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Oldřich Hájek

Kolegium Jagiellońskie – Toruńska Szkoła Wyższa,  
Faculty of Administration and Economic Studies in Uherské Hradiště, Czech Republic

Jana Novosáková

Newton College, Czech Republic

Michal Lukač

University of St. Cyril and Methodius in Trnava, Slovakia

# Regional Disparities on The New Silk Road: Some Thoughts about Regional Convergence

**Key words:** regional disparities; One Belt, One Road Initiative; regional development

## Abstract

Regional disparities are a research and political theme that has received considerable attention. This is also because regional disparities constitute a pull factor of migration, because high regional disparities may seriously threaten territorial integrity, and because socioeconomic development potential is not fully realized in lagging regions. Not surprisingly, regional disparities are an important research and political theme for New Silk Road countries and this is also reflected in the focus of this paper. The primary aim of this paper is to characterize regional disparities in selected New Silk Road countries, namely in China, in Russia and in Visegrad Four countries, and subsequently to discuss the relationship between regional disparities and the One Belt, One Road Initiative. The results point out the presence of a pattern of regional disparities in the countries. In this regard, the importance of the East-West gradient, of spatial hierarchy, and of inherited specialization is particularly emphasized. Reflecting the pattern of regional disparities, the potential of the One Belt, One Road Initiative to stimulate development of lagging regions is indicated.

## Introduction

Regional disparities are a research and political theme that has received considerable attention<sup>1</sup>. This is due to several reasons. Firstly, large regional inequalities may threaten territorial integrity, national unity and also regional security because of dissatisfaction of poor, but

also of rich, regions<sup>2</sup>. A number of examples may be given, including the North-South divide of Italian provinces. Secondly, regional disparities provide an essential

<sup>1</sup> M.M. Fischer, C. Stirböck, Pan-European regional income growth and club-convergence, *The Annals of Regional Science* (2006), 40(4), pp. 693–721; G. Petrakos, P. Artelaris, Regional inequalities in Greece [in:] *Regional Analysis and Policy. The Greek Experience*, Heidelberg 2008, pp. 121–139.

<sup>2</sup> L. Grigorev, N. Zubarevich, I. Urozhaeva, The Scylla and Charybdis of regional policy, *Problems of Economic Transition* (2009), 51(12), pp. 58–77; R. Ezcurra, Does income polarization affect economic growth? The case of the European regions, *Regional Studies* (2009), 43(2), pp. 267–285; V.N. Kholina, M.N. Mironova, The Russian economics space: evolution during periods of reform, growth and crisis (1990–2010), *Miscellanea Geographica* (2012), 16(1), pp. 23–28.

element of the push-pull theory of migration<sup>3</sup>. Hence, people migrate to seek higher income and a better quality of life in more developed regions. Thirdly, the argument about economic efficiency is of importance due to the unused potential of production factors, particularly of labour-force, in lagging regions<sup>4</sup>. Consequently, the interest in regional disparities, and also in regional policies, arises.

These considerations are of particular relevance for the One Belt One Road Initiative. Overholt claims<sup>5</sup> that the One Belt One Road Initiative, led by China, is: “*a vision of common development of up to 60 (Eurasian and African) countries based on infrastructure development and common standards*”. Naturally, the territory covered by the Initiative is characterized by huge between- and within-country inequalities. Therefore, it seems desirable to discuss the One Belt One Road Initiative in the context of within-country regional disparities in selected Initiative countries, particularly in China, in Russia and in the Visegrad Four (hereafter referred to as V4) countries. This is also the intent of this paper, which is structured as follows. The first section provides theoretical framework relating to the influence of transport infrastructure on regional development. The second section deals with within-country regional disparities in China, the third section with within-country regional disparities in Russia, and the fourth section with within-country regional disparities in the V4 countries. The fifth section concludes, discussing the relationship between within-country regional disparities and the One Belt One Road Initiative.

### Theoretical framework – transport infrastructure and regional development

A number of theories and factors have been proposed to explain differences in regional development. Capello

distinguishes<sup>6</sup> four groups of theories and factors of regional development on the basis of the following two perspectives: (a) the macro- or microeconomic perspectives; and (b) the active or passive role of space. In this regard, the macroeconomic perspective examines the influence of particular factors on regional development using econometric models, while the microeconomic perspective is more focussed on individuals' behaviour. Concerning the passive role of space, the advantages of spatial proximity and of spatial externalities are not considered, while the opposite is true for the active role of space<sup>7</sup>. Table 1 illustrates the classification of theories and factors of regional development with respect to the two defined perspectives.

The One Belt One Road Initiative emphasizes the importance of infrastructure for regional development<sup>8</sup>. This is why the theoretical framework of this paper follows this route and investigates the influence of transport infrastructure on regional development. It is worth noting that transport infrastructure has been an essential element of the classical location theories already since the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century<sup>9</sup>. However, no definitive conclusion regarding these effects has been provided.

Table 1. Classification of theories and factors of regional development

	Macroeconomic perspective	Microeconomic perspective
<b>Passive role of space</b>	Factors: resource endowments, production specialization Theories: neoclassical growth model, export base theory	Factors: infrastructure, accessibility, exogenous technologies, the presence of large firms Theories: growth poles theory, core-periphery models

<sup>3</sup> A. Demuth, Some conceptual thoughts on migration research [in:] Theoretical and Methodological Issues in Migration Research: Interdisciplinary, Intergenerational and International Perspectives, Aldershot 2000, pp. 21–57.

<sup>4</sup> M. Boldrin, F. Canova, Inequality and convergence in Europe's regions: reconsidering European regional policies, Economic Policy (2001), 16(32), pp. 207–253.; P. Nijkamp, Regional development as self-organized converging growth [in:] Spatial Disparities and Development Policy, Washington 2009, pp. 265–282.

<sup>5</sup> W.H. Overholt, One Belt, One Road, One Pivot, Global Asia (2015), 10(3), pp. 1–8.

<sup>6</sup> R. Capello, Space and theoretical approaches to regional growth [in:] Modelling Regional Scenarios for the Enlarged Europe, Berlin 2008, pp. 13–31.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibidem*; O. Hájek, Regionální disparity a regionální politika: Česká republika programovém období 2007–2013 [Regional Disparities and Regional Policy: the Czech Republic in the Programming Period 2007–2013], Žilina 2011.

<sup>8</sup> W.H. Overholt, *op.cit.*

<sup>9</sup> G. Weisbrod, Models to predict the economic development impact of transportation projects: historical experience and new applications, The Annals of Regional Science (2008), 42(3), pp. 519–543; K. Gkritza et al., Influence of highway construction projects on economic development: an empirical assessment, The Annals of Regional Science (2008), 42(3), pp. 545–563.

Tab. 1 – cont.

	Macroeconomic perspective	Microeconomic perspective
<b>Active role of space</b>	Factors: increasing returns Theories: endogenous growth theories, new economic geography	Factors: agglomeration economies, spatial externalities, endogenous technologies and knowledge Theories: learning regions, industrial districts, innovative milieu

Source: adapted from Capello (2008); Hájek (2011)

The most straightforward arguments concerning the influence of transport infrastructure on regional development are that: (a) improved transport infrastructure decreases transport costs<sup>10</sup>; and that (b) improved transport infrastructure facilitates market access through improved connectivity<sup>11</sup>. Consequently, investments in transport infrastructure projects may be recommended to stimulate the development of peripheral regions. Two counter-arguments, however, can be made in this respect<sup>12</sup>:

- Firstly, transport infrastructure projects often improve more the accessibility of core regions than the accessibility of peripheral regions;
- Secondly, transport infrastructure projects may improve the access to markets of core regions. Nevertheless, improved transport infrastructure also cheapens import prices from core to peripheral regions. Consequently, firms in peripheral regions lose their protection from high transport costs and they may become uncompetitive and at risk for failure<sup>13</sup>.

Accordingly, the influence of transport infrastructure on regional development and regional disparities

must be viewed in the broader socioeconomic context<sup>14</sup>. It is claimed that transport infrastructure is necessary but not sufficient condition for regional development<sup>15</sup>. Moreover, the relationship between improved transport infrastructure and convergence of regional disparities is not definite.

## Regional disparities in China

China's reforms that started in the late 1970s have brought dramatic growth and change in the country<sup>16</sup>. Hence, China has experienced high economic growth rates<sup>17</sup> and China's poverty rates have been reduced substantially<sup>18</sup>. However, the spectacular economic growth of China has been also accompanied by several problems, including within-country regional disparities<sup>19</sup>.

Jeong and Jang<sup>20</sup>, Fan, Kanbur and Zhang<sup>21</sup> mention at least three dimensions of disparities in China: (a) regions; (b) city-countryside; and (c) social classes. The former two are of spatial nature and therefore of importance for this paper. Regarding the regional dimension of disparities, Chen<sup>22</sup>, Frattini, Nicolli and Prodi<sup>23</sup> emphasize the differences between coastal and interior regions. These were particularly coastal regions of China that benefited significantly from the Open-Door Policy initiated in the late 1970s. The main factors of the

<sup>14</sup> R. Crescenzi, A. Rodriguez-Pose, *op.cit.*

<sup>15</sup> R. Capello, *op.cit.*

<sup>16</sup> Y.D.Wei, Multiscale and multimechanisms of regional inequality in China: implications for regional policy, *Journal of Contemporary China* (2002), 11(30), pp. 109–124, 2002.

<sup>17</sup> H.Y. Jeong, J.H. Jang, Effects of regional development policies on the resolution of income disparity in China, *Journal of Economic and Financial Studies* (2015), 3(6), pp. 45–57; F. Frattini, G. Nicolli, G. Prodi, Growth convergence and local steady states across Chinese prefectures, *Applied Economics Letters* (2017), 24(8), pp. 563–566; Y. Li, Y.H.D. Wei, The spatial-temporal hierarchy of regional inequality of China, *Applied Geography* (2010), 30(3), pp. 303–316.

<sup>18</sup> S. Fan, R. Kanbur, X. Zhang, China's regional disparities: experience and policy, *Review of Development Finance* (2011), 1(1), pp. 47–56.

<sup>19</sup> A. Chen, Reducing China's regional disparities: is there a growth cost?, *China Economics Review* (2010), 21(1), pp. 2–13; A. Chen, N. Groenewold, Reducing regional disparities in China: an evaluation of alternative policies, *Journal of Comparative Economics* (2010), 38(2), pp. 189–198; Y. Li, Y.H.D. Wei, *op.cit.*

<sup>20</sup> H.Y. Jeong, J.H. Jang, *op.cit.*

<sup>21</sup> S. Fan, R. Kanbur, X. Zhang, *op.cit.*

<sup>22</sup> A. Chen, *op.cit.*

<sup>23</sup> F. Frattini, G. Nicolli, G. Prodi, *op.cit.*

<sup>10</sup> M. Lambrinidis, Y. Psycharis, A. Rovolis, Regional allocation of public infrastructure investment: the case of Greece, *Regional Studies* (2005), 39(9), pp. 1231–1244.

<sup>11</sup> R. Crescenzi, A. Rodriguez-Pose, *Innovation and Regional Growth*, Berlin 2011; R. Vickerman, K. Spiekermann, M. Wegener, Accessibility and economic development in Europe, *Regional Studies* (1999), 33(1), pp. 1–15.

<sup>12</sup> D. Puga, European regional policies in light of recent location theories, *Journal of Economic Geography* (2002), 2(4), pp. 373–406; R. Vickerman, K. Spiekermann, M. Wegener, *op.cit.*; R. Crescenzi, A. Rodriguez-Pose, *op.cit.*

<sup>13</sup> S. Dall'Erba, Distribution of regional income and regional funds in Europe 1989–1999: an exploratory spatial data analysis, *Annals of Regional Science* (2005), 39(1), pp. 121–148.

above-average economic growth of coastal regions relate to their better connection to global markets and to their better preparedness for marketization of China's economy<sup>24</sup>. Moreover, special economic zones were firstly established in the coastal regions, aiming at attracting foreign direct investments to China<sup>25</sup> and also internal migration followed new jobs in the coastal areas<sup>26</sup>.

The rise in within-country regional disparities, caused by the economic reforms initiated in the late 1970s, attracted attention to the question of more balanced regional development. Consequently, new policies, such as the Go West Development Strategy (2000–2005), were designed to stimulate the development of interior regions and to reduce spatial inequalities in China<sup>27</sup>. Additionally, Li and Wei, Zhang<sup>28</sup> mention the focus of policies on revitalizing and transforming the old industrial base of Northeast China. Finally, new policies relating to education, to healthcare and social security and to agriculture development were adopted to improve the quality of life in China's countryside. The main aim of these policies is to reduce the long-term large urban-rural disparities in China<sup>29</sup>.

Table 2. Gross Regional Product per capita – coefficient of variation; China's provinces, selected years

Year	1996	2000	2005	2010	2015
Coefficient of variation	0.64	0.69	0.66	0.51	0.43

Source: own calculations based on the National Bureau of Statistics of China (2017); available online from <<http://data.stats.gov.cn/english/>>

Table 3. Gross Regional Product per capita (yuan) in 2015 – top 5 and bottom 5 China's provinces

Province	GRP per capita	Province	GRP per capita
Tianjin	107,960	Shanxi	34,919
Beijing	106,497	Tibet	31,999
Shanghai	103,796	Guizhou	29,847
Jiangsu	87,995	Yunnan	28,806
Zhejiang	77,664	Gansu	26,165

Source: the National Bureau of Statistics of China (2017); available online from <<http://data.stats.gov.cn/english/>>

<sup>24</sup> S. Fan, R. Kanbur, X. Zhang, *op.cit.*

<sup>25</sup> H.Y. Jeong, J.H. Jang, *op.cit.*

<sup>26</sup> *Ibidem*; S. Fan, R. Kanbur, X. Zhang, *op.cit.*

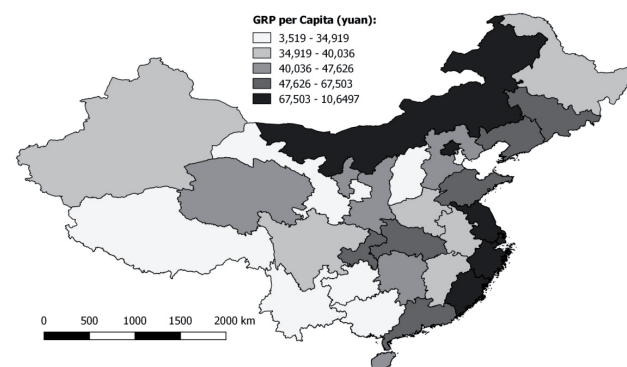
<sup>27</sup> H.Y. Jeong, J.H. Jang, *op.cit.*; Y. Li, Y.H.D. Wei, *op.cit.*; A. Chen, *op.cit.*; A. Chen, N. Groenewold, *op.cit.*

<sup>28</sup> Y. Li, Y.H.D. Wei, *op.cit.*; Zhang, *op.cit.*

<sup>29</sup> S. Fan, R. Kanbur, X. Zhang, *op.cit.*

Despite the efforts of Chinese government to reduce regional disparities and despite the decreasing trend in this regard (see table 2), regional disparities have remained an important issue for Chinese government. Table 3 shows the China's top 5 and bottom 5 provinces with respect to the Gross Regional Product (GRP) per capita. It is indicated that the average GRP per capita of the top 5 provinces is more than three times of the GRP per capita of the bottom 5 provinces. Additionally, the coastal-interior (East-West) and urban-rural pattern of regional disparities is apparent (see table 3; figure 1). Overall, it is fully substantiated to think about the One Road One Belt Initiative in the context of the China's within-country regional disparities.

Figure 1. Gross Regional Product per capita (yuan) in 2015 – China's provinces



Source: own elaboration based on the National Bureau of Statistics of China (2017); available online from <<http://data.stats.gov.cn/english/>>

## Regional disparities in Russia

Zubarevich and Safronov<sup>30</sup> characterize Russia as a vast and heterogeneous territory. Similarly, Artobolevskii<sup>31</sup> point out a wide variety of Russian regions. Regional disparities are therefore a highly relevant issue for the country<sup>32</sup>. It is worth noting that Zubarevich and Safronov<sup>33</sup>, Kholina and Mironova<sup>34</sup>, Kolomak<sup>35</sup> empha-

<sup>30</sup> N.V. Zubarevich, S.G. Safronov, Regional inequality in large Post-Soviet countries, *Regional Research of Russia* (2011), 1(1), pp. 15–26.

<sup>31</sup> S.S. Artobolevskii, Regional policy: social compensation or economic development? *Regional Research of Russia* (2013), 3(1), pp. 75–81.

<sup>32</sup> V.N. Kholina, M.N. Mironova, *op.cit.*

<sup>33</sup> N.V. Zubarevich, S.G. Safronov, *op.cit.*

<sup>34</sup> V.N. Kholina, M.N. Mironova, *op.cit.*

<sup>35</sup> E. Kolomak, Spatial inequalities in Russia: dynamic and sectoral analysis, *International Journal of Economic Poli-*



size increasing regional disparities among Russian regions particularly after the collapse of socialism in the 1990s. This is because the socialist redistributive mechanism was substantially weakened and the success of particular regions has become significantly dependent on their capacity to adapt to market conditions. However, Zubarevich and Safronov<sup>36</sup> claim that the Russian redistributive policy has remained relatively strong if compared with the redistributive policy of Kazakhstan or Ukraine.

The pattern of regional disparities in Russia is primarily influenced by two groups of factors<sup>37</sup>:

- The first group relates to natural factors, including resource endowment and location;
- The second group relates to man-made factors, including human capital and institutions.

Considering the importance of these two groups of factors, Kholina and Mironova<sup>38</sup> emphasize the following aspects of regional disparities in Russia. Firstly, there is a divide between the European part and the Asian part of Russia. While the first group of factors is of a high importance for the Asian part of Russia, the second group of factors plays an essential role particularly in the European part of Russia. Note that Zubarevich and Safronov<sup>39</sup>, Kolomak<sup>40</sup> point out an increasing importance of the man-made factors in regional development, potentially contributing to increasing regional disparities. Secondly, agglomeration economies are regarded as another key factor of regional differentiation in Russia. On the contrary, peripheral regions (e.g. Siberia, Far East, and Northern Caucasus) suffer from financial and human capital outflow. Thirdly, a number of regions have been negatively affected by their industrial specialization when their dominant industry has experienced considerable difficulties.

Table 4. Gross Regional Product per capita – coefficient of variation; Russian regions, selected years

Year	2005	2010	2014
Coefficient of variation	0.86	0.76	0.74

Source: own calculations based on FSGS<sup>41</sup>

cy in *Emerging Economies* (2013), 6(4), pp. 375–402.

<sup>36</sup> N.V. Zubarevich, S.G. Safronov, *op.cit.*

<sup>37</sup> *Ibidem.*

<sup>38</sup> V.N. Kholina, M.N. Mironova, *op.cit.*

<sup>39</sup> N.V. Zubarevich, S.G. Safronov, *op.cit.*

<sup>40</sup> E. Kolomak, *op.cit.*

<sup>41</sup> FSGS, Регионы России. Социально-экономические показатели 2016, Moscow 2016.

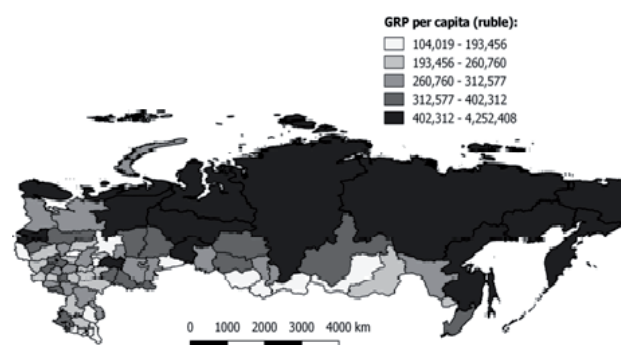
Table 5. Gross Regional Product per capita (ruble) in 2014 – top 5 and bottom 5 Russian regions

Region	GRP per capita	Region	GRP per capita
Sakhalin	1,620,313	Karachay-Cherkess	147,397
Tyumen	1,453,073	Ivanovo	145,235
Chukot	1,118,862	Kabardin-Balkar	137,437
Moscow City	1,053,950	Ingush	113,791
Sakha	690,643	Chechnya	104,019

Source: FSGS<sup>42</sup>

Table 4 and table 5 illustrate statistics on regional disparities in Russia, with respect to the Gross Regional Product (GRP) per capita. Firstly, the values of the coefficient of variation (table 4) indicate large, though decreasing, regional disparities among Russian regions. As table 5 shows, this is caused by the high GRP per capita of two groups of regions: (a) mineral-rich regions; and (b) main agglomerations (see also figure 2). On the contrary, the lowest GRP per capita is characteristic for the Northern Caucasus regions, but also for some rural regions and for peripheral South-Siberian regions (see also figure 2).

Figure 2. Gross Regional Product per capita (ruble) in 2014 – Russian regions



Source: own elaboration based on FSGS<sup>43</sup>

## Regional disparities in the V4 countries

Regional disparities of the V4 countries have been influenced by the collapse of socialist regimes at the end of the 1980s. Subsequently, the V4 countries underwent a number of economic, social and political re-

<sup>42</sup> FSGS, *op.cit.*

<sup>43</sup> *Ibidem.*

forms that have altered the importance of particular factors of regional development. Firstly, the industrial structure of post-socialist countries has been changed. In this regard, the importance of services has been reinforced and deindustrialization and reindustrialization processes have repositioned economic strength of particular regions<sup>44</sup>. Secondly, post-socialist transformation has been accompanied by the increasing importance of agglomeration economies, new knowledge and innovations, human capital and other market-based factors of regional development<sup>45</sup>.

Regarding regional disparities of the V4 countries, the capacity of particular regions to adapt to changing conditions was not the same<sup>46</sup>. Consequently, a number of authors point out increasing within-country regional disparities in the V4 countries<sup>47</sup>, though the between-country regional disparities tend to converge<sup>48</sup>. Moreover, some typical features of regional imbalances in the V4 countries have been identified:

- Firstly, large metropolitan areas have benefited significantly from agglomeration economies. Therefore, their socio-economic performance is considerably better compared to that of non-metropolitan areas<sup>49</sup>;
- Secondly, the proximity to EU markets is essen-

tial for the development of V4 regions. Generally, Eastern regions indicate a higher propensity to lag behind their Western counterparts<sup>50</sup>;

- Thirdly, there are regions suffering from deindustrialization and loss of employment opportunities. Besides peripheral regions, this is the second group of disadvantaged regions in the V4 countries<sup>51</sup>.

Table 6 and table 7 illustrate statistics on regional disparities among the V4 regions with respect to the Gross Regional Product (GRP) per capita. In this regard, the presence of large regional disparities is revealed. Moreover, the strong position of the main metropolitan areas is suggested (see table 7 and figure 3). Moreover, table 7 and figure 3 support the claim that Eastern V4 regions lag behind their Western counterparts. Generally, the lowest GRP per capita values are reported for the Eastern V4 regions.

Table 6. Gross Regional Product per capita – coefficient of variation; NUTS 2 regions (V4 countries), selected years

Year	2005	2010	2015
Coefficient of variation	0.48	0.48	0.44

Source: own calculations based on Eurostat (2017); available online from <<http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/data/database>>

Table 7. Gross Regional Product per capita (EUR) in 2015 – top 5 and bottom 5 NUTS 2 regions (V4 countries)

Region	GRP per capita	Region	GRP per capita
Bratislavský	54,400	Dél-Alföld	13,900
Prague	51,400	Lubelskie	13,600
Mazowieckie	31,600	Dél-Dunántúl	12,900
Közép-Magyarország	30,400	Észak-Magyarország	12,900
South East	23,500	Észak-Alföld	12,500

Source: Eurostat (2017); available online from <<http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/data/database>>

<sup>44</sup> G. Lux, The institutional conditions of reindustrialization in post-crisis Central Europe, *Journal of Economics and Management* (2015), 19(1), pp. 16–33; R. Ezcurra, P. Pascual, M. Rapún, The dynamics of regional disparities in Central and Eastern Europe during transition, *European Planning Studies* (2007), 15(10), pp. 1397–1421.

<sup>45</sup> B. Banerjee, M. Jarmuzek, Economic growth and regional disparities in the Slovak Republic. *Comparative Economics Studies* (2010), 52(3), pp. 379–403; O. Hudec, M. Prochádzková, Visegrad countries and regions: innovation performance and efficiency, *Quality, Innovation, Prosperity* (2015), 19(2), pp. 55–72; R. Ezcurra, P. Pascual, M. Rapún, *op.cit.*

<sup>46</sup> R. Ezcurra, P. Pascual, M. Rapún, *op.cit.*

<sup>47</sup> P. Artelaris, D. Kallioras, G. Petrakos, Regional inequalities and convergence clubs in the European Union new member-states, *Eastern Journal of European Studies* (2010), 1(1), pp. 113–133; R. Ezcurra, P. Pascual, M. Rapún, *op.cit.*; A. Golejewska, Competitiveness, innovation and regional development. The case of the Visegrad Group countries, *Gospodarka Narodowa* (2013), 24(7–8), pp. 87–112.

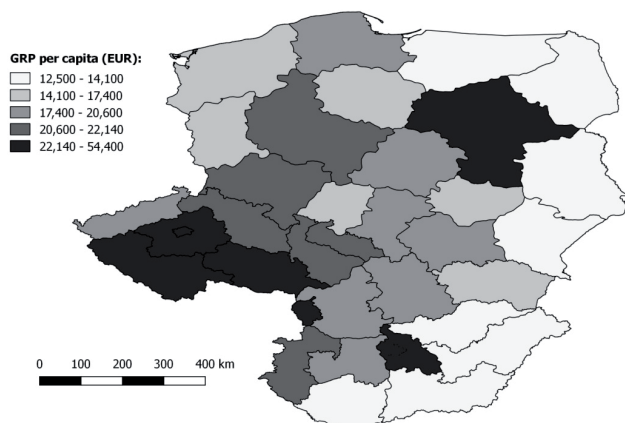
<sup>48</sup> P. Zdražil, P. Applová, Growth disparities among regions of the Visegrad Group countries: an evidence of their extent and nature, *Ekonomie a management* (2016), 19(2), pp. 37–52.

<sup>49</sup> P. Artelaris, D. Kallioras, G. Petrakos, *op.cit.*; R. Ezcurra, P. Pascual, M. Rapún, *op.cit.*; B. Banerjee, M. Jarmuzek, *op.cit.*; A. Golejewska, *op.cit.*

<sup>50</sup> B. Banerjee, M. Jarmuzek, *op.cit.*; M. Smetkowski, Regional disparities in Central and Eastern European countries: trends, drivers and prospects, *Europe-Asia Studies* (2013), 65(8), pp. 1529–1554; P. Artelaris, D. Kallioras, G. Petrakos, *op.cit.*; R. Ezcurra, P. Pascual, M. Rapún, *op.cit.*; A. Golejewska, *op.cit.*

<sup>51</sup> A. Golejewska, *op.cit.*; M. Smetkowski, *op.cit.*

Figure 3. Gross Regional Product per capita (EUR) in 2015  
– NUTS 2 regions (V4 countries)



Source: own calculations based on Eurostat (2017); available online from <<http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/data/database>>

## Discussion and conclusions

The intent of this paper was to discuss the One Belt One Road Initiative in the context of within-country regional disparities in selected Initiative countries, particularly in China, in Russia and in the V4 countries. In this regard, it was shown that regional disparities are a highly relevant research and political theme for all the countries. Moreover, the pattern of regional disparities indicates some typical characteristics of each of the countries. Table 8 summarizes the findings.

Table 8. Characteristics of regional disparities in the analyzed countries – summary

Country	Characteristics
<b>China</b>	Regional disparities – coastal (East) vs interior (West) regions Urban hierarchy – urban vs rural areas
<b>Russia</b>	Northern Caucasus and South Siberia as lagging regions Mineral-rich regions as the richest regions Urban hierarchy – urban vs rural areas
<b>V4 countries</b>	Regional disparities – West vs East regions Urban hierarchy – urban vs rural areas

Source: own elaboration

Regarding the One Belt One Road Initiative, this could have important influence on regional development and regional disparities of analyzed countries. The “Silk Road Economic Belt” stretches across interior China, Western Russia and V4 countries. Hence, the belt may be perceived to be somehow opposite to the typical directions of regional inequalities in China

and V4 countries, creating potential for more balanced regional development. Concerning Russia, the belt stretches close to the Moscow region. Therefore, the Russian story seems to be different from that of China and V4 countries and more focussed on the competitiveness objective of regional development. Because the One Belt One Road Initiative is infrastructure oriented, it is desirable to consider the theoretical framework relating to the influence of transport infrastructure on regional development and regional disparities.

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