

Tomasz Zarycki

Antoni Kukliński's unfulfilled vision of geography

Anna Gašior-Niemiec & Józef Niżnik (Eds.) *The Individuality of a Scholar and Advancement of Social Science. The Scholarship of Antoni Kukliński*.
Pruszków: Rewasz Publishing House, 2008. pp. 125-130.

Kukliński and geography

Professor Antoni Kukliński in his “autopresentation” of “research activities in the years 1953 – 2007” (Kukliński 2007) mentions eight major fields of his academic activity¹. One can note that only one of them represents a fully fledged academic discipline – it is geography which according to Kukliński was an object of his interest between 1953 and 1984. Afterwards Kukliński leaves the institutional field of geography and gets involved or continues his activities in a number of other fields. As a matter of fact many of them are closely related to geography but institutionally enjoy an independent status like for example studies on “Local Poland” or regional development. These smaller, interdisciplinary academic fields undoubtedly gave Kukliński much wider freedom to act, and allowed him to implement many of his ambitious projects without the constraints he encountered in much strongly regulated and hierarchical field of geography. Let us remind here that his intellectual evolution was strongly related to the institutional path he has followed. Thus, in 1985 Kukliński became the head of an autonomous unit called the Institute of Spatial Economy, formally part the Department of Geography and Regional Studies of Warsaw University. Later, in 1991 the Institute become a fully independent unit within the university structure and was renamed European Institute for Regional and Local Development (EUROREG). Kukliński remained its director until 1996. In this way, by moving away from geography much of his energy was certainly saved. I was directed towards creative undertakings in multidisciplinary teams he was leading rather than used for confrontation with the institutional elite of the well established field. But while this move can be seen as rational from the point of view of an individual, its results for the discipline were clearly negative. It has lost one of the most creative and productive scholar of a great format working within its limits. The scale of the loss the Polish geography suffered with the leaving of its formal field by Antoni Kukliński is visible better and batter with the passage of time. The discipline, in particular its Warsaw school is very clearly lacking an

¹ The fields are: One – Industrial location, industrial geography – industrialization (1953-67); Two – Geography – paradigmatic change in theory and practice (1953-84); Three – Space economy – empirical and institutional approaches (1956-84); Four – The dormant potential of Local Poland (1984-90); Five – regional development, regional policies and regional studies (from 1965); Six – Science policy and knowledge based economy; Seven – Global and strategic studies (from 1984); Eight – European studies (from 1965).

intellectual leader, a person with a wide outlook and ability to integrate different streams of scholarship which is of particular importance for such an intrinsically interdisciplinary branch of science as geography. Kukliński not only possesses all those qualities but moreover had a very clear and extremely ambitious program of the development of Polish geography. That program elaborated at the beginning of 1980s was never implemented and Kukliński got involved in other, above mentioned areas. As it seems however the Kukliński program called by him “The Third Paradigm” is worth reminding and a reassessment not only because of its intellectual qualities. The history of its emergence and rejection seems to be a very interesting case study in the sociology of science. Among other aspects it illustrates well the problems encountered by strong and creative personalities in the well established institutional fields of formal scholarship. The story of the “Third Paradigm” is also, despite its failure, and important element of the intellectual history of the Polish geography. As it seems, the Kukliński vision given its stimulating and innovative character as well as its fate may appear quite inspiring for future attempts at reviving the discipline. Finally its intellectual heritage is an important part of the Kukliński’s achievements. As its brief analysis presented below should prove, it is also an excellent case study for analyzing characteristic features of the intellectual style of Antoni Kukliński.

Kukliński vision for geography

I will never forget when as a young graduate student of the department of Geography and Regional Studies of Warsaw University I came across Antoni Kukliński paper on the needed reform of the Polish geography (Kukliński 1984). Kukliński was presenting a vivid vision of future oriented discipline, a field open to the challenges of the modern world in particular of the approaching information era. Although Kukliński’s text was already at that time over 5 years old, contrast between his ideas and the realities of my studies was striking. I have been obliged to follow mostly very traditional courses on classical disciplines like geography of industry or physical geography of Poland. Their purely descriptive content required memorization of huge amount of detailed information on location or particular factories, mines or limits of theoretical regions on the physical map of Poland. This was the first time, while confronting the Kukliński vision with the intellectual program I have been offered as a student, that I realized how unfortunate it was that Kukliński withdrew from the institutional field of geography and his ideas for its reform became forgotten.

Let me here briefly reconstruct some of the major features of the vision of geography that Kukliński proposed in the first half of the 80. In fact he has been gradually building it since late the 1970s, as we can see elements of the program were emerging in the publications from that period (e.g. Kukliński 1977). The most important element of his thinking was implementation of the Kuhnian notion of the “paradigm shift” to the analysis of the evolution of geography in Poland (Kukliński 1985). Kukliński has divided the post-war period of the development of the discipline into two major parts, which he called the first and the second paradigm periods (Kukliński 1982). He has attributed the achievements of the Polish school of that period to the ability of paradigm change which took place in late 50s. At the end of 70s he saw however a need for a new paradigm shift,

which would be another step forward in the development of the discipline. Kukliński thinking about the future was thus deeply rooted in the historical context. His projects and hopes did not materialize however. The second “revolution” in Polish geography didn’t took place and the third paradigm didn’t emerge as a coherent intellectual project as Kukliński has imagined it. What we observed in the 80s was rather slow fragmentation of the discipline which effected in degradation of its prestige in the academia and wider circles. Inability of the Polish geographers of overcoming the paradigm developed in the 60s by was one of the major factors which led to Kukliński break with the discipline. Here is how he describes this moment of his biography: *“I was deeply involved in the successful paradigmatic revolution in Polish economic geography which took place in the years 1954-58 in the political and intellectual climate of Polish October. This splendid achievement was the result of an alliance linking the old and young generation of Polish economic geographers. My hope that this alliance will function again in the climate of Polish August of the years 1979-81 ended in a grand disillusion.”*(Kukliński 2007).

Let me however turn to the discussion of the selected points of the Kukliński program which he envisioned as the basis for debates on the expected “third paradigm” of the Polish geography. As it has been already mentioned, one of the most impressive features of the Kukliński proposal was integration of geography with information sciences. He saw geography as a field of integration of regional information systems, cartography, computer sciences and other even before the advent of the era of personal computer and internet. This approach in my view would allow radical modernization of Polish geography and make it a leader interdisciplinary fields in the new millennium. Of course the actual development in 1990s confirmed the Kukliński instinct – information technology become indeed a part of geography in particular in the framework of the so called Geographic Information Systems (GIS). This development was however, especially in Poland, rather late and did not involve deeper engagement of most of the geographical sub-discipline as Kukliński has envisaged it. In particular the cooperation with cartography appeared to be far beyond potential prospects.

Similar remarks can be made about other aspects of the Kukliński vision. He proposed in fact a far reaching project of integration of many of the most promising intellectual trends of the development of sciences and humanities into geography. It included suggestions of using the inspirations of sociology and cultural anthropology in the development of social and cultural geography. Kukliński saw them among future “intellectual growth poles of geography”, which was also an inspiring way of using geographical metaphors in his own sociology of science. This appeared to be an excellent prediction – culture become recently a major point of interest not only for classic social sciences and humanities but also in economics, medicine and even such technical fields as arterial intelligence. Thus one could say that Kukliński predicted the arrival of the so called “cultural turn” in social sciences. However also in this place Polish geography was very late to follow the global trend and Kukliński suggestions.

Similarly accurate prognosis concerned the economic geography. Kukliński predicted the growing importance of the price geography as well as the new industrial geography which is currently developing around such notions and “clusters” (Kukliński 1984). On

the other hand many of the direction of research which could become uniquely Polish specialties were not in fact developed. This concerns for example the idea of developing a geographical dimension of János Kornai theories of socialist economic system. In the same time Kukliński made a very good prediction on the growing role of surveys, which also gained considerable role in geographic research. Here again geographers appeared rather to follow trends in other disciplines (in this case mainly sociology) rather than developing their own methodologies. In this case they could appear very useful as the problem of special context in sociological research remains an important theoretical problem.

One can emphasize that Kukliński's writings on geography undoubtedly manifest not only his intellectual independence but even courage, as many of the opinions he presents are controversial to the extent that many scholars would avoid expressing them. One can also note the Kukliński courage to criticize the restrictions imposed on the developed by the communist state. Writing in the first half of 80s Kukliński criticizes the actions of censorship pointing to the "institutional restrictions on the accessibility of cartographic and remote-sensing data" (Kukliński 1984) as a factor limiting Polish geography's development in the international context ².

The author of this article is not competent enough to analyze the roots and mechanism of the crisis of Polish geography in the 1980s. As it suggested by Kukliński among other factors the political situation of that period, the effect of the martial law and its aftermath could make the re-emergence of the intellectual atmosphere which appeared in Poland on the turn of the 50s and 60s during the period of political thaw. On the other hand we can not blame only politicians or even Polish context for what happened with geography. It has to be recognized that its crisis has not been in fact a global phenomenon. Although in many countries it remains a strong and creative field, in general its global impact has considerably decreased. In particular its influences on other disciplines has radically diminished. It would be difficult to find a contemporary equivalent of the Torsten Hägerstrand's influence on Anthony Giddens' work (Giddens 1979). As David Harvey (Harvey 1989) has predicted, the post-modern revolution has brought in increased interest in special dimension of social processes. Geography however, not only in Poland, was unable to adequately respond to that challenge. Thus, the failure of the Kukliński ideas, were to some extent a part of a global logic, and blaming for it only Polish scholars would not be just.

² One can remind in this context another important figure from the point of view of the development of the Polish and in particular Warsaw school of geography, namely that of Lech Ratajski. Ratajski was the head of the Chair of Cartography at the Warsaw University. Besides his outstanding academic record Ratajski was known as a courageous fighter for access to and openness of cartographic data. In 1973 he prepared a letter to the government known as "Manifesto to the Censorship" which was later signed by several other geographers. Ratajski was pointing out in the letter how the government restrictions hamper the development of science and economy in Poland. Unfortunately Ratajski died prematurely in 1977.

Kukliński as a sociologist of science

We can note in the same time that in his writings on the evolution of the Polish geography Kukliński is himself suggesting some of the reasons of the inability of the discipline to overcome the constraints its traditional school of thinking. In particular Kukliński points out to the possible problems with “*mechanisms of selection, promotion and obliteration operating with respect to people who demonstrate exceptional abilities in creative, non-conventional thinking*”. In this context Kukliński asked is “*such mechanism infiltrated by strong strata of mediocrity and conformism, creative barriers to the emergence and development of eminent academic personalities?*” or “*provides avenues along which young scholars could steer new vehicles of creative and innovative thinking*”? (Kukliński 1984). Today one can point out that Kukliński was in fact himself a victim of the very mechanism he mentioned. Polish geography was not able to accommodate him, integrate his creative energy into its structures.

Thus, we can see that Kukliński has proved to be not only a visionary scholar with ability to blaze a trail for other researchers to follow, but also an excellent sociologist of science. Besides discussing the problem of selection of creative young scholars as the basis of the development of the future generations of the elite of the discipline, which is probably among important sources of its current crisis, Kukliński directly tackled the problem of leadership. In particular he discussed at length the role of Stanisław Leszczycki, the intellectual and institutional leader of Polish geography in the post-war decades. In fact Kukliński presented a small socio-psychological study of Leszczycki’s personality reflecting openly on the advantages and negative sides of his domination in Polish geography. It was a very open study on the role of the personal factor in the development of an academic discipline. Interestingly, Kukliński concluded his analysis of Leszczycki’s role and domination with “*believe that such a mechanism should be reconstructed, as a necessary condition for full renaissance of Polish geography*” (Kukliński 1977).

Another of the very characteristic features of the Kukliński intellectual style which was manifested very well in his programmatic texts on geography is what is today called self-reflexivity. Kukliński is constantly emphasizing the fact of his very subjective view on the issues he analyzes, and making it clear that he was personally involved in the processes he is describing, in this case the development of the Polish geography. Such an attitude of self-consciousness and self-criticism is rare in most of the works which may fall under the rubric of sociology of science. In the same time, the self-reflexivity of Kukliński, his awareness of limits of his perspective fulfils the ideals of the recent critical self-reflexive sociology promoted by such eminent theoreticians as Pierre Bourdieu (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992) or Craig Calhoun (Calhoun 1995).

Conclusions

As mentioned above, the program Kukliński developed for the Polish geography in early 80s is one of the best manifestations his specific intellectual style. His vision of the “Third Paradigm” is undoubtedly a unique plan of revival of an entire academic discipline. Kukliński was able to present a holistic view of the whole discipline ranging from physical geography, through cartography, economic geography up to human geography. In the same time he was able to contextualize his vision of the reform in the historical development of the discipline as well as in the theoretical framework of the sociology of science. Additionally in his writings on Polish geography Kukliński has presented many other very characteristic traits of his intellectual style. Among them are:

- Ability to see the larger context of phenomena under investigation, or institutionally defined fields.
- Ability of integration of different approaches and intellectual schools.
- Long-term vision encompassing both the historical context but especially the analysis and proposals of future trends, as prognostic studies were always Kukliński favorite topic.

Antoni Kukliński’s experience of rejection by geography, as it has been already suggested, can be also seen as a very interesting case study for sociology of science. One can use the Bourdieu’s notion of “field” to study Kukliński’s relations with geography. In such framework Kukliński’s exit from the field of geography could be interpreted as conversion of subordinated position in a strong and established field into a privileged or even dominant (as in the case of the so called “Local Poland” theme) positions in a number of smaller and weaker fields but often enjoying a considerable autonomy. It is also possible to refer to the Bourdieu’s notions of *doxa* (“the universe of undisputed” assumptions), *orthodoxy* (the dominant ideology) and *heterodoxy* (views that contest the reigning orthodoxy) (Bourdieu 1977). Kukliński program was to a large extent an instance of heterodoxy which challenged not only the dominating orthodoxy but also at time the doxa, as Kukliński was questioning for example the established structures of institutional organization of Polish geography or its weak contacts with other disciplines or international science.

The author is not able to judge the Kukliński decision to leave the field of geography. One may assume that in given circumstances it was a right decision which allowed Kukliński to continue his intellectual passions and institutional plans. When we however look at the on the side of geography the balance is very clearly negative. Polish geography lost an intellectual leader who had a very clear, wide and future-oriented vision of the discipline. In addition he possessed a network of rich contacts outside the political borders of the country as well as outside the institutional borders of geography. Although all these assets have not been wasted, their use inside the field of geography, given its institutional power and size, would have been probably much more effective. Lack of strong intellectual leadership, especially in the sub-field of socio-economic and cultural geography in turn effects in less efficient use of the talents of many young geographers. Another effect of this situation is the process of gradual taking over of traditional geographic problems by other disciplines. A very good example is provided by the 2007 congress of the Polish Sociological Association (PTS) in the program of which

at least 12 out of some 50 thematic groups deal with traditionally geographic topic as regional cultural differentiations, urban sociology or trans-border studies. Most of them appear considerably underdeveloped within the institutional field of Polish geography.

The history of Kukliński unfulfilled vision of the Third Paradigm will be always an important lesson for all those attempting any future reforms of the Polish geography. The specter of the Kukliński project will loom over the Polish geography for many years to come and hopefully it will one day play a role in a new, more successful attempt at modernization of this discipline.

Literature

- Bourdieu, P. (1977). Outline of a theory of practice. Cambridge, New York, Cambridge University Press.
- Bourdieu, P. and L. J. D. Wacquant (1992). An invitation to reflexive sociology. Chicago, University of Chicago Press.
- Calhoun, C. (1995). Critical Social Theory: Culture, History and the Challenge of Difference. London, Blackwell.
- Giddens, A. (1979). Central problems in social theory : action, structure, and contradiction in social analysis. Berkeley, University of California Press.
- Harvey, D. (1989). The condition of postmodernity. An enquiry into the origins of cultural change. Oxford, Cambridge, Blackwell.
- Kukliński, A. (1977). "Problemy organizacji nauk geograficznych w Polsce." Przegląd Geograficzny XLIX(2): 263-268.
- Kukliński, A. (1982). "Cztery geografie III paradygmatu." Biuletyn KPZK PAN 118: 283-289.
- Kukliński, A. (1984). "Druga rewolucja naukowa w geografii polskiej." Przegląd Geograficzny LVI(3-4): 145-149.
- Kukliński, A. (1984). Poland [Polish Geography after World War II. Mainsprings of Development]. Geography since the Second World War. An International Survey. R. J. Johnston and P. Claval. London & Sydney, Croom Helm: 132-155.
- Kukliński, A. (1985). "Podstawowe problemy rozwoju geografii polskiej w latach osiemdziesiątych. Artykuł dyskusyjny." Przegląd Geograficzny LVII(1-2): 173-180.
- Kukliński, A. (2007). The research activities in the years 1953 – 2007. Three Preferences – Eight fields. The preliminary version of an autopresentation. This volume.