

Polish LAU 1 units in the international space of flows (PL-FLOWS)

Global flows have always been a driving force for development and innovation: from the time of the Silk Road, the colonial period, to the industrial revolution. However, the flows of goods, capital, knowledge and people have now reached a scale that determines the level of principal economic and social metrics. Nowadays, flows create new degrees of interconnectedness between economies and play an increasingly important role in determining the future of entire nations, companies and individuals. To be unconnected means to lag behind. On the one hand, global flows and diverse networks of linkages produce measurable benefits, such as diffusion of innovation, technology and knowledge, but on the other, excessive dependencies can create threats, especially in times of recession. The ample evidence of the benefits and threats to countries, enterprises and people resulting from the intensity and nature of flows, as described by literature on the subject, pertain equally to regions, cities and other territorial units. In other words, in addition to determining the economic and social situation, flows also shape space, not only at global and European levels, but also on a nationwide and local scale. The main underlying reasons include integration processes (including the openness and greater permeability of political borders), removal of customs barriers, decreasing transport costs, increasing mobility of societies (migration, tourism, education), and technological developments (ICT). Growing disparities in economic development and living standards (spatial inequalities) also affect migration flows to an increasing extent. This requires looking at space and the situation of individual cities and regions from a different angle, as an effect of external influences, including foreign ones.

However, previous research on international flows at regional and local scales in Poland, but also in other countries, has been fragmentary, covering only one type of relationship, or have remained static, spanning only one year. Knowledge of the rank of small territorial units in international systems has remained incomplete. Therefore, it has been **considered purposeful** to analyse the dynamics and state of international linkages of Polish local units (LAU1) using the most recent and retrospective spatial data. Such analyses can contribute vitally to research of the geography of flows on a European scale and will have an important methodological dimension (proposing a model for determining the position of territorial units in the European and global space). Attempting to determine the balance of international flows for LAU1 units in both economic and socio-demographic terms is also recognised as vital. The key and so far unresolved **research problem** to be addressed by the proposed project can be summarised as the need to assess in a dynamic way how local territorial units (LAU1) function within the global space of socio-economic flows, using the example of a country whose overall position within this space has been changing rapidly (spectacular growth of exports, influx of capital, and intense emigration and immigration). In this context, it seems vital that the central emphasis in such research be placed on the following **research issues**: (a) spatial differences and concentration of individual types of international linkages and flows; (b) a synthetic economic and demographic balance of international flows at the level of local units; and (c) identification of territorial patterns as regards the strength and structure of linkages (typologies); (d) the rate of change in the position of local units in the space of flows in the context of the macroeconomic and geopolitical situation.