

To whom the university? For whom? Provinciality, peripherality and the frontiers

Lexicon – space and values

The phrase “university on the border” can be understood metaphorically, as the *border* does not only imply spatial relations, although it refers primarily to them. The primary – place-related – meaning is (to use Umberto Eco’s language) denotative, supplemented, perhaps, by a connotative¹ indicating an axiomatic aspect. Province (but also province, provinciality), periphery (as well as periphery, peripherality), frontier (but not foreign) – words, although built on three different cores, evoke similar associations to a certain extent. These are terms indicating the relationship between man/people and space. They entered the Polish language in different ways and at different times. Borrowed from East Slavonic (but originally related to Polish *řqbać*), the word *rubież* is from Old Russian *řubežb* – “notched”, “a boundary strip cut in the forest or marked by notches on trees” (PSS **řqbežb* “to cut, end, boundary” from the verb **řqbiti* “to chop”). In Polish since the 16th century, it has had the meaning “frontier, border area, boundary lands” and previously also meant “chop, cut, beat” (Boryś, 2005, pp. 512, 525–526; Bańkowski, 2014, p. 164). Denotatively, it is not loaded with values and emotion as strongly as *border area*, which (being originally a military-legal term) over time, originally thanks to Vincentius Paul Mohort, became both a geographical category denoting specific places at different historical moments and an explicitly axiomatic category (com. Kolbuszewski, 2008, pp. 15–30).

Borrowed from Latin, the noun *province*, having merged with the Polish language, acquired new meanings over time. Linde gives two understandings of it, which can also be found in the Dictionary of Warsaw: “part of the country, district” and “territory under the administration of clergy, monasteries” (Linde, 1811, p. 1052). As Ewa Kosowska writes:

¹ For Eco: “A denotative relation is a direct and unambiguous relation, strictly defined by code [...]. A connotative relation occurs when a pair consisting of a denotative and a denotative meaning becomes entirely the denotative of some additional meaning” (Eco, 2012, p. 57).

The administrative division of the Polish state was already recorded by ancient Polish chroniclers; those who wrote in Latin used the terms *terra*, *regio*, *territorium*, leaving the term *provincia* to denote the sphere of jurisdiction and offices, primarily ecclesiastical, but with time also secular. Traces of the division of the country into provinces can be found in the *Statute of Wislicka-Piotrków*, which in the mid-14th century consolidated the differences between the Greater Poland and Lesser Poland. From the time of the Union of Lublin, the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth officially gained a third voivodeship. It can be assumed that while Latin functioned as an official language, *province* as a legal term retained a predominance of descriptive characteristics (Kosowska, 2014, p. 19).

The *Dictionary of Warsaw* has the meanings given by Linde and two other meanings, moreover, one of them refers to ancient history: “a conquered country that became part of the Roman state” and the latter, which indicates the appearance and consolidation of a new, valuable meaning “country outside the capital, big city, peculiar, flooded corner, village, parish, backwater” (Kryński, Niedźwiedzki, 1908, pp. 1133–1134). According to Bańkowski:

In a special sense, “an area remote from a large (metropolitan) city, inhabited by dark and indecent people” since the 18th century after the German *provinz* and the French *province* (Bańkowski, 2000, p. 795).

The latter word, *periphery* – is the most recent to have entered the Polish language. Bańkowski attributes the first use to Stanisław Staszic (1780), while he dates the French *périphérie* to 1544 and points to the Greek *periphēreia* “circumference” from the verb *peri-phérein* “to carry in a circle, to carry around” as its source (Bańkowski, 2000, p. 532). This noun is not recorded by Linde, but we can find it in the *Dictionary of Warsaw*, which gives four understandings, including: basic – “circle of a circle, circle”, figurative – “circle, sphere”, figurative and also humorous – “volume, carcass of a fat man”, and also “surface of some body”; a periphrastic adjective is also recorded, without specifying the meaning, but with a reference to the noun (Kryński, Niedźwiedzki, 1908, p. 120).

The vocabulary in question indicates spatial relations. *Periphery* (in the plural) and *frontiers* (also more frequently than in the singular), like the aforementioned *border area*, evoke a sense of something far away, and thus their meaning includes a point of reference: a place from which far away. They refer to themselves to the middle-edge opposition (com. Dąbrówka, Geller, 1995, p. 812).

Province or *provincial* refer first of all to the relation whole-part (such a meaning may be found, for example, in the *Dictionary of Antonyms*, which suggests the opposite: *province* – country a (Dąbrówka, Geller, 1995, p. 766), but the *Dictionary of Expressions with a similar meaning* gives two meanings: “away from civilisation” and “away from a big city”, in the latter case the antonym *metropolia* is added (Wiśniakowska,

2006, p. 427). As Ewa Kosowska writes, noting the change in the meaning of the word *province*:

From the end of the 17th century the French language entered the Polish salons, and with-it additional connotations of the term. Since the Middle Ages in France the provinces (.)] enjoyed relative independence (.)]. During the reign of Louis XIV, during the creation of a strong state by restricting the traditional autonomy of individual states, the settlement of aristocrats seeking political independence outside Paris was a signal of rebellion or monarchal disfavour. A fierce opposition between centre and province emerged, with life in the “centre”, however uncomfortable due to the cramped confines of Versailles and oppressive court etiquette, slowly becoming a symbol of prestige for the majority of French nobility from the turn of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (Kosowska, 2014, pp. 19–20).

All three words: *frontier*, *periphery*, *province* convey an external, dependent, non-proprietary perspective. Even if one declares oneself to be in the province, in the periphery, on the frontier or coming from there, one thereby perceives this place not autonomously, but in opposition to another place, because the point of reference is elsewhere. It is a form of marking dominance or difference (or a combination of both).

Peripheral university, frontier university and, most notably, provincial university are informal terms (like centre, city, etc.) in which the spatial is combined with the axiological. Denotatively the peripheral university or the frontier university denotes remoteness (in the sense of literal distance from the centre), the additional connotative meaning is associated with inferiority, lower rank and hence lower value. The same can be said of the adjective *regional*. It has a mostly descriptive meaning, but in the nominative phrase (often used during the work on higher education reform): “regional university” loses its unambiguity and axiological innocence².

Beyond the centres – anthropological and cultural inspiration

Various ideas and concepts have been identified as sources of reflection on the centre-periphery opposition. In the context of these reflections, I think it is worth recalling some elements of German and American diffusionist thought that emerged in cultural studies in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The first school of

² Not everyone agrees with this view, but confirmation that the term regional university is of value can be found in Minister Przemysław Czarnek’s statement of 15.06.2022 (471st Senate Meeting of the Bydgoszcz University of Technology): “I am here to prevent the implementation of a plan according to which there should have been only 10 universities in Poland that would have awarded doctoral degrees, habilitation, and all others would have been some kind of only regional universities [footnote A.G.]. All universities in the country are equally important” (Starzyńska-Rosiecka, Więclawski, 2022).

anthropology, i.e., evolutionism, assumed above all the spontaneity of the processes of individual cultures, although, of course, it did not diminish the importance of cultural contacts, but they were not of interest to evolutionists. Diffusionism, on the other hand, focused on the question of mutual influences and relations between cultures, and diffusionist thinking to a certain extent abandoned thinking of a political nature (which does not mean that the concept was not used as a scientific basis for German expansionism), but focused on relations between groups by studying migration and diffusion and their – essentially undesigned – effects. It is thanks to Leo Frobenius that the term *Kulturkreis* – *the cultural circle* – entered science at the end of the 19th century; we will find it, for example, in the title of *Der Westafrikanische Kulturkreis*, published in 1897. I recall these issues even though the concept of cultural circles is not topical³, but the imaginative potential inherent in the semantic scope of the term “cultural circle” also includes direct references to the periphery as a borderland – junction and transition.

Around the same time that the term *Kulturkreis* appeared in German science, the American ethnologist Otis T. Mason published an article including the term *culture area* – *cultural acreage* (Mason, 1895, p. 646), a decade later it appeared in the work of Alfred L. Kroeber’s *Types of Indian Culture in California* (Kroeber, 1904, p. 82). For American scholars carrying out research close to diffusionist reflection (although far more modest in the diachronic sense), the cultural areal became an important unit of description, overriding the elements constructing it. In Clark Wissler’s publications (*The American Indian*, 1917; *Man and Culture*, 1923; or finally *The Relation of Nature to Man Aboriginal America*, 1926), the problem of the *cultural centre* (the term *culture climax* appears in Kroeber’s later work) as a centre influencing the cultural areal, i.e., a certain demarcated area, emerged as significant. The centre (least influenced by other cultures) is thus distinct from a marginal (peripheral) culture, combining features of both neighbouring cultures (Wissler, 1917, pp. 242–244; 1923, pp. 61–63). Kroeber points out that where influences from places of cultural culmination meet, i.e., at the border, at the periphery, there are often few cultural differences (Kroeber, 1939, p. 5). Such an approach dehegemonises thinking about political spheres of influence (which is not to say that it completely invalidates it), but it draws attention to the specificity of peripheral areas resulting from cultural dynamics and the causality of this specificity.

³ The history of the term, the concepts associated with it and the dangers of these concepts have been discussed many times. Philipp Sarasin (Sarasin, 2016) provided a brief but informative overview of the identified issues.

The faces of local needs

So, who needs a university on the frontiers and for what purpose? In the periphery? And also, in the provinces (assuming its autonomous significance)? I will try to start from a historical perspective, recalling the efforts to establish a university in Upper Silesia. A reconstruction of this process must take into account the time immediately after the end of the First World War⁴. This was the moment when the former universities were reopened (the former Vilnius University was reconstituted as the Stefan Batory University) and new universities were established: the University of Lublin (from 1928: the Catholic University of Lublin) and the Polish University in Poznań (after successive name changes from 1955 to Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań), as well as other higher education institutions, such as the Mining Academy (founded in 1919, later the Mining and Metallurgy Academy) in Krakow⁵. It was at this time, even before the planned plebiscite of 20 March 1921 (and thus before the III Silesian Uprising), when the borders between the Second Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth and the German Reich were still unclear, that the idea of creating a university in Upper Silesia was proposed. During the debates in the Legislative Sejm – on February 3, 1921 – Wielkopolska: Stanisław Adamski (later diocesan bishop of Katowice), who in 1919 also pushed for the foundation of a university in Poznań (Kobylnicki, Michalski, 1985, p. 77), and Wojciech Sosiński, supported by ambassadors from the Polish Christian Democratic Party, put forward “an urgent proposal (...) to prepare urgently for the establishment of a university and polytechnics in Upper Silesia” (Report, 1921, p. 71); the application was sent to the Education Committee (materials not preserved). It is not known how autonomous this proposal was and to what extent it was a form of political struggle before the plebiscite (com. Drogoń, 2015, p. 97). A few months earlier (1.08.1920), in the bilingual journal *Der Bund – Związek* (published in Bytom), in the second part of the article *Cultural Problems in the Upper Silesian Question* (the author hid under the pseudonym *Pharus*), devoted, among other things, to the expected educational problems in connection with the introduction of German in Polish schools and Polish in German schools, the following was anticipated: “Development of education appropriate to the folk characteristics [emphasis added A.G.] Upper Silesia will be crowned with the ‘Upper Silesian University’ to be established” (*Pharus*, 1920, p. 7). This part contained references to cultural institutions (including the Catholic Church), proposed concrete solutions and complemented the first part (of 25 July 1920), which condemned the previous neglect of cultural issues and emphasised their importance. A relatively large amount of space was devoted to the identity of Upper

⁴ Read more about this process (Fertacz, 2008, pp. 24–65).

⁵ The Silesian voivodeship authorities have taken steps to move this university, which trains personnel for Silesian industry, to Katowice (Chodakowska, 1974, pp. 146–147).

Silesia and the specificities of its inhabitants: “The Upper Silesians feel like members of a new nation. (...) The Upper Silesians, as if balancing each other out, both strains feel largely international” (Pharus, 1920, p. 2). Stressing the cultural identity of Upper Silesia, the magazine promoted the idea of an autonomous state in this territory, it was associated with the German Plebiscient Commissariat (Sieradzka, 2017, p. 543; Drogoń 2015, pp. 96–97).

The educational situation in the Silesian Voivodeship in the early 1920s was peculiar. According to statistics, it had the lowest percentage of illiterates, 2.6% (1921), while the Polish average was 31.1%, and 71.1% in the Polesie voivodeship (Olszewicz, 1938, p. 127). The voivodeship, the smallest in area but the most densely populated, was divided into two separate (due to historical preconditions between Prussia and Austria) parts: Upper Silesia and Cieszynska Silesia⁶. Cieszyn Silesia had Polish schools (including grammar schools) and there were close links, including academic links, with Krakow. In Upper Silesia German was the only language of education until 1918 and there were few Polish intellectuals. Therefore, when it became apparent in the early 1920s that knowledge of the Polish language was needed in official institutions and schools, there was a shortage of official staff and teachers, as some of the available staff left for Germany⁷. Intellectuals were encouraged (in particular with a salary supplement) to come to Silesia (Chodakowska, 1974, p. 145), and special retraining courses were organised.

The idea of establishing a university was revived in 1928 (efforts to establish a polytechnic had been made a year earlier, in 1927). A conference was held in Katowice, to which representatives of the academic circles of Warsaw, Lviv and Krakow, as well as the central authorities, were invited. The Province of Silesia was to guarantee the preparation of the physical facilities (institution buildings and their equipment, as well as staff accommodation; a competition was held to design the buildings), but these efforts were not supported either by the state authorities (WRiOP minister Prof. Kazimierz Bartel and president prof. Ignacy Mościcki), nor the representatives of Lviv and Krakow⁸. Instead, attention was drawn to the advantages of “making the Silesians popular” through education in Kraków, Poznań or Warsaw (Chodakowska, 1974, p. 147). Such arguments were protested by Ludwik Ręgorowicz, the conference organiser and head of public education, who stressed that sending children to study outside the voivodship was so difficult from a financial point of view that few people

⁶ From the sixteenth century, the name Upper Silesia referred to both; they began to be distinguished from the mid-eighteenth century (Prussian-Austrian wars), when the term Austrian Silesia appeared, and from the mid-nineteenth century – Cieszyn Silesia (Fertacz, 2008, p. 27).

⁷ Danuta Sieradzka writes extensively on this subject (Sieradzka, 1989).

⁸ The plans for a polytechnic institute were supported by Prof. Ludwik Sziperla, who was Rector of the Warsaw University of Technology from 1926 to 1928.

made such attempts (Szczepanik, 1958, p. 7). This is confirmed by statistics: the proportion of students here was significantly lower (1 in about 2600–2650) than in other regions of Poland (1 in about 750) (Lubos, 1930, p. 23)⁹. A university was not established, but in Katowice, profile higher schools began to be organised: the Pedagogical Institute (1928), the Music Conservatory (1929), and the Higher School of Social and Economic Sciences (1936).

However, the argument about cultural dependence, not least because of the historical origins of the lands constituting the pre-war Silesian Voivodeship, was taken seriously. Roman Dyboski, a native of Cieszyn¹⁰ professor at the Jagiellonian University, published a brochure in 1932 on Kraków and Silesia in which he characterised the cultural dependence of Silesia on its “cultural metropolis” with friendly paternalism:

Krakow looks on with benevolent joy at the truly overwhelming development of this great industrial city in its new function as the capital of an autonomous Polish border province; but remains convinced that even in this new order of things the old Podwale city remains to perform certain cultural functions in relation to Silesia, which only within the hitherto existing spiritual tradition of the Krakow-Silesian community can really be performed with dignity and efficiency (Dyboski, 1932, p. 12).

Kraków, according to the author¹¹ – is able to resist “the powerful intellectual emanation of Wrocław”, but also to cope with other problems. As we read:

We are afflicted in the new united states as if by childish diseases of its body, but there is one specific Silesian ailment that Krakow can effectively cure. I am not referring to the tribal separatism of the Silesians in general.

There follows a large section devoted to the divergent histories of Upper Silesia and Cieszyn Silesia, which resulted in significant differences:

Cieszyn, owing to the easier conditions of the former Austrian annexation, had an older tradition of free national and cultural life, and thus a higher degree of socialisation and

⁹ On this topic also (Drogoń, 2015, p. 100).

¹⁰ His father, Antoni Dybka, a lawyer (a graduate of the Universities of Lviv and Krakow), was not from Cieszyn, having arrived there only in 1881 (Morys-Twarowski, 2018, p. 15).

¹¹ Dyboski was the curator of the “Znicz” dormitory association. The association was divided into sections: Krakowska, Lwowska, Warszawska, Poznańska and Gdańska; the headquarters were in Krakow (during the academic year) and in Cieszyn (during holidays). He also supported the initiative to establish the Silesian House in Kraków (Musioł, 1929, p. 113). The Silesian House was established in the years 1932–1936, as Andrzej Dogoń writes: “The location in the city centre, the almost symbolic fees for accommodation and the meals which the House offered to young students coming from Silesia, were a breakthrough in yet another economic barrier for the hundreds of Silesians studying in Krakow at that time. The Silesian House fulfilled a number of other cultural functions, and was an important institution linking the spirituality and culture of the Royal City with the Silesian lands restored to Poland” (Drogoń, 2015, p. 100).

active state sense among the masses of its Polish population; it also had a larger ready-made host of native Polish intelligentsia with academic education. As a result, in Polish Silesia, the vast majority of which is a former Prussian district, and the administrative capital of which lies on the former Prussian side, a considerable number of Cieszyners occupied leading and responsible positions. Hence the sense of disempowerment and resentment among the former Prussian citizens, who, after all, not without justification attribute to the hard Prussian school certain educational advantages (Dyboski, 1932, p. 14).¹²

The education of young Silesians should take place in Krakow in order to be subject to the “benevolent action of Krakow’s August ‘genius loci’” (Dyboski, 1932, p. 15).

In the new terms

The next wave of university establishment in Poland came at the end of the Second World War. The first to be established was the Maria Curie Skłodowska University in Lublin (1944), followed by universities in Łódź, Toruń and Wrocław; further efforts were also made in Katowice. This is evidenced, among other things, by the *Memorial on the Establishment of a University in the Silesian-Dąbrowa Province*, issued in 1945. The document is the result of the work of the Civic Preparatory Committee of the University of Silesia in Katowice. This Committee, which had 34 members, operated under the honorary patronage of General Aleksander Zawadzki, Governor of Silesia-Dąbrowa. Its chairman was Dr Józef Lisak – director of the already mentioned Higher Seminary of Social and Economic Sciences in Katowice; the Committee’s Presidium consisted of 5 members: Zdzisław Grelowski, Mieczysław Kłapa, Kornel Michejda, Jan Smoleń, Kazimierz Stawarski. Among the members were representatives (like Lisak) of the pre-war educational and scientific institutions of the voivodeship (Dr. Józef Pieter – director of the Pedagogical Institute, Dr. Roman Lutman – first director of the Silesian Library and then of the Silesian Institute in Katowice, Rev. Dr. Stanisław Mysliński – rector of the Seminary of the Katowice Diocese,¹³ Bishop Adamski’s delegate), representatives of scientific staff from various universities (medics¹⁴: Stefan Kwaśniewski – assistant professor of the University of Poznań, Stanisław Laskowicki – professor of the University of Lviv, Kornel Michejda – professor of the University of Vilnius, Stefan Pokrzewinski – professor of the University of Warsaw, but also scholars of other specialties: Tadeusz Bigo – professor of law at the University

¹² The name of the publication’s publisher is highly significant: Municipal Commission for the Advancement of Krakow.

¹³ The seminary was based in Krakow from its inception until 1980, then moved to Katowice.

¹⁴ Most of them were employed in local hospitals.

of Lviv, Roman Ingarden – professor of philosophy at the University of Lviv, Edward Rose – professor at the Warsaw School of Economics) as well as political activists from the PPS and PPR, politicians associated with the cities of the province (with Katowice and Bytom), civil servants, teachers and farmers. The memorial is an interesting material showing the migration of Polish scholars after the Second World War and their participation in the establishment of higher education).

The document in the first part refers to earlier attempts to establish a university, a failure it prescribes to the small size of the pre-war Silesian Voivodeship and the proximity of two centres: Kraków and Poznań. It also points to the change in borders that brought the whole of Upper and Lower Silesia into Polish territory. The authors of the memorial acknowledge that Breslau had university traditions and was predestined to be a focus of Polish culture for the whole of Silesia, it also had an adequate infrastructure and “scientific resources”, but on the other hand it was “German in spirit and language, moreover, it was an easternmost bastion of militant Prussian-Hitler nationalism” (Memorial, 1945, p. 8). They conclude that there will be educated personnel in the Silesia-Dąbrowa Province who, with the help of scholars from the universities of: Vilnius, Lviv and Warsaw universities, can cope with the task of creating the new institution. The cities of Upper Silesia (not only Katowice, but also Chorzów, Bytom, Zabrze and Gliwice) have sufficient material facilities to enable the establishment of a university (well-equipped hospitals, laboratories and school offices) and to guarantee accommodation for the academic staff. The transport infrastructure is good enough to enable convenient commuting for the region’s residents. We also find here a very important passage testifying to the fact that the authors of the Memorial took into account the cultural specificity of the province. In their optics, the University here was to build new organisational forms of teaching (this passage is underlined) that would “become an instrument for the influence of high scientific culture on the general public” (Memorial, 1945, p. 10). A university has different functions to a polytechnic,¹⁵ so the existence of both will satisfy the academic needs of Upper Silesia. The purpose of a university is not only to prepare specialised human resources, but also to create a specific environment – it is a “focal point of culture”. For Silesia, this is particularly important because for “seven centuries it had been subjected to the influence of a foreign, hostile culture, which was a pseudo-culture and a negation of humanism” (Memorial, 1945, p. 11). Other passages dealt with detailed organisational issues.

¹⁵ The Technical University of Łódź was established two days after the signing of the Memorial – by Decree of 24 May 1945 (Decree, 1945). The University of Łódź and the Technical University of Łódź were also established at that time.

The annexes to the memorial are also extremely interesting. The first two deal with the efforts of the medical community to establish a medical¹⁶ faculty, the seventh with a theological faculty. In the third one (by Józef Pieter), one can see, among other things, an attempt to drum up arguments in favour of the Wrocław location of the university: Wrocław is quiet and Katowice is noisy, but, Pieter argued, all over the world universities are located in industrial cities, and Zdzisław Grelowski, Head of the Presidial Department of the Provincial Office, pointed out in the sixth appendix that the urban character of the voivodeship, the high population density, was even a rationale for the creation of a university.

However, the fourth annex formulated by Lisak¹⁷, which reports on the negotiations held with the rector of the University of Lviv Stanisław Kulczyński on 3–5 May, 1945 in Katowice, seems to be the most important. The following passages show that the Rector came to Katowice looking for a place to relocate the University. Lisak states that “Relocating a whole university of some sort” will not be beneficial, as it is not just a question of employing adequately prepared academic staff, but of “the attitude to the local population of the vast majority of peasants and workers”. He believed that the University of Silesia had to be organised by someone who knew the local specifics. It is important to make it possible for those who, for material reasons, have not been able to study¹⁸ before, this must be done without lowering the level of education. The demand for knowledge about the cultural and social conditions of education in Silesia was not unfounded. The lack of understanding that was observed in teachers coming to work in Upper Silesia in the inter-war period had an impact on the school failures of young people:

Separatist attitudes towards Silesian youth from working-class backgrounds were also observed in some immigrant teachers. These young people, left to their own devices, without sufficient academic or educational support, achieved worse results in their studies than young people from intelligentsia backgrounds (Chodakowska, 1974, pp. 145–146).

A similar issue appears in appendix five by Jerzy Hutka – head of the Department of Culture and the Artp. He recalls the reluctance of Silesians – peasants and workers – to

¹⁶ A separate medical university was soon established in the Upper Silesian conurbation, which: “was established in 1948 as the Academy of Medicine with one faculty of medicine and a dental department based in Rokitnica Bytomska; a year later it was renamed the Silesian Academy of Medicine, then the Ludwik Waryński Silesian Academy of Medicine” (History, 2013).

¹⁷ Lisak was a graduate of the Academy of Commerce in Krakow and the Jagiellonian University, taught at the School of Economics and Commerce (1927–1937) and at the Administrative and Economic Institute in Krakow (1932–1935), and from 1935 was professionally attached to Katowice – the Department of Public Enlightenment of the Silesian Provincial Office (1935–1939) and from 1936–1939 and 1945–1949 with the WSNS-G.

¹⁸ Lisak proposes allowing self-taught students without formal training whose knowledge allows them to continue their studies.

educate their children and gives historical reasons for this: the threat of sons educated at German universities abandoning their native environment (the problem can be found in Szczepan Twardoch's novel *Pokora* from 2020), the necessity or profitability of taking up gainful employment quickly, the unwillingness to invest time in education. The lack of opportunities to get a solid education results in, how according to Hutka:

(...) a huge amount of capital being wasted here, which we should activate. A lot of individuals here are taking it in the wrong direction. Many people here take this in the wrong direction. A lot of individuals here are taking it in the wrong direction. Many people, unable to accept their fate, practise a branch of knowledge, such as history, in addition to their gainful occupation. The number of amateur historians is significant, and the contribution of these people to historical research in Silesia must be highly appreciated. Most of these people are *perpetum mobile* in improbable combinations, adepts of the occult, researchers of sacred scripture, or solvers of the problem of the squaring of the circle, soliciting the academies of various countries and, in the end, enraged at the whole world (Memorial, 1945, p. 21).

These dangers could be averted by proper education at an early age, but also by an influx of Polish intelligentsia, characterised by such an attitude to Silesians that would make it possible to counteract the damage done by "representatives of the immigrant intelligentsia or semi-intelligentsia, whose behaviour and incompetence in dealing with the local population create the so-called problem of districtism" (Memoriał, 1945, p. 21).

To whom is the university?

In answering this question, one must ask another – to what purpose? Is the University on the Borderlands supposed to defend the national culture and represent the state, to be a borderland statehouse of knowledge? Or is it to nurture the local specificity of culture (also with regard to elitism and egalitarianism)? Is it to be a bridge to others? What is it to grow out of and who is to be responsible for it, and what is it to be responsible for?

Similar questions can be asked of local and regional universities today. The answer depends not only on the moment-to-moment balance of political forces, but also on the deep conditions of the culture. On the frontiers, the initiative to establish a university is a particular form of political game, because the university as a – prospectively emancipatory – nexus of people and ideas can work to reject foreign(er) domination. Hence, the struggle for the fundamental tools of cultural autonomy for Western civilisation is difficult and sometimes protracted, and perhaps doomed to failure.

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Summary

The introductory section of the article examines the etymology and contemporary meanings of the vocabulary associated with “peripherality” or “provincialism” in relation to the location and valorisation not only of universities but also of academic centres. The second section is devoted to recalling German and American diffusionist concepts and related terms, and concepts (cultural circle, cultural areal, cultural centre, peripheral culture) that have generated specific ideas about intra- and intercultural relations. The last part contains a case study: a profile essay on the history of the struggle to establish a university in Katowice (i.e. from the early 1920s to 1945). The reconstruction focuses on highlighting local/regional needs, indicated as specific needs to be met by the projected university.

Keywords: university in Upper Silesia, cultural specificity, industrial region, Polish higher education in the interwar twenty-year period