

Paweł Grata*

Poland A and Poland B – Developmental Disproportions on Polish Lands in the 19th and 20th c. (Prior to 1939)

ABSTRACT

Grata P. 2018. Poland A and Poland B – Developmental Disproportions on Polish Lands in the 19th and 20th c. (Prior to 1939). *Analecta Archaeologica Ressoviensia* 13, 33–48

The problem of developmental disproportions occurring within a state is not an uncommon phenomenon, and the case of Polish lands is one example of it. As a result of numerous disadvantageous conditions, Polish lands experienced dramatic developmental differences, which fully came to light in the interwar period, when the territories which had belonged to the three partitioners of Poland were incorporated into the Second Polish Republic. The disproportions were so deep that a much better developed Poland A and a much more backward Poland B (situated east of the Vistula River) were distinguished in the state. The scale of the differences was reflected in many economic and social indices, ranging from population density, to the degree of urbanisation processes and sources of population income, to the state of transportation infrastructure, to the involvement of workforce, to the production of basic goods. An attempt to reduce the disproportions was the establishment of the Central Industrial District in the mid-1930s and the Fifteen Year Plan for the state's development prepared by Deputy Prime Minister Eugeniusz Kwiatkowski (1888–1974). These plans were thwarted by the outbreak of WWII, and the developmental disproportions on Polish lands, despite the post-war change of state borders, remain visible even today, especially in territories that were part of Poland B before 1939 (today Podkarpacie, Lubelskie, Podlasie Voivodships).

Keywords: developmental disproportions, Second Republic of Poland, Poland A and Poland B, Eugeniusz Kwiatkowski, Central Industrial District

Received: 18.12.2018; **Revised:** 28.12.2018; **Revised:** 28.12.2018; **Accepted:** 30.12.2018

Introduction

The problem of developmental disproportions occurring within a state is not an uncommon phenomenon; in fact, it could be considered a norm stemming from many important factors which result in a situation where some regions develop well or even superbly, whereas other regions, even ones which used to be important centres of political and economic

* Institute of History, University of Rzeszów, Rejtana 16C, 35-959 Rzeszów, Poland; pgrata@wp.pl

life, lag significantly behind. Natural conditions and resources, financial and human resources, as well as policies of central and local authorities and negative historical factors are the basic determinants which generate developmental differences.

They occur virtually everywhere, but their scale can be really varied. In countries which have developed harmoniously for centuries and which have a set of beneficial determinants, the disproportions are relatively small and comparatively easy to reduce. Great Britain is a good example of such a situation; the economic processes leading up to the Industrial Revolution were natural, and the resultant socio-economic development occurred in a balanced way and covered the entire territory gradually. In other countries, where the developmental determinants were not as beneficial, and the industrialisation as such was insular, the disproportions occurred naturally, and their scale was possible to minimise only with time, and often with difficulty.

The situation of Polish lands was very complicated in this regard. At the root of the detrimental tendencies and the occurrence of severe disproportions were many phenomena which had a deep impact on developmental processes. It is worth looking at them more closely and attempt to answer the fundamental questions related to the division into Poland A and Poland B, which became fully apparent after Poland regained independence after WWI. The geographical scope of the analysis covers the area of the Polish state, rebuilt after over a hundred years of subordination, and the temporal boundary is the year 1939, when the Polish Republic essentially stopped existing within the borders agreed on after WWI.

Factors behind the spread of developmental processes on Polish lands

In the last two centuries, developmental processes were mainly determined by industrialisation, which was the necessary condition for taking the path to economic and social modernisation. As a result, factors which had previously been significant continued to lose their importance. Consequently, places which had been even the most vital trade, manufacturing, political and cultural centres in the Middle Ages or even in the early modern times, could be marginalised if they were not included in the “new” modernisation, related to industrialisation.

In order for industrialisation to occur it was necessary to meet several preliminary requirements. The fundamental ones included suitable raw material resources, manufacturing traditions outside agriculture, well-disposed institutions, labour resources and ready markets (Kaczyńska and Piesowicz 1977, 196–200).

Great Britain met all of these requirements, which is why the process of industrialisation started there. In other countries, industrialisation, defined as a widespread use of modern production techniques (with all their consequences), was initiated much later and was much less prevalent. Belgium, France and German lands took the path to fast development in the first half of the 19th c. Other countries, not equipped with adequate resources by nature, did so slightly later, when – taking advantage of favourable conditions – they managed to find their place in the international division of labour, determined by the countries which had been industrialised earlier (Cameron 1993, 223–257).

The situation of Polish lands was very different and extremely disadvantageous, and their backwardness started already in the times of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. Internal weakness, resulting from an inert political system, anarchy and underdeveloped economy, is considered to have been the main cause of the Commonwealth's collapse. The latter factor was largely a result of the state's policy. Consequently, in the face of the increasing dualism of Europe's economic development, which was a result of deep institutional differences, as well as the division of labour among Europe's various parts, which was shaped in the 16th–18th c., the economy on Polish lands, which had flourished in the High Middle Ages, with time was left lagging far behind the continent's developing nations (Rutkowski 1947, 358–361).

Accordingly, Polish lands entered the period of partitions as an already economically backward territory, and the state's collapse as a rule meant an increased influence of detrimental developmental determinants. With the exception of the short-lived, only sixteen-year-long, period of autonomy of the Kingdom of Poland and Galicia's autonomy after 1867, the directions of development on the territories of the former Commonwealth were decided by the partitioning powers, who were not interested in developing the areas – which were peripheral from their point of view. Their modernisation was mainly determined by the direction of institutional solutions adopted in each of the three monarchies. Opportunities for the development

of Polish lands depended on them, and they also determined the scale of disproportions in this regard.

The necessary condition for starting modernisation were institutional changes oriented towards abolishing feudalism. In the West of the continent, such changes were brought about by the French Revolution and Napoleonic Wars; in the East, they were much more difficult to effect. Only one of the partitioning powers, Prussia, started on its way to change in agriculture in the early 19th c., and the so-called Prussian regulation, initiated in 1807, brought about the liquidation of feudal relations, restructured the agricultural sector, and created a strong structure of modern, market-driven farms. Although they meant the liquidation of a large proportion of small farms, these processes undoubtedly facilitated progress, which also occurred on Polish lands under the Prussian rule. As a consequence, they led to the quick development of agriculture on these territories, coupled with an improvement of the entire farming infrastructure working to support its needs. The positive tendencies in agriculture in the Prussian partition were in no way mirrored in the other partitions. In Austrian Galicia, land was not granted to peasants until 1848; in the Kingdom of Poland it only happened in 1864; and the method of introducing reforms, unlike in the Prussian regulation, petrified the disadvantageous structure of farms and determined the future deep backwardness of agriculture on the majority of Polish lands (Duda and Orłowski 1999, 133–134, 141).

The second determinant which had an impact on the emergence of glaring developmental disproportions on partitioned Polish lands were the conditions of industrialisation. Since they lacked their own state, they were directly dependent on the partitioning powers' broadly defined potential and policy with regard to Polish lands. The first determinant was the most advantageous in the Prussian state, which was able to take the path towards industrialisation relatively early, thanks to the emerging common market of German lands and raw material resources. As a result, the fast development of modern industry began in Upper Silesia already in the 1840s and this region remained the most industrialised part of the lands which made up the Polish state after WWI. However, we should remember that this development was mainly based on German capital and German ready markets (Łukasiewicz 1988, 14–15).

It was much later that industrialisation covered the territories of the other two partitions, which resulted from the mentioned

lateness of institutional changes, as well as from lower economic and cultural potential of the partitioning powers. In the Russian partition, industrialisation, which was insular in nature, cannot be spoken about until the 1870s, when the Łódź industrial district, built on the textile industry, went through a period of unprecedented development (Dzionek-Kozłowska, Kowalski and Matera 2017, 236–238). Slightly later, a modern industry sector emerged in the Dąbrowa Basin, Warsaw became an important centre, and the Białystok district thrived. The rest of the territories remained a virtual industrial desert (Jeziński and Leszczyńska 1999, 180–186; Kula 1947, 30–56).

In Galicia, enclaves of modernity were even fewer and farther between. The crude oil industry, which developed fast especially since the 1880s, became the symbol of industrialisation and a hope for the modernisation of the state. Other than that, we could list the Cracow Basin, individual machinery plants, and numerous, usually small, food production plants. In the face of a lack of capital, a non-absorptive internal market, scattered agriculture and a detrimental state policy, there was not much that Galicia's autonomous authorities, oriented towards developing the economic potential of the partition, could do (Kula 1947, 71–86).

The latter issue is also related to a set of other determinants which had an impact on the developmental opportunities of Polish lands. Deprived of their own state, these lands did not necessarily find support for such processes from the partitioning powers. While in the Prussian partition the economy on Polish lands, despite Germanisation efforts, could count on the protection of the state, in the other two partitions the situation was markedly worse. Austria-Hungary treated Galicia as a peripheral country, a ready market for industrial products and a source of raw materials. Meanwhile, in the competition for the internal market, the Russian government openly supported Russian companies at the expense of those operating on Polish lands (Rusiński 1969, 312–319).

Without going into detailed reflections on the directions of the influence and impact of the other developmental determinants on the modernisation of Polish lands prior to Poland regaining independence, it must be concluded that the processes occurring on these lands obviously must have brought deep developmental disproportions not only between the individual partitions, but also between specific regions within them. Therefore, the Polish Republic, rebuilt after over 100 years, would consist not only of territories which differed in terms of the legal,

administrative, monetary, and tax systems, but also – or perhaps most importantly – really varied in terms of the degree of developmental processes, dividing the state in advance into two not very matching components, which would come to be called Poland A and Poland B¹.

The Second Polish Republic – one state, two Polands

The terms Poland A and Poland B appeared in Polish political commentary journalism in the second half of the 1930s, and the Deputy Prime Minister at the time, Eugeniusz Kwiatkowski (1888–1974), put the spotlight on them in the public debate. Poland A included territories west of the conventional boundary marked by the Vistula River. These lands were considerably better developed than the ones located in the east, and the differences were visible not just in the purely economic aspect, but in virtually all spheres of life. Things could not have been any different in view of the fact that the territories of the former Prussian partition, better developed in many ways, were situated in the west, as were the Dąbrowa and Cracow Basins, and the Łódź and Warsaw Industrial Districts. East of the Vistula, the only larger industrial area was the Drohobycz Oil Field, and relatively small enclaves of well-developed industry were still connected to urban centres which held important administrative functions (Lublin, Lwów, Stanisławów, Białystok, Wilno; cf. Fig. 1).

The boundary marked by the Vistula River was, of course, only a conventional one, but it did mean that Poland A included the Voivodeships of Poznań, Pomerania, Silesia, Kielce, Warsaw (including the capital) and Cracow, whereas Poland B comprised the Białystok, Lublin, Wilno, Nowogródek, Polesie, Volyn', Lwów, Tarnopol and Stanisławów Voivodeships². It should be stressed that a closer analysis of the level of development of individual voivodeships would also require putting considerable stretches of the Warsaw, Kielce and Cracow, Voivodeships in Poland B, but in order to make the analysis clearer it is worth keeping the division proposed above³.

¹ For the first findings of a study on the differences in the GDP level *per capita* in individual administrative entities on Polish lands in the early 20th c. see Bukowski, Koryś, Leszczyńska and Tyimiński 2017, 163–193.

² For the history of the east territories of the Second Polish Republic in the years 1918–1939 see Mędrzecki 2018, *passim*.

³ Some pre-war authors also distinguished Poland C, which covered the territories of voivodeships situated in the Eastern Borderland, formerly in the Russian partition; see Tomaszewski 1981, 105–106.

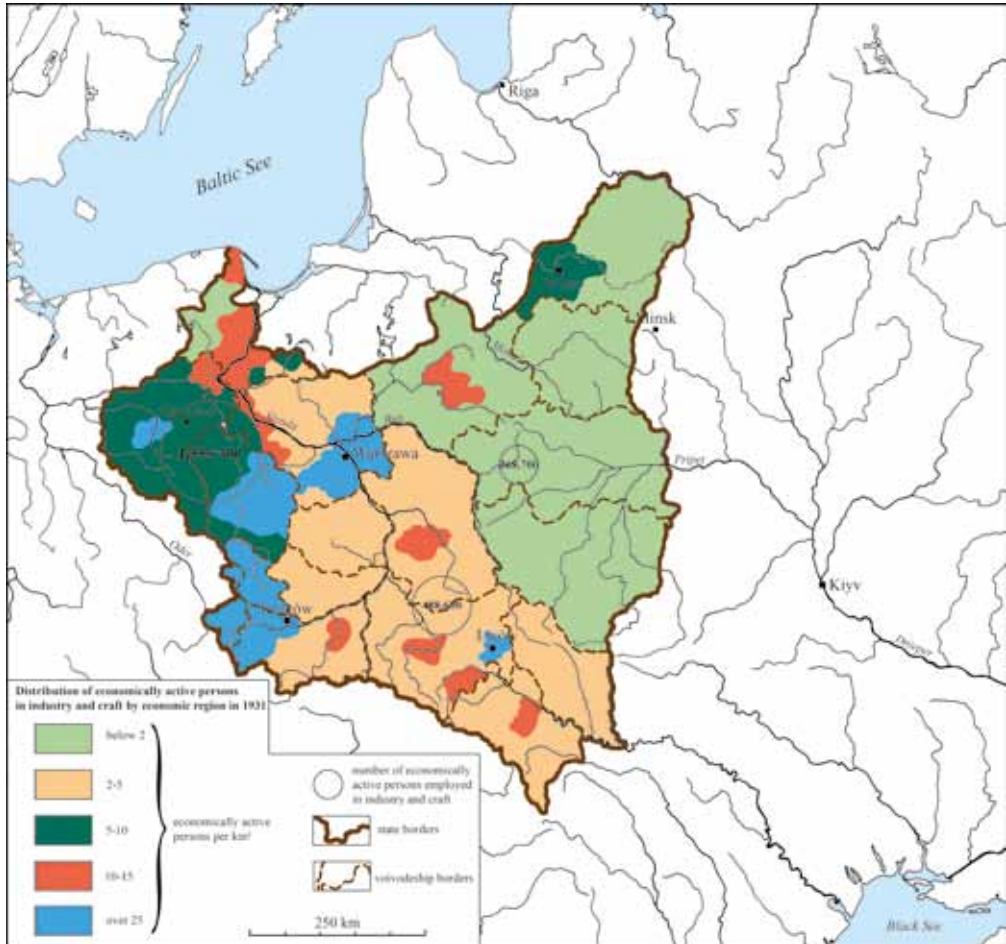


Fig. 1. Distribution of economically active persons in industry and craft in the Second Polish Republic – 1931 (Source: Z. Landau and J. Tomaszewski 1991, 58; redrawn by J. Oźóg)

The developmental disproportions between the two parts of the state can be illustrated with many indices, which are difficult to list in their entirety in such a short sketch is this. The occupational structure of the population, employment outside agriculture, the density of the transportation network, the efficiency and yield of marketable agricultural output, the volume of industrial production, and the accessibility of the communal infrastructure are just some of the differences related to economic issues. They should be coupled with

elements, just as significant from the point of view of developmental disproportions, which might be called social or cultural ones. They included e.g. the level of industrial workers' wages, employment relationships in industry and agriculture, access to the social insurance system, development of health care, the population's health care awareness, and household equipment and appliances. Importantly, the more indices of modernity we consider, the more conspicuous it becomes that the territorial range of the area referred to as Poland A becomes smaller. One example is social insurance, which was available in the full objective scope only on the territories of the former Prussian partition (Grata 2016, 398–403).

However, if we keep the division which is based on the conventional line of the Vistula River, it is worth emphasising the basic differences between the two parts of the country. The comparison of population density indicates fundamental disproportions. According to the census of 1931, the western part of the country was inhabited by 16,100,000 citizens, i.e. 50.1 per cent of the entire population, while the area of so-called Poland A was 138,800 square kilometres, i.e. only 35.7 per cent of the total area. This meant that the development index showing population density, which had been a basic one since the Middle Ages, left no illusions about the depth of changes in this regard. An average of 116 persons per square kilometre lived in the west, while only 64 persons lived in the east, and the scale of this phenomenon was indicated by comparisons of the most industrialised Silesian Voivodeship (308 persons per square kilometre) and the four eastern voivodeships (Wilno, Nowogródek, Polesie, Volyn'), where the population density was 45 persons per square kilometre⁴ (Mały Rocznik Statystyczny 1936, 8–10).

These most rudimentary data were confirmed by the indices which directly showed the economic and social potential, as well as the economic processes occurring in individual parts of the country. We should note here the considerable differences visible in the context of the place of residence and sources of income. With a low level of urbanisation of the country, which was reflected in just 27.4 per cent of city dwellers in 1931, it is worth noting the fundamental disparities in this regard. In the western part, called Poland A, the percentage of urban population was 36.3 per cent (nearly 6 million people), i.e. it

⁴ Author's own calculations.

was 9 percentage point higher than the national average and almost twice as high as in Poland B (almost 18.6 per cent of urban population, i.e. less than 3 million people)⁵ (Leszczyńska 2018, 73; *Mały Rocznik Statystyczny* 1936, 8).

The indices presenting the population structure by source of income, divided into agriculture, industry, and mining, were closely correlated with this. In 1931 agriculture was the source of income for 60 per cent of the population, while industrial occupations, which determine the extent of developmental processes, were 19 per cent. The Silesian Voivodeship was considerably different from these averages; the share of industry and mining was 55 per cent there, while agriculture provided a source of income to only 12 per cent of the inhabitants (in the Łódź Voivodeship the percentage of people who earned their living in industry was 31 per cent, while in the Kielce Voivodeship – 27 per cent). On the other end of the spectrum were the eastern voivodeships, where only 10 per cent of the population earned their living in industry and mining, while the share of agriculture increased to as much as 80 per cent (Leszczyńska 2018, 106–107; Landau and Tomaszewski 1980, 36–40).

The geographical differences visible with regard to selected indices showing the population's potential were visible equally well in the area of strictly economic indices. Moreover, an analysis of at least some of them clearly shows that the voivodeships in the heart of the country, which used to be in the Russian partition, did not really meet the standards of Poland A. This was especially true for the railroad network. In the late 1930s, when 5.2 km of railroads per 100 square kilometres was the average, only the Warsaw Voivodeship, including Warsaw, reached this average in the centre of the country. In the former Prussian partition, which was the most developed in this regard, the average ranged from 10 km in the Poznań Voivodeship to 18.5 km in the Silesian Voivodeship. In the eastern lands, the number was around 3 km, i.e. it was six times lower than in Silesia (*Mały Rocznik Statystyczny* 1939, 188).

The proposed division into Poland A and B is similarly reflected in the network of roads, although it is worth noting that in central Poland this index was clearly connected to industrialisation. With the average of 16.2 km of roads per 100 square kilometres, in the Warsaw Voivodeship the number was 24.1 km, in the Łódź Voivodeship it

⁵ Author's own calculations.

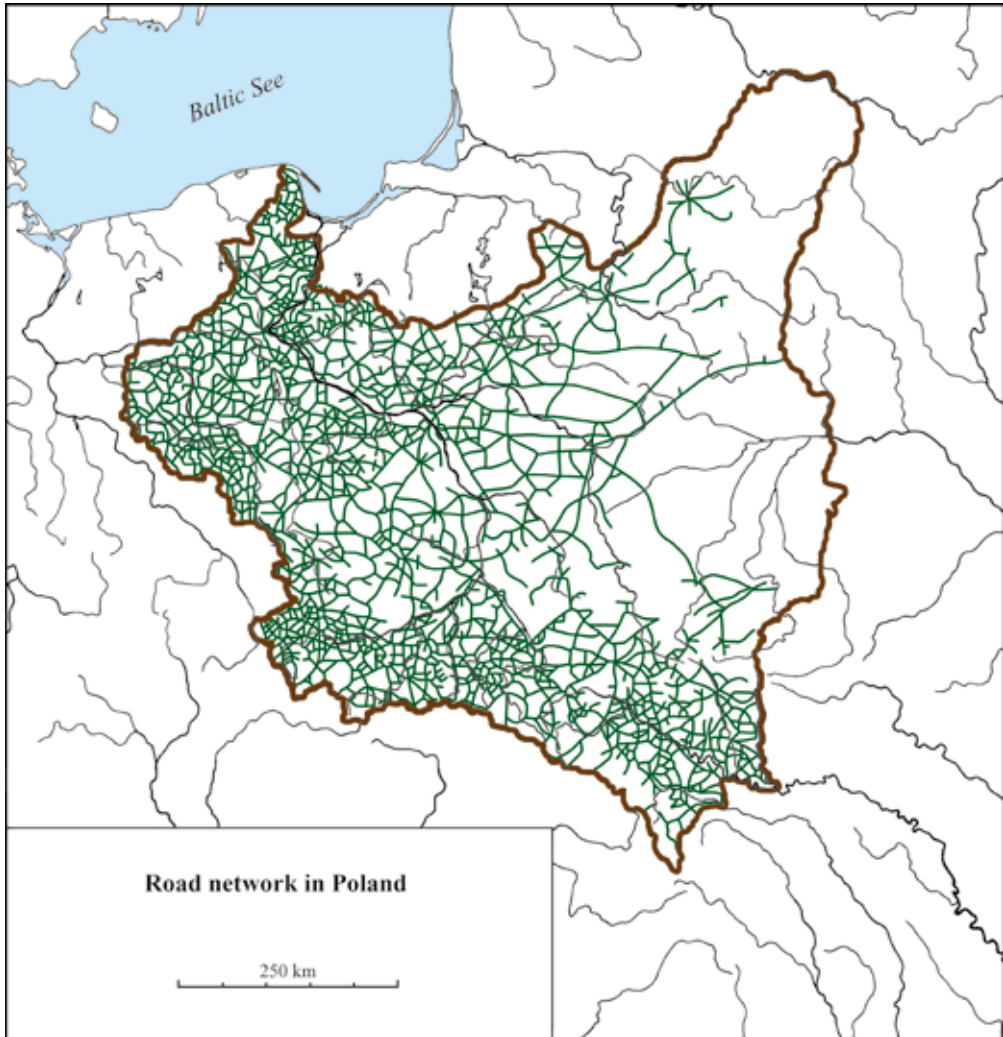


Fig. 2. Road network in in the Second Polish Republic (Source: Z. Landau and J. Tomaszewski 1991, 56; redrawn by J. Ożóg)

was 24.6 km, and in the Kielce Voivodeship – 18.6 km, while in the Lublin and Białystok Voivodeships it was only 11–12 km. On the other hand, in the eastern voivodeships it never exceeded 10 km, and in the Polesie Voivodeship it was only 2.9 km per 100 square kilometres, i.e. over eighteen times smaller than in Silesia (Mały Rocznik Statystyczny 1939, 188; cf. Fig. 2).

Another confirmation of the existence of fundamental dualism in the level of the state's development was the involvement of hired workers in the economy of individual regions. The voivodeships included in Poland A decisively dominated in the country – in 1931 out of 2.8 million workers outside agriculture almost 2.1 million, i.e. as many as 75 per cent, worked in this part of Poland. The disproportions became even more visible in the geographical structure of employment in industry and mining, where a total of almost 1.7 million workers were employed in Poland. Over 1.3 million of them were employed in companies operating on the territory of so-called Poland A (with the majority in the Łódź, Silesian and Warsaw Voivodeships), which meant that it employed as many as 80 per cent of all industrial workers. The scale of the differences is reflected in the comparison of 290,000 industrial workers in the Łódź Voivodeship with only a few hundred thousand of such workers in the Polesie and Volyn' Voivodeships⁶ (*Mały Rocznik Statystyczny 1939*, 134, 258).

Due to a lack of appropriate data, which would allow us to make a precise comparison of the national income or the value of the global production by voivodeship, it is difficult to pinpoint the share of the two analysed parts of the country in the production of goods and services, but we can get an idea of the actual state of affairs on the basis of the disproportions quoted above, which showed the employment of workers, as well as the below map of the division of the Polish Republic into two extremely different parts in terms of economy. To get a better idea, it is worth quoting data related to the production of electrical energy, which in principle was not dependent on the occurrence of natural raw materials, but reflected the extent of developmental processes. In 1938, the production of energy in Poland A was 3,688,000,000 kWh, i.e. almost 93.5 per cent of the total energy produced in Poland and constituted the conclusive proof that two almost completely different (in terms of development) parts of the same country existed side by side⁷ (*Mały Rocznik Statystyczny 1939*, 127; cf. Fig. 3).

Instead of recapitulation

Both the facts presented above, showing the chasm between Poland A and Poland B, as well as a number of other facts, unmentioned in this

⁶ Author's own calculations.

⁷ Author's own calculations.



Fig. 3. Division of the country into Poland A and Poland B on the basis of selected indices of industrial production in the in the Second Polish Republic (Source: Z. Landau and J. Tomaszewski 1991, 64; redrawn by J. Ożóg)

sketch, prove the thesis, formulated already in the interwar period, about the virtually clinical and very detrimental developmental dichotomy of the Second Polish Republic. Although it was noticed by many, for the first dozen or so years of independence it was treated as a necessary evil and a phenomenon which could not be overcome. It was not until the experience of the Great Depression and Eugeniusz Kwiatkowski taking the position of Deputy Prime Minister in 1935 that things changed⁸.

⁸ For the economic crisis in Poland in 1929–1935 see Landau and Tomaszewski 1982, *passim*.

Diagnosing the state's economic situation, Kwiatkowski was not only aware of the deep divide into Poland A and Poland B, but he also formulated a programme to alleviate the problem. The first step in this direction was to be the implementation of the Four Year Investment Plan, which, when modified in 1937, was the starting point for building the Central Industrial District. This zone of industrial and infrastructure investments, situated on the border of Poland A and Poland B (parts of the Cracow, Kielce, Lwów, and Lublin Voivodeships), was meant to be a prelude to resolving developmental differences between the two parts of the state. The next step was supposed to be another industrial district, which Kwiatkowski planned to build east of the CID (around Lwów). Moreover, towards the end of 1938 the Deputy Prime Minister presented a Fifteen Year Plan for the Development of Poland, whose final result was to be complete equalisation of the developmental level of the two parts of the country, which differed so much (Grata 2015, 84–86).

The outbreak of WWII thwarted Kwiatkowski's plan, and the occupation brought about a few years of devastation of Polish economy. As a result of the war, Poland also lost the eastern half of its territory, incorporated into the USSR. Importantly, this was a territory which was all included in the boundaries of pre-war Poland B, which had only 13 per cent of persons employed in industrial plants, and only 5 per cent of electrical energy production (*Mały Rocznik Statystyczny Polski* 1941, 54–61).

In the context of the fact that, as some sort of compensation, in 1945 Poland took over much better developed German territories in the west and north of the country, it might seem that the divide into Poland A and Poland B, so glaring in the Second Polish Republic, would end when the war finished. However, this was not the case and contemporary Eastern Poland, whose territories were included in Poland B already before WWII, still sometimes continues to be referred to in this way. What is more, its regions are still the worst developed regions in the European Union, which only goes to confirm the difficulties with overcoming the developmental disproportions resulting from ages of late development, mentioned at the beginning of the paper.

References

- Bukowski M., Koryś P., Leszczyńska C. and Tymiński M. 2017. Rozwój regionalny ziem polskich pod zaborami. Porównanie poziomu produktu brutto per capita na dzisiejszych terenach Polski na przełomie XIX i XX w. (wyniki pierwszych estymacji). *Roczniki Dziejów Społecznych i Gospodarczych* 78, 163–193.
- Cameron R. 1993. *A Concise Economic History of the World: From Paleolithic Times to the Present*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Duda J. and Orłowski R. 1999. *Gospodarka polska w dziejowym rozwoju Europy (do 1939 roku)*. Lublin: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Marii Curie-Skłodowskiej, 133–134, 141.
- Dzionek-Kozłowska J., Kowalski K. and Matera R. 2017. Geography matters. Environmental factors that affected the „take-of” of Łódź. *Roczniki Dziejów Społecznych i Gospodarczych* 78, 223–246.
- Grata P. 2015. Centralny Okręg Przemysłowy. In Ł. Dwilewicz and W. Morawski (eds.), *Historia polskich okręgów i regionów przemysłowych*, vol. I. Warszawa: Polskie Towarzystwo Historii Gospodarczej, 84–86.
- Grata P. 2016. System emerytalny Drugiej Rzeczypospolitej. In A. Janiak-Jasińska, K. Sierakowska and A. Szwarc (eds.), *Ludzie starzy i starość na ziemiach polskich od XVIII do XXI wieku (na tle porównawczym)*, vol. I. Warszawa: Wydawnictwo DiG, 398–403.
- Jezierski A. and Leszczyńska C. 1997. *Historia gospodarcza Polski*. Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Key Text.
- Kaczyńska E. and Piesowicz K. 1977. *Wykłady z powszechnej historii gospodarczej (od schyłku średniowiecza do I wojny światowej)*. Warszawa: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe.
- Kula W. 1947. *Historia gospodarcza Polski w dobie powojennej 1864–1918*. Warszawa: Spółdzielnia Wydawnicza „Wiedza”.
- Landau Z. and Tomaszewski J. 1980. *Polska w Europie i świecie 1918–1939*. Warszawa: Wiedza Powszechna.
- Landau Z. and Tomaszewski J. 1982. *Gospodarka Polski międzywojennej*, vol. III. *Wielki kryzys 1930–1935*. Warszawa: Książka i Wiedza.
- Landau Z. and Tomaszewski J. 1991. *Gospodarka Drugiej Rzeczypospolitej*. Warszawa: Krajowa Agencja Wydawnicza.
- Leszczyńska C. 2018. *Polska 1918–2018*. Warszawa: Główny Urząd Statystyczny.
- Łukasiewicz J. 1988. *Początki cywilizacji przemysłowej na ziemiach polskich*. Warszawa: Krajowa Agencja Wydawnicza.
- Mały Rocznik Statystyczny 1939. Warszawa: Główny Urząd Statystyczny.
- Mały Rocznik Statystyczny Polski wrzesień 1939 – czerwiec 1941. Londyn: Ministerstwo Informacji i Dokumentacji.
- Mędrzecki W. 2018. *Kresowy kalejdoskop. Wędrówki przez ziemie wschodnie Drugiej Rzeczypospolitej 1918–1939*. Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Literackie.
- Rusiński W. 1969. *Rozwój gospodarczy ziem polskich w zarysie*. Warszawa: Książka i Wiedza.

Rutkowski J. 1947. *Historia gospodarcza Polski*, vol. I. *Czasy przedrozbiorowe*. Poznań: Księgarnia Akademicka.

Tomaszewski J. 1981. *Polska A, B i C*. In *Encyklopedia historii gospodarczej Polski do 1945 roku*, vol. II. Warszawa: Wiedza Powszechna.