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Contemporary Issues of Services in Light of Polish Geographic Literature

Abstract: Service activity, which is an essential part of modern economy, is constantly changing. The changing economic reality also involves changes in research orientations. Changes in the subject of interest in the literature related to geography of services are a reflection of the changes taking place in services. Economic changes, as well as technological and civilisation progress, result in the emergence of new directions of research, as well as the disappearance of some of the existing ones, which in current circumstances are losing their relevance. The beginnings of geography of services as a distinctive scientific discipline date back to the 1970s. Previously, service research was part of the field of settlement research. The 1970s brought an increased interest in services, which initiated the process of crystallising geography of services, manifested in both theoretical and methodological work. The article discusses current changes in Polish geography of services, in particular its new trends and research directions.

Keywords: geography of services; literature review; Poland

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INTRODUCTION

Service activity, which is an essential part of modern economy, is constantly changing. The changing economic reality also involves changes in research orientations. Transformations of economy with technological and civilisation progress result in the emergence of new directions and trends of research, as well as the disappearance of some of the existing ones, which under current conditions cease to be relevant and lose their significance. It is a natural development process of any scientific discipline. “Scientific progress, responding to current questions, leads to civilisation development, and this in turn opens new research fields through the emergence of new research needs” (Retkiewicz, 2014a: 157). Similar trends are observed in the area of geography of services. It

is connected with the basic role of geography, which according to Z. Chojnicki (1991: 371–372) is to “more faithfully and deeply describe and understand the world, and thus obtain a more interesting and useful knowledge”.

The beginnings of independent systematic research on geography of services as a distinctive scientific discipline date back to the 1970s (Werwicki, 1998; Kłosowski, 2006a; 2006b; Ilnicki, 2014). In the past, research on services was mainly conducted within the field of settlement research. Only the 1970s brought increased interest in geography of services, and its crystallisation into a separate discipline, manifested in publishing both theoretical and methodological papers (Polarczyk, 1970, 1971, 1976a, 1976b; 1979, Nowosielska, 1994). Since then, there has been a continuous increase in the number of research papers related to services. D. Ilnicki (2014) notes, however, that Polish literature on the subject lacks comprehensive, synthetic studies that capture the problems of the sector and the entire sphere of services. Nowadays, studies on services are fragmentary, both in relation to the composition of services and the scale of analysis (Ilnicki, 2014). This brings, among others, a lack of visual progress on the basis of theory, practice and methodology of geography of services. The reasons for this state of affairs is believed to be primarily in the heterogeneity of services and conditions related to the lack of interest by stakeholders positioned in economy and politics (Jakubowicz, 1993; Nowosielska, 1994; Ilnicki, 2014).

In the development of Polish research on services, D. Ilnicki (2009) proposes the delimitation of four periods: (1) the beginning of research on services – until the early 1970s, (2) systematic service surveys (1970s and 1980s), (3) the first decade of the transformation period (1990s), and (4) contemporary geography of services (from the turn of the century). A comprehensive chronological and thematic approach to services in Polish literature on the subject was presented by D. Ilnicki (2009, 2014). The aim of this article is to try to discuss the contemporary changes in Polish geography of services, in particular the characteristics of new trends and research directions, attempt to answer the question in which direction it is developing and what its challenges and possible scenarios for further development are. The time range of this analysis is the last period of development of Polish geography of services, which dates back to the beginning of the 2000s.

CHARACTERISTICS OF CONTEMPORARY RESEARCH TRENDS IN POLISH GEOGRAPHY OF SERVICES

As mentioned in the introduction, service activity, which is an essential part of modern economy, is subject to constant changes, which is reflected in the achievements of geography of services. The transformations taking place in the sphere of services can be considered through structural and restructuring changes. A similar division can be applied to the main contemporary research trends. In structural terms, the achievements of contemporary Polish geography of services include, among others: (1) increased interest in modern services based on knowledge; (2) undiminished dominance of studies in the field of broadly understood commercial services, (3) relatively weaker achievements in the field of public services. In addition to structural changes in the sphere of services, there are also organisational changes, which are also reflected in the achievements of modern geography of services. Among them, the most important are: (1) outsourcing of services resulting from the increase in competitiveness linked to

the globalisation process; (2) the process of internationalisation of services as a result of progressive globalisation (the phenomenon of offshoring); (3) changes in terms of forms of distribution and the provision of services, and contact with the customer as a result of technological progress, in particular the development of the ICT sector. In the further part of the study, an attempt was made to organise the achievements of contemporary Polish geography of services in reference to the presented transformations in the sphere of services.

One of the basic features of the achievements of Polish geography of service is its fragmentary and an increasing number of detailed studies related to the narrow scope of certain types of services. The increase in interest in modern knowledge-based services (knowledge-intensive) is particularly visible. According to theories of service activity, knowledge-intensive services are gaining importance in the structure of modern economy. Their development was caused, *inter alia*, by increased competitiveness and the related increase in the demand for specialised and modern services using advanced technologies, both within the enterprise and acquired. They play an important role at every stage of the development of innovative economy (from generation of innovation, through its transfer to economic practice, support of the commercialisation process, to sales) and thus are becoming its indispensable element. The growing importance of this type of services in the economy is also reflected in the number of studies on this subject. Among the works in this field, one can list studies on the diversification of the level of development of services based on knowledge (Knowledge Intensive Services – KIS), or their part related to business support (Knowledge Intensive Business Services – KIBS), and the role they play in dynamising the processes of economy based on knowledge (KBE) in various spatial scales: in the EU countries (Skórska 2012, 2015; Węgrzyn, 2013; Zięba, 2015; Wyszowska-Kuna, 2016), and in regional terms (Skórska, 2016; Dominiak, 2017a). In this context, in the subject literature, there is also the concept of new and modern services (largely identified with more or less services based on knowledge). In Polish literature, the term new services was used, among others, in the following studies: E. Jakubowicz (2000), M. Sobczyński, A. Słowik (2000), A. Janc (2001), D. Ilnicki (2001; 2003; 2009), J. Dominiak (2017a). New services include dynamically developing services with high knowledge saturation, related to IT support, scientific, research and development, financial, insurance and broadly understood consulting services (organisational, economic, technical, marketing, etc.) (Dominiak, 2017a, 2017b). These services have developed in Poland only after the systemic changes of 1989, and their importance in the development of innovative and competitive economy is constantly growing, which is reflected in the increase in interest in this type of services in publications. The achievements related to spatial diversification of the development of specific types of knowledge-intensive services are dominated by the studies related to: (1) ICT services (e.g. Męczyński, 2006; Micek, 2006, 2008; Stryjakiewicz, 2009; Strożek, Jewczak, 2016), (2) financial services (e.g. Ilnicki, 2003; 2006; 2007; 2008; Weltrowska, 2003; 2007; Brezdeń, Spallek, 2009), and (3) services for producers and business (e.g. Dominiak, 2006, 2008a, 2008b, 2012b, 2013, 2018; Dzieciuchowicz, 2009a, 2009b, 2009c, 2009d, 2009e, 2009f).

In addition to the dynamic increase in the number of studies related to knowledge-based services, the continuation of a large interest in traditional services, including primarily commercial ones, can be noted in the output of modern geography of services. Geography of trade, dealing with the study of trade in space, including most of

all the links between the distribution of enterprises and commercial establishments versus consumer behaviour, is one of the basic areas of geography of services (Dzieciuchowicz, 2012a). According to J. Dzieciuchowicz (2012a), traditionally the most important research topics of geography of trade include: (1) analysis of market areas of outlets and service centres; (2) determinants and models of spatial behaviour of store customers; (3) spatial and institutional organisation of trade; (4) internationalisation of wholesale and retail trade; and (5) impact of technological progress on the development and distribution of trade. The evolution of the problems of geography of trade in Poland is presented in the studies of, among others, D. Ilnicki (2009), S. Ciok and D. Ilnicki (2011), and J. Dzieciuchowicz (2012a). They draw attention to the emerging new directions related to the creation, evolution, location of new shopping centres in urban space and urban agglomeration as multifunctional outlets combining commercial, gastronomic, cultural and recreational functions (Kaczmarek, Kaczmarek, 2006; Kaczmarek, 2014; Więclaw-Michniewska, 2006) and retail chains (Wilk, 2005, 2012, 2013). J. Dzieciuchowicz (2012a) writes about new geography of trade that begun in the 1990s in which most attention is paid to contemporary changes in trade in the socio-economic space. Among the key research problems dealt with by new geography of trade J. Dzieciuchowicz (2012a) lists the following: concentration and restructuring of trade in space, trade supply networks, areas of trade exclusion, geography of international trade and geography of virtual trade.

Public services are much less popular in geographical surveys. In this area, we find studies primarily related to geography of education, devoted to higher education, focusing on academic centres and analysing their impact on the development of cities and regions (e.g. Gaczek, 2006; Wolaniuk, 2006, 2008; Bajerski, 2008; Wiśniewski, 2008; Ilnicki, 2008).

In addition to structural changes in the sphere of services, there are organisational changes too, which are also reflected in the achievements of modern geography of services. An important role in these changes in services is played by the globalisation process. Between the two megatrends – the process of service development (servicisation) and the globalisation process, there are bilateral relationships that dynamise both processes (Naisbitt, 1997; Masłowski, 2008). On the one hand, globalisation stimulates the demand for new services, on the other – the rapid development of services, especially the ICT sector, favours the processes of globalisation. The ongoing globalisation along with the increase in competitiveness is the direct cause of significant organisational changes in service activities. These include: the process of internationalisation of services, externalisation of service provision and the use of outsourcing in order to minimise the operating costs of enterprises. Many studies related to the service sector are devoted to the issues of changes in the processes of organisation of service activities in the era of globalisation. First of all, they mainly concern the outsourcing and offshoring processes. Relocation of services following globalisation is the subject of studies of, for instance, A. Zorska (2007, 2008) and B. Liberska (2008). The increase of interest in the literature of subject in the centres of shared services, which provide services (usually IT, accounting, etc.) to the units of a given international corporation worldwide, is particularly noticeable. Poland sees its chance of development as a country with well-educated staff and at the same time competitive labour costs. These centres are most often located in Asia, but also in Central and Eastern European countries, including Poland (Nowocień, 2007; Mielcarek, 2008; Dominiak, 2012a). These changes would not be

possible without the use of modern technologies, which are essentially responsible for changes in the sphere of services. Particular importance is attributed to the development of information and telecommunication technologies. Thanks to the Internet, the geographical space permeates with cyberspace (Ilnicki, 2006; Retkiewicz, 2008). The development of the Internet, according to many, not only did not translate into a crisis in geography, but initiated geography of the Internet (Castells, 2003, 2007). The Internet is only seemingly non-location-based and non-spatial (Ilnicki, Janc, 2008; Ilnicki, 2014). In this context, it is worth paying attention to the impact of the Internet and the entire ICT sector on service activity. It caused the transfer of some services to cyberspace and the development of new forms of service provision, distribution and forms of contact with the client. It is responsible for an important aspect of organisational changes in the sphere of services, consisting in the development of new forms of providing traditional services with the use of computer techniques and the Internet (electronic services). Electronic services treated as a new form of providing traditional services or completely new services constitute an important branch of modern geography of services. It is the development of electronic services (e.g. electronic administration, distance education or e-commerce) that revolutionised the sphere of services at the beginning of the 21st century. In this area, there are papers analysing changes taking place in traditional service activities, e.g. in administration, trade, education, banking, and even medicine due to the use of various types of devices (especially computer devices) and the Internet. Numerous studies are devoted to the functioning of electronic administration, e.g. M. Kaczmarek-Śliwińska (2004), I. Jaros (2005), W. Michalski (2006), R. Perdał (2008; 2011), A. Minkowski, P. Motek, R. Perdał (2009), J. Drobiazgiwicz (2010), T. Taraszkiewicz (2010), and electronic banking – e.g. M. Szczeń, S. Jakubiec (2002), M. Polasik (2007), J. Weltrowska (2008, 2009). Dynamically developing electronic commerce is also gaining more interest, e.g. B. Księżopolski, Z. Kotulski (2004).

In addition to the research trends mentioned above, geography of services is also concerned with issues related to the differences in the level of development of the services sector, structural changes in the services sector, servicisation and the role that services play in the socio-economic development at various spatial scales (national, regional, and local). These issues are the themes of studies of, among others, S.M. Szukalski (2004), J. Dominiak (2004), K. Kłosiński (2006), M. Wodnicka (2009), G. Węgrzyn (2009), I. Rudawska (2009), I. Lichniak (2010). At the same time, it should be pointed out that among the studies in the field of geography of services, the static over dynamic approach is definitely predominant (Ilnicki, 2014), which is related to the changes taking place in the classifications of economic activity. The change of Polish classification of economic activity PKD 2004 to PKD 2007 (forced by changes of the NACE of the EU), led to the lack of comparability and difficulty in conducting analysis of the structural changes of the services sector and dynamic outlines in the time series covering the period before 2009.

PERSPECTIVES AND CHALLENGES FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF GEOGRAPHY OF SERVICES

Further development and evolution of geography of services will probably be associated with future changes in the sphere of services. One of the most important challenges seems to be the process of servicisation understood not only as the increase in the

importance of the third sector (tertiarisation process), but also – and perhaps above all – the process of increasing the importance of service functions, also in the production activity. The growing importance of services in production processes and the links between the production and service sectors leads to the interpenetration of both of these activities (Wyszkowska-Kuna, 2016). According to the theory of Giarini, services cease to be an economic sector, and they are becoming functions that have dominated many production activities at every stage. The intensification of the penetration of material and service products has led to an increased blurring of boundaries between the sphere of services and the sphere of production (the concept of the extended product of Levitt). More and more often we are dealing with an extended product created as a result of continuous enrichment of the offered product with the so-called accompanying services, which over time become an integral part of the product. Production companies do not sell only material goods anymore, but instead offer packages with individualised design, service, etc. There is no unambiguous boundary between companies producing goods and providing services. Many service companies operate on the principle of production companies, and as a result of their activities a standardised, mass service is created. Services have begun to be “produced” like material goods. There is even talk of a process of industrialisation of services¹ (Szukalski, 2009). On the other hand, production companies are transformed into services due to commissioning the production process itself to subcontractors, while they specialise in design, marketing (e.g. Apple). It is becoming increasingly difficult to clearly assign a company to the sector. Work in production companies is not limited to pure production activities, but more and more employees are involved in service activities such as management, design, finance, marketing. In this context, it seems important to use a functional approach in the analyses of the differences in the level of service development and their types, taking into account the entire sphere of service activity, including the one implemented in the production sectors.

The integrated approach should also cover various scientific fields dealing with issues related to the sphere of services. Increasingly attention is paid to the “appropriation” of the subject of services by technical sciences, especially those related to the ICT sector (Rogoziński, Gnusowski, 2017). It seems, however, that it can be perceived not only in the context of a threat, but also an opportunity offered by such integration. It gives the opportunity to use modern techniques in analyses related to the distribution of service facilities, access to services, or research on the extent of their impact.

It also seems that the trend connected with the development of research on modern knowledge-based services, and in particular their relation to the development of modern economy, will continue. Networking of the economy, the importance of which is emphasised in the context of increasing the level of innovativeness of economies, will result in an increase in the demand for various analyses of links between the sphere of services related to the innovation environment (universities, R&D sector, institutions responsible for innovation transfer) and business entities implementing innovations.

SUMMARY

An overview of Polish studies devoted to service activities allows us to formulate the following features of its achievements. In structural terms, one can notice, inter alia, an

¹ “The industrialization of services is understood as providing services that take on a massive, standardised character based on the industrial technology of their provision” (Szukalski, 2009: 51).

increase in interest in modern services based on knowledge; dominance of studies in the field of broadly understood commercial services and a relatively smaller achievements in the field of public services. Trends in services are directly or indirectly related to technological progress, hence they are often referred to in terms of service innovation. It is particularly true of organisational changes (the phenomena of outsourcing and offshoring) and changes in the distribution of services and contact with the client (electronic services), which are the result of the progress in the field of modern information and communication technologies. The main directions of changes in research trends in Polish geography of services in the analysed period are and will be associated with processes occurring in the socio-economic reality.

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