating to nature resources and tourism. This combination proves to be attractive, however creates a certain disparity of activities, which are difficult to tie together under aspects of identity, cohesion and continuity. That makes it difficult to address in a comprehensive way the urgent problems of an aging population, the accessibility by disabled groups, and the emigration of young people.

Again quite different and unexpected effects indeed are to be observed in another regional project area: Lanckorona launched a project on “local products”, and implemented the straightforward innovation of a regional kitchen-incubator. That daring initiative for promoting the agricultural and touristic development targets decisively the dainty customers of nearby Kraków, a true metropolis. However, the efforts to offer and sell organically certified products in Kraków met with unexpected problems. Because not only well-off potential clients are present there, but also a strong competition by agile big businesses trading organically certified labels. Nevertheless, the implementation of the new incubator as a very visible focus point and symbol of the new association created an unexpected cohesion and identity among the small farmers, the communities involved and generally among the people in the entire region.

As a summary, the unicoloured linear vector of modernity meets different answers and counter-strategies in these five regional contexts. Relative distances, the chosen strategic combination of modernising and recursive elements, the varying agility of stakeholders, communities and enterprises decide essentially about success or failure of the chosen paths. Cohesion can be achieved not only by purely traditional elements, but also by highly innovative technical or operational decisions; while choosing solely modernising tools and strategies may lead to social and target disorientation. A comparing assessment of all projects could be summarized by placing them within the various colours of the proposed prism of value-fields (Fig. 11). It is noteworthy that two especially successful projects link their responses to modernity directly to projects about identity: both refer to historical periods, either to the lesser known archaic pre-history of their region (Gotania), or to the prominent historical period of Jan III Sobieski, so central to the Polish collective memory. Specifically the latter links this quest for identity with decidedly new innovations in its virtual presentation.



**Figure 11.** An assessment of the five projects according to the relevance of the colours  
Source: Cultur Prospectiv

Despite of the fact that the regions of the peripheral areas share some basic problems – lack of working places, emigration of the young, poor life conditions, resignation, aging – the rural societies produce manifold colours to cope with these situations. The five projects are proving that efforts cannot be restricted to unicoloured and sectorial strategies, for instance concentrating exclusively in investments for roads and infrastructures and other communication lines. More integrated and symmetric planning is necessary. Certainly history, historical memory and their respective references have proven to be especially vital to induce coherence and stamina into the various projects, for helping to build communicative bridges between the various stakeholders and standing up with confidence to their respective centres and agglomerations. Furthermore, the smaller a microregion presents itself, the more visible problems and challenges become. What are the conclusions? Rural areas need projects, which activate and promote the self-regard and identity, enabling autonomy in thinking, planning and acting. Thereby it is essential to deal with modernity in the prism of all colours – multiple values: identity, cohesion, nature, modernity.

Thereby specific conditions are relevant: the territorial capital and capacities to proceed and act successfully allocated inside a region is the more promising as it interacts positively with the exchange relations to the outside; it is visible especially in the project Jan III Sobieski, where the interior potential of the region is interacting well with Lublin. This neighbouring city offers knowledge while it simultaneously profits from its rural neighbour as a destination for leisure and cultural

events. Already before the official ending of the project the continuing interaction between internal capital and external exchange was clearly envisaged: Jan III Sobieski and Gotania were prepared to build up contacts and exchange relations with many places and towns in order to secure sustainability and developing dynamics<sup>7</sup>.

We have to add another observation: the smaller a region (i.e. in microregions) the more the mobilization of internal capital and the initiation of external exchange is depending on highly profiled personalities, ready to take up leading roles. Personalities of charisma, who are capable to match the capacities of municipalities and NGOs for organising and implementing projects. The most telling example for this we found again in the Gotania project.

It is necessary to consider further factors for remote regions: the creation of an active society is especially difficult, since the limitations and shadows of the peripheral situation are not favourable to attract the participation of many groups and people. Simultaneously the villages and towns in these regions have to cope with long-established paternalistic mentalities and the danger to resign to a "here and now" with missing optimistic outlooks.

## Epilogue

Evidently the current debates about modernity address predominantly the translocal and global levels; the flow model is driven and accelerated by new elites and its followers, visible for instance in the Silicon Valley group, creating and propagating a new progressive utopia of a virtual mankind of post-humanist identities. Such radical innovators stand in strong contrast to trends, counter-elites and groups who are aiming to re-evaluate the past, for instance by generating ascetic alternatives and images of "retrotopia"<sup>8</sup>.

Our paper is the proposal to deliver a more in-depth approach to the issue of flows and space, to counter the predominance of the unicolored notion of modernising trends:

- 1) It is suggesting that modern flows transcend all the borders of the present world; but that is a one sided perspective, generalizing and over-simplifying all spatial realities of humans. Be it on an individual, local, regional or national level. Such monolithic perspectives are typical for naive ideologies, imposed on complex realities.
- 2) Such projections negate especially the realities of rural regions and the countryside, which are only considered under the shadows of a transnational hyper-urbanism; the local lives of people in their closer environment and neighbourhoods, in their villages and communities (which applies as well to towns and even megacities) are neglected and interpreted only as regressive, backward, populist, romantic or at best conservative.
- 3) This unicoloured outlook blocks all efforts to become aware of the existing multicoloured regional realities and the flows between them. But there are counter-movements. In the upcoming exhibition "Country Side: Future of the World" the countryside will be recovered and re-legitimised<sup>9</sup>. This exhibition reflects the increasing interests in the future of rural spaces and flows.

<sup>7</sup> Tadeusz Markowski and Tadeusz Kudłacz stressed during the conference of the Warsaw Regional Forum (Third Plenary Session) in their key-note speech "Urban functional areas as a challenge for territorialisation of the development policy?" the important aspect, that "territorial capital" consists not so much in the sum of all capitals present in a defined spatial entity, but in the quality of the relations and communication and exchange channels within such a space or region.

<sup>8</sup> "Retrotopia" by Z. Bauman replaces "Utopia".

<sup>9</sup> Countryside: future of the world, Rem Koolhaas, Guggenheim Museum 2019, <https://mobile.nytimes.com/2017/11/29/arts/design/rem-koolhaas-guggenheim-museum-countryside-exhibition.html> (J. Barone, The New York Times, 29 November 2017).

The prisms of the various colours: modernity, cohesion, identity, nature should be set more substantially on the agenda of practice, research and politics for regions, the villages, middle and small-sized towns. The future of whole societies needs the microcosmos of the countryside as well as of the districts outside the illuminated parts of metropolises and cities.

4) One trend, however, is crucial: the worldwide turmoil, the whirls and crises polarize developments, i.e. “progressive” mentalities and strategies against “regressive” reactions. The political agenda for addressing problems of space, borders and flows is challenged to find new middle ways, i.e. to merge progressive modernity with regressive needs, mainly in relation to identities. The present and future communities are on the track to a transgressive development. Last but not least it is necessary and promising to promote symmetrical rather than asymmetric flows for the benefits of all actors and communities involved. For that the current conventional ideas about modernity will have to be complemented by looking anew into the past, being controlled by/or embedded in identities, cohesion and nature.

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