



Higher education system of interwar Poland

A geographical approach

Summary

The chief goal of the reflections offered in this monograph was to explain the development and operation of the higher education system in the Second Polish Republic using theories of social sciences and research methods typical of modern geography. It presents the results of the research on the development of this system, changes in its spatial structure, migrations of students and scientific-didactic staff, its staff-related potential, changes in the prestige of its universities and higher-education centres, as well as regional determinants of the level of university enrolment. An analysis of the rich empirical material with the use of various quantitative methods allowed drawing general conclusions concerning regularities in the self-organisation of the Polish educational system in the interwar period as well as the effect that long-term structures exerted on it.

The research results revealed both the complexity of the operation of the Polish higher education system and the multi-directional transformation taking place in its spatial structure. After the country had regained independence at the close of the First World War, the most important structural changes included the establishment and development of new or reactivation of old higher education centres (Poznań, Warsaw, Vilnius, Lublin and Łódź), accompanied by an increase in the number higher educational institutions (from 9 to 24) and students (from 12 thous. to over 50 thous.). Those processes resulted in a considerable deconcentration of the higher education system when compared with the pre-1918 period. This shows the importance of the new academic centres: in the entire interwar period they accounted for about two-thirds of all students, i.e. twice as many as the 'old' ones (Cracow and Lvov) that played the basic role in teaching Polish intellectual élites when the Polish state did not exist.

The deep and dynamic changes in the spatial structure of the Polish higher education system that occurred in the interwar period, especially the development of a network of higher schools, were possible because the institutional system was based on Humboldt's model of a university. It was this implicit adoption of a higher education model resting on the institution of professorial chairs, a considerable asymmetry of authority and wages in higher schools, and

the sanctioning of migrations of the scientific staff that made possible a fast rate of the establishment of new higher educational institutions and the development of their staff, allowing each of them to admit a few thousand students already 2-3 years later, without detriment to the level of education offered.

The setting up of new higher schools marked the beginning of an intensive period of flows of the research and didactic staff among higher educational institutions that lasted a few years. Those flows were partly organised hierarchically. As shown in this book, the scientists moving from the already existing Polish higher schools to Poznań University, set up practically from nothing, were primarily young *Dozents* (scholars holding a post-doctoral degree) taking their first professorial chair. In the capital, at Warsaw University, scholars taking up work were both *Dozents* and professors, while at the prestigious Jagiellonian University in Cracow they were almost exclusively professors. Those migrations produced wide differences in the demographic structures of the 'old' and 'new' higher schools.

In spite of the outflow of scientific staff to the newly established higher educational institutions, the 'old' Galician academic centres (Cracow and Lvov) managed to keep their above-average staff potential and prestige in the academic circles. This was because the great deconcentration of students was accompanied by a much smaller deconcentration of the staff potential and an even smaller deconcentration of scientific excellence (understood as the distribution of the most eminent scholars elected to the prestigious Polish Academy of Skills). While in the initial years there was an outflow of such scholars to the newly established higher schools, later their concentration at Cracow and Lvov ones gradually grew again.

A separate issue in the migration of scientific staff among the Polish higher educational institutions was the earlier routes of education and career of the migrants. Using the migration of scholars to Poznań University in the first years of its activity as a case in point, it was shown that university staff consisted of people with considerable international experience: every other person had studied, at least for a time, at a university outside the Polish lands, and at least every third person had studied at one of the ten academic centres most important in the late 19th / early 20th centuries (cf. Taylor et al. 2008), the period when Poland was partitioned among three neighbouring powers. This was due to the favourable 'geo-scientific' location of the Polish lands, close to the system of German science dominating in the world at that time. The conducted research also showed that the routes of the earlier education of Poznań professors (e.g. places where they had studied and obtained their doctoral degrees) largely depended on the region where they were born (the occupied partition).

Connected with this issue is that of migration to studies in the interwar period. The research showed that predominant flows were those to the nearest of the large academic centres (Warsaw, Lvov, Cracow, Poznań and Vilnius), hence there were five academic regions in Poland. What influenced their range were not only old political factors, but also infrastructural (transport-related) and socio-cultural ones partly connected with them. The boundaries of the regions coincided with those of the former partitions.

This pattern of historical boundaries emerging in migrations to studies is one of the examples described in the book of the effect of Braudelian long-term structures on the operation and development of the higher education system in interwar Poland. Several aspects of their impact were identified, reflected in both, advancing structural changes of some and the inertia of other elements of the spatial structure of this system.

The effect of long-term structures on changes in the spatial structure of the higher education system in interwar Poland could be found, e.g., in the fast, bottom-up establishment of the universities in Vilnius and Poznań. It followed from the centuries-old academic traditions of those cities and the conviction of the local intellectual élites that it was necessary to set up Polish-language higher schools as soon as possible because it was a factor of the country's development.

In a few cases, however, the long-term structures could be shown to have a reverse effect leading to an inertia of some aspects of the higher education system or those associated with it. They include the already mentioned partial re-creation of the spatial structure of scientific eminence in the Polish higher education system and the pattern of the academic regions. Another example is the key significance, determined in this research, of the level of development of the secondary education system and, indirectly, that of economic development in the formation of inter-regional differences in the level of higher education (cf. Sujkowski 1923, Falski 1932). This is directly connected with the centuries-old perseverance of the socio-economic division of the Polish lands (cf. Rutkowski 1948, Jezierski and Leszczyńska 1994, 2003, Zarycki 2008, Hryniewicz 2015).