

The question of whether poor countries or regions tend to catch up with richer ones has long been a key issue in the theory of economic growth and development economics as well as socio-economic geography. This question has become particularly important after the accession of the countries of Central and Eastern Europe to the structures of the European Union, within which the member states and their regions are characterized by large differences in terms of income levels.

Various theoretical approaches to analysing the impact of European integration on economic growth and income convergence have been identified in the literature. Early neoclassical theories of growth predict that economic integration should stimulate convergence through increased mobility of factors of production and diffusion of knowledge. However, theories of endogenous growth, as well as models of New Economic Geography, are much less optimistic and suggest that, in fact, economic integration may have exactly the opposite effects and lead to divergence. This cognitive dissonance is confirmed by numerous empirical studies that have used various research methods to analyse the processes of income convergence at the level of countries and regions in the enlarged European Union. However, different methods yield ambiguous and often contradictory results. Recent studies tend to reject ubiquitous convergence in favor of more realistic results showing the existence of convergence only between selected countries or regions.

The main objective of the proposed research project is to investigate the convergence of regional per capita incomes between both the regions of the old and new member states of the European Union in the period 1995-2025 and to identify regional convergence clubs at different NUTS levels. In particular, we intend to extend previous studies that focused mainly on the old Member States and considered only one regional level of spatial data aggregation. Therefore, we propose a study on regional income convergence in the enlarged EU at the NUTS-1, NUTS-2, NUTS-3 data aggregation levels. Taking into account three levels of spatial data aggregation in the research will allow for a more comprehensive analysis of the processes of convergence and regional divergence taking place in the enlarged European Union and a better assessment of the spatial location of convergence clubs within it. Taking into account three levels of spatial data aggregation in the study will allow for a more comprehensive analysis of the processes of regional convergence and divergence taking place in the enlarged European Union and a better assessment of the spatial location of convergence clubs within it.

The proposed study will be based on the innovative analytical framework for convergence testing developed by Phillips and Sul (2007, 2009), which takes into account the existence of heterogeneity between different countries and regions in terms of their technological advancement. This approach provides a solid theoretical basis for studying convergence and divergence processes, and in particular the methodology for distinguishing and grouping convergence clubs at the national and regional level. The application of the aforementioned method will allow for the development of alternative, to the traditional neoclassical approach, analyses of income convergence and divergence at different levels of spatial data aggregation and to contribute to the existing state of knowledge. This novel approach has been used only in a very limited number of empirical studies so far, and it is important to popularize its use among researchers who still continue studying convergence in traditional ways in order to obtain more reliable results and recommendations for regional policy.