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Occupational restructuring as a scientific concept
in Hungarian human geography

main findings of the PhD dissertation

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Introduction and aims of the research

Restructuring of workers between economic sectors used to be a popular research topic in Hungarian geography in the 1960s and 1970s emerging partly because of the rapid industrialisation of the country, however it has lost importance as a field of study in the past two decades despite marked structural changes in postsocialist economies.

In this PhD dissertation I focus primarily on why this shift happened within geography. I address the topic through questions, such as: What is the importance of classifications within the discipline? Why and how has this topic emerged in the context of Hungarian geography? Why was the topic of restructuring of workers important for socialist geographers, and conversely, why has it lost importance after the regime change? Is there a need at all for renewed studies of this kind? Were and are there any comparable shifts in the dominant Anglo-American geographical literature, and what can these international studies tell us?

My dissertation focuses primarily on the philosophy of geography, but also partly on the history of the discipline and the sociology of scientific knowledge. I provide an in-depth analysis of the changing discourse of occupational restructuring within Hungarian human geography. To develop my ideas I foment clashes between scientific texts and research practices on three different scales. First, I contrast changes within Hungarian geography with changes in international (primarily with Anglo-American and German) geography and social sciences. Second, I seek to show in detail how clashes revolving around the topic of occupational restructuring have happened within the Hungarian discipline. Third, the dissertation itself is an outcome of a clash with myself: departing from my regional scientist background I consider writing on the topic of occupational restructuring in other ways and epistemologies. As a consequence, among the layers of meaning of this dissertation there is an identity-seeking one; the dissertation can be conceptualised and understood – to paraphrase Donna Haraway – as a form of appearance of my knowledge situated in distinctive spatialities and temporalities of the dissertation-writing process.

Subsequently, the dissertation – to quote the statement of the geographer Ian Cook on his own one – ‘sounds like a hugely destabilis/ed/ing process’. It is destabilising in the sense that it seeks to challenge dominant approaches, scientific ideas, people’s positions in the scientific field and my own identity. It is destabilised

in consequence of mediating between different viewpoints (thanks to the identity-seeking referred to above), and because of the aim to introduce destabilised, not fixed interpretations of scientific texts. This dissertation itself is destabilising and destabilised in spite of the fact that the main findings presented here have more or less an appearance of being fixed.

Theoretical approach, methodology and literature review

As the dissertation is a theoretical one which is based on interpreting texts in human geography it cannot exist on its own and without the discussed texts. The objects of my research are the discourses themselves which are generally presented in a literature review as premises to the actual studies. When speaking of a 'traditional' dissertation both the inspected literature and the thesis ventures to understand 'real-world processes' which is not the case in my study.

In searching for different scientific inquiries the dissertation builds on several theoretical standpoints. I borrow the idea of the relationship between the world and our knowledge of it from realism, I define the social production of class and classifications as objects of study from a critical geographical viewpoint, and I draw upon post-structuralism in analysing scientific discourses.

This dissertation is a critical reading of studies on the occupational restructuring, a standalone one in the Hungarian geographical literature. As a consequence of that and of the aforementioned identity-seeking I do not describe in a 'confident' way what the literature has written before, but in order to establish a context for the thesis I discuss three issues in detail. All of them revolve around the question whether and why occupational restructuring as a topic is relevant in contemporary international human geography, and if not, why its importance could have been diminished. The first issue is the changing role of class and classifications, indicated by a shift from an understanding of these concepts as a means to explore and describe the world, to an investigation of the social construction of classifications as well as a re-evaluation (or by some, even a rejection) of the role of classes and social structures. Second, I examine the changing importance of the sub-branches of geography – and concomitant industrial change – by revisiting the so-called progress reports of the journal *Progress*

in Human Geography. A considerable shift can be recognised within these reports, which in the 1980s departed from researches on the socio-spatial division of labour – having been studied first and foremost in the dimension of the three sectors of the economy, i.e. agriculture, manufacturing and services – and arrived at a performative, pluralist and multi-dimensional (e.g. gender and ethnic aspects) understanding of economy, class and identities. Third, in parallel with the first two points, I follow the changes in research on work and labour in which neoclassical location theory and studies on geographically uneven development lost importance vis-à-vis the so-called labour geographies programme which pushed work and workers' practices to the forefront, and attempted to understand capitalism as it actually is.

Results and conclusions

I critically examine in the dissertation three different, but in several ways interlinked topics which all revolve around causes and conditions of establishing, maintaining and effacing geographical discourses. In this summary I present the main conclusions.

The first part of the dissertation deconstructs the economist Jean Fourastié's three-sector hypothesis of economic and occupational transformation which describes sectoral shifts between agriculture, manufacturing and services as a result of technical progress. In this chapter the main results are as follows.

The original idea by Fourastié is a travelling theory which has functioned as a black box in the Hungarian context, as the articles and books by Hungarian researchers have only looked at the hypothesis itself and have disregarded the economic causation of the concept.

Therefore, most of the Hungarian literature has considered the original idea as based on an inductive form of reasoning, and has used it as a model in a hypothetico-deductive framework. By destabilising this kind of thinking I suggest that the original concept shows both inductive and deductive features. Moreover, I discuss in detail in which regard Fourastié's idea has hypothesis- as well as model-like features. I argue that these findings have a considerable effect on the usefulness of the concept by others, as different characteristics open up different ways of interpretation.

One of the premises of the three-sector hypothesis is that it dissects society into three sectors. I show in the dissertation how in economics, statistics and human geography classifications as such have emerged, and what are their theoretical assumptions. Although the Hungarian literature has discussed questions of classification from a 'spatial' viewpoint, it has done it with a positivistic epistemology, and has not analysed it as a social construction. I make connections between the three-sector hypothesis and the French social scientist Pierre Bourdieu's theories of classification and the field (or social space). Through that I pursue the issue of legitimising scientific actions in statistical data production and in human geographical practices.

Apart from society, Fourastié's idea dissects time, and it establishes a modernisation discourse with a teleological view of time and history. The focus of the narrative is on an economic equilibrium which is disrupted and then attained by technical progress. Correlation of time and development (as independent variables) and shares of the three economic sectors (as dependent variable) in the hypothesis has not yet been questioned by papers in Hungarian human geography. Besides, many examples show that causal relations between the variables have been reversed in the literature or have been used in a confusing way resulting in incoherent arguments.

The three-sector hypothesis not only dissects society and time, and establishes causality between time, development and sectoral shares, but also produces and dissects spaces. Fourastié being an economist did not consider this aspect in his works, yet, in critical readings of the concept some geographers have analysed it in detail. However, they have generally approached the issue in a restricted way, as they have not discussed on the one hand whether the original idea can be scaled up from the national level (as in the original source) to the macro-regional or global level. On the other hand Hungarian articles have not critically studied either whether the concept can be scaled down and applied for sub-national data.

By looking at spaces and times in the three-sector hypothesis jointly, I show that the modernisation discourse often has interpreted spatial differences in restructuring processes as being temporal questions (i.e. spatial inequalities has been regarded as temporary difference which will be annihilated by development). What is at issue here is that geographers have obliterated geography from this concept, and as a consequence they have also rejected the idea of spatial divisions of labour. I argue

that the approach of socio-spatial divisions of labour (which emerged in British human geography in the 1980s) offers a better way to contemplate Fourastié's idea with a coherent way of thinking on time, space and society.

The second part positions Hungarian socialist geography's concepts of occupational restructuring and within that Edit Lettrich's ideas about connecting macro- and micro-level studies in a broader context of disciplinary history and theory of geography. The main arguments put forward are the following:

This part of the dissertation builds primarily on Pierre Bourdieu's theory of the scientific field. It seeks to show that Bourdieu's ideas are adequate in describing struggles over the power of knowledge in socialist geography, and that by concentrating on the topic of occupational restructuring the changing scientific life of an era can be interpreted in a complex way.

Furthermore, drawing on Bourdieu, I discuss how key figures in geography established and appropriated certain symbols (words, ideas, institutions etc.) in the socialist period in order to reposition themselves in the scientific field. I investigate in detail how a binary opposition – also in the ideas of occupational restructuring – was constructed and maintained mostly by socialist geographers between micro-level studies or urban monographs rejected as 'bourgeois' geography (and later on, as being inspired by the German tradition of social geography), and macro-level general studies of settlement geography appropriated through a positive value production by socialist economic geographers.

By focusing on the geographer Edit Lettrich's CSc (candidate of sciences) defence procedure (1962) more thoroughly, I argue that a combination of Bourdieu's ideas with qualitative methodologies and archival sources (i.e. transcript of the defence) can open up new interpretations of the history of socialist geography. I also try to show that ideas, frameworks of arguments set forth by socialist geographers were different and multiple, and that socialist geography was not a homogeneous discourse.

In addressing macro-level studies of Edit Lettrich I concentrate on how she used the idea of occupational restructuring in her books and papers, how spatial division of labour and the modernisation discourse intersects in them and how these works try to distance themselves from the mainstream socialist economic

geographical imperative and internalise characteristics of *géographie humaine* (the dominant paradigm in the inter-war period in Hungary) and the then contemporary German social geography.

I argue in this dissertation that the hegemonic discourse of socialist economic geography (with economic production as its central concept) ceased to dominate in the 1970s which meant that studies focusing not primarily on production could have subsequently emerged. From these I study in detail how and with which ideological justification population geography (and especially the reading of its proponent, Béla Sárfalvi) was established. I also reflect on the contradiction between Sárfalvi's depiction as a humanist, how he would have liked to rehumanise socialist geography with the population geography programme, and how in the end he left the subdiscipline dehumanised (e.g. by conceptualising the worker as the primary productive force).

I compare disciplinary shifts on the topic of work in Anglo-American geography highlighted in the contextualisation part of my study with changes in Hungary. I suggest that as an applied geography they both served planning purposes in a certain period, whereas an important distinction is that Western critical Marxism interpreted workers differently from Hungarian socialist geography.

Yet another comparison drawn in the thesis is how socialist geography and the Hungarian social geography school (influenced mostly by German scholars) interpreted occupational restructuring. Instead of the dominant discourse which emphasises differences between the two approaches, I place emphasis on the interpretation that similarities could have explained that social geography could subsist in the socialist times on the peripheries of the discipline. In parallel, I consider some aspects of how German social geography as a travelling theory changed in the Hungarian context.

I analyse through the themes of work, spatial division of labour and occupational restructuring how Hungarian settlement geographers and social geographers have related to the ideas of Tibor Mendöl, an important figure of the inter-war period of human geography. My objective here is to show the apparent paradox of his heritage: in spite of his exclusion from the scientific life in the 1960s the usefulness and importance of his thoughts have prevailed in completely different arguments during the struggles taking place in the scientific field.

At the end of this chapter I argue for a situated reading of Jacques Derrida's *Spectres of Marx* in order to make closer acquaintance with the spectres of Hungarian socialist geography and of our scientific identities and practices in the socialist and postsocialist contexts.

The third part of the dissertation examines which research topics and approaches may emerge in Hungarian economic geography in the postsocialist condition, as postsocialism as a new era and a new epistemology both enables and encourages us to rethink the discipline, as well as topics of work, workers and economic change within that. The conclusions are as follows:

I show with which concepts of time and space scientific practices in postsocialist human geographies translate 'real-world processes' into scientific texts. I argue in this dissertation that our thinking of postsocialism reflects geographies of knowledge production; Hungarian geographers have mostly been reluctant to accept the epistemological change of the new era.

Furthermore, I propose the viewpoint that in the geographical research of occupational restructuring scientific narratives and approaches are mostly invariable after 1990, although economic processes of the regime change should have meant a shift in this sense.

Scientific texts produced after 1990 – comparable to the three-sector hypothesis itself – establish continuities or discontinuities in space and time. In my opinion, for a deeper understanding of geographical imaginations on Central and Eastern Europe we should put more emphasis on finding out why certain geographers have written about continuities while others have concentrated on breaks in postsocialist transformation processes or have even combined the two, as well as how empirical reality has been translated into scientific practices by them. I advance the argument that in interpreting temporal and spatial continuities and ruptures a reflexive and a relational understanding would help to open up discussions on the topic.

The dissertation attempts to deal with the hybrid nature of teleological thinking on time which is a result of the socialist geographical heritage and that of postsocialism arriving from Anglo-American geography. I also deal with container spaces and values imposed upon them which emerge as a consequence of this thinking.

My objective in this chapter is to look at whether epistemological changes in Anglo-American economic geography could be relevant for shifts in Hungarian economic geography. Although there are several similarities in economic processes (such as deindustrialisation in the 1970s in the United Kingdom comparable to the deindustrialisation of the Hungarian economy after 1990), there are hardly any signs of the pluralism of contemporary Western economic geography in the Hungarian context. Based on this, I argue for in-depth investigations of more-than-capitalist forms of work in Hungarian economic geography, which is essential because we have just started familiarising ourselves with the rules and consequences of capitalist and neoliberal transformation.

Presenting one aspect of postsocialist capitalist realities I examine in a short case study the activities of the temporary staffing industry in Hungary. I conclude here that Hungarian statistical data and articles dealing with the world of labour from an economic geographic point of view are limited in scope. There is an urgent need to rethink basic concepts like place and scale in this context, and to consider the social construction of sources in geographical studies which (also) interpret 'hard' official data.

To round off this chapter and the dissertation I present a longer case study which draws on the 'cultural turn' in economic geography. I describe how postsocialist economies and primarily workers are represented in contemporary works of art from the region. Arts, works of art and artists play a considerable role in constructing meanings of 'the economy', nevertheless, links between arts and geography are mostly neglected in Hungarian human geography (also in postsocialism). I look at exhibitions and works of art as heterotopias which can lead us to deeper and multi-faceted understandings of the world around us (such as in deciphering geographical imaginations emerging in and because of postsocialism) compared to 'classical' sources and methodologies of economic geography.

Publications of the author related to the thesis

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