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Relations between Regions of Uneven Economic Development: Report at the Sixth International Congress of Economic History

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The proceedings began with a short introduction to the main paper, which was compiled by L. H. Klaassen, P. W. Klein and J. H. Paelinck from the Netherlands. The members of the panel present, who took part in the discussions were G. de Brabander (Belgium), T. Stoianovich (U.S.), J. Kuzcynsky (G.D.R.) and R. Hilan (Syria). Observations from the floor were made by T. Veliev, A. Tchistozvonov, G. G. Kotovsky (U.S.S.R.), Z. P. Pach (Hungary), R. Adamson (Sweden), A. A. Boahen (Ghana) and G. Toniolo (Italy). The session was chaired by Prof. S. Clough.

The introductory paper itself consisted of three parts, two of which were of a theoretical nature, one being more empirical. The authors pointed out that they were well aware of the fact that they were almost certain to run into difficulties, as the interdisciplinary approach adopted by the two specialists in regional economics and the other economic historian created many problems. The study of interregional relations, moreover, is still unexplored territory in the field of regional economics, which hitherto has been confined mainly to the study of regional development with little or no attention to the problems of interregional relations.

In order to establish the problems involved, the authors first of all had made use of a set of definitions current in the theory of regional economics, the most important being the concept of the polarised regions. A polarised region implies a more or less open economy which does, however, show some degree of autonomous economic life and a certain internal coherence, so giving a specific region its own specific system of economic relations. Starting from this functional definition of a region, the authors then described a regional system, showing both the structure and the changes in the

structure of the relations between the regions making up the system. The object was to show that the location of economic activities and their dispersion was dictated by both economic and non-economic factors. The authors also focused their attention on economic variables, and they concluded that whereas formerly transportation costs had been decisive in determining location, this factor lost its relative importance in modern times, and that location nowadays depends more on the cost of information and communications than on the cost of transportation, as is evident from the location of the steel-industry. In the empirical section of the paper the way in which primary economic activities in Northwestern Europe between 1150 and 1700 moved from one place to another under the pressure of changing locational factors was discussed.

As was to be expected the paper gave rise to many general criticisms. Nearly all those present pointed out that the authors had failed to integrate their theory in their historical analysis. The theoretical framework was considered too cumbersome when compared with the results of their research. This point had to be conceded. Secondly the definitions used by the authors did not meet complete approval. Prof. de Brabander held that the concept of polarised regions might be brought closer to reality if a geographical component could be incorporated into the definition. He also suggested two new formulae for the model which would incorporate population factors in order to measure the density of interregional flows of man-power, goods or services in a more realistic way. He finally pointed out that the concept of polarised regions tended to vary according to the function studied, and this might give rise to problems, when phenomena which different constituent elements polarise the same global space in a different way, so that the existence of the region would depend on the assumed function. The relationship between these different regions, however, is far from being clear, so that it would be more valuable to consider the links between the regions.

Prof. Stoianovich also doubted whether the authors had been correct in choosing contemporary polarised regions as a starting point of their study. Prof. Stoianovich argued emphatically that historians should start by defining regions at the very beginning of their socio-economic evolution, as the temporal element would otherwise be neglected, for an economic region is not only a spatial and socio-economic but also a temporal entity. In different form this point was also taken up later in the discussion by Prof. Hilan and Prof. Boaben, who both pointed out that the model used lacked universal applicability. In non-European, less developed areas, regions had not yet been able to develop themselves as polarised, structured regions so that it was of no use trying to apply the model to these areas. They both thought that in these case it would be more fruitful to pay

more attention to the rôle of social, political and cultural forces as obstacles to the process of polarisation.

A third criticism was that the authors had concentrated on a very specific relationship between areas of uneven economic development, and neglected the more general theme, that is the contemporary relations between formerly colonised countries and the colonising countries. This between the developed and less developed countries of the world. In this context Prof. J. Kuczynsky mentioned the relations between formerly colonised countries and the colonising countries. This relationship was dominated for about 400 years by a price ratio, in which the prices of raw materials had been kept fixed at a very low level. Only after the Second World War did part of the formerly colonised areas — i.e. the oil producing countries — succeed through political revolution in effecting a change in this relationship, in a truly revolutionary manner. Prof. Tchistozvonov also discussed the framework of relationships between regions, in which the objective laws of history gradually emerged as most important factor.

The authors were, of course, well aware that interregional relations can be studied from different perspectives. They did not, however, consider that they had confined themselves to a single specific aspect of a more general problem. On the contrary, they claimed that their approach was more general than the study of the relations between developed and non-developed areas, since their model attempted to consider the spatial diffusion of economic activities over different regions. The diffusion naturally results in a pattern of uneven economic development, even if this unevenness is not expressed, for instance, in differences in the level of per capita income. This, however, is not to exclude the emergence of patterns where differences in per capita income do exist.

A fourth point of criticism was that the authors had not paid sufficient attention to those locational factors which hinder balanced economic development. Prof. Toniolo in this context drew attention to the case of Northern and Southern Italy, where market forces as well as government policies had been unable to effect a change for the better. Within this context it was also pointed out that the authors had failed to pay sufficient attention to locational factors of a non-economic kind, and many suggested that non-economic factors were probably more important than economic factors for the shaping of economic relations between different regions. The authors were well aware of the primary economic functions of northwestern Europe in long-distance valid exercise in the field of economic history.

Much of the discussions, concerned the historical section of the paper. In this context Prof. Stoianovitch criticized the way the changing location of the primary economic functions of northwestern Europe in long-distance trade had been treated. He argued that the process which led to the move first from Champagne to Bruges, then from Bruges to Antwerp and finally

from Antwerp to Amsterdam, resulted from complex, different and varying forces, which the authors had not considered sufficiently as they had restricted their survey to very limited empirical data. Had they provided more empirical data, however, they would have realised that the relocation was a product of changes in long-distance trade, of changing trade patterns, and of the changing socio-economic, spatial and political functions of northwestern Europe. He claimed, that for the historian northwestern Europe's rôle in long-distance trade was not constant as the authors had assumed. While the authors agreed with many of Prof. Stoianovitch's remarks, they still held that it was valid to consider long-distance trade in a more abstract way than Prof. Stoianovitch proposed. They recognised, for instance, that important changes in the commodity structure of long-distance trade also changed market relations, but they still claimed that this did not affect their assumption that transportation costs were decisive in the way economic activities were dispersed over the area in question. Prof. Pach, while making, the same point as Prof. Stoianovitch, also drew attention to the fact that the location of a region's primary economic activities contributed to the creation of new locational factors. In this way the location might be considered as a factor peculiar to regions, which contributed towards shaping the density of intra-regional relations. This was certainly a new problem which could be studied further.

The authors were then criticized for the inadequacy of their theoretical model as well as for the insufficiency of their empirical data, and it was also pointed out by Prof. Kotovsky that the authors had not had anything to say about the consequences of unevenness. Was it a beneficial or harmful situation, or were its results positive or negative? Indeed the authors had been wary of committing themselves to any value judgements.

Despite these criticisms, the authors were happy to notice much of their paper received a more positive welcome, and they hope that, together with the discussion which followed, it may encourage further study of the relatively unexplored field of interregional economic relations in history.