

## Russian Socio-Economic Geography: Status, Challenges, Perspectives

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## DISCUSSION



### RUSSIAN SOCIO-ECONOMIC GEOGRAPHY: STATUS, CHALLENGES, PERSPECTIVES

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*Socio-economic geography studies processes, characteristics and patterns of spatial development. In the recent decades, however, this area of scientific investigation has failed its promise, which happened for a number of external and internal reasons. The main external reason is the development of "consumer society", which does not require the search of new space and therefore ignores the "spatial" science, geography. Internal reason is the blurring of socio-economic geography along the variety of new lines of research. The discipline was, in many ways, redundant, and unselective in the application of theoretical and methodological tools liberally borrowed from other branches of both geography and economics. The only way this discipline can return to its former glory is by going all the way back to doing proper spatial research.*

*Key words:* socio-economic geography, crisis, sustainable development, «consumer society», regional economy, «core — periphery», geopolitics, geospace.

Socioeconomic geography (SEG) is a science studying processes, features, and patterns of spatial development of society. However, the recent decades, it has been going through a crisis. It doesn't come as a surprise. The crisis in the development of Russian SEG was observed and described long ago: 1992 — 'the limitedness of theoretical legacy in the field of social geography is especially evident; there are no remarkable general concepts' [7, p. 5], 2000. 'Geography is almost absent in analysing the macroprocesses of the global system development, since it is faced with conceptual vacuum relating to the deficit of general zeitgeist criteria' [21], 2011. 'In modern human geography... negative phenomena started to accumulate in the

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past century, whose first have witnessed the “heyday” of economic geography and the second the “chase” of the eluding object of cognition in the rapidly changing country and world’ [24].

In Russia, socioeconomic geography became an almost ‘marginal’ science with few adepts and little influence on the life of the country. This is corroborated by the information presented by A. A. Agirrechu: ‘According to the Ministry of Education and Science of the Russian Federation, as of the end of 2013, there were more than 2.5 thesis panels in the country. Only ten of them specialise in human geography; this is a very small proportion.’ He continues, ‘A calculation of the number of announcements about defences of doctoral and postdoctoral thesis published on the website of the Higher Attestation Commission in 2012—2013 shows that approximately 4,000 postdoctoral and 26,000 doctoral theses were defended in the country over two years, including 26 postdoctoral (0.7%) and fewer than 300 (0.8%) doctoral theses in geography... Over these years, approximately one fourth of postdoctoral and one third of doctoral theses in geography focused on human geography’ [1, p. 152—153].

Therefore, 0.004% of the Russian thesis panels defend theses in human geography; theses in human geography account for less than 0.2% of postdoctoral and 0.3% of doctoral theses. The average value is within the statistical margin of error, in other words, zero point zero repeating. Therefore, very few people are interested in the existence of human geography as a science except for specialists in the field. The prospects for the development of geography in general and human geography in particular are not often estimated as positive. In 2012, A. I. Chsitobaev wrote commenting on the situation at Saint Petersburg State University, ‘Given the lack of postdoctoral degree holders in geography at the Faculty (of Geography and Geoecology — V. M.), specialists in other fields — geology, biology, economics, etc. — are increasingly often involved ... If this trend persists, the Faculty will not have a thesis panel on geography, which means that geography will cease to exist’ [23, p. 22].

A question arises as to whether human geography turned into something of a ‘steam locomotive science’ that reached its peak in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century and went obsolete alongside its object of study in the 1960s. To answer this question, one has to understand what brought human geography to the current sorry state. The factors behind this process can be divided into external and internal ones.

External factors include the ‘public demand’ for research in economic geography. Economic and human geographies were most influential when the society strived for a change and least influential when stability was proclaimed a priority. The highest public demand for human geographic studies was observed twice in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The 1920s-30s and the mid-50s-late 60s witnessed the development of numerous concepts and approaches within human geography. There is no need to consider them in detail, because this will not be very informative for non-specialists and specialists are very familiar with them. Those interested in the issue can find relevant information in A. M. Nosonov’s articles recently published in the journal *Regionology* in Pskov [14—17].

In the second half of the 1960s, the development of human geography stalled, its significance reduced, and the science was ‘replaced’ by different economics-based regional sciences (W. Isard’s regional science in the US, N. N. Nekrasov’s regional economics in the USSR, etc.).

The reason behind this is the change in the social development paradigm. In the golden years of human geography, further development was seen as a change, which can be presented as the ‘transformational paradigm’ (‘the world has to change’). This holds true for both the 1920s-30s and the 1950s-60s. The transformational paradigm was replaced by the ‘conservative paradigm’ (‘the world should not change’), whose essence is the concept of limits of growth, which later transformed into the sustainable development concept. The key idea behind both concepts is preserving the current state of society and economy in an indefinitely long-term perspective attained through the self-restraint of the society in all areas.

There were attempts to implement this idea both in the capitalist and socialist parts of the then divided world. In socialist countries, it was the concept of developed socialism, which gained wide recognition after the 24<sup>th</sup> Congress of the CPSU (1971).

Of interest is the evolution of the views of Soviet leadership, which virtually governed most of the ‘socialist camp’, on the role of ‘real socialism’ in the system of the then world order. It becomes evident when one analyses the decisions of the CPSU congresses, which determined the development path of the Soviet and ‘socialist’ societies. If the 22<sup>nd</sup> Congress of CPSU (1962) stated that the major element of the period following the 20<sup>th</sup> Congress of CPSU is the competition between the two world systems — the socialist and communist ones [26, p. 17], the 23<sup>rd</sup> Congress (1966) discussed the growing international influence of the Soviet Union and the world socialist system [27, p. 19] and the 24<sup>th</sup> Congress (1971) — the significant contribution of the Soviet Union and socialist countries to peace and security [28, p. 26]. The 25<sup>th</sup> Congress declared that everything possible had been done to create conditions for peaceful building of socialism in the USSR and kin countries for peace and security of nations [29, p. 27]. The views of the party leadership of the USSR followed the path from ‘we will bury you’ to ‘do not touch us and we will not touch you’.

Throughout the 1970s, the Soviet Union voluntarily abandoned the idea of a struggle with the ‘capitalist world’ beyond the ‘socialist camp’ self-restraining its influence in the outer world. However, it did not bring any positive results. In the late 1980s, ‘self-restraint in its growth’ turned into ‘self-denial’. The zone of Soviet influence established after World War II started to crumble; no peaceful initiatives could save it. In 1990, the German Democratic Republic ceased to exist; the withdrawal of Soviet troops from European countries commenced. In 1991, the Soviet Union collapsed. After that, the conceptual approaches of ‘limits of growth’ were sporadically implemented throughout the post-Soviet space, including Russia. The population growth — a major irritant to its creators and adherents — stopped.

In most former Soviet republics, the mortality rate has exceeded the birth rate over more than twenty years. The demand for different resources dec-

reased, because the economies of post-Soviet states faced a deep crisis, which has not been completely overcome so far. Environmental pollution has reduced, since a significant part of industrial facilities stopped their operation and agricultural companies on the verge of bankruptcy used less fertilisers.

From the perspective of ‘limits of growth’ replaced at the time by the concept of ‘sustainable development’, these developments can be assessed as positive ones, since the population size, resource consumption, and environmental pollution have been steadily decreasing Russia and other post-Soviet states. However, most Russians associate the 1990s with general impoverishment and degradation of the state and society rather than with ‘sustainable development’. ‘Sustainable development’ and ‘harmonisation of relations between society and nature’ were out of question. The beautiful pseudo-theoretical constructs of ‘self-restraint in consumption’ and ‘quantitative growth replaced by qualitative development’ in practice turned out to be a national scale catastrophe.

A positive trend is that the ‘sustainable development’ concept has faced increasing criticism. V. A. Shuper argues that ‘special attention should be paid to such ‘field of science’ as sustainable development studies, since it has characteristics of a pseudoscience’ [25, p. 25]. Why did this pseudoscience receive wide recognition? The attempts to identify ‘growth limits’ and pursue ‘sustainable development’ relate to increasing consumer society trends. ‘Perfect consumers’ do not need new horizons. They are encouraged to live ‘here and now’ in maximum comfort — and they do not mind it. The attitude of the ‘consumer society’ to space and time is brilliantly described by Arkady and Boris Strugatsky in the novel *Monday Begins on Saturday*: ‘I told him a thousand times: ‘You are programming a standard superegocentrist. He will gather up all the material valuables he can lay his hands on, then he’ll fold space, wrap himself up in a cocoon, and stop time...’ But Vibegallo could never grasp that the true colossus of the spirit does not consume as much as he thinks and feels” [20].

The desire to ‘wrap oneself up in a cocoon’ space and stop time can pertain to not only an individual but also social structures, including the state. The above citations from the decisions of the CPSU congresses make it clear that, in the last years of the country’s existence, the party leadership of the USSR strived to ‘fold space, wrap themselves up in a cocoon, and stop time’. The results were similar to what happened with the above described ‘perfect human’ in the Strugatsky’s novel, namely, an explosive demolition of the system.

The ideology of consumption society does not tolerate the ‘expansion of space’, since this expansion is redundant, the science studying the properties of this space — geography — also becomes redundant.

Figuratively, geography is a ‘science of travellers’, a ‘science of the walking’. It originated from the descriptions of travels, generalisations of descriptions, and the analysis of generalisations. Economics emerged as a ‘science of peddlers’, a ‘science of the sitting’. Economics began with an analysis (a rather primitive analysis, at first — how to buy cheap and sell

high), followed by the systematisation and only later facts. This course of the development of economic science explains the abundance of economic theories, each ignoring inconvenient facts. All theories proclaim themselves universal, applicable throughout the world at all stages of development.

Of course, for a consumer society striving to ‘wrap itself up in a cocoon and stop time,’ the economic approaches are more useful and easier to understand than the geographical ones based on the idea of the uniqueness of each — even the smallest — part of the geospace. S. A. Tarkhov is right to stress that ‘the primary target of a human geographer is the patterns of spatial distribution of objects and phenomena, their spatial interaction, the factors and reasons behind the formation of the extant spatial structures’ [22, p. 12].

That is why human geography had little to do with the turbulent events of the late 20<sup>th</sup>/early 21<sup>st</sup> century. Among the ‘decision makers’ in the key countries of the world, there was no one, whose knowledge of geography extended beyond the school curriculum. Probably, if more members of the world leadership had more profound knowledge of geography in general and human geography in particular, Russia and the other countries would live better.

A simple example is the radical reforms implemented in the Russian Federation in the early 1990s. All transformations in all areas — from the economy to defence — were carried out simultaneously and uniformly throughout Russia. However, their consequences were not the same due to the differences between Russian regions. If, for Moscow, the socioeconomic reforms had an overall positive effect, for the country in general — even for Saint Petersburg — their consequences were rather negative. Many parts of the country were affected by the reforms so strongly that their recuperation will take decades if it ever starts.

The ‘spatial factor’ of the country’s development was completely ignored by the leadership when conducting reforms and is still ignored today. Unlike other countries of the world, including post-socialist ones (for instance, Poland — see [12]), Russia lacks a spatial development programme. The very term ‘spatial development’ is very rarely used in official documents. If spatial development ‘does not exist’, there is no need for human geography.

However, it would be wrong to suggest that this difficult situation for human geography was a solely result of unfavourable external factors. The role of internal factors — the particularities of the science’s development — was as important.

The major problem of human geography is its diffusion across numerous research areas under the influence of other sciences. It is sometimes stressed that the ‘research space of human geography denies borders; moreover, there is a need to encourage the interdisciplinary approach to modernise the theoretical, methodological, and conceptual frameworks’ [5, p. 61].

Encouraging the interdisciplinary approach is a good thing. Nevertheless, in the case of human geography, interdisciplinarity often resolves into adding the prefix ‘geo’ to the name of another science that provides the approaches, methods, and content of research. A lack of clear borders results in it ceasing to be a science.



For instance, a large number of studies have been published recently in the fields of ‘behavioural geography’, ‘perception geography’, and other related areas, where geographers cannot make any scientific discoveries and their research is often secondary or amateurish or both. The leading role is played by cultural studies, philology, psychology, etc. An example of a successful regional cultural study is the series of publications entitled *The Multicultural Space of Russian Regions* (see [8; 9]). As a result of the cultural/cognitive/philological invasion, the boundaries of human geography became so blurred that specialists in the field hardly understand what is studied by their colleagues. Probably, such research is to be conducted within a new scientific discipline, since geography of mechanical engineering and ‘geography of suffixes and prefixes’ cannot be considered different areas of the same science.

In general, the theoretical problem of human geography is the attempts to develop it based on the theory and methodology of other sciences, the most influential being economics, sociology, and political science.

The excessive ‘economisation’ of Russian human geography began in the 1930s. In the 1950s-80s, it manifested itself in the discussion about the significance of relations of production for the deployment of productive forces. In the early 1960s, it was argued that relations of production have nothing to do with human geography. ‘The deployment of production is a continuous process, which is inevitable under any mode of production’ [2, p. 198].

Unfortunately, this statement has been forgotten and has been hardly applied ever since. However, it makes it possible to identify the priorities of economic geography, i. e. the identification of processes, trends, and patterns of deployment of economic objects. Economic geography should analyse the spatial structure of the economy, whereas the organisational structure is beyond its competence. Whether the Norilsk Metallurgical Plant is owned by the Ministry of Non-ferrous Metallurgy of the USSR or MMC Norilsk Nickel should be of no consequence to human geography, since it does not affect either the plant’s location or the conditions and factors of its operation.

Moreover, only something existing in the geographical space — plants, institutions, transport routes, cities, states, etc. — can serve as the object of human geography. Phenomena existing only in the ‘virtual reality’ should be of no interest to human geography. For instance, the ‘geography of investment’ can hardly be considered an area of human geography. Investment is an object of research of economics rather than geography, since it is not manifested in the geospace. However, if investment results in the creation of an actual object, human geography can and should study the latter.

Today, human geographical studies are very rare. Human geography virtually missed all spatial changes in the Russian economy in the 1990s-early 2000s. The restoration of industrial production in Russia after the crisis of the 1990s manifested itself in the concentration of production and, thus, regional specialisation [13] followed by territorial differentiation. There were few studies into the problems of transformations of Russia’s economic space. However, human geographers could have taken the leading positions in this field, since no one else studies the issue.

The key notion of human geography proper is territorial division of labour and its major area of research is the place of a certain company or region in this system. The emergence of multinational corporations gave rise to the opinion that the very notion of ‘territorial division of labour’ should become obsolete in the conditions of economic globalisation, since plants across the world may belong to the same company. However, these companies became multinational because of the very fact that they establish specialised enterprises in different countries; these enterprises cannot function without the multinational corporation. This contributes to the process of territorial — in this case, international — development of labour.

It is important to understand that, the very moment human geographers abandon spatial problems and economic development processes and start analysing production and transportation costs or any other cost-related parameters; they lose to economists, since economists are usually much better at that than geographers. Human geography has often resorted to calculations and gone beyond.

Sociologisation became a major trend in human geography in the 1990s. This related to the prevalence of theoretical approaches following the core-periphery model. This model was developed by John Friedmann in the late 1960s and gained wide recognition in Russia in the 1990s. The first reviews of this model dating back to the Soviet times were often non-critical and even full of pathos: ‘...Friedmann’s model... reflects the universal nature of the territorial distribution of radical innovative processes, regardless of which spatial level is considered...’ [6, p. 92] (This reminds of the formula ‘Marx’s teaching is omnipotent, because it is right’).

The core-periphery model is a mere modification of the well-known ‘hero-crowd’ idea. Its major drawback is that it follows the binary paradigm, which ‘presents the world as a set of binary relations blurring the prospects of integrated development... Binarism is aggressive... Enforcing the “either/or” pattern, it generates the deadly ideology of antagonism...’ [3, p. 353]. In view of the fact that the geospatial systems are not binary, the third element of semi-periphery had to be introduced. Later, the three elements of the model were divided into external and internal ones (internal periphery, external semi-periphery, etc.). Moreover, the boundaries between these components — as well as the main elements of core, semi-periphery, and periphery — were not clearly defined.

One can assume that the core-periphery model cannot be applied to geographical studies, except for those into the systems of political and administrative division. In geospace, no sectors can be clearly identified as the ‘core’ or ‘periphery’ relating to any type of human activity. One can easily identify more and less populous territories, regions differing in natural conditions and resources, transport accessibility, income level, attractiveness for national and international migrations, and other parameters. However, the ‘cores’ and ‘peripheries’ identified using different parameters and/or methods do not coincide.

For instance, in today’s Russia, the economic ‘cores’ include — alongside Moscow — the ‘oil’ and ‘gas’ cities of Western Siberia — Surgut,

Nizhnevartovsk, Novy Urengoy, Nadym, etc. In terms of population income, all these cities will be identified as 'core'. However, it is unlikely that many Russians will see the Khanty-Mansiysk and Yamalo-Nenets autonomous districts as the 'cores of the country' and the Pskov, Novgorod, and Tula regions demonstrating more modest performance as 'periphery'.

Salaries in Surgut (the average salary in the Khanty-Mansiysk autonomous district reached 50841.3 roubles in 2013) and Novy Urengoy (63696.3 roubles in the Yamalo-Nenets autonomous district in 2014) are much higher than in Saint Petersburg (32930.2 roubles in 2013) (for data on the average salary, see [18]). However, many people are willing to move from Western Siberian cities to Saint Petersburg, whereas few would do otherwise. Therefore, the core-periphery relation has the opposite direction.

Physical geography has the notion of zoning. The planet is divided into geographical zones — from the torrid to frigid ones. Geographical zones are divided into subzones; their parts comprise physiographic divisions divided into physiographic provinces divided into physiographic sections. Geographical zoning is complicated by altitudinal factors. However, the 'core-periphery' relations are not observed at any spatial level of the Earth's geographical surface.

Another example from physical geography is the notion of catena (see, for instance, [4]) widely used in landscape studies. Catenae are sequences of soils down a slope, created by the balance of processes such as precipitation, infiltration, and runoff. Catenae interact but none of them is core or peripheral. One will hardly answer the question as to whether denudation or accumulation reliefs have the characteristics of the core.

If one accepts that the basis of human geography is studies of geographical space (the geographical surface plus people plus the environment created by people), one should also recognise the equivalence between parts of this space. Each geospace element is unique and human geography aims to identify its uniqueness. Standard approaches explaining the characteristics of a certain territory through its 'core' or 'periphery' position should be the realm of other sciences, in this case, sociology.

The influence of political science on the development of the socioeconomic geography manifests, primarily, in the wide usage of geopolitical ideas, concepts, and approaches in human geography — the more so in the 1990s. Geopolitics has never been a geographical science. In effect, it has never been a science. This is a typical pseudoscience, whose premises resemble astrology. If astrologers see the mystical in the position of celestial bodies, which at least do exist, geopoliticians 'analyse' the position of the imaginary 'points', 'lines', and 'key territories'. None of the geopolitical structures has ever been substantiated.

Sir Halford Mackinder — the founder of geopolitics — writes in his first article 'The geographical pivot of history' submitted in 1904, 'Is not the pivot region of the world's politics that vast area of Euro-Asia?.. Russia replaces the Mongol Empire. Her pressure on Finland, on Scandinavia, on Poland, on Turkey, on Persia, on India, and on China, replaces the centrifugal raids of the steppemen. He continues, 'Outside the pivot area, in a great in-

ner crescent, are Germany, Austria, Turkey, India, and China, and in an outer crescent, Britain, South Africa, Australia, the United States, Canada, and Japan' [10].

The 'pivot area', 'inner crescent', 'outer crescent' — all these sounds impressive; however, these conclusions are not substantiated and the terms are not defined being a sequence of words even visually resembling the reasoning of an astrologer. In his 1919 work *Democratic Ideals and Reality*, Mackinder combines trivial statements 'the Volga and Ural Rivers [flow] to the Caspian Sea, and of the Oxus and Jaxartes to the Sea of Aral' [11, p. 140] with conclusions allegedly based on these statements, 'During the nineteenth century, the Russian Czardom loomed large within the great Heartland, and seemed to threaten all the marginal lands of Asia and Europe' [11, p. 143]. The combination of facts from a school textbook with 'global' claims ('the Volga flows to the Caspian Sea, therefore, Russia threatens the rest of Asia and Asia) has provided the framework for geopolitical reasoning since Mackinder, which is also used by Russian geopoliticians, including 'patriotic' ones.

The visual simplicity of geopolitical structures facilitated the wide recognition of geopolitics and forged the idea that this pseudoscience can solve most of the modern world's problems, including spatial ones. There is an Academy of Geopolitical Problems; however, there is also an Academy of Astrology in Moscow.

This, again, might remind of the Strugatsky Brothers' works. In many of their sci-fi books, the authors described the life of the Soviet society: 'They drank and chatted, and in the course of their aimless conversation it came out that Mac had absorbed an entire textbook on geopolitics in the preceding half-hour... Guy opened the book at random, found questions at the end of a chapter, and read: "Explain our government's moral magnanimity with respect to northern expansion." Mac answered in his own words but correctly summarized the text, adding that in his opinion moral magnanimity had nothing to do with expansion... "What is the population pressure at the mouth of the Blue Snake River?" continued Guy. Mac stated a figure, cited an error in calculation, and did not fail to add that the concept of population pressure troubled him. He couldn't understand why it had been introduced' [19].

Russian textbooks and articles on geopolitics published in different scientific and pseudoscientific journals do not rise above the level of 'our government's moral magnanimity with respect to northern expansion' and the 'population pressure at the mouth of the Blue Snake River'. There are many works of this kind, citing some of them means 'showing disrespect' for the others; however, many of the readers will remember a couple of recent articles and even books of the kind. It is worth stressing that astronomers refrain from citing astrological treatises in their works. Nevertheless, pseudoscientific geopolitical fabrications are widely used in human geography for some reason.

External factors affecting human geography cannot be overcome by geographers. One can only wait for the society to develop demand for studies in human geography. One cannot know when it will happen. However, the

internal factors partially described above can and should be handled. To begin with, it is important to remember that the key notion of human geography is geographical space — neither ‘virtual’ nor ‘imaginary’, but the actual space interpreted as the life environment of a human being. The ‘human being/space’ system of reciprocal relations should be the key object of economic geographical research.

This system of relations is manifested in the development of the spatial structure of society at different levels. Of interest is the insufficiently studied issue of the causes and processes of this structure’s formation. This structure develops in the course of human settlement. Settlement understood as both a structure and a process results from the movement of people within the geographical space. This movement is a result of people pursuing different goals in the course of settlement.

The ‘biological’ human being is attracted by favourable environmental conditions. The favourability of these conditions is not the same for different civilisations. For individuals belonging to the European civilisations, the perfect settlement area is the Mediterranean. In modern Russia, the closest analogues are the Black Sea coast of Caucasus and the southern coast of Crimea. As a rule, the ‘biological’ human being does not need anything from the society any more (or yet). This explains the high proportion of senior citizens in the regions with the most favourable environmental conditions in different countries (the Côte d’Azur in France, Florida and California in the US), also in those where life is cheaper and climate is better (Turkey, Egypt, Thailand, Cambodia).

The top priority of the ‘economic’ human being is income, which can be generated through moving to a new place. Income can range from the revenue from banking or trade transactions and increasing industrial capital to a higher salary and revenue from selling agricultural goods. The key factor behind the movement of the ‘economic’ human being is the economic and geographical position. The notion of the economic and geographical position was proposed by the father of Soviet economic geography N. N. Baransky in the interwar period. Its definition has not been changed since. It is the position of an object within the geographical space in relation to other objects. In this case, the movement of the ‘economic’ human being improves their position in relation to those who do not change their place of residence.

The ‘social’ human pursues self-fulfilment in the chosen areas regardless of how much it costs and how much it brings. The key factor behind the movement of the ‘social’ human being is their social environment. The more developed the environment, the more attractive the corresponding region is for the ‘social’ human being.

The top priority of the ‘political’ human being is the resources of the political system (a state, a commonwealth of states), with which they are affiliated. Therefore, the key reason behind the movement of the ‘political’ human being is control over natural resources. These resources might not be found within the national territory and control over them can be secured by different — economic, political, or military — means. The scope of natural resources controlled by a state defines its political significance.

It is hardly possible to observe ‘unalloyed’ biological, social, economic, or political motivations. However, it is possible to identify the prevalent motivation.

The closer the territories, the more attractive they are from the perspective of the ‘biological’, ‘social’, ‘economic’, and ‘political’ human being, the more favourable the spatial prerequisites for the development of the state or region, the more successful the development. A good example is the US, where the most favourable environmental conditions are observed in the coastal areas, which accommodate most of large urban agglomerations, where a complex structure of social environment develops. These regions also enjoy the most beneficial economic and geographical position as well as a high concentration of natural resources.

In Russia, these regions are disconnected. The most favourable Russian regions in terms of environmental conditions are North Caucasus and Crimea, the most populous area is Central Russia, the most beneficial economic and geographical position is characteristic of the coastal and border regions of European Russia and Far East, whereas natural resources are concentrated in Siberia and the North of Far East.

A more detailed study into the reasons behind the formation of the spatial structure of society and its significance for human geography is of considerable interest; however, it has not been conducted yet. Nevertheless, it is possible to arrive to several conclusions. Firstly, studying spatial patterns of the society’s development from the perspective of individuals and the geospace created by them makes it possible to abandon the idea of ‘global dichotomy’ manifested in the ‘core-periphery’ model. For different areas of human activity, completely different regions and cities can be ‘cores’ and ‘peripheries’.

Secondly, human geography should pay special attention to the spatial self-organisation (‘people know best’ best where to move either maintaining or changing the spatial structure of society, there is no need to oppose it) rather than the (spatial) organisation of society (‘everything is awful and only we know what to do to change the world for the better). In other words, there is a need to develop what does not develop itself.

Thirdly, public interests, including those in the field of spatial development, are determined only by the interests of citizens. The attempts to defy natural processes can be successful for a time, but everything will eventually ‘get to normal’.

Fourthly, if human geography focuses on spatial problems, there will be a way out of the current crisis. If it continues to ‘import’ research results from other sciences presenting them as ‘a novelty in human geography’, human geography may cease to exist, at first, actually, and, later, technically, just as the subject of the same name vanished from the curriculum of higher educational institutions in Russia and the other post-Soviet countries.

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