

A Postcard from the Province

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A global approach to social, cultural and economic phenomena in the contemporary world aims to show the universal features of today's reality. This method of presentation gives possibilities that would be unachievable in research conducted in a narrow scope. This broad perspective allows for seeing dependencies and structures in a more general way, thus helping to better understand the mechanisms governing the contemporary world. In this way, certain important details are omitted, yet relations and principles governing the processes that remain invisible in a narrow view are revealed. It is therefore possible to see the broader context and long-term consequences of the changes taking place.

This approach was characteristic of the research methodology that Immanuel Wallerstein used when developing the world-systems theory, which was based on the long-duration (*longue durée*) analysis¹ and the relationship between the core and the periphery. Adopting a broad perspective does not mean breaking away from specificity or losing connections with reality. Quite the opposite, it allows for a better understanding of the mechanisms that shape the contemporary world. Universal features of social and economic phenomena constitute their general properties, which are revealed at specific moments in history, giving them a characteristic form and dynamics. According to Wallerstein, the key factor shaping contemporary social reality in the long term is a system based on the accumulation of capital, which determines global divisions, power relations and economic structures. In historical terms, this system is currently the dominant model of socio-economic organization, influencing the way people act, the structure of productive forces and, ultimately, decisions made by individuals. It shapes social polarization, dividing the world into regions with different levels of development – the highly developed core and less privileged semi-peripheries and peripheries, which remain in economic and structural dependence on the core of the world-system. This core is most often identified with the regions of Western culture, which impose social, economic and political norms on the remaining parts of the world, thus maintaining the dominant model of global dependencies. This system not only perpetuates divisions between regions but also deepens internal social stratification in both peripheries and the core. This leads to a clear division into wealthier and less privileged social groups, reinforcing existing power structures and economic inequalities. Thus, even in the most developed regions of the world, this system contributes to maintaining and deepening social hierarchies and the concentration of capital in the hands of elites, which additionally limits social mobility and reproduces

¹ The term '*longue durée*' comes from the historiography of the Annales School (Fernand Braudel) and means the study of long-term historical structures rather than short-term events.

existing mechanisms of domination. As a result, one can be classified as a resident of a semi-periphery country, for example, Poland, while living in its provincial area.²

Provincial areas, in comparison to urban areas, are characterized by a more homogeneous and less dynamic social structure, which exposes features typical of dominant patterns of social behaviour in a given period. Lower mobility and limited social diversity mean that larger-scale processes are more stable and noticeable in their characteristic form. It is in the provinces that social myths, populist ideas and reactions to emerging new cultural patterns resulting from socialization processes, such as growing sensitivity to the heterogeneity of the community, are most strongly revealed. In this type of environment, xenophobic, nationalist attitudes and intolerance towards behaviours deviating from accepted norms are often observed. They are an expression of defence mechanisms aimed at preserving the existing social order and limiting the impact of potential, rapid changes. Due to the desire to stop time and maintain intact order, the implementation of norms and patterns of functioning originating from the core areas encounters resistance. Being more isolated, the province exposes the consequences of rules shaped outside its borders, leading to their modification and adaptation to local realities. In this context, these spaces are often identified with areas that fit into the concept of Foucault's heterotopia.³ However, it should be emphasized that even in its extreme dimension, the province does not so much distort or deform social patterns, but rather highlights them, revealing their most expressive and established forms. It is these spaces that become areas where observations and research can contribute to a better understanding of the mechanisms shaping social attitudes. Thus, it is possible to recognize and counteract earlier phenomena that are unfavourable for the processes of socialization, which may remain less visible in more diverse and dynamic core communities. In particular, the province becomes an area where observations and research can contribute to the development of alternative solutions and the prevention of unfavourable tendencies that hinder the process of socialization. While in the dynamic and diverse societies of the core areas certain social mechanisms may remain less visible, in the provinces, they are revealed in a more distinct and concentrated form, which allows for their earlier recognition and analysis.

In this context, the province should not be seen only as an area of backwardness or social stagnation, but rather as a space where fundamental mechanisms governing society are visible. It is there that global processes are adapted to local conditions, often subject to reinterpretation and transformations that reveal their real consequences. Thanks to this, the analysis of the province makes it possible not only to understand the dynamics of social change more deeply but also to notice hidden tensions and defence mechanisms that shape collective consciousness. A thorough study of these processes offers the opportunity to better predict future directions of development and to create more adequate social and cultural strategies considering both global trends and local specifics.

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² For example, a small town near Poznań is a province in relation to that city, but Poznań itself remains provincial in relation to Warsaw, which in turn occupies a peripheral position in relation to the regions of Western Europe.

³ Michel Foucault's concept of heterotopia indicates a place governed by its own time and different rules of functioning. It is a space of 'inactivity' or isolation, including hospitals, prisons, places of worship, boarding schools and other areas of exclusion or separation.