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# CHALLENGES FOR HUMANITY IN THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY

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**Asian Part of Russia – The Peripheries of Globalization?****Introduction**

With the globalizing world being the backdrop, the Asian part of Russia is a region which due to its isolation resulting from environmental, social and political factors escapes easy assessments. P. Sztompka<sup>151</sup> describes the process of globalization as a gradual assimilation of different forms of organization: political, economic, cultural patterns, customs and traditions. The distinctive character of this region was shaped by specific attitudes promoted in the Soviet Union for a few decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and before by the preceding policies of the Tsarist authorities. Hence, looking for parallels in the course of globalization processes with other places in the world proves to be studded with hurdles.

So the question whether the Asian part of Russia is the periphery of globalization seems to be highly justified. Looking for the answer, it seems necessary to start this paper with the theoretical considerations of what is the centre and what is the periphery, how and to what extent we can determine that we are able to use those terms precisely. The key enabling us to find answers to these questions is to examine the phenomena that occur in the process of globalization. Some of them are not to be found on the studied territory and others have their own unique dimensions, which does not question, however, the very fact that we can observe globalization processes in modern Russia.

**The Center and the Peripheries – A Theoretical Approach**

It is extremely difficult to define the terms “center” and “peripheries” in a way that would be universal and fully objective for the research purposes. In the first case, it seems to be easier but only if we agree that the middle is synonymic to the centre. Defining peripheries poses greater problems. According to *Mały słownik języka polskiego* [The Concise

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151 Sztompka P., 2002, *Socjologia. Analiza społeczeństwa*, Kraków.

Dictionary of the Polish Language]<sup>152</sup> peripheries are the outer part of something, in contrast to its central part, or territories distant from the centre.

In geometry, treating the centre and the middle as synonyms one can define the middle accurately enough: it is the one and the only point determined precisely. Geometry encounters greater problems trying to define the peripheries because it is impossible to set out precisely what distance is to be the measure of periphery. Further possibilities of speculation open up thanks to topology, the science of figures and solids which arose from geometry in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In topology, the *analysis situs*, in order to find the centre and peripheries there used a translucent spherical ball made of a stretchable material. With a syringe a portion of blue paint was injected into the sphere. This was the way of precise determination of the centre. In order to find peripheries red paint was injected in different places. Some places within the sphere joined taking an irregular shape "inscribed" within the sphere. After deforming the sphere the shape of the irregular solid inscribed within the sphere will change<sup>153</sup>.

According to the said experiment when we combine "topological thinking" with analogy, A. Tchórzewski came to a conclusion that the center and peripheries move, and there are areas that cannot be ascribed either to the centre or peripheries. Another important conclusion is that as a result of the deformation some points of the solid inscribed within the sphere were to be found beyond the sphere. The author questions then: Does it mean the "peripheries' demise"? If the answer is positive, one should point out that being at the peripheries is dangerous. If, as the author says, the example with the deformed sphere is enriched by a greater number of solids inscribed into the initial object and using different colors to mark centers and peripheries, further observations will follow. The most numerous are areas that are neither peripheries nor a centre, and the relations between the centers remain generally stable, though the distances differ.

Peripherality means being localized in a considerable distance from the central point. In geography, periphery is the outer part of some area. Peripherality hinders communication between people, with institutions and with other social groups, both living in the centre of a given country as well as with the representatives of global society. Being guided by the criterion of importance, one can confirm the rule that peripheral means less relevant.

### The Centre and the Peripheries in Russia

In Russia, in terms of territory the biggest country in the world, it is relatively easy to determine the centre and the peripheries. Taking a more general perspective, the European part of Russia is thought to be the center, with Moscow and Sankt Petersburg, its today's and historic capital cities, being its border points. In a narrower approach, being the biggest city in Russia, both demographically and politically, it is Moscow that is thought to be the centre.

152 *Mały słownik języka polskiego*, 1978, Szymczak M. (ed.), t. I, Warszawa.

153 Tchórzewski A., 1999, *Między „topologią” a „semantyką”*, in: Gołbiowski B. (ed.), *Centra i peryferie*, Oficyna Wydawnicza Stopka, Łomża.

Whereas the peripheries are the territories that lie far away from the center, with the peripheral European part being only rarely classified as periphery, in contrast to the territories to the east of the Ural mountains which are almost always referred to as such. Therefore, the defining factor in determining the distance between the centre and the peripheries, especially in spatial terms, is the remoteness. As J. Kolbuszowski<sup>154</sup> says, the remoteness is the factor of economic and cultural development. Considerable distances between different centers and those centers and peripheries are almost always the factors that substantially and negatively affect the economic development of both because they threaten with isolation and autonomization of the former ones, which leads to limiting the role of their economic base and bring about the economic backwardness of the latter. The distance between some towns in the Russian Far East and Moscow is greater than 10 000 kilometers.

The construction of trans-Siberian railway line became an important factor in the development of Siberia and Far East population. Separate sections of the railway line came into use at different times. This construction triggered intensified migrations and in the years 1895-1906 one million people came to inhabit this region. Even greater migrations could be observed after the whole railway line came into use.

The peripherality of the Asian part of Russia is mainly determined by its distance from the centre but one should bear in mind that the criteria allowing us to classify a given region as a periphery are rather a matter of agreement. T. Popławski<sup>155</sup> thinks that peripherality to a large extent depends on the criteria that we use to define a given place. Generally, industriality assesses it positively and rurality negatively. At the same time, the industrial potential of the Asian part of Russia, a region in 75% inhabited by urban population, is a positive feature of these peripheries, especially if compared with the peripheries of definitely rural character. However, borderlands with developed industry are quite similar to each other, and can be characterized by the following: comparable cultural patterns, poor condition of natural environment and social inequalities.

### Phenomena arising in the process of globalization

At the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century the knowledge of globalization processes still seems to be incomplete and is subject to transformation on the basis of new experiences that are rich in factual data. A.J. Chodubski<sup>156</sup> characterized main phenomena arising in the world globalization process, touching upon different aspects of life: political, economic, demographic and social. Due to a great number of the phenomena that accompany globalization processes, the author of this study chooses only a few characteristics.

154 Kolbuszowski J., 1999, *Centra i peryferie. Kilka uwag na temat relacji: kultura, literatura i aksjologia przestrzeni*, in: Gołbiowski B. (ed.), *Centra i peryferie*, Oficyna Wydawnicza Stopka, Łomża.

155 Popławski T., 1997, *Peryferyjność i społeczeństwo. Dylematy przełomu w Europie*, Wyd. Fundacja Ekonomistów Środowiska i Zasobów Naturalnych, Białystok.

156 Chodubski A.J., 2005, *Główne zjawiska polityczne ujawniające się w procesie globalizacji świata*, in: Becker R., Marszałek-Kawa J., Modrzyńska J. (ed.), *Globalizacja, integracja, transformacja*, Wyd. Adam Marszałek, Toruń.

Their analysis should allow to describe the course of the globalization processes in the Asian part of Russia.

Among the demographic phenomena that accompany globalization one indicates a surge in spatial mobility. It is difficult to give a definite answer whether Siberia and the Russian Far East are the regions where spatial mobility started to play a decisive role along with the development of globalization processes. It was already in the Tsarist times and for the whole period of the Soviet rule that this region was distinguished by a great spatial mobility. The influx of new people accompanied by a rising birth rate (always at a higher level than in the remaining parts of Russia) was coupled with a significant outflow of people. A distinct coexistence of immigration and emigration (with the influx of people prevailing) was decisive for the population development of this land.

The Asian part of Russia is one big temporary camp: for 1 million people to stay in this area, there must have come and gone a dozen times or so more people<sup>157</sup>. In the 1990s the factor that contributed to an increased spatial mobility was the liquidation of the institutional barrier that conditioned this phenomenon. Now, it is the people who can make independent decisions where they want to live.

A phenomenon that has been occurring worldwide in the process of globalization is a decreasing sense of responsibility for common good. If it was the measure of the globalization processes, the Asian part of Russia perfectly fits the description. Due to uncertainty of tomorrow and being used to temporariness, the majority of people that inhabits this area is not greatly interested in social issues. Lack of coercion is an important factor that affects this lowering level of responsibility for the common good. In the Soviet times, the state apparatus of control encouraged specific attitudes in the society, often under coercion.

Another phenomenon that surfaces in the process of globalization is indifference towards escalation of social pathology. Russia is the theater of many exogenous deaths (unnatural ones) which to a large extent are conditioned by the social pathology development. At the beginning of the 1990s the death incidence as a result of a fatal occurrence accounted for 9.5% in the studied area (with its regular mortality rate, every tenth death was due to unnatural causes). The proportion of deaths that expresses the social pathology development is constantly on the increase. This unfavorable trend that, among other things, results from deteriorating material conditions, is accompanied by a rising indifference towards the escalation of this phenomenon.

Among the pathologies that are developing in this area one should point out an excessive consumption of alcoholic drinks, a great number of suicides and homicides. In the Asian part of Russia, the region that at the turn of the millennium characterized by the greatest proportion of murders both attempted and committed was Primorsky Krai where a substantial surge in homicides was recorded (from 402 in 1991 to 707 in 2001). Another social pathology, which developed only after the Soviet Union's collapse, is drug

abuse. The drug abuse contributes to an increased mortality not only directly but also indirectly being the cause of a number of suicides, homicides and accidents.

Another phenomenon that occurs in the globalization process is a relation superficiality, both in families as well as among neighbors and acquaintances. In the Asian part of Russia, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, in many towns and villages one can observe a trivialization of genuine family relations. The lack of reliable value patterns at home is often accompanied by a deteriorating material conditions. Human alienation is caused rather by the brake-down of family than the absence of future outlooks. In the majority of the Asian part of Russia, in 1991, 400 out of every 1000 marriages ended in divorce, and in 2001, the number reached 700. Record values came from two administration units: In 2002, in the Chukotka Autonomous Okrug for every 1000 marriages there were 1404 divorces and in the Magadan Oblast their number reached 1596. The number of negative phenomena called a “national trauma” is treated by many researchers as a byproduct of globalization processes.

Among phenomena that surface both in the Asian parts of Russia as well as worldwide one can list the minimization of state institutions. In Russia, despite the federal segment system being warranted by the constitution, in fact, the country is ruled like a unitary state. In practice, in the opinion of many Russian researchers, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century the country is being centralized, with the weakening position of individuals coming as a result. Thus, an individual is unable to comprehend the essence of civilization developments that affect entrepreneurship.

Russia as a state is still in charge of economic affairs and international companies have only a slight influence on the economic order. Nowadays, the Asian part of the country, not unlike in the Tsarist and Soviet times, is treated as a resource base that fuels Russia's clout on the international stage. In the globalized Asian part of Russia only few towns and villages, which are called “oases of prosperity”, managed to accommodate to the new reality of the transition period. With continuously decreasing social security, however, most of industrial towns and cities found themselves unable get adapted without state financial support. These places are called “depression funnels” and they decidedly outnumber the “oases of prosperity”.

The people who live in the regions where the globalization processes are high are characterized by readiness for the future and the sense of belonging to the global community. However, the inhabitants of the Asian part of Russia, after 1991, hardly feel to be “citizens of the world” because, as they admit, it is hard for them to feel like the citizens of Russia. Talking about the peripheral localization of the region, with nostalgia, they refer to the European part of Russia over the Ural mountains as *materik* – the continent. This term is used quite commonly among the people of the North, especially among those living in Siberia and Far East it is used to emphasize their isolation that is caused by the distance between them and the European part of the country. It has a very positive meaning.

157 Wein N., 1999, *Bevölkerungsbewegungen im asiatischen Rußland. Migrationsströme in Sibirien und im Fernen Osten nach dem Zusammenbruch der Sowjetunion*, „Osteuropa”, 49, no 9, pp. 908-923.

When we look for the common features of the Asian part of Russia community with the general global community, one can observe that many features that are characteristic of the areas of the ongoing globalization processes is nowhere to find in the studied area. Whereas the features that appear in both areas, in the studied one take a unique and individual character.

### The Peripheries of Globalization

With globalization understood as a process of assimilation of different forms of organization, i.e. political, economic and social, one should start with naming the centre of the globalizing world to be able to determine whether a given region is a periphery or not. It is not easy and there is a possibility of making a mistake because it is difficult to determine whether there is only one centre. The notion that there are many centers of globalization seems to be more justified. In today's world, it is equally difficult to define centers and peripheries because, as J. Szczepański<sup>158</sup> wrote, "when the Earth becomes the global village the division lines cutting territories into centers and peripheries, metropolises and provinces, condominiums and colonies or half-colonies get blurred. The quality of education and authenticity of the polycentric self-government democracy and a genuine partnership of supranational unitarism are the decisive issues."

Another important factor that determines the lack of clear-cut centre-periphery divide is the unavoidable subjectivity in drawing division lines. S. Czarnowski<sup>159</sup> thinks that the factor determining a given area as a part of periphery depends on subjective spatial assessment. What for some seems to be periphery for others constitutes an important centre of spiritual, religious or cultural life. In the case of some places we have to do with alternation of functions, sometimes being central and at some other times peripheral and of little importance. Being peripheral geographically does not have to mean that a given place cannot be an important artistic centre.

If so called "global cities" with their considerable concentration of sophisticated services can be hailed globalization centers, it is much more difficult to determine the peripheries of globalization. If the global cities are places whose impact reaches beyond their state territory, it seems reasonable that one should search for peripheries outside the borders of those countries. Peripheries are the territories where the globalization processes, due to various conditions, are running slower and a little differently. Hong Kong, London, New York, Singapore are thought to be global cities.

Limiting ourselves to the conclusion that only the global cities can be called the centers of globalization processes means that, bearing in mind to the theoretical attempt of determining the centre and peripheries, a large part of the world does not belong either to the centre or peripheries of globalization. How can we, then, arbitrarily recognize it that a given territory is not a periphery of globalization and became probably an transition area between the center and peripheries. In this case, the topological divide seems

158 Szczepański J., 1998, *Indywidualna tożsamość człowieka*, in: Suchodolski B. (ed.), *Strategia obrony i rozwoju cywilizacji humanistycznej*, Warszawa.

159 Czarnowski S., 1956, *Podział przestrzeni i jej rozdzielanie w religii i magii*, in: *Dzieła*, t.3, Warszawa.

to be inadequate. Only matter-of-fact knowledge about ongoing globalization processes, the knowledge that gets updated depending on time and space, and rich in empirical experiences can be helpful.

In the case of Russia, the European part of this country along with the most important cities one can treat as the political, economic, social and cultural center. Therefore, the inhabitants of this region have easier access to the benefits of the globalization processes. If we refer to the theory of diffusion, we can say that the peripheral communities are in the situation of limited opportunities to participate in the "new", unlike the communities living in the center.

As regards the Asian part of Russia, the only practical piece of information flowing from theoretical deliberations on determining centers and peripheries is that Moscow being the political centre undoubtedly is a globalization center, however, not the only one in the global village. In the topographic experiment, where the initial object had a greater number of solids inscribed into, it turned out that one center peripheries can lie in the close vicinity of another center. In the case of the Asian parts of Russia and without questioning the big distance to Russian decision center, one should note that this area lies in the close vicinity of other centers of globalizing world.

With Japan and China, whose economies rank as second and fourth respectively, being so close to the Asian part of Russia, it is difficult to call it periphery. The same is reflected by the theoretical topological model that shows that a considerable distance dividing the peripheries from the center can mean that the previous would remain in the close proximity of other centers.

One should also point out that in the development of globalization processes, the geographical distance does not play the most important role for the people's mobility, technology and capital transfer. In this case, it is the Russian center that plays an important, but not key, role in building cooperation between Russian peripheries and spatially close areas of East Asia. Without initiatives flowing from the center, the peripheral areas are unable to benefit to a greater extent from globalization.

The status and quality of social life in peripheries largely depend on the attitude of the "central" decision centers, which does not mean that the dimensions and importance of "peripheral" actions and initiatives are limited. Despite the fact that the movement of investments, capital and people does not always find legal grounding in the central decisions, one can note bottom-up initiatives in the border areas. D. Simonides<sup>160</sup> emphasizes that the border people isolationism has never been absolute, and in time, the language barrier became more penetrable and even full of holes, and that is why it could be overcome by phenomena that only rarely, if at all, managed to reach the central regions.

Russia's, and especially its Asian part's, chance is the bottom-up initiative that could succeed only under many specific circumstances, without which this area will be

160 Simonides D., 1999, *Peryferie bogactwem słynne*, in: Gołębiowski B. (ed.), *Centra i peryferie*, Oficyna Wydawnicza Stopka, Łomża.

deprived of the benefits of globalizations for a long time yet. According to L. Zacher<sup>161</sup>, Russia can be pushed into modernization by internal dynamism generated by the market and pro-market reforms. It must be, however, accompanied by technological advancement, especially in electronics and biotechnology. According to the author, management modernization in administration as well as citizen participation at the local level will be of great importance. The question that still remains open to answer is whether Russia will achieve the coherence and synergy of its economic and social structures, or whether it will deepen its development dualism based on furthering both its traditional and modern activities.

In the opinion of many researchers, the development of the globalization processes in the Asian part of Russia causes many threats for traditional economic activity. It arises from the lack of adequate Russian initiatives aimed at adaptation and creativity, which leads to inability of many companies to resist the competition of their foreign counterparts. The adaptation difficulty and problems to find their own place in the new reality after the collapse of the Soviet Union are chiefly caused by unique social bonds present in this area that have been molded by people's mentality. P. Sztompka<sup>162</sup> thinks that modernization of a given region depends on cultural imponderables. The whole of values, social bonds and the mentality of people living in the transition times he described as the imponderables of a great change.

It is especially in the Asian part of Russia that the people described as *homo sovieticus* will find it very difficult to find their place in the new reality of transition. The term of *homo sovieticus* is an abstract notion that never and nowhere can find its complete realization, however, it has its partial counterparts in every society that had been indoctrinated long enough with the communist ideology. With the system unable to meet the expectations and hopes, the essence of *homo sovieticus* contributed to overthrowing communism. The type of personality nurtured in communism had to face the system transition. The results of this clash can be found on the demographic, social and economic grounds.

### Conclusions

The Asian part of Russia is a region that due to its spatial circumstances and the distance separating it from the country's decision centers can be called the periphery. The imponderables of great change are features characteristic of the people who inhabit these areas. A person who was born and raised in a society that has been greatly affected by spatial, social and economic isolation starts to understand that he or she is a part of a global village.

161 Zacher L.W., 2003, *Rosja na rozdrożach – kierunki, struktury, potencje transformacji*, in: Stępień-Kuczyńska A. (ed.), *Europa Środkowa i Wschodnia wobec współczesnych wyzwań integracyjnych*, Wyd. Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego, Łódź.

162 Sztompka P. (ed.), 1999, *Imponderabilia wielkiej zmiany – Mentalność, wartości i więzi społeczne czasów transformacji*, PWN, Warszawa-Kraków.

One can question the fact that the Asian part of Russia is a region which resists the processes of world integration and consequently call it the periphery of globalization. In the case of the Asian parts of Russia and without questioning the big distance to Russian decision center, one should note that this area lies in the close vicinity of other centers of globalizing world.

The geographical proximity of China and Japan, thought to be one of the poles of the globalizing world, in near future, can lead to a switch where the present Russian center may become a periphery of globalization. Therefore, Siberia and the Russian Far East have every chance to become the center of people, technology and capital transfer to other parts of Russia and the remaining republics of the former Soviet Union.

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