

## PART I

# THE (RE-)PRODUCTION OF PERIPHERALITY IN CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE

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### FOREWORD

The idea of this special issue was inspired by two powerful processes that encompassed academic studies focused on socio-spatial inequalities within Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) and beyond.

1. One is the highly uneven development of socio-spatial processes endemic to global capitalism, that manifested itself recently as a persisting financial, structural and social crisis across Central and Eastern and Southern Europe, a sluggish recovery in European (and other) ‘core’ economies, and a multiplicity of political conflicts at various scales inside and outside (yet related to) Europe. For CEE, it was the first deep structural *and* financial crisis since the transition. It exhibited and reproduced the inequalities stemming from post-socialist conditions (accumulation through rapid and extensive dispossession) as well as from the embedding in global spatial division of labour and European institutional contexts in a strongly dependent and contested way (Böröcz, 2010; Pickles and Smith, 2015).

2. Moreover, the region has been objectified and marginalized by academic inquiries from the West (Timár, 2004; Stenning and Hörschelmann, 2008). Studies from the East remained mostly invisible, as they failed to enter mainstream discourses and challenge them from the periphery through reflexive re-conceptualization of CEE transformations, such as re-thinking their (our) own peripherality (Timár, 2004).

Nevertheless, the recent crisis raised new concerns about growing socio-spatial inequalities and heated the debates on powerful concepts and narratives of the highly diverse realities of everyday life. To contribute to such discourses, this issue aims to get a deeper understanding of the reproduction of peripherality through research

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results and everyday experiences of academics who live and work in CEE. Thus, the added value of this issue was meant to discuss inequalities from this specific ontological and epistemological context, the ‘immediate periphery’ of the European core – ‘immediate’ in terms of visibility and political conflicts, material flows, institutional arrangements, and of knowledge production – that is discussed below.

The concepts of peripheralisation and peripherality were taken as points of departure for organising this issue.<sup>1</sup> A fairly broad understanding of peripheralisation was adopted, as a manifestation of the space-producing logic of capitalism that occurs constantly through flows, multiple institutional arrangements and practices as well as discourses at various interrelated scales, yet in very different contexts (as it is discussed by Wallerstein, 2004; Domanski and Lung, 2009; Fischer-Tahir and Naumann, 2013; Kühn and Berndt, 2013; Lang, 2015). Peripherality refers to the way dependence and powerlessness are perceived, interpreted, signified and (re)acted upon (shaped by place-based values and norms) – the way being on (part of) the periphery is ‘lived’ (Lefebvre, 1991; Meyer and Miggelbrink, 2013). Peripheralisation/peripherality (in this broad sense) offer a flexible interpretative framework to research the material, institutional and discursive (re)production of inequalities within from, CEE contexts and challenge dominant concepts/ideas driving such processes.

To explain the relevance of the spatial focus, a brief explanation of the ‘immediate’ peripherality of CEE is given in the following. Then, the dimensions are discussed through which the authors grasp the mechanisms of peripheralisation at various scales and the ways they approach it from various epistemological contexts.

## **1. MODERNITY, IN-BETWEENNESS AND PERIPHERALISATION – THE ENTANGLED HISTORIES OF THE EAST AND THE WEST**

When a series of institutional reforms were launched across CEE from the late 1980s, the possible models of modernization – institutionalization of capitalism and democracy, including the completion of nation-state building – were in the focus of political debates. Diverse concepts for the transformation processes were at work and brought together within a ‘modernization consensus’ rested on the

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<sup>1</sup> The very root of both processes – the World System Theory/WST – has been subject to critique from various disciplines and theoretical angles. Nevertheless, we considered it a relevant point of departure due to its holistic, historicized, and deeply critical approach toward existing power relations and the structures of knowledge that reproduce inequalities at global scale (Wallerstein, 2004). Moreover, we also considered and relied on the critique of the theory that targeted the WST for its economic reductionism, functionalism and little sensitivity to various contexts and (even less to) agency – generally, its propensity to suggest a simplified, binary view of a highly uneven capitalist world, offering just a new narrative that can be exploited to reproduce the status quo (Lang, 2011; Peet and Hartwick, 2015).

rejection of state socialism and the adoption of ‘western’ values and institutional practices as models (Böröcz, 1999; Sebók, 2016). Based on this political platform, institutional reforms – supported by international think tanks and the emerging groups of domestic capitalist elites – were pushed forward rapidly along a neoliberal agenda (Bockman and Eyal, 2002). This turbulent period heated the debates on *national and European histories* as a context of actual modernization concepts – such as the interpretations of state socialism as a ‘detour’ vs. an alternative non-capitalist modernization model (Berend, 2005; Böröcz, 1999). Such discourses were shaped by earlier debates related to CEE history, in which the region was considered (implicitly or explicitly) as a peripheral modernization model, a specific trajectory emerging in relation to the European core – that was perceived in CEE as economic peripherality and being the immediate ‘other’ to the West.

The idea of *peripheral modernization* shaped academic discourses on the history and development trajectories of the East within CEE from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. The future of emerging CEE states were discussed in relation to their perceived ‘backwardness’ (in relation to the ‘West’), and alternatives to western capitalism were being sought for from the perspective of the European periphery (Berend and Ránki, 1980; Boatca, 2006). The World System Theory/WST – its critique toward the exploitative nature of capitalism and also to the western-centric understanding of modernity (Wallerstein, 2004) – introduced new dimensions and scale to the discourses on CEE history and embedded there region’s historical-structural changes in core-periphery relations explicitly (Wallerstein, 1974). The WST was employed later to challenge the classical idiographic approach, as well as the orthodox (linear) Marxist interpretations of history, though it remained a contested concept due to its little sensitivity to difference and context (Chirot, 1989; Lampe, 1989; Wallerstein, 2004). Nevertheless, the entanglement of the mechanisms of modernization and peripheralisation within Europe and the reproduction of the region’s geopolitical and cultural ‘in-between’ position (East/West) across *long durées* were considered powerful arguments by many scholars researching CEE modernity. In the following, we give a brief overview of the ideas/arguments that related CEE history to the processes of the European core and the unequal relations between the two – to highlight why we consider the region an ‘immediate’ periphery (by our definition) to Western Europe, thus a specific context for discussing peripheralisation/peripherality.

1. One key point in the debates was relating the transformations of the ‘East’ to the social processes – rising incomes and living standards, the spread of contractual relations and rising autonomies as vehicles of modernization – of the ‘West’. The rise of capitalism and its powerful transformative effects on CEE through trade relations and unfolding spatial division of labour from the early modern times was put in the focus that (re)produced not only long term dependencies and highly vulnerable economic structures up until the ‘great crisis’ in 1929/1933, but generated social changes that encompassed *power relations and political agency across CEE*.

Such processes manifested themselves in the rising economic power of and the colonization of political life by the aristocracy, considered as the historical roots of *political elitism* and also the drivers of social struggles against it (Szűcs, 1986; Kochanowitz, 1989; Szalai, 2006). Moreover, the long term *co-existence of 'modern' and 'traditional' within CEE societies* shaped political discourses and ideologies in which 'progress', 'modernity' (mostly, related to West European models of industrialization and state building) and national identity were interlinked ambiguously and often conflictually – leading to the alternative interpretations of 'western' political categories and the rise of tribal nationalism and political extremes during the crises of capitalism from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century (Berend, 2005; Boatca, 2006; Balogh, 2015).

2. The concept of western modernity as a particular trajectory – raised by Brenner, following Weber, Gerschenkron and Polanyi – and the related discourses drove the attention toward institutionalization processes, such as *the rise of the modern state* in CEE as a key agent of monopolies conditioning capital accumulation and the expansion of western capital(ism) (Brenner, 1989; Chirot, 1989). The modern state took shape in the context of multiethnic empires – more broadly, within European geopolitical constellation – in CEE until the end of the *long durée* of classical modernity. This process was considered as a powerful condition of an ambiguous state agency in modernizing 'from above' and the root of political contestation of the state by emerging national identities (Gerschenkron, 1959; Kochanowitz, 1989; Böröcz, 1999). This contradictory agency and perception of state roles was reproduced even under state socialism when the omnipotent role of the state was conditioned by actual geopolitical (and macroeconomic) contexts and being constantly eroded by everyday practices – such as 'informalization'<sup>2</sup> and structural reforms shaped by political battles within the elites (Konrád and Szelényi, 1978; Scott, 1993; Böröcz, 1999). The uncompleted project of nation state building and the contested state agency under and before socialism are considered powerful conditions of institutionalizing capitalism and democracy – of 'modernization' – across CEE after 1989.

3. In-betweenness in its wider sense – as a powerful narrative of CEE social history – embraced the above-discussed entanglement of the modern and traditional in social processes, including modern state-building and the reinterpretations of 'western' ideologies and categories. However, in-betweenness emerged also as a more practical term in academic and public discourses, such as a particular geopolitical context within Europe that made political processes and institutions of CEE dependent on external power(s) and produced economic vulnerability and political instability repeatedly within the region. Thus, 'in-betweenness' was associated with shifting cultural and political boundaries within Europe that separated various models (agencies and trajectories) of modernity, with unsettled

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<sup>2</sup> A wide array of informal social practices ranging from income-raising outside the realm of the centrally planned system to artistic movements challenging the dominant ideology of socialism (Scott, 1993; Böröcz, 1999).

national borders and related conflicts, as well as major geopolitical concepts that considered the region as a ‘frontier’ (Soviet bloc/transition countries) up until now (Gerschenkron, 1959; Szűcs, 1986; Bibó, 1991; Böröcz, 1999; Berend, 2005).

4. Discourses on peripheralisation in relation to modernization were revolving not only around powerful macro-processes but also around the diversity of contexts in which social restructuring and changes in institutional patterns and everyday life unfolded. It was often discussed in the binary context of homogeneity and diversity of/within CEE, relating external forces and effects – e.g. the embedding in the spatial division of labour or modern state building by adopting ‘western’ models (public administration, army, school system etc.) – to growing uniformity across the region (Chiot, 1989; Böröcz, 1999; Szalai, 2006; Stenning and Hörschelmann, 2008). However, diversity was also associated with institutional arrangements (such as the rise and transformations of the modern state as an entity with its internal logic and autonomy), social agency driving institutional changes, and the values and norms governing everyday life. These aspects were related – explicitly or implicitly – to experiencing and addressing peripherality and in-betweenness in the discourses (Boatca, 2006; Bohle and Greskovits, 2007; Düzgün, 2013). The diversity of CEE as a European periphery has been discussed at various scales. While the macro-focus highlighted the rise of CEE as a semiperiphery (between the ‘West’ and the ‘East’/Russia) and the variety of institutional arrangements across *long durées* (see e.g. Berend, 2005; Kochanowitz, 1989; Bohle and Greskovits, 2007), recent critical readings of peripheralisation and peripherality drove the attention toward regional and local processes within the periphery in the context of CEE modern history (Boatca, 2006; Zarycki, 2011; Düzgün, 2013; Fischer-Tahir and Naumann, 2013). They linked grand historical time to ‘internal time of spatial systems’ (Braudel, 1992; Massey, 2008) and opened up the way to understand peripheralisation from the periphery.

The explanations of CEE history in relation to modernity and the transformations of the European core exhibited the region as an ‘immediate’ periphery that was always ‘visible’, rested on direct and regular contact between the ‘East’ and the ‘West’ and was involved in various political conflicts and institutional arrangements at European scale. In our understanding, this led to subsequent (re)inscriptions of belonging (to Europe) and differences (East/West) that produced a specific ontological and epistemological context and as such, a relevant framework for discussing peripherality.

## 2. THE DIMENSIONS OF PERIPHERALISATION IN CEE CONTEXT

A major body of scholarly work discussed the recent peripheralisation processes of CEE in the context of postsocialist transition, embedding in global capitalism and European institutions revealing the multiplicity of scales and dimensions

– such as ‘material’ inter-firm relations, institutional contexts and practices, and the collective memories of political and cultural relationships that encompass social practices in the region (Smith and Timár, 2010; Lang, 2011; Ehrlich *et al.*, 2012; Fischer-Tahir und Naumann, 2013) – along which a highly differentiated/uneven social landscape has emerged in the region. This special issue is meant to contribute to understanding the multiplicity of peripheralisation/peripherality in terms of material processes, public discourses, as well as institutional practices. The broad concept of peripheralisation we relied upon and experiencing the reality of peripherality allowed the authors to link macro-structural changes to social practices at various scales – not losing the sight of the local, the everyday and the acting subjects/agency – and discuss socio-spatial processes from various CEE contexts.

Zsuzsanna Pósfai and Gábor Nagy discuss the peripheralisation of CEE within global capital flows through the mechanisms of the housing market. They put the issue of housing in the context of powerful macro-processes such as financialization and flows of capital between the European core and peripheries in the recent pre-crisis/crisis/recovery periods of markets, and reveal how uneven development unfolds within the periphery – producing inequalities in the conditions of life chances and everyday practices – along urban/rural, regional and metropolitan/non-metropolitan dimensions. By focusing on a particular peripheral market – Hungary – they highlight how global processes are translated to other scales through institutional practices of mortgage lending that rests on unequal (core-periphery) power relations and reproduce the dependencies of peripheral housing markets. By discussing the interrelatedness of peripheralisation and territorial mobility in Romanian context, Aura Moldovan brings macro-processes (economic restructuring) and everyday practices (individual mobilities) closer. Taking the LHDI-based<sup>3</sup> core-periphery structure as a point of departure, she reveals how peripherality was reproduced and spatially extended and thus, socio-spatial polarization was deepened by the mobility of people in the Northwest Region between 2002 and 2011. She suggests that such processes manifested themselves in the centralization of the young and skilled in a few urban spaces and also in growing dependencies in labour markets that can be revealed through complex commuting patterns.

While the above papers focused on CEE peripheralisation as a set of entangled material processes, Bianka Plüschke-Altó and Sebastian Schulz focused on the making of peripheries through discourses. Taking the Foucauldian notion of discourses as means of production as a conceptual basis, Plüschke-Altó analysed media discourses on peripherality and the way it is related to rurality in Estonia. She identified the powerful – competing – narratives of recent socio-spatial inequalities such as the neoliberal ‘reading’ of rural peripherality based on self-responsibility and interventionist approach relying on solidarity and state agency,

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<sup>3</sup> LHDI – Local Human Development Index a complex indicator explaining social restructuring processes at local scale. See Moldovan’s paper in this issue.

however, stressing the all-encompassing concept of capitalist modernity in which these narratives emerged. Her findings are substantial contributions to the discourses on CEE modernity, state roles and identity discussed above – it helps understand how peripheralisation discourses become performative in this (post-socialist/post-Soviet, neoliberal, Estonian) context. Schulz’s analysis enriches our knowledge further by placing the power of ‘periphery’ label in the focus of his argumentation on innovation policy making and practices in Estonian context. By reading his paper, we can understand more of the way that powerful concepts in EU policies – such as knowledge-based development and endogenous growth – are employed at national scale by the political and economic elites to marginalise regions outside the capital city in development discourses, while hiding growing spatial inequalities by using EU nomenclature for regional policy. He sees such discourses as tools for pushing a neoliberal agenda for policy-making that is polarizing Estonia, primarily in a metropolitan/non-metropolitan dimension.

Stefan Telle’s paper is focused on institutional practices highlighting how state restructuring is embedded in EU context – in the European institutional system regulated along the principles defined in European core context – that manifest themselves in specific settings in CEE border regions. Conceptualizing Euroregions as ‘soft spaces’ – flexible institutional arrangements addressing the specific problems, such as peripherality of the regions involved – he discusses the ambiguity of the relations between hierarchical/territorialised (state) and cross-border organisations that might produce various outcomes in organisational terms. Relying on his fieldwork results, he challenges the idea of institutionalization as the dominant concept to overcome peripherality in border regions and drives the attention to the variegated landscape of institutional arrangements and cultures that shape cooperation – that might rest either on cross-border (supranational) or national/state institutional relations or on networks of various local agents.

### **3. PERIPHERALISATION IN CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE – QUESTIONS OF EPISTEMOLOGY**

When we set out to put together this thematic special issue, we were not only interested in the ontological aspects of peripheralisation in CEE, but also intended to see whether we could find any distinctive regional characteristics related to the manner CCE researchers think about peripheralisation. Although the authors in this issue generally address epistemological questions only indirectly, this collection of their work allows us to draw some conclusions which may be found interesting from the perspective of the academic discourses on spatial differences and inequalities in European knowledge production.

Some years ago, we, editors, were also engaged in these debates on the matter of the convergence or divergence of national schools of spatial studies in Europe (*European Urban and Regional Studies* 2004, Vol. 11 (4); the Western or American hegemony and the struggle against it (*Geoforum* 2004, Vol. 35 (5); *Belgeo – Revue Belge de Géographie* 2007, Vol. 3; *Documents d'Anàlisi Geogràfica* 2007, Vol. 49). Thinking about these questions not long after the transition in CEE (1989–1990), it would not have been difficult to fall into the trap of the self-colonization or self-peripheralisation which many rightly criticize (see in Koobak and Marling, 2014; Plüschke-Altöf in this issue). The 'Western' concepts and the tendencies of the discipline outlined in progress reports served as reference points to us. Nevertheless, rather than functioning as norms to be followed, they served as tools of communication. We needed this new common language in order to find the framework for discussing the questions raised by the new schools of thought, like critical geography (Timár, 2003). We found this 'lingua franca' within the existing western narratives, so we could avoid references to the frameworks of orthodox Marxism or the value-neutrality of positivism which had been the two prevalent traditions of the region during the socialist period. Looking for 'our' own place within this scientific discourse, we did not treat the evolution of 'Western' knowledge production as a 'development narrative' to be applied. We suspected path-dependency behind the distinctiveness of the ways of thinking of Western and local researchers who studied spatial issues in CEE (Timár, 2007). Substantive differences may be identified in this regard which go well beyond the general 'insider-outsider' debate.

We are of the opinion that shifting conditions have placed these epistemological questions in different light in terms of the used theories and methodology, even if not from the perspective of power dynamics. This is partly due to the transformation of the structural frameworks of academic research and partly to the generational change which has occurred in the meantime. With the exception of one co-author, the present thematic special issue has been prepared with the participation of young scholars, who lived in CEE for a significant part of their lives, but whose personal experiences only extend to the period after the transition, and have always had the opportunity to travel between 'East and West' freely and, accordingly, have pursued studies in many countries and in many 'schools' and now enrich their knowledge by participating in international exchanges of experiences and views. These scholars are too young to be 'captured' intellectually by the influence of an employer (institution) following the formerly prevalent traditions. They are not only free in terms of their thinking, but also in terms of their positionality, or are at least significantly more free than the social scientists of the same CEE institutions had been during the socialist period. The differences between their knowledge on the peripheralisation/peripherality in CEE is not a consequence of some kind of East-West path-dependency, but rather of their distinct personal approaches to social theory. It would be interesting to see whether the



paths to get knowledge on CEE by local researchers and the results themselves are more different from the way Western researchers would study this region (and topic) today, or from the likely results of research conducted by an earlier generation of local scholars, had such researches been done. The papers published here seem to support that they are more different from the latter. It must be noted, however, that this does not mean that the relevant questions raised by studies in peripheralisation in CEE are identical to those raised with regard to other regions of Europe.

The perspective of Aura Moldovan's examination of the interrelationships between the changes within core-periphery structures and territorial mobility flows is significantly different from the studies conducted in CEE so far, as previous CEE studies on urban-rural changes have been narrowed down by many researchers to structural questions, and studies on territorial mobility flows employed a behaviourist approach and concentrated on decisions to migrate. Nonetheless, her perspective also befits the relational approach to core-periphery disparities, hence the conclusions drawn from the study of the situation in Romania may contribute to the structure-agent debate in the West, just as to the ongoing international discourse on peripheralisation.

Its theoretical approach certainly separates the paper of Stefan Telle from the many border studies published in CEE which consider border areas geographical periphery due solely to their distance from the centres. By means of the 'organisational ecology' perspective employed by Telle, we are able to understand the way 'unstable and/or inaccessible politico-administrative hard spaces constitute an unfavourable environment for the development of euroregions.' In addition, the perspective makes clear why these hard spaces of transition country-sections of the two examined Euroregions make the situation worse and it also indicates how the Euroregion Šumava (as a soft space) could make a substantial contribution to overcoming peripherality in view of the close relations to national hard spaces. This relational approach provides for an easy access to participation in other current international debates on organizational strategies, border spaces and peripherality.

The work of Sebastian Schulz is also different from earlier CEE research projects focusing on the structural and institutional elements and the traditional economic geographical questions related to the innovation system because of its relational perspective and its focus on the study of peripheralisation and its relationship with the innovation-based regional policy. In Schulz's constructivist approach peripheralisation is manifested in language, policy making practices and power rationalities. This formulation of questions related to the adaption of EU policies on the member-state level may be taken a step further in academic discourse: what kind of meaning is attached to theories coming from outside of CEE, how do new theories arise in the region, and how do these travel further?

The two other papers offer an interesting 'contrast' from this perspective and in relation to the above mentioned questions on the role of CEE in knowledge production. The works of Zsuzsanna Pósfai and Gábor Nagy are notable for build-

ing significantly on the concept of uneven development which is rooted in the Marxist meta-theory that still has bad connotations because of the region's state socialist past. This concept, however, has been 'imported from the West' (Smith, 1984) and cannot be traced back to the mainstream of the socialist region's socio-geographical thought. Pósfai and Nagy study the housing market using this concept (as well as WST and dependence theories) and consider the mutually dependent, intertwined cross-scalar homogenization and differentiation, as well as peripheralisation itself, to be a systematically (re)produced process endemic to capitalism. Nevertheless, they do not describe CEE processes as post-socialist (as East-West difference) but use the concept of variegated capitalism (Peck and Theodore, 2007).

On the other hand, the research of Bianka Plüschke-Altóf adopts a decolonialist approach which explicitly arose in the debate aimed at intersecting postcolonial ('as a product of the anglophone world': Tlostanova, 2012, p. 1) and post-socialist approaches, in which CEE social scientists have played a decisive role. Using this perspective, she succeeded in exposing the narratives present in Estonian (media) discourse on peripheries centring around two competing regional development models: the neoliberal model advocating self-responsibility and the interventionist model supporting state responsibility. As Plüschke-Altóf summarizes it at the end of her paper:

[...] both development concepts essentially rely on capitalist spatial disparity discourses. Due to the concurrent socialist de- and capitalist neo-colonization, the discourse participants are left with no other option than to embrace capitalist modernity. This might be questioned in interventionist discourses but never fully rejected as a regional development model building on socialist modernity cannot form a viable alternative in a post-socialist and postcolonial context (Plüschke-Altóf, 2017, p. 73).

We are hopeful that this argument and all the other ideas raised by the authors having different positionalities serve as a starting point for future epistemological debates.

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