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REVIEW ARTICLE

One Challenge Disguised as Two? New Scholarship on the Economic and Social Effects of Border Changes and Modernisation in Twentieth-Century Poland

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Hans-Christian Heinemeyer, *Quantitative Studies on European Economic Integration Between 1880 and 1939* (Berlin: Freie Universität, 2013), 291 pp., available at: http://www.diss.fu-berlin.de/diss/receive/FUDISS_thesis_000000094516.

Peter Polak-Springer, *Recovered Territory: A German-Polish Conflict over Land and Culture, 1919–1989* (Oxford: Berghahn, 2015), 304 pp. (hb), €67.23, ISBN 978-1782-38887-6.

Andrzej Karpiński, Wiesław Żółtkowski, Paweł Soroka and Stanisław Paradysz, *Od uprzemysłowienia w PRL do deindustrializacji kraju. Losy zakładów przemysłowych po 1945 roku [From Industrialisation in the PRL to Deindustrialisation of the Country: The Fate of Industrial Facilities after 1945]* (Warsaw: Muza, 2015), 400 pp. (pb), €14.92, ISBN 978-8328-70186-1.

Wojciech Musiał, *Modernizacja Polski. Polityki rządowe w latach 1918–2004 [The Modernisation of Poland: Government Policies between 1918–2004]* (Toruń: FNP, 2013), 336 pp., zł36.00 (hb), ISBN 978-8323-12950-9.

Jurij Kostjašov, Olga Kurilo and Piotr Zariczny, eds., *Granice i ich pokonywanie na obszarze niemiecko-polsko-rosyjskim [Borders and Their Overcoming in the German-Polish-Russian Area]* (Toruń: Adam Marszałek/Berliner Wissenschafts-Verlag, 2012), 212 pp., zł32.60 (hb), ISBN 978-8377-80188-8.

Marcin Piątkowski, *Europe's Growth Champion: Insights from the Economic Rise of Poland* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), €90.40 (hb), 364 pp., ISBN 978-0198-78934-5.

Few European countries have gone through as much as Poland during the twentieth century. Even among the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, which during the ‘Age of Extremes’¹ experienced the substantial losses and movement of tens of millions of people, Poland’s history is somewhat unique, as most of these expulsions affected the Polish border regions. Although not the only culprit, one can make a strong case that the border changes were a primary factor, having – for better or worse – a strong effect on the economy, the society and the general development of Poland. Poland has, nevertheless, been economically successful since the 1990s. It is thus with good reason that two questions have played a major role in the historiography of economic and social trends in twentieth-century Poland. The first one was whether the ‘border changes’ were a burden, or if Poland was able to profit from them. The second question asks whether Poland was able to modernise because of them. At the same time, few authors recognised that both issues are closely intertwined. Emphasising their interconnection is the main purpose of this review.

After both world wars Poland faced a remarkable set of challenges as a result of the redrawing of its borders, including not only reconstruction after a devastating war and considerable population loss but also the

¹ Eric Hobsbawm, *Age of Extremes: The Short Twentieth Century 1914–1991* (London: Abacus, 1995).

need to integrate disparate regions in order to enable economic growth. This was no small feat, given that the new governments had to unite deeply fragmented societies and adapt regional infrastructures that were once oriented to other imperial centres. Interestingly, while economic historians generally consider this process to have unfolded mostly positively, social historians insist that the process did not go smoothly. The publications under review show that these differences of perspective have not yet completely disappeared.

After 1919 the new Polish government had to create a functioning, successful administration that ensured a thriving economy and a united society, all at the same time. After the Second World War, the communist regime equally had to pursue this goal, since a new – and supposedly rationalised and therefore more effective – economic system and reshaped borders made social integration all the more necessary but difficult to achieve. Moreover, the country was in both cases forced to initiate a catching-up process with Western European countries. Raising production levels, enforcing industrialisation and achieving a certain level of economic growth were not the only goals. They were also linked to the development of an effective administration and a state that was as functional as other European countries. That is why the border issues and the matter of modernisation were – as the publications discussed here indicate – analytically intertwined.

Conventional accounts have stressed the infrastructural effects of wartime destruction, social problems and human capital losses that have become visible when changes to Poland's borders have been made. For a very long time, there was an implicit consensus that both world wars left behind an utterly destroyed country. Even recent publications insist on this diagnosis, especially with regard to the Second World War.² That may be the reason why for several decades Polish historians just assumed that the economic potential of these regions virtually vanished and started their research from there.³ German publications, on the other hand, rarely mentioned the high level of war destruction. In fact, it became an implicit scientific controversy.⁴ In most cases, however, the border changes were not at the centre of the analysis. Authors mostly concentrated on the question of how quickly Poland was able to establish an integrated country with a suitable infrastructure.⁵ Additionally, they tended to ask how Poland was transformed into a united society.⁶ Beyond that, Polish publications mostly focused on the question of how positively Poland's economy developed during the interwar period and how Poland fared after 1945, during a time when Central and Eastern Europe increased its productive potential and standards of living rose at an unprecedented rate.⁷

The first two books under review in this article explore the consequences of border changes after the First World War. They do so from very different perspectives. Peter Polak-Springer's contribution explores the construction of Polish borders from a broad political and social perspective. Despite the misleading title, his work actually concentrates on the interwar and post-war period, especially the years from 1922 to 1953. And that is not the only way in which the title might lead the reader astray.

² See for instance Włodzimierz Borodziej, *Geschichte Polens im 20. Jahrhundert* (Munich: C.H. Beck, 2010), 258; Hanna Jędruszcak, 'Miasta i Przemysł w Okresie Odbudowy', in Hanna Jędruszcza and Krystyna Kersten, eds., *Polska Ludowa 1944–1950. Przemiany Społeczne* (Warsaw/Wrocław: Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich, 1974), 279–407; *Rocznik Statystyczny 1947* (Warsaw: Główny Urząd Statystyczny, 1947), 72; Beata Halicka, *Polens Wilder Westen. Erzwungene Migration und die kulturelle Aneignung des Oterraums 1945–1948* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2013), 232. With regard to Poland's territories that were already Polish before 1939, see the reprinted publication from 1947: Mariusz Muszyński, ed., *Report on Poland's Wartime Losses and Damage in the Years 1939–1945* (Warsaw: Fundacja Polsko-Niemieckie Pojednanie, 2007), 131 et seqq.

³ Jerzy Kociszewski, *Proces integracji gospodarczej ziem zachodnich i północnych z Polską* (Wydawnictwo Akademii Ekonomicznej im. Oskara Langego: Wrocław, 1999), 27 n; Anna Magierska, *Przywrócić Polsce. Przemysł na Ziemiach Odzyskanych 1945–1946* (Warsaw: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Ekonomiczne, 1974), 54.

⁴ For further discussion see Yaman Kouli, *Wissen und nach-industrielle Produktion. Das Beispiel der gescheiterten Rekonstruktion Niederschlesiens 1936–1956* (Stuttgart: Steiner-Verlag, 2014), 123–9; Yaman Kouli, *Dolny Śląsk 1936–1956. Syzbyki rozwój i nieudana odbudowa. Wpływ wiedzy na produkcję przemysłową* (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego), 123–42.

⁵ Uwe Müller, 'Standardisierung im Straßen- und Straßenfahrzeugbau von der frühen Neuzeit bis zum Beginn der Automobilisierung', in Gerold Ambrosius, ed., *Standardisierung und Integration europäischer Verkehrsinfrastruktur in historischer Perspektive* (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 2009), 37–58.

⁶ Daniel Beauvois, *La Pologne. Histoire, société, culture* (Paris: Le Seuil, 2004), 309.

⁷ Trenkler and Wolf, 'Economic Integration'; Vonyó and Markevich, 'Economic Growth', 281.

Although ‘Recovered Territory’ was actually the official name for the entire region that came under Polish administration, the publication clearly focuses on Upper Silesia, while the rest of the Recovered Territories – Pomerania, Warmia, Masuria and even Lower Silesia – are hardly mentioned. To be fair, the focus on Silesia is justified for (at least) three reasons. First, the partition of this region in June 1922 placed it at the centre of the Polish–German antagonism. Second, Upper Silesia was the economically most important region, thanks to its heavy industry. Already in 1922 one third of this region included 79 per cent of the industrial district’s coal mines, 60 per cent of its blast furnaces and 75 per cent of its steel mills.⁸ Lastly, it was Silesia that was – and still is – supposed to have developed a specific regional identity that distinguished it from the other Polish regions.

A central aim of Polak-Springer’s work is to write a transnational history of irredentism as a form of popular culture. As a consequence, his main argument is to show that there were not two different cultures – a German and a Polish one – that allegedly were in constant conflict. He rather assumes that there was in fact *one* common political culture on both sides, which became the playground of German and Polish propaganda and conflicting camps. As a consequence, in this new and unique specifically Silesian political culture ‘the policies and discourses of each were not only strikingly similar, but also inherently interwoven’.⁹ Ironically, the construction of this irredentist culture was the result of a joint effort of both German and Polish nationalists.¹⁰

To make this argument, Polak-Springer draws on sources from various regional archives in Poland, and to a lesser extent in Germany. As his bibliography shows, he used documents of specific Upper Silesian cities wherever possible. Equally important is the use of ‘Press, Periodicals, and Almanacs’, which allows him to back up his main argument that while both the Germans and the Polish tried very hard to take over the region and make it part of ‘their’ country, the region was always aware of its own specific history and culture. Incorporating Silesia was, thus, not just a matter of economic success. Polak-Springer’s central argument is that all this happened while Silesians not only maintained a regional culture but developed what Polak-Springer – with reference to Tara Zahra – qualifies as ‘national indifference’.¹¹ Zahra argues that this attitude can primarily be found in Central and Eastern Europe, which provoked national policy makers to intensify their efforts to encourage feelings of national loyalty within sometimes reluctant populations.¹² As Marta Grzechnik has recently shown, the ‘Recovered’ Territories of Poland were no exception.¹³ Polak-Springer’s monograph thus intends to take part in a much broader debate on how to categorise regional nationalism in Eastern Europe.¹⁴ One consequence of Polak-Springer’s approach is that he tends to construct the German and Polish minorities as homogeneous groups. This position is, however, not uncontroversial. Jesse Kauffman emphasises the severe tensions that existed between Germans and Poles immediately after 1918, tensions that ‘generated intense German hatreds for Poland’.¹⁵ Calling these confrontations

⁸ Peter Polak-Springer, *Recovered Territory: A German-Polish Conflict over Land and Culture, 1919–1989* (Oxford: Berghahn, 2015), 33.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 3.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 10. The situation is similar to the one in Alsace, where the population also developed a specific regional identity.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 15.

¹² Tara Zahra offers the concept ‘imagined non-communities’ to solve a methodological problem. While the concept of classical nationalism was barely applicable to Central and Eastern Europe, some regions like Silesia – to name an obvious example – were reluctant to follow. In contrast to France, where ‘Peasants [turned] into Frenchmen’ (Eugene Weber) during the nineteenth century, other countries successfully fought off such tendencies. In effect, they were proud of not being members of the nations that surrounded them. Zahra proposes to label this chosen non-membership, which still resulted in a certain community, ‘national indifference’; see Tara Zahra, ‘Imagined Noncommunities: National Indifference as a Category of Analysis’, *Slavic Review*, 69, 1 (2010), 93–119.

¹³ Marta Grzechnik, ‘“Recovering” Territories: The Use of History in the Integration of the New Polish Western Borderland after World War II’, *Europe-Asia Studies*, 69 (2017), 668–92.

¹⁴ For a more thorough discussion see Winson Chu, ‘Ethnic Cleansing and Nationalization in the German-Polish and German-Czech Borderlands’, *German Studies Review*, 41, 1 (2018), 143–52.

¹⁵ Jesse Kauffman, *Elusive Alliance: The German Occupation of Poland in World War I* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015), 227.

'indifference', in this context, appears to be a euphemism. Moreover, Winson Chu shows that there was a hierarchy within the German minority. He specifically points to the Germans in Łódź, who were even considered 'dangerous to the German minority'. This cleavage intensified during the 1930s. In the end, however, Chu agrees that there was a clear 'regional distinctiveness'.¹⁶ Polak-Springer's publication thus indicates that the creation of one united Polish society never was an attainable goal. As a consequence, Polak-Springer's publication is able to give the reader a hint of how the 'border before a border' – as Heinemeyer puts it – was actually made.

Hans-Christian Heinemeyer's dissertation explores European economic integration between 1880 and 1939, and Poland features prominently in his research. However, Heinemeyer's work has received relatively little attention among Polish economic historians, perhaps because the focus on Poland is not indicated in the titles of three of the articles that form Heinemeyer's dissertation. Generally speaking, Heinemeyer applied several methods to measure European economic entanglements between 1880 and 1939. His cliometric,¹⁷ cumulative dissertation consists of four articles. The first two papers deal directly with border changes.¹⁸ In these, the author turns the matter around and exploits them for an intriguing experiment: did the appearance of a new border after Versailles affect trade between the then divided regions? How did the border changes of 1919 influence Polish trade? The first article focuses on Polish–German trade, while the second one includes all three partition states (Prussia, Austria-Hungary, Russia).

Heinemeyer's methodological approach is derived from the so-called gravity theory of trade, which posits that borders always have a negative effect on trade. There is, however, one problem with this theory: while the first economists who developed the concept found out that there is a border effect, they did not specify the exact reason that triggers it.¹⁹ There are several likely candidates: different languages, disparate legal systems, higher transaction costs, etc.²⁰ Usually, that kind of research can only be conducted by taking two different, but similar, border regions and comparing their parallel developments during a certain period of time. Doing so, it is possible to figure out in which ways the border affects trade. This is in fact a counterfactual approach: what would have happened if the changes had never taken place? Heinemeyer's method, on the other hand, allowed him to conduct this analysis differently. Instead of trying to find two identical regions, he focused on one region. By comparing trade flows before and after the implementation of the new border, he is able to show how the newly established border influenced trade.

The result of his analysis is twofold. According to it, there really was a border effect in Polish–German trade. In other words, the new border caused relatively low trade between the German and the Polish region. This is at least true for the products Heinemeyer analyses (brown coal, chemicals, iron and steel, rye, paper, hard coal and coke). This is well within what one would expect. What one would *not* expect is that the degree of trade reduction actually was less severe than expected: 'borders that were put in place after WWI separated regions from Germany that were economically integrated well below average already before the war. This finding is valid at least for trade in the selected groups

¹⁶ Winson Chu, *The German Minority in Interwar Poland* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 279.

¹⁷ Cliometrics can be defined as the 'application of economic theory and quantitative techniques to study history'; see Michael Hauptert, 'History of Cliometrics', in Claude Diebolt and Michael Hauptert, eds., *Handbook of Cliometrics* (Heidelberg: Springer, 2016), 3–32, here 5.

¹⁸ The remaining two articles address the economic crisis after 1929. They are of no interest for the matter at hand and are mentioned here for the sake of completion. In the third article ('The Course of the Great Depression. A Consistent Business Cycle Dating Approach'), Heinemeyer re-dates the 1929 economic crisis in Central Eastern Europe, France, Belgium, Germany, the United States and Japan. According to one of his conclusions, economic integration was still high, which is why the crisis spread quickly. In his last article ('The Persistence of the Great Depression: How Large Were Nominal Wage Rigidities in Europe, the US, and Japan?'), Heinemeyer asks the question of whether wages that did not follow market demands aggravated the crisis.

¹⁹ John McCallum, 'National Borders Matter: Canada-US Regional Trade Patterns', *American Economic Review*, 85, 3 (1995), 613–23.

²⁰ That's where the word 'gravity' comes from. The more compatible two potential trade partners are, the more they are drawn to each other.

of goods'.²¹ This is an important finding. Many publications – for instance Kowal²² – argue that Poland's interwar economy suffered severely because of the newly established borders.²³ Heinemeyer's conclusions suggest a gradual re-evaluation, since he is the first to measure trade between the two regions and – consequently – the actual drop of trade volumes. In passing, he also points to a general problem that undermines the credibility of research on border effects. Even within a perfectly integrated economy, it will always be possible to identify two regions whose exchange of goods and services is lower than that of other regions. In other words, there will always be invisible borders. In the end, Heinemeyer concludes that as far as the economy is concerned, the newly established borders caused only a few economic problems. With this claim he goes one step further than Nikolaus Wolf, who argued that by 1929 Poland had already become a surprisingly well integrated country.²⁴ Thus, while Wolf is convinced that the pre-war borders had no long-term effect, Heinemeyer comes to the conclusion that these post-war borders were placed between regions that never were highly integrated. Prior to the First World War there already was a 'border before a border'.

The econometric approach allows the researcher to only analyse two different factors: the presence of borders and their absence. Yet it is also important to consider that the nature of borders significantly changed. Before the First World War, borders within Europe had a very limited effect on trade. The post-Versailles borders, on the other hand, were very hard borders. Moreover, German–Polish trade profited from hardly any support from either government: 'German–Polish economic relations at the time of the Weimar Republic were a symptom of the policies towards Poland in those years. During the whole time of the Weimar Republic no regulations were made in the form of a trade treaty.'²⁵ Despite all this, the border effect was limited. Further research might ask the opposite question: why did even hard attempts to reduce trade have only limited consequences? Heinemeyer also posits another question: did 'new' integrations compensate for the older ones? The products Heinemeyer lists – brown and hard coal, chemicals, iron, steel, rye, paper and coke – are unspecialised, undifferentiated ones. Virtually every country had use for them, and it is not surprising that the newly established country of Poland kept its hands on them. It would be interesting to see whether the trade of differentiated products, whose exchange is usually more linked with specific trading partners, would lead to different results.

Third, Heinemeyer's work points in a direction that has still been only marginally uncovered by historians: the establishment of new trade networks. The conundrum Heinemeyer leaves us with might be a good starting point for further research on this matter. Was inner-European de-integration at least in this case offset by inner-Polish integration?

In the end, Polak-Springer's and Heinemeyer's publications are able to show us how the different perspectives of social and economic historians can lead them to reach almost contradictory results. While Heinemeyer gives the impression of a self-contained and increasingly well integrated economy that was in fact hardly affected by the newly established borders, Polak-Springer illustrates their much more significant social impact: after Upper Silesia was partitioned in June 1922, it splintered into *two* societies. A pivotal moment occurred in 1925, when Germany began a tariff war against Poland. And since the tariffs targeted especially coal, the Eastern Silesian economy soon felt the consequences.²⁶ In effect, while the German part of Upper Silesia recovered rather quickly thanks to financial support from the government, Eastern Upper Silesia was placed in a dire situation that fuelled the cultural

²¹ Hans-Christian Heinemeyer, *Quantitative Studies on European Economic Integration Between 1880 and 1939* (Berlin: Freie Universität, 2013), available at: http://www.diss.fu-berlin.de/diss/receive/FUDISS_thesis_000000094516, 31.

²² Stefan Kowal, *Partnerstwo czy uzależnienie?: Niemieckie postawy wobec stosunków gospodarczych z Polską w czasach Republiki Weimarskiej* (Poznań: Uniwersytet im. Adama Mickiewicza, 1995).

²³ On a more general level, Heinemeyer also enquires whether the border effect is really that influential. For instance, 'one can argue that East Upper Silesia might have been less economically integrated into the German economy before WWI for ethnic reasons. This would result in overestimating the border-effect', Heinemeyer, *European Economic Integration*, 36.

²⁴ Trenkler and Wolf, 'Economic Integration', 199.

²⁵ Kowal, *Partnerstwo czy uzależnienie*, 4.

²⁶ Heinemeyer, *European Economic Integration*, 37.

struggle and led to the rise of radical parties like the Upper Silesian Defence League, a party that aimed for regional autonomy as part of the Polish state. The ensuing economic crisis also led to the rise of communist parties on both sides. In the 1930s the nationalist governor Michał Grażyński went so far as to remove the German industrialists from their positions and ‘polonised’ the industry.²⁷ As these various developments can attest, the 1930s witnessed a fragmentation of society, which was worsened by growing antagonism between the Polish nationalists from the Union for the Defence of the Western Territories (*Związek Obrony Kresów Zachodnich*; ZOKZ) and the League of the German East (*Bund Deutscher Osten*; BDO).²⁸ Against the background of these findings in Polak-Springer’s book, Heinemeyer’s findings are all the more unexpected. They also demonstrate the need for further analysis of the new trading networks established after 1921. Such an analysis would shed light on the specific characteristics of the assumed border effect within the region in question.

The volume edited by Jurij Kostjašov, Olga Kurilo and Piotr Zariczny similarly emphasises the social effects of borders. Theoretically, the book aims at analysing the German–Polish–Russian borders before 1945 from an interdisciplinary perspective. According to its description, the book’s chapters show that despite the ongoing globalisation, borders hardly lost their importance. The contributors emphasise that borders are as much a separating feature as they are a means of linking people and peoples together. One group of chapters covers concrete confrontations with borders, for instance when people cross them in order to study, to work, to travel or quite simply in order to realise a common project. The second group covers different kinds of ‘mental maps’. In this case, it is not the factual border that matters but the confrontation with it in literature, collective consciousness, individual biographies or collective identities. One interesting example is the article on Danzig. Olga Kurilo describes a multi-ethnic, multi-religious city that tried to preserve its character after 1919, despite the changes that happened around it. Ralph Schattkowsky’s contribution on ‘The Treaty of Zgorzelec’ (1950) emphasises the important role the contract played for Poland’s political stability, since it was the contract that made a (West or East) German government calling into question the German–Polish border less likely. Viktor Romanovski and Olga Romanovskaya emphasise in their analysis of Kaliningrad how a new regional identity had to be forged after the border changes. Ultimately, the edited volume provides anecdotal descriptions of individual cases. As the title and the description indicate, the articles do not follow a clear agenda. If somebody is looking for insightful portrayals of individual cases, then – and only then – the edited volume will be of use. Otherwise, there are preferable publications.²⁹ One particular recommendation is a publication from Marta Grzechnik. In her article, she explains how strategically historical research, and also the Catholic Church, have been instrumentalised to legitimise the official policy that border regions have to be entirely polonised. The historiographically constructed argument was that the ‘recovery’ of the former German regions was an act of historical justice, as these regions had been Polish before but were unlawfully conquered by the Germans since the Middle Ages.³⁰

The next two books, by Karpiński, Żółtkowski, Soroka and Paradysz, and by Musiał, take another approach and concentrate more on Poland’s modernisation itself. They thereby contribute to the debate on the success of Poland’s modernisation attempts over the last three centuries, which has been rekindled during the last couple of years, at least partially in response to Poland’s surprising success in weathering the recent financial crisis.³¹

²⁷ Ibid., 45.

²⁸ Ibid., 47.

²⁹ For instance Detlef Brandes, Holm Sundhaussen and Stefan Troebst, eds., *Lexikon der Vertreibungen. Deportation, Zwangsaussiedlung und ethnische Säuberung im Europa des 20. Jahrhunderts* (Wien: Böhlau, 2010); Elena Fiddian-Quasmiyeh, Gil Loescher, Katy Long and Nando Sigona, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Refugee and Forced Migration Studies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

³⁰ See Grzechnik, *The Use of History*, 668–92.

³¹ M. Piątkowski, *Europe’s Growth Champion: Insights from the Economic Rise of Poland* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018).

According to Andrzej Karpiński, Stanisław Paradysz, Paweł Soroka and Wiesław Żółtkowski, Poland's post-communist modernisation does not amount to being a success story. Their main message is that the modernisation process during the transformation after 1990 was in fact a process of de-industrialisation.³² To prove their point, Karpiński, Żółtkowski, Soroka and Paradysz made a list of all accessible enterprises and factories, especially those that disappeared during the transformation. By compiling such a list, they aim to establish which economic branches were hardest hit. They work on the assumption that the industrialisation during the communist era was a successful programme to modernise and develop the Polish economy. According to them, it could have been a solid base for a modern country with a productive agricultural sector and low unemployment rates. Such a country could have been more on par with its Western European neighbours. This possible success, however, was undone during the transformation, when privatisation led to the disintegration of large parts of the Polish industry.

The emphasis of Musiał's book is different: it aims to explain the strategies of the Polish governments with regard to social policy, population policy and economic policy. The book consists of four main parts. The first 100 pages provide a recapitulation of current modernisation theories. The following three chapters cover the interwar period (1919–39), the communist era (1945–89) and the transformation phase until Poland's entry into the European Union (1989–2004).

With regard to the interwar years, Musiał explains how Poland had to create a new country despite the difficult circumstances. This entails the six different currencies as well as the three regions and the ethnically and religiously diverse population. While the protagonists knew of the most urgent problems aggravated by the coup of 1926 – agrarian overpopulation, infrastructure, literacy programmes, administration and homogenisation of the Polish industry – the state which they led failed to formulate a sound strategy. In sum, Musiał is convinced that the interwar period was a failure.

In this regard, he follows the broad trends in recent publications on Poland's economic development. For a long time, Poland's interwar reforms had been evaluated positively, especially in contrast to the communist era.³³ In recent years, however, historians indicated that in practice the economic and social policy pursued until 1938 was actually unsuccessful. For instance, the establishment of the Central Industrial Region (*Centralny Okręg Przemysłowy*; COP) did little to address unemployment, low urbanisation rates and a relatively high level of illiteracy. Piątkowski emphasises that during the interwar period, entrepreneurship and business life was almost completely in the hands of foreigners and the border changes had nothing to do with the limited success. Essentially, Piątkowski blames an institutional system which ensured that political power was left in the hands of a few and which prevented others from taking part in economic activities.³⁴

Interestingly, the publications by Karpiński, Żółtkowski, Soroka and Paradysz, by Musiał, and by Heinemeyer and Piątkowski, and in fact also by Polak-Springer, do not just deconstruct the concept of a successful interwar period. Piątkowski and Karpiński, Żółtkowski, Soroka and Paradysz also highlight the successes of the communist era, emphasising the positive long-term effects it had on industry. The examination by Karpiński, Żółtkowski, Soroka and Paradysz is accompanied by several comments on the recovered territories. Part of the – according to the authors – successful industrialisation process was due to the former German territories. While in 1937 twenty-five out of 1,000 citizens worked in industry, that number rose to forty-five out of 1,000 in 1946.³⁵ In the new territories themselves, that number amounted to seventy out of 1,000. That may be the reason why the majority of the

³² The process after 1989/90 is usually called 'transformation'. Yet since it covered the society, the economy, the political system and also the administration, it is reasonable to say that modernisation and transformation meant the same thing. In this article, both notions will be used as synonyms.

³³ Zbigniew Landau and Jerzy Tomaszewski, *Wirtschaftsgeschichte Polens im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert* (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1986).

³⁴ Piątkowski, *Growth Champion*, 100–1.

³⁵ Andrzej Karpiński, Wiesław Żółtkowski, Paweł Soroka and Stanisław Paradysz, *Od uprzemysłowienia w PRL do deindustrializacji kraju. Losy zakładów przemysłowych po 1945 roku* (Warsaw: Muza, 2015), 83.

newly constructed firms in the new territories were mostly conversions or extensions of already existing buildings and facilities.

When it comes to the analysis of post-1945 Poland, the picture is more diverse. Piątkowski's conviction that the border changes after 1945 were 'a remarkable real estate deal, one of the best in mankind's history'³⁶ has already been mentioned. He also emphasises that 'communism was not all bad'.³⁷ The expulsion of non-Polish peoples made – despite the material hardships they brought with them – the Polish society more homogeneous and stable.³⁸ Education levels, social inequality, social mobility, emancipation of women, access to culture (theatres, operas, museums, etc.) and sports all changed for the better.³⁹ This positive take on the communist period is supported by Vonyó and Markevich, who also identify structural modernisation of the economy in Central and Eastern Europe.⁴⁰ It is here where an analysis of modernisation in Poland might have given valuable insight. Given the successes communist Poland attained, one would like to know whether they were actually achieved thanks to a specifically pursued strategy. Musiał suggests that the economic and social concepts during the communist era had a predominantly imitative character.⁴¹ Yet as he insists that Poland mostly copied the Soviet model, he fails to take countervailing evidence into consideration.⁴² Moreover, in contrast to Piątkowski and Karpiński, Żółtkowski, Soroka and Paradysz, Musiał does not even consider the border changes of 1945 and their long-term effects, let alone integrate them into his analysis.

Karpiński, Żółtkowski, Soroka and Paradysz draw far-reaching conclusions from their analysis of communist Poland. They insist that the industrial capital was well developed. Therefore they are convinced that had the Polish post-1990 government done more to protect industry – especially the more sophisticated sectors – current employment would be one million higher, and unemployment consequently one million lower.⁴³ This assumption, however, completely ignores the fact that even by communist standards, Poland's economic development was a disappointment, as economic investment in Poland was substantially lower than in Hungary and in Czechoslovakia.⁴⁴ What makes this book extremely valuable is not so much its conclusions as its approach. The lists the authors compiled sorted the firms by industrial branch, *voivodeship* (or administrative division) and year of construction, which allows them to raise numerous intriguing questions with regard to the border changes: why were the firms in the former German territories hit harder by liquidation than the rest of the country? Why were most of the liquidated factories constructed after 1945 and why were the older ones spared? How successful was Poland in reactivating these firms after 1945? By posing and tackling these questions, this book marks a step forward in the literature.

Conclusion

Modernisation and border changes in Poland are not only closely related. While they are both an extraordinarily good starting point for research on Poland's economic and social history during the twentieth century, it is imperative not to analyse one without considering the other. And, clearly, there remain many unanswered questions. Whether the interwar economy was successful and well-integrated by 1938 is still contested – as is the matter of whether there really was a united society. Arguments are commonly made that Poland would today be much closer to Western Europe – both ideologically and economically – had it not been for the Second World War. The publications under review indicate the opposite.

³⁶ Piątkowski, *Growth Champion*, 90.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 94.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 91.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 101–7.

⁴⁰ Vonyó and Markevich, 'Economic Growth', 281.

⁴¹ Wojciech Musiał, *Modernizacja Polski. Polityki rządowe w latach 1918–2004* (Toruń: FNP, 2013), 208.

⁴² See for instance Tokarski, *Die Wahl wirtschaftspolitischer Strategien*.

⁴³ Karpiński et al., *Losy zakładów przemysłowych*, 100.

⁴⁴ T. Vonyó and A. Klein, 'Why Did Socialist Economies Fail? The Role of Factor Inputs Reconsidered', *The Economic History Review*, 72 (2019), 317–45.

Polak-Springer's and Heinemeyer's books show that the interwar period witnessed numerous problems: chiefly that Poland did not become a united society. A comparison of Heinemeyer's and Polak-Springer's publications also reveals not so much different interpretations of the same data as two altogether different approaches to common questions. While at Heinemeyer's national level, purely economic analysis draws a rather romantic picture of the impact of the Versailles borders on the Polish economy, Polak-Springer's Silesia-focused work emphasises the increasing social tensions⁴⁵ that surfaced during national holidays⁴⁶, in school books⁴⁷ and – of course – when elections took place.⁴⁸ Future research that includes economic, cultural and social aspects could build on Polak-Springer's approach, although a widened temporal focus would also be desirable, given that before 1914 crossing a border was much easier than doing so during the interwar period.

The publications also reveal that there still is a gap between the level of research on interwar Poland and on post-Second World War Poland, even though Matthias Morys' edited volume on South, Central and Eastern Europe – though not Poland in particular – has the potential to narrow that gap.⁴⁹ That assessment is not limited to the effects of the border changes. Heinemeyer and his colleagues factually avoided post-1945 Poland. And while Polak-Springer is able to contribute significantly to what is hitherto known about interwar Silesia – or Poland in general – his remarks on the years after 1945 hardly go beyond what is already well established. With regard to communism, the books by Karpiński, Żółtkowski, Soroka and Paradysz, and also by Piątkowski, are more helpful.

Nonetheless, the books reviewed here are not without flaws. The main argument put forward by Karpiński, Żółtkowski, Soroka and Paradysz is in fact an accusation. The authors argue that during the transformation the Polish governments were unable to develop a coherent long-term strategy for industry. As a consequence, most industrial firms were sold under value; in many cases they were closed. The state also gave up on the more important enterprises that would have had the potential to develop their own patterns by use of their knowledge in research and development. It is not easy to follow these arguments. Would it really have been better to subsidise the extremely inflated textile industry in Łódź or the numerous Upper Silesian mines? Would it have been realistic to believe that firms that were highly unproductive during the 1980s would suddenly be able to innovate and increase productivity within just a few years? And yet, one must not dismiss the authors' reasoning entirely. Karpiński, Żółtkowski, Soroka and Paradysz follow the voices that argue that more social protection during the 1990s might have eased the social pain of the transformation, which favoured the current populist government. Admittedly, Poland's economy grew by 5.1 per cent in 2018, but Poland's economy also grew under previous administrations, which obviously did not automatically lead to high approval rates of the governments in charge. There is good reason to argue that the governing party 'Law and Justice' profited much more from social spending than from high GDP growth rates. Thus, in the end, Karpiński, Żółtkowski, Soroka and Paradysz question not only the economic but also the social aspects of the post-1990 modernisation strategy. It is here where Musiał's book could have dived deeper. But his results are in the end little more than what one might have intuitively expected: the communist era was a hindrance, the transformation was a success. Only with regard to the interwar period can Musiał's analysis be considered a new contribution, since it contradicts the traditionally positive stocktaking of the era before 1939.

Summing up, these publications point to the emergence of two promising research fields. The first one covers the interwar period. The issue of the national integration of Poland – both on the economic and social level – is still controversial. What looks rather neat economically was much less so socially. The second field concerns the decades after 1990. Convincingly evaluating the modernisation strategy after 1990 is not as easy as it looks. While the standard economic indicators – GDP growth,

⁴⁵ Polak-Springer, *Recovered Territory*, 49.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 69.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 73.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 77 et seqq.

⁴⁹ Matthias Morys, ed., *The Economic History of Central, East and South-East Europe: 1800 to the Present* (London: Routledge, 2020).

productivity, unemployment – all indicate a thriving country, the social effects appear much less so. In order to understand the current cleavage between the European Union and Poland, there is good reason to follow up on the questions Karpiński, Żółtkowski, Soroka and Paradysz ask. This also leads to a further one: given the illiberal policy of the current government and its support by the apparent majority of the population, one might also ask whether the current modernisation wave, whose success is backed up by Piątkowski, Musiał and economic growth figures, is reversible.

Understanding the modernisation process – or the modernisation processes – and their link to the border changes is key to a better understanding of Poland's development during the twentieth century. The reviewed books both indicate the still untapped potential of further research and pave the way for future knowledge. That is no small achievement.