A WELL TROD PATH TO NO-WHERE:
THE IDEOLOGICAL BURDEN OF GEOGRAPHY
IN POLAND

To the declining number of Polish geographers willing to risk their prestige, perks and privileges for the sake of the truth

Introduction

Thanks to Bolesław’s Domański presentation we can realize the extent and the directions of changes in Polish landscape in the period of political and economic transformation. Now let us look at the situation in geography as an academic discipline in the context of this dramatic ideological shift which we have experienced since 1989. Polish science is now having a hard time. A university education isn’t what it used to be, scientists lost their very high position in the social hierarchy, the level and social relevance of their production has fallen. The science’s downfall began with the communists and continues under the post-communist governments.

Geography is a field which is highly affected by the symptoms of homo sovieticus. Its present day situation is a reflection of the 50 years period of ideological dogmatism, moral relativism and scientism — the methodology tolerated by the communist ideologists. As a consequence, the most common peculiarity of Polish geography was the process of specialization which led to the increase in the number of the specialist sub-fields, publications and conferences. In spite of this growth there is the decline in the number of institutions having the right to give scientific degrees and in the number of practitioners who possess them. Also the number of subscribers of scientific journals has been greatly reduced. E.g. Czasopismo Geograficzne (Journal of Geography) lost most of its readers in the last five years (at present this most important Polish geographic quarterly has no more than 500 subscribers). The process of quantitative growth in the number of publications in the frame of particular specialist sub-fields is accompanied by the disintegration of the field and the loss of geography’s identity.

All these problems do have an ethical basis. According to the Committee for Ethics in Research, Polish Academy of Science, the mode of research, educational process, as well as the promotion of scientists is strongly influenced by the lies and forgeries which characterize the life of scientific institutions (Pelc 1994; Znosko 1994). One of the Committee member has explained this moral fall by the religious/ideological reasons: among the scientists there are huge ravages and the general demoralization that is the consequence of the period of war-
ring atheism, when the so called socialist ethics was practiced (Znosko 1994: 188). The very obscure legal situation, lack of funding, symptoms of pseudo-science, the importance of personal connections, general corruption of the academic life are now one of the themes for magazines and newspapers. The leaders of Polish geography seem to be however deaf. Contrary to some other disciplines, nothing disturbs the very well atmosphere at the heights of the geographical theatrum. However, according to Professor Jerzy Vetulani, the Editor of “Wszechświat” — one of the oldest and most popular Polish periodical on natural history, Polish science has come to the state of infarct, which is the result of the primacy of political qualifications over truly scientific ones. He has written also that the level of scientific research has fallen down dramatically and the professorship lost its former esteem (Vetulani 1992: 71-72).

As far as geography is concerned, this difficult situation can be explained by the fact that the official academic structures resist all efforts aimed at the promotion of desirable changes. The wind of change which seemed to overturn everything in Poland, left the scientific minds and structures undisturbed. Like in the previous epoch, scientific research has no philosophical basis, selection to the scientific work and academic positions is bad, and the influences of the so-called eternal authorities are unlimited. These are the reasons that our discipline stopped developing and started to dissolve. To better understand the present condition of Polish geography, it is necessary to view it in light of its historical background and ideological context.

The origins: idealism, romanticism, and holism

Before the First World War, Polish scientists were deprived of all means necessary for scientific research. In those sections of partitioned Poland, which fell within the Russian and Prussian empires, there did not exist a Polish educational system. For Polish people a scientific career was only possible in the frame of research carried out at German or Russian institutions. During this time in Warsaw working in isolation, as a teacher of private gymnasium, was the founding father of Polish geography — Waclaw Nałkowski (1851-1911). His views on the essence of geography were, in general, subsequently absorbed to the geography of independent Poland. Works of the most outstanding interwar geographers show the influence of the nineteenth century German geography, and, above all, the heritage of our great predecessor (Wilczyński 1991). The most important peculiarity of Polish geography was its synthetic character. Geography was seen as a counterweight of the unavoidable specialization process in science. Nałkowski has shown:

*The specialist defends geographer from shallowness and from too quick generalizations, and geographer defends in turn against the one sided views of limited horizons of thought; he defends the specialist from straying amid the oppressive weight of details in one exclusive area of study, he teaches to understand these details as an integral parts of a coherent and harmonious whole — the Gaia* (Nałkowski 1911: 11-12).
Geographers realized themselves the danger of excessive specialization of the knowledge, and saw the great educational strength of geographical synthesis. It was expressed by one of the leaders of Polish interwar geography — Ludomir Sawicki of the Jagiellonian University, who wrote some 75 years ago:

*The hitherto existing education of societies has been performed at schools, which have cultivated exclusively the arts or the sciences. And there have emerged two camps. The first consists of people, who are mainly influenced by aesthetics, literature, history, and philosophy, who look at the world with the eyes of idealists, fixed on the past. The other camp in turn is coming from the empirical and looks at the world with the eyes of realists. Failing to embrace with their senses, and to grasp the whole of terrestrial phenomena, both camps have judged reality falsely, making mistakes in the area of public life (...) Geography forces us to put both points of view together, and join the scientific and humanistic perspectives to create an organic whole, it makes us see simultaneously with the eyes of scientists and humanists(...) Modern geography is a field, which wants to unify the whole of terrestrial phenomena, to comprehend them in a coherent view. If we make the cosmos, the eternal order of things intelligible for us, we will master our land and our people with care, and will lead them to where social needs and our conscience tell* (Sawicki 1932: 2-4).

Geography was the field which transcended all boundaries, in which every sharp distinction between different disciplines and particular paths of knowledge disappeared. It was a wonderful journey and in its fascinating views of landscapes strictly scientific knowledge was harmonized with humanistic values and practical wisdom. Of course, except for descriptive-interpretative regional geography, Polish geographers practiced advanced empirical studies. Stanisław Pawłowski (1882-1940) marked out two complementary stages within geographical study. The first, general geography, consists of the description and discovery of some hidden connections that exist between particular elements of the geographical environment, with the use of inductive methods. The other stage is expressed by regional geography. We are moving from the sphere of abstract connections and relations to the domain of perceived and experienced reality. Our aim is to show the individuality or identity of particular territories (Pawłowski 1939). The inductive approach proper to the first stage of geographical inquiry is here supplemented with deduction and interpretation. Strictly scientific explanation is enriched by typically humanistic approach. Both approaches are the necessary components of cognitive process. While inductive studies in general geography were considered as a source of geography's scientific progress, the deductive-interpretative regional geography was seen as an educational device and as a necessary condition of the very existence of the field (Wilczyński 1992). Polish interwar geography was a specific fusion and reconciliation of the positivist analytical methodology with the inclination towards the creation of synthetic visions, full of romanticism and hermeneutic exegesis of landscapes on the other. Supposedly, Polish geography was more “Oriental” in its
character when compared with the Western one (compare de Pater 1989). It is partly due to the romantic idealism which accompanied Polish people in the period of rebuilding independence. This spirit permeated even studies written according to the positivistic methodology.

Marxism-Leninism and scientism — an influential marriage

The Second World War showed to be a great crash for the entire national culture. Also Polish geography lost its many leading representatives, exterminated in concentration camps and murdered in Soviet Gulag. On that account, and because of the imposition of a totalitarian ideology, the continuity of Polish geographical tradition was disrupted. Scientific methodology had to conform with the ideological dogmas of the state. Totalitarian ideology did not tolerate all geographical ideas. Some of them were seen as unworthy of the socialist scientist’s attention. On the register of those excommunicated concepts we can find some issues of theory and philosophy of geography, political geography, cultural geography, behavioral and perception geography, all aspects of humanistic geography (Taylor 1985). Among those “blank spaces” on the body of Polish geography we can also see the history of geographical thought. The Commission on the History of Geography which formally exists in the frame of the Polish Geographical Society is in fact dead and no one geographical faculty has a chair or department on the history and philosophy of geography.

The development of Polish post-war geography went by way of strict specialization and the classical regional geography squeezed out. It was mainly due to the memorable manifesto formulated by the most prominent ideologists at the special conference in Gdańsk in 1949. As the document says, we should only look for the laws which rule over the Earth’s phenomena by way of reliable, empirical research, instead of making efforts in order to create any geographical philosophies (Leszczycki 1949). Polish post-war geography, even if formally referred to the ideology of Marxism-Leninism, remained strongly imbued with pure scientism. The scientism with its indifference in relation to every philosophy, fulfilled the role of geographer’s shield against “just” philosophy. Polish geographers had to play a double game and sometimes it was the matter of “to be or not to be”. They were not in position however to defend the earlier holistic concepts. The privilege of controversy, proper to the potential synthetic visions continually loses its place in competition with the valor of complete certainty, as giving in results of specialized studies. It is because up to this moment, for a successful publication and for obtaining scientific positions and degrees, one had to conform with the official orthodoxy. The notion of geography was replaced by “the system of geographical sciences” in which was no longer any place for “philosophical” considerations or “metaphysical” effusions. Moreover, this “system” was never a real system. In fact, the necessary relations between its particular elements became extremely superficial.
Representatives of particular geographical disciplines lost their common language, and the number of specialist subfields was continually growing. Today each subfield possesses its own commissions, esoteric seminars, terminology, and professional liturgy, i.e. accepted and indisputable set of formulations. Sometimes situations occur in which representatives of all specialist disciplines come together in their patronymic groups, like dispersed members of a family returning home on the occasion of Christmas, for example the annual meetings of Polish Geographical Society. During such a meetings, most tend towards their own group of disputants. The disintegration of geography became sanctioned institutionally, and ancient geography's stock is running low. Polish geographical journals used to publish only the results of specialist research, embellished usually with mathematical formula while the holistic tradition had undergone reduction. In fact, geography in its classical understanding was eliminated, and most of geographers do not understand the very sense of their own research. Even if we formally honor our classics, problematic is the very idea of geography as a science, which is not limited to the mere deepening of the knowledge ever narrower streams of specialization. Geographers mostly prefer the specialist mode of research, perceiving only single aspects of the geographical environment. They touch separated points of reality and do not cover its entire surface. It seemed forgotten that it was not their task to analyze all the kinds of phenomena and to make more and more specific distinctions. The abstract and false distinction between particular branches of physical and human geography today has become a taken-for-granted fact. The process of specialization is undisturbed and unlimited, leading sometimes to the limits of absurdity. For example, a young and progressive Polish geographer asked to explain what was his main research area, formulated his answer along one of the following lines: “I am a specialist of commuting in Kielce district”, or “I am a specialist of rain-drop activity on slopes”, or generally “I am a specialist of the mouse-tail”. And when one asks him again, what else is he interested in, he dispels ones doubts definitely: “I am a specialist of the mouse-tail, and not even the whole tail, but only from here to there!”

For the most of geographers the scientism showed to be a kind of methodological asylum, that is to say, an attitude which was the necessary requirement from the point of view of the survival in the situation of totalitarian limitations. But nowadays those limitations have disappeared. We can again enjoy national independence and the damned notion of People’s Republic has been replaced by the Third Commonwealth. Formally there are no hindrances for us to restore the lost traditions of the interwar geography and to reformulate the old ideas in their modern shape, acceptable to the standards of contemporary scientific requirements. In spite of the fact that there have passed eight years of political and economic transformation, Polish geography is still keeping on the previous epoch scientistic habits. The reasons of this durability of scientism and the inertia, which destroy the chance for development of Polish geography are neither ideological nor methodological matter. So, they are not the matter of scientific research.
Going beyond pure research

It happens from time to time, that the affairs which make the main content of our everyday life, recede into the background and they no longer appear to be matters of major importance. We are then in shock, in love, in peril of our life, or just have experienced a revelation. As well, the development of science may not be devoid of such critical periods, when pure research, kept within generally accepted guidelines is no longer the most important thing. Polish geography happens to be going through just such a critical period. After a half-century, the grip of totalitarian ideology compressing the organizational structure and methodology, has happened to be, at least formally, loosened. Pure scientism, indifferent in relation to ideology, no longer has to be the protective shield of geographers against the aggression of Marxism. Taking advantage of the benefits of liberalism, we can, at least in theory, enrich Polish geography along those lines, which have hitherto failed to develop, and particularly with those, which have been consciously neglected. We should take the opportunity and make Polish geography compatible to its Western counterpart. But is it really possible?

According to Max Planck's statement, the organizational and methodological shift in science is a difficult and long drawn out process. It can not be achieved by convincing the majority of scientists of the validity of new ideas. It comes to fruition only when the older generation is replaced by the new one, which introduces new views and concepts. Particularly difficult seems to be a change in the prevailing ideas on the very essence of the discipline. Polish post war geography has been mainly shaped after the Soviet model. Scientism, strict empiricism, quantitative approach, and indifference in relation to philosophy have been its main attributes. It seems to be unbelievable, that those people, who had created such a reduced geography, would be able to start proclaiming quite different views. So, we can not bank on the people educated in the atmosphere of cold hearted, materialistic scientism. Even if they falsely proclaim their will for deep reform, and their openness to the new views, they will block the way and nip every sign of the new in the bud. The present day problems of Polish geography can not be addressed seriously, if the moral problems are not undertaken. The necessary changes in Polish geography are being hampered not only for reason of specific inertia and attachment of geographers to earlier accepted methodological positions. The main reason for restraint to the necessary changes is the moral decline in Polish geographical circles.

As we can see from the memoirs of Professor Alfred Jahn, “Just after the World War II Polish universities had lost the right to select research workers, and the consequences of which appeared only in several years”. At the universities had appeared many people only thanks to their ideological connections. “A lot of accidentally employed persons had even reached professorships”. And, as a result, “just in the 1960s there had originated the crisis in science,... which at the end of 1970s had assumed the proportions of disaster”. As Professor Jahn explains, the reason for which was neither lack of money nor equipment:
"As I see, that crisis is tantamount to the crisis of human individual,... I reduce it to the moral decline of man. The crisis affected most people, who were being infirm of purpose. Only some outstanding individuals... did not turn traitors at that time" (Jahn 1991: 165-166, 180). It appears to be obvious, that the most fundamental problem of Polish geography is of a moral nature.

The present disastrous situation of Polish geography can be understood only from the perspective of the succeeding Polish communist governments’ policy. Just in the early fifties this policy aimed to dismiss those persons, enjoying particular respect from all the universities, and to appoint other persons to their posts. Later the communists tried to cause a break in correlation between particular school subjects and to introduce the narrow specialization into scientific and educational institutions and curricula. The general aim of the policy was to introduce into the universities people coming from the lowest social classes, who showed no scientific interests, but only had the will to gain scientific degrees.

Now we have to realize, that the people who govern Polish geography are the same people, who could be accepted by the communist authorities. Then, our respect for our professors can not be longer unlimited. Indeed, they are rather very simple people in Poland, who relate the value of a man with the scientific degree he possesses. For it is obvious, that scientific competence has been formally only one of the conditions required for scientific promotion. And we have to emphasize that it has not been the most important. To describe the scientific careers of the most prominent personalities in Polish contemporary geography we have to introduce the character of Konrad Wallenrod.

**Myth of Konrad Wallenrod**

Konrad Wallenrod, a mysterious XIVth century knight from Rhineland, is a hero of the well-known romantic epos by Adam Mickiewicz. During a military expedition he took a Lithuanian boy prisoner. Later the boy came to be his armor-bearer. Thanks to the patriotic songs of the Lithuanian troubadour, who lived at those times at Wallenrod’s court, the boy had not forgotten his language and his native land. When grown up, he killed his lord to escape and defend his people against the Teutonic pressure. When realizing the hopelessness of the fight of his little nation against the pressure of all Christian Europe, he returned to the West. Under the name of his ex-lord, he gained great renown as a conqueror of Saracens, to become later the Grand Master of the Teutonic Knights. As such, he had never really proven himself as a good Christian knight. He had been successful at delaying all the military expeditions against the pagans, who had been constantly bringing Prussian towns to ruin. Finally, he had brought his matter to completion when his great Christian army had been completely exterminated in Lithuanian woods. At that time, due to secret investigation, the truth about the death of the real Wallenrod had been revealed, and the hero was condemned to death.

For many Polish geographers, the attitude of the legendary Lithuanian has become the convenient excuse for their activity in the post-war period. They
have been trying to argue, that if all the honest people had inflexibly refused to collaborate with the regime, to their posts would have been appointed persons completely incapable of managing the research. According to many Polish geographers interpretations, all they could do was to simulate good communists, like the Lithuanian hero had simulated a Teutonic knight. If so, Polish post war geography has had a lot of Wallenrods, who in order to save their native field became turncoats. Contrary to their XIVth century predecessor, they often yielded to the temptation of a chivalrous life under the aegis of the communist party. The temptation of the life at the court was so great that they have been willing to forget their native Lithuania-geography, crossing easily the subtle border line between constrained obedience and disposability. Only a few individuals have avoided to bow before the only “just” ideology and have kept faith with the values, which they have been educated in (Jahn 1992; Wilczyński 1993).

Most of Polish geographers, even if they have called themselves Wallenrods, seem to be contrary in character. They have passed from the position of heroic knight, to the stance of obedience while still being warriors faithful to their ideals. Then, some of them have been reduced to disposable slaves, and finally to traitors.

**Practice of Polish geography**

The greatest influence on the current shape of Polish geography has been exerted by just that generation of those, who wished to be spoken of as Wallenrods. Besides a few studies drawing directly from the ideology of Marxism-Leninism, their scientific output comprises a large number of elaborations of empirical data, usually devoid of methodological aspects. These being the only kind of studies, which conformed to the prevailing ideology. Little attention has been paid however to the possibility of verification of the social relevance of those works. Such a verification seems to be rather impossible, since the language of scientific works has become highly esoteric and no-one, besides the narrow circle of specialists is in a position to question their arguments embellished usually with mathematical formulas.

Experimental research is considered to be important from a practical standpoint. Meanwhile, experimental works concern mainly single facts and episodes rather than problems expecting to be solved by the use of scientific means. For the beginner the greatest difficulty is not the question of how to resolve existing problems, arising from the current state of knowledge. Instead, the majority of young assistants at the universities cudgel their brains over the question of how to find any special topic, which was not yet worked out, and which could be used to apply a particular method, and finally, which would have a chance of publication.

That is why there have appeared a lot of highly sophisticated or even curious subjects of scientific work. It is a symptom of the lack of authenticity of scientific research, and it calls into question the sense of continuation of studies, the social
relevance and real scientific value of which seem to be plain postulate. There appears a glaring disproportion between the number of scientists, the costs of research, and the value of significant output. The scores of insignificant research gain power, and the banks of information swell. Meanwhile there grows the shortage of creative thought (Sedlak 1988). It has become increasingly difficult to find truly creative works in the boundless sea of information added each year to the existing scores. The aim of many scientists has become publication and, as stated by a well known Polish geologist, it is very difficult now to find any essential contents in the mountains of senseless printed matter (Jaroszewski 1993).

The creative ideas originate from doubt or from conflict. Scientific research is however performed in a way, in which eventual conflicts are prevented. Not to irritate the authorities, the controversial ideas are never allowed to surface. The observance of that principle in geographical practice have led to the disappearance in research of its necessary condition, i.e. creativity. Geography no longer relies on creativity. Looking at the doings of many meritorious geographers, at their workshops, laboratories, subtle methods, we can not avoid the impression, that a large part of Polish geography has been reduced to the level of quasi-intellectual deceit.

Here is one of the most vivid example of such seeming research. At one time, some professor had worked out a stupendously sophisticated mathematical method, and then he had collected the necessary empirical data in the course of very long drawn out and expensive field work. When worked out, he had put it into the computer waiting impatiently for the output. And the output of that very labor-consuming procedure appeared to be the infallibility of the statement, that the Holy Cross Mountains do exist, and that they could be divided into several relatively homogeneous parts. Is this not a revelation? From now on, people in Bodzentyn and St. Catharine, looking out of their windows in the mornings, will not have to rely on their very deceptive sense of sight. Thanks to this scientific discovery, they can with unshaken conviction say, that they live in the middle of the Holy Cross Mountains.

Elaborations of that kind are read mainly by the students, who have to gain a credit or pass an exam at their professor’s chair. One day they will appear to be very attractive subjects for historians of science, searching for various forms of scientific pathology. Such studies do not contribute to scientific progress. They only cause the raising of an informational cloud, which obfuscates the ways of geography, led astray by the analytical obsession and by the euphoria of the easy career on the carrying wave of experimental quantitiveness (Sedlak 1984).

Fate of dissenters

Not all Polish geographers are inclined to accept the present day situation of the discipline. But those, who wish to extricate geography, and to show any new perspectives are being restrained by methodological customs, as well as by regulations, norms and habits, which rule academic life. The organizational structure
of science does not allow for the development of research, which can not be contained into the frames of narrow specialization. Interdisciplinary studies are continually ignored by the universities as well as by the Committee of Scientific Research — the only institution which has the right to establish the list of scientific disciplines and to judge what is science and what is not.

We need however to create the place for those, who could be able to look at some specialist problems from a broader perspective, to join them with logical or interpretative cement, to create the syntheses, necessary to show the very sense of scientific research. There, in that interpretative aspect, and not in pure facts appears the enlivening controversy. And it is for just this reason, that geographers used to avoid the holistic interpretations and that they seem to be satisfied with so-called protocollar facts. To describe the protocollar facts in an analytical way, one need not to think creatively. The proficiency in repetition of learned algorithms may be sufficient there. Scientistic habits are so strong nowadays, that the synthesis is seen to be just an incoherent mix of facts, a “belles lettres” devoid of any scientific value (Wilczyński 1995).

The arrangement of institutional conditions for the truly creative, based on controversial science research will not be easy. Every controversy around any creative idea, which is necessary for the scientific progress, appears to be highly undesirable for scientific authorities. It can be easily converted into the contestation of their personal views and merits. Moreover, those scientists who decide to leave the comfortable niche of analytical experimentalism, and to enter the rugged way of synthetic investigations will probably annihilate their chance of speedy promotion. It is easy to foresee huge difficulties in obtaining imprimatur and in gaining necessary financial support for their research. Editorial boards as well as the bodies having the right to recommend eligible research projects are appointed by the persons, who have no appreciation for too different ideas. So, those individuals who do not have the proper connections and who are not inclined to avoid controversy according to the habits consolidated during the last 50 years, are left without a chance. In the context of the Commission Symposium on gatekeeping in Saragossa in 1993 it must be emphasized that the notion of gatekeeping does not exist in Polish and all efforts aimed at the analysis of this phenomenon are not allowed to surface. This is mainly due to the activity of some very influential professors who wish to avoid to use this embarrassing word at all, and in particular in their reports published in Poland. Their efforts failed (comp. Babicz 1994; Wilczyński 1995A), but they are still very efficient in their activity as gatekeepers.

If we want to close the period of avoiding ticklish questions, the era of false modesty and exaggerated tactfulness, we will have to make our journals and conferences the field for open discussions. Changes in the way of conference arrangement as well as changes in the way of functioning of editorial boards are however necessary. At present they are effectively prevented by some binding norms in academic circles.

One of these unwritten norms, which regulate the relations between scientists is the principle, that those who have a higher degree or a higher position,
and not necessarily those who have essential arguments, are right. What is before one’s name is more important than what one has in one’s mind. And not all, who have original concepts and ideas appear to be able to improve their position in the scientific hierarchy. There are a lot of examples of individuals, who have been forced to leave Poland or to give up the profession. Only the most patient are waiting for their turn, for the moment when most of the gatekeepers will finish their career (Winklewski 1993).

Polish science does not enjoy as much respect among society as does science in most Western countries. It is largely because of pathologies, which have appeared in Polish science due to the ideological circumstances of the last half-century. One of the measures of scientific progress is thought to be the number of doctorates and habilitations. Which scientists are considered to be due for promotion? Who can attain the honor of being a doctor, and a professor? Of course, all decisions in these affairs fall by right to the bodies, which consist of earlier promoted professors. And that is why Polish science is losing its esteem. For a lot of professors have reached their positions and titles thanks to the achievements which have nothing to do with research. Today they do not even have to make as if they are interested in scientific research. They are satisfied with their positions in various committees, editorial boards, and commissions which are to give opinions of concepts and projects designed by the others.

Let us look at the system of scientific promotion in Poland. Realizing the necessity of scientific degrees we have to ascertain however, that the Polish system of doctorates and habilitations, all this hierarchic structure is seriously ill. It is not true, for example, that for promotion are thought to be eligible the most intelligent, most gifted and hard working scientists. Some promotions do not originate as a result of efforts of candidates trying to crown with success their work. The real creators of many doctoral promotions are in fact associate professors, who wish to improve their own positions (i.e. to become full professors). They are just those, who actively look for eligible candidates. They agitate, incite to cooperation, invite to conferences, make easier publications, etc. But they neither make it for the great idea of scientific development nor because they wish to help their younger colleagues. First of all, they do it for they wish to get candidates for the degree. Without being the referee and without conferring a degree, the increase of their own positions would not be possible (at least in theory). And this is the reason that the general intellectual capabilities of a considerable number of persons having the doctoral degree are running low, and their knowledge of their own fields is poor because of their inability of reading in foreign languages.

What about the very completion of doctoral (post doctoral) proceedings? To get a degree one has to prepare the dissertation, and then to defend it before the faculty. Before that however there are inconspicuous requirements concerning
the earlier output of the candidate. What should be the dissertation? Should it be revealing and make a step ahead on the way of scientific development? Not necessarily. That appears to be of secondary importance. If the doctorate or habilitation is to be awarded, the dissertation must not be controversial. It must not question any fixed opinions and consolidated paradigms, for there among the faculty members can just appear followers of such views. It must not be too unconventional, for not striking with excessive dissimilarity of style in comparison to the generally accepted convention. It necessarily must include some contents, which are easily confirmed by the specialists, which assist the defense, that is to say, the contents which are self evident. The only alternative is to make the dissertation intelligible for no one. In the dissertation one must not convince that it may be different than it is generally considered to be. If one behaves otherwise, among the referees will immediately originate the doubts concerning the candidate’s maturity.

For many, the scientific degree have become the objective in itself. At the cost of simulated tactfulness, false modesty, and the gratitude for the “invaluable critical remarks” they unanimously enter a well trod path of doctorates and habilitations. Surely, Polish geography has many true scientists, who could be able to steer it on new ways, which are beyond the analytical experimentalists reach. But the valuation of those geographers work falls within the cognizance of the high ranking personages, who first of all wish to keep the status quo and to survive quietly till retirement. Fat volumes of doctoral and post doctoral dissertations are food for worms while geography stands at a deadlock, and keeps intensifying specialist studies, systematizing and classifying continually the same matters, although with the use of again and again newer means and methods.

Considering this current state of geographical affairs in Poland one can see the visions of Włodzimierz Sedlak being fulfilled:

*The scientists are like a herd of intelligent sheep. Each, looking at the tail of the one in front of him thinks he sees the leader of the herd, and he concludes that the way is correct because he can see the well trod path. Only the black sheep, the anarchist dissents from popular opinion and cries out that they are going the wrong way. But they say he is just a madman, a lunatic. Meanwhile the herd of intelligent sheep blindly continue on their intellectual parade* (1988).

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