

Interface with Europe

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While the people and enterprises of Poland have numerous international contacts, the extent, nature and direction of such contacts differ greatly across various regions. These patterns manifest a historical legacy that dates back to the 18th century, a time when Poland was missing from maps of Europe

International social and economic linkages are among the major issues embraced by modern geography. Work on spatial linkages and mutual impacts has been at the core of the discipline since the 1950s. These were regarded as key to measuring differences and similarities between various places on Earth. Such work, however, was often limited to examining linkages between regions in a given country or between countries. The general trend towards globalization and the new geopolitical situation in Europe (in particular the intensification of European Union integration programs) have set the stage in Poland for the comprehensive analysis of inter-regional linkages within an international configuration. Such analysis is now in progress at the Institute of Geography and Spatial Organization.

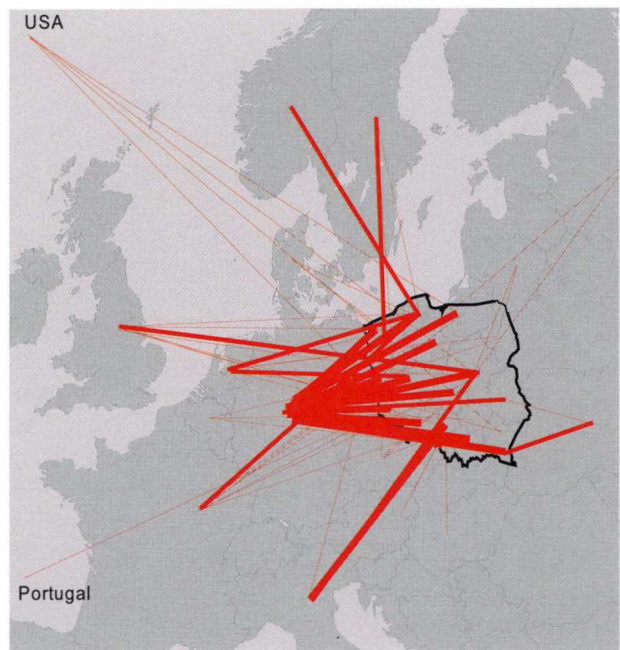
The main empirical goal of this work is to identify the intensities and directions of each region's international linkages on the eve of European Union membership. Traditionally, spatial linkages are divided into economic, social, political and other. Flows of goods and capital are considered manifestations of economic linkages, while flows of people (migration and tourism) indicate social linkages, including personal relations. Political linkages at the regional level take the form of direct international (including cross-border) cooperation between local governments. The remaining types of linkages are in the areas of transport and communications, which can illustrate both economic and social contacts. Where statistical data is unavailable for linkages of substantial importance, the Institute decided to gather information by way of surveys.

Echoes of history

The pattern of different types of linkages is quite complex, but we can in general conclude that western Poland (bordering on Germany and the Czech Republic)

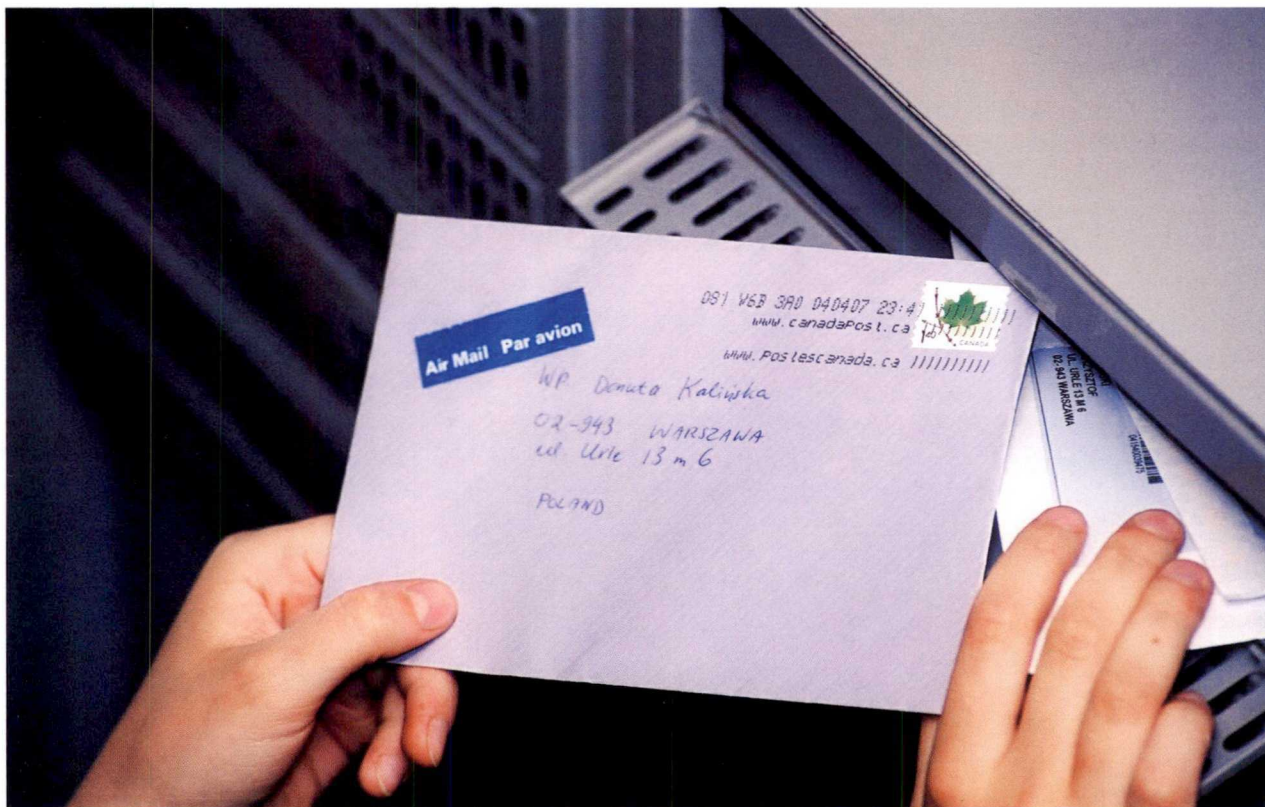
has stronger international contacts than the eastern part of the country (bordering on the former Soviet Union). The area of strongest contacts extends eastward in the areas of northern and southern Poland, creating a fan-shaped pattern with its center of gravity in Poznań – a pattern that in some ways harks back to the state of affairs in Poland prior to World War I. At that time, the territory of Poland was divided into three zones controlled by Russia, Prussia and Austria. The present areas of strongest contacts more or less overlap with the Austrian and Prussian zones.

The strong international linkages of southern Poland are also the result of concentrated industry (coal and copper mining, steel production, modern vehicle factories) and the German minority (almost half a million inhabitants with two citizenships). Apart from the contact-intensive “fan” in the west of Poland there is an “island” of the strongest international contacts centered on Warsaw. The country's capital is surrounded by a ring of areas with linkages that are weak or very weak. Further places of linkage concentration are other large cities, particularly Poznań, the Gdańsk agglomeration, Kraków, and to a lesser extent, Wrocław and Szczecin. The city with



Directions of international linkages in terms of export of goods – a synthetic assessment based on standardized per capita values for each of Poland's “voivodship” regions

Tomasz Komornicki



The distribution of international personal linkages divides Poland into two distinct domains: the west gravitates towards EU, and the east towards former Soviet Union and North America

the weakest international relations is Łódź, partly due to the collapse of the textile industry that dominated the city's economy for more than a century.

International economic contacts tend to be highly concentrated, not only in large agglomerations, but also in medium-sized regional centers, especially where substantial foreign investments are present. Other areas with strong foreign linkages are border zones, especially near border crossing points. Certain regions that are attractive to tourists also rank high on this list, i. e. the western part of Polish Baltic coast, visited each year by thousands of Berliners.

The big split

It is important to note that the real scale of geographical differences with regard to international linkages is not as great as available statistical data suggests. The intensity of personal contacts inferred from the independent surveys resembles the pattern for economic linkages in that it declines the further we progress eastwards across the country, but the disproportion proves to be far less marked. This can be explained by poverty, which is a major factor stimulating certain types of international interactions, like commuting to work abroad or carrying goods over the border to avoid taxation.

The eastern part of Poland has different directions of linkage than the western part. For certain types of contacts a distinct split line can be observed on distribution maps. This line separates the voivodships of Podlasie and Lublin, and to a lesser extent also the voivodship of Podkarpacie, from the rest of the country. These areas have

the weakest relations with the European Union, and simultaneously the strongest relations with the countries of the former Soviet Union, partly in the form of unofficial cross-border trade. The split line is not as clear, however, when personal international contacts are analyzed. While eastern Poland gravitates towards Eastern Europe in the economic sense, in the social sense it also demonstrates strong connections with the western part of the continent, as well as with the USA, due to mass migration to North America from these areas in the past.

It is thus reasonable to see the country as being divided into one zone associated socio-economically with the European Union (mainly Germany; 2/3 of the country), and another zone associated socio-economically with North America and the countries of Eastern Europe (the remaining 1/3 of Poland). A separate category of multi-directional links includes the agglomerations of Warsaw, Katowice, Kraków and Gdańsk. Hence, the true border between Eastern and Western Europe can be seen as running through Poland itself. ■

Further reading:

- Komornicki T. (2003) *The spatial differentiation to international social and economical linkages in Poland*, Prace Geograficzne, 190 [in Polish, summary in English].
- Komornicki T. (2002) *The geographical aspects of Polish-Slovak socio-economic relations*, Geografický Časopis, Roc. 54, No. 3, pages 239-254 [in English].
- Komornicki T. (2000) *Commercial commodities flows of Polish foreign trade and international transportation connections*, Prace Geograficzne, 177 [in Polish, summary in English].