

MISCELLANY

Warsaw Regional Forum – an overview of all the four conferences

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Introduction

The Warsaw Regional Forum is organized on a regular basis once every two years (biennially) by the Institute of Geography and Spatial Organization PAS (IGiPZ PAN) in collaboration with the Academic Branch of the Polish Geographical Society (PTG). The institutional collaboration that has existed for several years between the IGiPZ PAN and other similar institutions operating in Central-East Europe, especially the Centre for Regional Studies at the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, have provided the impetus for the organization of this particular conference. To date, there have been four meetings held under the common title *The Warsaw Regional Forum*:

- *Central and Eastern Europe: The Changing Spatial Patterns of Human Activity* (6-9 October 2004)
- *Core and peripheral regions in Central and Eastern Europe* (5-8 October 2005)
- *Contemporary dilemmas of spatial development in Europe* (17-20 October 2007)
- *Networking in the European, regional and local space* (21-24 October 2009)

The detailed reports of the first two conferences were published in *Przegląd Geograficzny (Polish Geographical Review)* in volumes: 77, no.2 of 2005 and 78, no.2 of 2006. This paper concentrates mainly

on the general characterization of: (i) the central subject matter of the provided papers and the scientific discussions that took place; (ii) the scholars participating in these conferences by the country of origin and by the institution they were representatives of; (iii) the field study trips that are an integral part of the *Warsaw Regional Forum* and (iii) the scholarly works published as a result of these conferences (scientific achievements).

The main topics of the presented papers

During the four meetings of the Warsaw Regional Forum more than 170 papers have been presented. The research studies dealt with a wide spectrum of themes, and the analysis contained within them covered a wide spectrum of spatial scales – ranging from that of the European through the national and regional, to the local level (the intra-urban scale, a group of a few gminas (*communes*), the concrete location of an industrial plant). It is worth noting at this point that a change was made to the conference title – during the first and the second meetings the term “Central-East Europe” was used; in the two meetings that followed, this was extended to include the whole of Europe. The scope of the topics addressed in the presented papers can be divided into a small number of main groups:

- Regional and spatial policy (17% of the total number of presentations): issues related to the shaping of national and European developmental policies, developmental paradigms (competitiveness

- cohesion), sectorial policies (transport, agriculture, urban) as well as presenting the results of various projects being carried out within the ESPON framework;
- Cities and metropolitan areas (15%): detailed analyses of various metropolitan centres in Europe at the intra-urban level (e.g. Warsaw, Berlin, Bratislava, Ljubljana), of suburbanization processes from the spatial, economic and social perspectives, as well as of linkages between the metropolises.
 - Rural areas and peripheral areas (15%): the varied socio-economic processes taking place in rural areas as well as of the processes of agrarian structure transformations, of the impact of the European Union on local development, and the developmental problems that peripheral areas face;
 - Infrastructure and transportation linkages (12%): analyses of different infrastructural elements (primarily those linked to transport, but also to water and sewage systems and communication) as well as studies on transportation, accessibility to job markets and the spatial mobility of populations;
 - Socio-demographic issues (12%): analyses of internal and external migrations, social exclusion and unemployment, demographic structures at different spatial scales, human capital and ethnic structures;
 - Transborder cooperation (9%): examples of socio-economic cooperation on the part of local governments located in border zones as well as the role of European Union initiatives which aim to support international collaboration;
 - Management and protection of the environment (8%): issues relating to sustainable development, conflicts in spatial organization of highly-valued environmentally sensitive areas and protection of environmentally valuable areas;
 - The remaining topics (12%) mainly covered aspects of socio-economic structures at different spatial scales.

At the conclusion of each Warsaw Regional Forum conference there was a panel discussion attended by people from a variety of scientific institutions at the invitation of the conference Organizers.

Participants of the conference

When planning the Warsaw Regional Forum conferences, its organizers aim to ensure that the event is highly publicized and attracts a significant number of scholars from a variety of European countries (though first and foremost from East-Central Europe) representing the whole spectrum of the scientific fields, as well as people responsible for the practical application of the results of the conducted research studies (policy-makers).

Firstly, it is important to present the dynamics of the total number of participants of the Warsaw Regional Forum conference (Fig. 1). From the beginning, the number of foreign participants has remained virtually unchanged, totalling about 40 attendees. Similarly, the numbers of participants representing the IGiPZ PAN, (the institution that is responsible for the organization of the conference), has also remained relatively constant, amounting to 20 attendees (that figure more or less reflects the number of IGiPZ PAN employees involved in the research studies associated with what can be broadly defined as socio-economic geography). Interestingly, though, it may be noted that the participation of Polish scholars from other scientific institutions has changed significantly – during the first two meetings it continued to be at a very low level, while during the 2007 and 2009 meetings that number increased to the same level as the number of people representing the IGiPZ PAN. Two basic reasons for this positive change can be adduced: (i) the increasingly high profile of the Warsaw Regional Forum conferences among Polish scientific circles as a result of their cyclical nature and (ii) the fact that the date of the event was moved from the first week (the

Table 1. The number of participants from abroad by country of origin (the total number of participants from all of the four meetings of the Warsaw Regional Forum)

No.	Country	Number	Share (%)	No.	Country	Number	Share (%)
1	Hungary	29	19	13	Italy	4	3
2	Czech Republic	23	15	14	Belgium	2	1
3	Slovakia	19	13	15	Denmark	2	1
4	Germany	14	9	16	India	2	1
5	Bulgaria	7	5	17	Japan	2	1
6	Romania	7	5	18	Lithuania	2	1
7	Ukraine	7	5	19	Norway	2	1
8	United Kingdom	6	4	20	USA	2	1
9	Russia	5	3	21	Austria	1	1
10	Slovenia	5	3	22	Brazil	1	1
11	France	4	3	23	Finland	1	1
12	Sweden	4	3	24	Iraq	1	1

beginning of the academic year) to the third one of October.

It is interesting to note that the foreign participants of all four conferences came from 24 different countries. However, each meeting of the Warsaw Regional Forum was usually attended by representatives of no more than 15 countries (Tab. 1). The scholars from Hungary formed the most numerous group (19% of all participants); they were followed by the Czech Republic (15%), Slovakia (13%) and Germany (9%). It must be emphasized that the Warsaw Regional Forum is the only regular geographical conference held in Poland that has such a large degree of participation and such great diversity of foreign participants. A number of these scholars have attended the Warsaw Regional Forum on several occasions – with two participants having attended all four meetings, seven people having been present on three occasions (including one person from Poland), and 26 scholars have attended two of the meetings (including eight from Poland), which is a clear indication that the forum is positively perceived and appreciated by these people.

Participants from Poland represented nine academic centres, and in addition over 85% of them were representatives of only three cities: Kraków (the Jagiellonian University, the Pedagogical University and the Institute of Urban Development), Warsaw (from a diverse grouping of institutions: the Warsaw University, the Central Statisti-

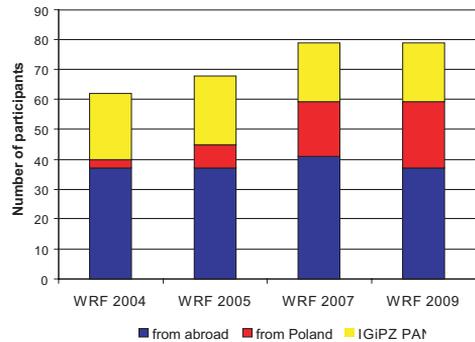


Figure 1. Number of participants in the subsequent editions of the Warsaw Regional Forum.

cal Office, the Warsaw School of Economics, the Institute of Agricultural and Food Economics and the Ministry of Regional Development), Wrocław (the University of Wrocław).

However, when the institutions represented at the Forum are taken into account (excluding the IGIPZ PAN), it may be pointed out that a substantial number of the Forum participants are from geographical scientific centres (49%). Furthermore, there were also representatives from such fields as regional science (24%), economics (10%), spatial planning (9%), ecology and environmental protection (4%), and also those who are involved in the broadly understood area of praxis – that is, people working for government and local government institutions. Not surprisingly, there is a prevalence of scholars

specializing in geographical sciences and regional studies, which naturally results from the scope of the activities of the institutions that organise the conference (the IGiPZ PAN and the Polish Geographical Society) as well as from the general title of the event, the Warsaw Regional Forum.

Given the objectives that have been consistently pursued by the Forum organizers, it can be stated that while the conference's goal of attracting participants from a wide variety of countries seems to have been fulfilled, it is notable that there is still not enough participation from those persons responsible for regional and local policy making (policy-makers).

Field studies tours

The overall programme for each of the four conferences has always included two days of field studies as well as two-day conference sessions which took place at the seat of the IGiPZ PAN located in Warsaw. The subject matter addressed during the field studies was always associated with the general theme of the particular conference:

- *Eastern border regions of the enlarged European Union (2004)*,
- *Polarization of space – a case from Central Poland (2005)*,
- *Spatial organization of the poorest EU regions (2007)*,
- *Cooperation & conflicts in space – examples from Poland (2009)*.

During the field studies there were meetings held with representatives of local government institutions (successively these were the gminas (communes) such as: Białowieża, Łomianki, Rościszewo, Nałęczów, Starachowice, Ząbki), civil service bodies and state enterprises (the Border Guard, State Forestry, national parks, special economic zones, the Polish Airports, scientific-research institutes (Białystok, Płock, Toruń, Lublin), private entrepreneurs (individual farmers, dairy cooperative in Grajewo), and tourist organisations. In 2009 a meeting was held with a parish priest from

the Warszawa-Białoleka gmina (commune), during which there was a discussion about the issue of the poor social infrastructure that is a salient feature of newly developed districts of large cities. In addition, it must be stressed that the organizers never had any problem whatsoever with regard to arranging the meetings with the people working for any of the above-mentioned institutions. Because of the wide spectrum of the people who were spoken to, the conference participants had an opportunity to confront their theoretical knowledge with the practical aspects of the modus operandi of the various Polish institutions. Each time while touring Poland the topic of the spatial management of Poland was always addressed with a special focus on the issues relating to transport infrastructure, to the management and protection of the natural environment, as well as to the functional structure of rural areas and the spatial structure of agriculture (which results from the fact that these matters are of special scientific interest to IGiPZ PAN scholars who were responsible for arranging the field study trips – namely T. Komornicki, M. Degórski and K. Czapiewski).

Furthermore, the organizers always aimed to organize the field study trips in such a way as to find time for visiting attractive and interesting tourist sites; these included the National Parks (Białowiecki NP and Biebrzański NP), cities and towns that are well known for their landscapes and high urban qualities (Ciechocinek, Toruń, Kazimierz Dolny, Opatów, Pułtusk and Tykocin) or institutions protecting cultural heritage (the mosque in Kruszyniany, the Holy Mount of Grabarka, the Museum of the Mazovian Countryside in Sierpc and the Archeological Reserve in Krzemionki Opatowskie) – see Fig. 2.

During the four study trips the conference participants visited five voivodships (provinces): Mazowieckie, Podlaskie, Kujawsko-Pomorskie, Lubelskie, Świętokrzyskie. It was and still is the organisers' clear objective not to visit the same sites or objects during successive field study trips.

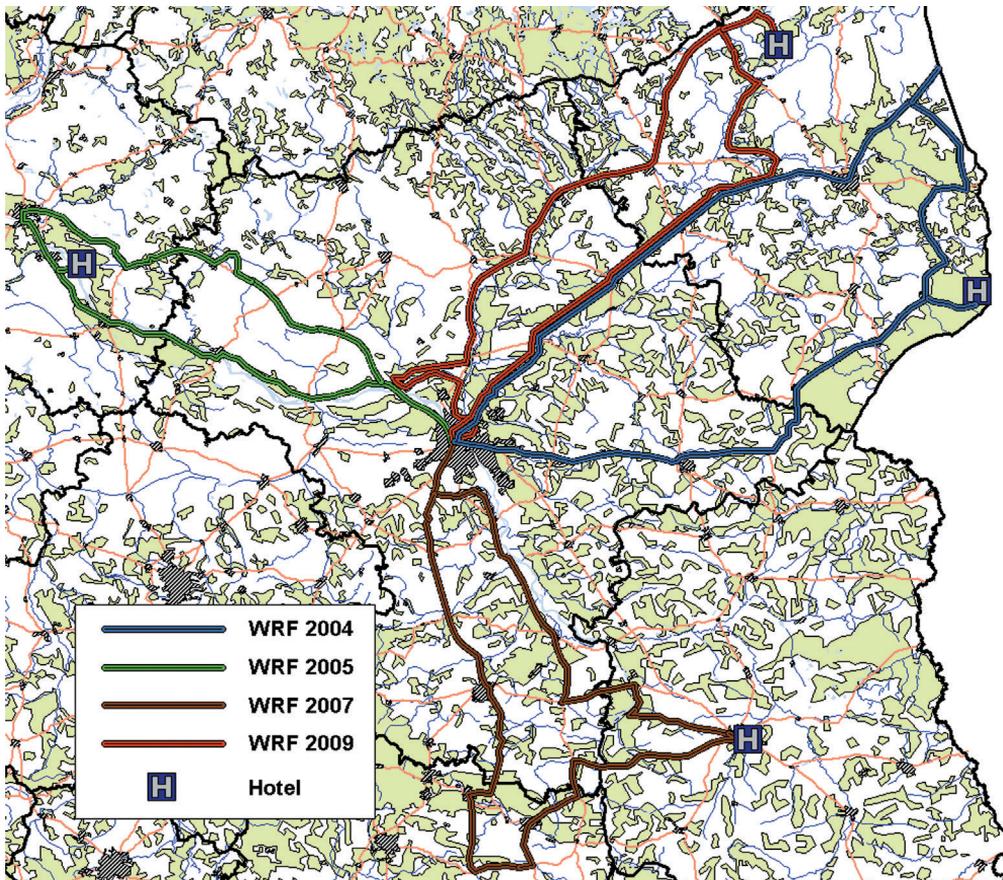


Figure 2. The routes of the field studies tours during the Warsaw Regional Forum conferences.

Publications

Publications are always considered to be the most important and tangible result of a conference. In the case of the Warsaw Regional Forum, there are two types of publications. The first is the conference materials (Proceedings) containing the abstracts of all the presented papers plus the basic information concerning the field studies. The second type includes the collections of the full paper texts delivered by the conference speakers. All the articles are assessed by two reviewers (one from abroad and one from Poland), and then published in the *Europa XXI* series – under the combined auspices of the IGiPZ PAN and the PTG. In each publication the editors

seek to group the delivered papers in order to create consistent and cohesive volumes. In the wake of the first three conferences, seven volumes of the *EUROPA XXI* periodical were issued including a total of 105 articles:

- *Central and Eastern Europe: Changing spatial patterns of human activity* (volume 12, 2005)
- *New spatial relations in new Europe* (volume 13, 2005)
- *Core and peripheral regions in Central and Eastern Europe* (volume 14, 2006)
- *The Regional periphery in Central and Eastern Europe* (volume 15, 2006)
- *Regional development in Central Europe – cohesion or competitiveness* (volume 16, 2007)



Figure 3. Participants of the Warsaw Regional Forum 2009 during a field studies trip in the Biebrzański National Park.
Source: Picture taken by T. Komornicki.



Figure 4. Participants of the Warsaw Regional Forum 2009 taking part in a Discussion Panel *Networking in European, regional and local space*.
Source: Picture taken by K. Czapiewski.

- *New functions of rural and industrial space in Central and Eastern Europe* (volume 17, 2008)
- *Territorial dilemmas of socio-economic development in Europe* (volume 18, 2008)

The first four of the aforementioned volumes (no. 12-15) appeared under the editorship of T. Komornicki and K. Czapiewski as the so-called guest editors (the editor-in-chief was at that time Maciej Jakubowski). Since the beginning of volume no. 16 the Editorial Committee has been made up of: Tomasz Komornicki (editor-in-chief), Konrad Czapiewski and Barbara Jaworska. At the same time, the Editorial Board has international membership, the composition of which is as follows: Giancarlo Cotella (Turin, Italy), Bálint Csátári (Kecskemét, Węgry), Jerzy Grzeszczak (Warsaw, Poland), Annegret Haase (Leipzig, Germany), Ewa Korcelli-Olejniczak (Warsaw, Poland), Miroslav Marada (Prague, Czech Republic) i Vladimír Székely (Bratysława, Slovakia).

At this point it is worth mentioning that the main subject areas of the papers, debates and panel discussions taking place during the Warsaw Regional Forum, consistently referred to the discourse that was dominant in the European scientific community, and were, in particular, always closely related to the works of ESPON (European Spatial Planning Observation Network). On several occasions, the conducted analyses dealt with such significant documents that were related to regional planning like the Territorial Agenda, the ESDP (European Spatial

Development Perspective), as well as national policies of spatial and regional development. Furthermore, on many occasions those scholars who contributed to preparing the above-mentioned documents participated in the Forum conferences. These aspects not only play a significant role in attaining the conference's cognitive objectives but also give it a much more practical meaning.

To conclude, there are three more issues that should be mentioned. First, each of the Warsaw Regional Forum Conferences and each of the conference and post-conference publications were subsidized by the Ministry of Science and Higher Education, as a result of which it was possible to offer the Forum participants relatively low conference fees (with a special discount for the members of the Polish Geographical Society and PhD students). Second, it should also be mentioned that there is close institutional collaboration between IGiPZ PAN and PTG in organizing that conference. Third, the Warsaw Regional Forum is held alternately with the East-Central European Regional Seminar organized by the Centre for Regional Studies (a research institution of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences). The conference from that series is planned in Pécs for 2010, and the next Forum conference will take place in Warsaw, Poland, in October 2011.

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