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SMALL CITY AND ITS REGION: HUEJUTLA DE REYES

INTRODUCTION

Small cities, forgotten and out of the way of main currents of socio-economic development of countries and regions, for a few years have been attracting attention of scientists and planners. This is connected with processes occurring in geographical space, mainly with the growth of the number of professionally active population in rural areas and its exodus to large cities on the one hand and with a rapid growth of the number of population and the area covered by cities on the other hand. In both cases there is a problem what should be done with the surplus of manpower, usually unskilled, which moves from one region to another looking for jobs. Thus there appears a concept to support development of small and medium-sized cities to which the stream of population should and must be directed. Then the cities could become centres stimulating development and emitting innovations in their regions which in result could contribute to modernization of the countryside and putting a stop to the outflow of population from rural areas. The importance and topicality of the problem is confirmed by a considerable number of publications appearing recently on the subject¹ and conferences² organized by international and national organizations.

DRAFT CONCEPT

Basing on the definition of a system as an existence which tries to exist within a changing surrounding we can assume that a small city is such a system which undergoes transformations in result of external activities. Impulses reaching the city from its surrounding cause changes in the city's structure and functions. The most important are as follows:

¹ Worth mentioning are mainly works published by Rondinelli, Hardoy and Satterwaite.

² For example, "Conferencia sobre la poblacion y las ciudades pequeñas y medianas en America Latina y El Caribe", México 1986, and "Development of medium-sized cities in Central and Eastern Europe", Hungary 1986.

(a) demographic changes (growth of the number of population, changes in the age- and sex-structure of its inhabitants, in the structure of working population).

(b) Functional transformations,

A small city under the influence of external impulses changes its functions from a highly specialized service centre for the local market and gradually its functions become more differentiated. Most often the first step towards functional transformations is differentiation of services: from simple ones to more specialized ones, usually requiring some professional training from the newly employed. Frequently changing functions are connected with location of an industrial plant (e.g. within the framework of a policy to industrialize the interior, to decentralize industry from a large centre, a policy to develop growth poles, etc.) or with development of transportation, and storing facilities for a vast region.

In order to learn the functions of a city it is necessary to examine relations between social systems (people, standards and models of their behaviour) and sub-systems: production, culture, education, etc. Within each sub-system there occur relations which condition the character of a city development, its form and specific features, different from those of other urban centres.

(c) Changes in spatial structure of a city or in its development when, according to M. Ptaszyńska-Wołoczkowicz, "all constructions permanently change the picture of the earth's surface". Urban space undergoes constant transformations which sometimes are hard to notice and at other times they assume a rapid course. Thus, the area covered by a city is gradually expanding. Initially new buildings are located along main exit roads; afterwards the space between them becomes to fill in. Often a main road runs beside the city, passing by it; then it is along road that new building are built and in time the new part is connected with the old centre. Also location of industry or other non-agricultural economic activity outside the city favours expansion of the city in that direction (Fig. 1). Parallel to spatial development of urban buildings there are changes in utilization of the old centre. However, the process as a rule is slow and initially its effects cannot be clearly seen in urban space.

The city as a spatial object is characterized by certain cohesion. It is expressed by various connections, characteristic of a given arrangement. Among a large number of connections that exist in each spatial object, some of them have a fundamental influence on its development, mainly on structural changes occurring in it. Regulski³ (1984) accepts

³ J. Regulski, 1984, "Indispensable conditions for an effective spatial economy", in: Conditions of the natural environment in spatial planning. Conference materials, Department for Training and Publications of the National Council of PZITB, Warszawa 1984.

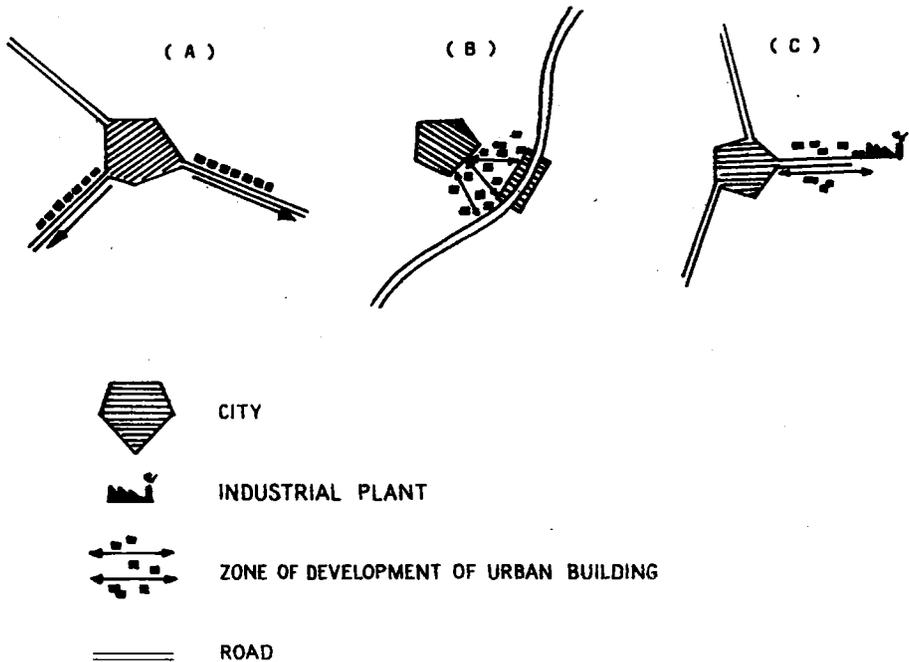


Fig.1. Expansion of the city

three kinds of connections as a basis to determine regional development: investment, earnings and socialities. It seems that connections occurring in the sphere of consciousness are equally important for development of a small city, in other words: a system-creating role of social ties and tradition that exist not only between individuals but also between groups of inhabitants of a given city. This is particularly important in the case of traditional societies or with dual economy where tradition occurs along with modernity.

A city and its region make up together a certain spatial system which is an open system, i.e. under specific conditions such a system is built spontaneously or is organized into structures. Such conditions appear when there are strong external stimuli. Power and intensity of the impulses are decisive for the speed of transformations or internal restructuring of the system. Effects are different in the case of a strong but single stimulus, different in the case of long-lasting impulses, repeated regularly or irregularly.

In each of the above-mentioned cases the inflowing stimuli may encounter resistance or barriers which check or modify their course. The resistance depends primarily on the degree of petrification of the existing structures. However, it is necessary to stress that barriers encountered by impulses are an objective phenomenon, existing in every fragment of geographical space. They can have different aspects with the environmental,

cultural and life-quality aspects as the most important. As a result of structural and functional transformations of a city and its regions, the barriers should be overcome.

Thus a process of city adaptation may take place, i.e. its structure will undergo a transformation thus reacting to transformations occurring in its surrounding.

The above-mentioned concept of development of a small city and its relations with the region is not just an attempt at creating a methodological basis but a desire to test it in practice. Further on, an analysis was made of structural changes that took place recently in Huejutla de Reyes, a city with 30 thousand inhabitants located in the state of Hidalgo in Mexico.

HUEJUTLA AND THE REGION

The choice of Huejutla is not coincidental. Location of the city, both with respect to administration (in the periphery of the state of Hidalgo) and topography (at the foot of mountains) created premises to note interesting socio-economic phenomena. This was also promised by the history of the city, located on the old trade route connecting the coast of the Gulf of Mexico with Cuenca de Mexico.

Huejutla de Reyes is located at confluence of rivers Tecoloco and Caimantla, in a place where they leave Sierra Madre Oriental, entering a hilly lowland sloping gradually towards the coast of the Gulf of Mexico. The natural environment of the piedmont region is very differentiated. This is due to both complex geological structure and very differentiated sculpture. Land configuration significantly influences local climatic conditions. Volume and distribution of precipitation during the year and air temperatures are much different than inside the mountains or in the coastal zone of the Mexico Gulf. Various weather anomalies are a frequent phenomenon here — droughts and large temperature drops.

The differentiated natural environment has much influence on economic and social lives of the city and region. Natural conditions permit cultivation of many kinds of plants, starting with maize and beans, the basic food crops, through sugar cane, sesame, and ending with coffee and fruits (oranges, avocado, mango). Henequen is grown locally. In the forests vanilla and copal are picked. The other important sector of agriculture is animal breeding, developing mostly in the north-eastern part of the Huejutla municipality and in the neighbouring municipalities in the state of Veracruz. The city of Huejutla, having no industry of its own, is a trading centre mainly of agricultural produce as it is located on the border of zones with various spheres of agricultural production.

The number of shops in Huejutla (over 190) and abundance of other services (34 schools, 3 banks, 6 large stores, over 70 canteens and restaurants, various workshops) seems to exceed the needs of the local population (30 thousand inhabitants in 1985), showing the role of the city as a centre rendering services to inhabitants of quite a vast region. This is confirmed by a dense road network and high frequency of minibus running connecting the city with a majority of places making up the municipality of Huejutla and a number of other settlements outside of it, within other municipalities.

There is no doubt that Huejutla is the focus of a nodal region (terminology after D. Whittlesey 1954). However, it is not easy to delineate its borders due to scarce data. Generally, it is assumed that the designations of nodal regions can be such areas as the area of procurement and sales of industrial enterprises, the service area of the city with respect to administration, trade, education, culture, health service, etc., the area of agricultural produce supplies to the city, the area leaning towards a transportation node and others (R. Domański 1977).

According to A. Bassols Batalla (1977), Huejutla due to its commercial connections with municipalities of the region of Las Huastecas, in the state of Hidalgo, can be regarded to be a centre with developed commercial functions. This function is commonly believed to be region-creative.

MARKET IN HUEJUTLA

An analysis of the city's commercial ties with the region surrounding it was an interesting research problem. The question was of their character, frequency (intensity) and spatial range. One of the ways to grasp the phenomenon were interviews in the local market square where markets are held every Sunday (*tiangis*). Interviews with salesmen were conducted by five independent teams. Totally over 100 interviews were made that covered about 20% of the salesmen. Even allowing for a number of repetitions, the number of the interviews can be regarded as a representative sample. The shortcoming of the applied method was a one-time character of the research, resulting in this case from the specific character and organization of field studies. The picture of the market and the network of existing commercial ties may undergo seasonal changes. Thus the obtained picture should be treated only as approximate.

A striking feature of the *tiangis* in Huejutla was an enormous variety of goods. A broad range of vegetable and animal produces were offered (mostly not processed), handicraft products (mainly ceramics), fishing products (*camarones*), results of picking (*copal*) and others, e.g. salt, herbs, etc. Most of the products, particularly with reference to agricul-

tural produce, were sold by their producers. Middlemen constituted not more than 10% of salesmen and were coming from the states of México, San Luis Potosí, Jalisco, Chiapas and the neighbouring states of Veracruz and Hidalgo.

Also salesmen from Huejutla constituted a small group (about 10%), presenting quite varied offer of goods: vegetable products (maize, vegetables), animal products (meat, cheeses) as well as products of local handicraftmen (furniture, machetes).

Inhabitants of the municipality of Huejutla constituted a much larger group (about 25%) and they offered for sale various agricultural produces, mainly of vegetable origin. Among them dominated basic food crops, a few varieties of maize and beans, fruits (avocado, mango, oranges), vegetables (pumpkins, tomatoes, opuntias), spices (coriander seeds, paprika) as well as coffee, sesame seeds, banana leaves. Among the few handicraft products there was ceramics—pans and ash-trays from Chililico and plates from Tehuetlán, Handicraft was also represented by a candle-maker from Ixcatlán and manufactures of *piloncillo* from Santa Cruz. Most of the salesmen-producers offering the goods live in the central part of the municipality, south of Huejutla (Fig. 1).

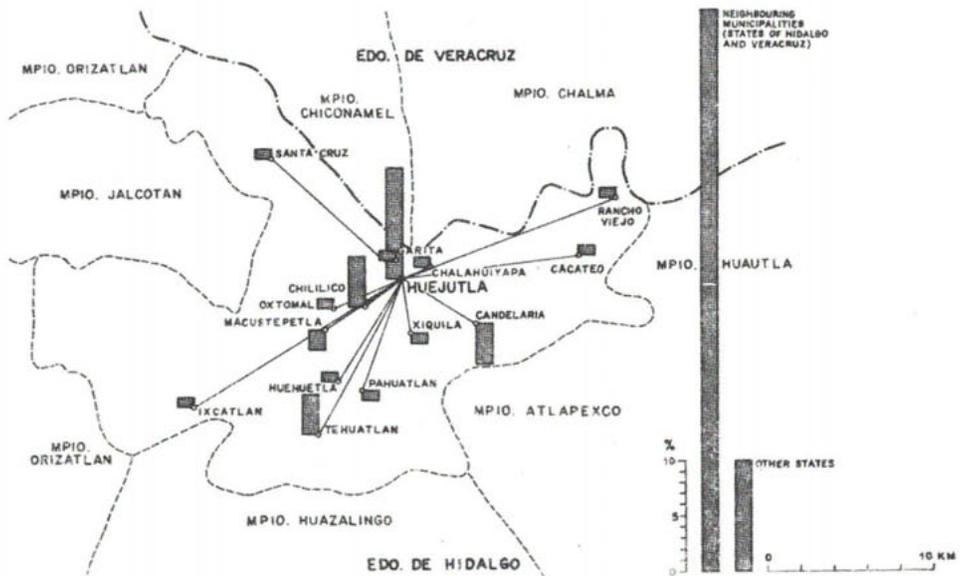


Fig. 2. Origin of salesmen in Huejutla

The most numerous group of salesmen (about 50%) was made up by people from the municipalities bordering Huejutla, or from settlements further away in the states of Hidalgo and Veracruz. Their commercial offer embraced various kinds of meat (veal, pork — fresh, dried), camarones (fresh and dried), cotton yarn and henequen fibre as well as

products from henequen (baskets, bags, lassoes, etc.), salt as well as hand sawn and embroidered clothes.

Middlemen brought to Huejutla potatoes (México, Puebla), some varieties of dried paprika (San Luis Potosi), rice (Sinaloa), beans (Jalisco, cocoa (Chiapas) and some ceramic products (Puebla and Hidalgo).

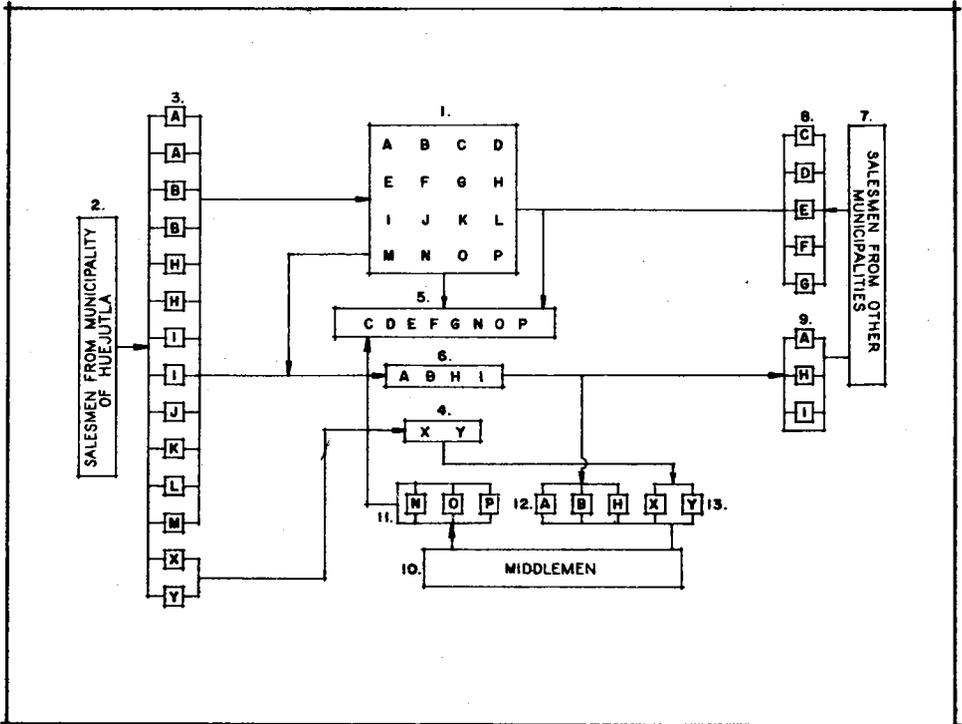


Fig. 3. Situation in the local market

Situation in the local market can be presented in a diagram (Fig. 3). In the market (1) are primarily represented needs of consumers from the city and municipality of Huejutla (A — P). Local producers (2) offer quite a vast range of goods (3), mostly to cover the demand of the city and region. Some goods (4), e.g. sesame seeds and vanilla are destined for buyers from outside the immediate region. The agricultural produce and some handicraft products offered for sale cannot meet the entire demand of the local market. Thus some needs are not satisfied (5). Simultaneously some goods, mainly vegetable produce, do not find buyers, making up a surplus of supply over demand. (6). Such a situation has been here for years.

The trade offer of local farmers and handicraftsmen is supplemented by the presence of producers from outside the municipality of Huejutla (7), offering goods in demand in the market (8), mainly meat which is not produced or produced in too small quantities by the local producers.

A numerous group of salesmen is made up of middlemen (10), coming to *tiangis* in Huejutla even from distant places who supplement to the selection of goods from outside the region (11). Both (9, 12) buy some of the surplus (6), usually at good prices. The middlemen also buy (13) products manufactured locally for buyers in other regions of the country (4).

The picture of the *tiangis* in Huejutla reflects accurately the present role of the city in the region. Nowadays, Huejutla has become an attraction for other producers-sellers from a vast areas, exceeding the borders of the municipality. Most of the sellers (including middlemen as well), i.e. about 60%, come from outside the municipality, whereas in 1970 (A. Bassols Batalla 1977) they constituted 42%. Sellers from Huejutla nowadays make up about 10% whereas in 1970 they predominated in the market (58%).

Thus one may conclude that within the recent 15 years there has been a large expansion of the influence of Huejutla in the south-western part of the region of Las Huastecas. The influence is visible not only in the state of Hidalgo but has been expanded also on many localities in the state of Veracruz. Middlemen are coming from such distant states as Jalisco, Sinaloa and Chiapas.

The development resulted in substantial transformations in the structure and functioning of the city. In the period 1970—1985 the population in Huejutla grew from about 15 thousand to 30 thousand. Age and sex structure of the population was changed. Due to migration, mainly from the area of the municipality, the number of men aged 15 to 30 grew by about 20% which simultaneously contributed to a growth in the group of working population. This should be supplemented by shuttling migration from Platon Sanchez and Tantoyuca who find jobs in building industry and administration.

Also the role of investment connections in city development has been growing. Along with development of services (mainly trade and transportation), building industry and finances, there was an inflow of funds for investments which in turn started a process of structural transformations in the city itself and in its vicinity.

Also the structure of population employment has been changing. No doubt, there is still a shortage of skilled labour but this results not so much from backwardness in education development as from continuation of old, traditional cultural models which differently interpreted professional activities and implied their different models. Traditionally much manpower had been absorbed by handicraft which, however, is slowly disappearing, giving ground to building and trade. However, this does not diminish unquestionable social integration based on old cultural models, history of the city and region as well as the ethnic factor (most of the inhabitants of the city and municipality of Huejutla are Indians).

Along with the growing significance of Huejutla as a trade centre the city's physiognomy changes. First of all, there was a growth of developed area in its south-eastern and eastern parts. Location of offices and modern stores along the road which passes by the centre and runs from the south of the state to the port of Tampico caused that the area which remained undeveloped so far gradually is becoming filled in with urban buildings — the area between the centre and the road. Houses are erected mainly by inhabitants of Platon Sanchez, who recently arrived at Huejutla and by migrants from surrounding villages.

The cultural and environmental barriers have been overcome — in many cases they check spatial development and structural transformations of a city and in the case of Huejutla they proved relatively easy to overcome in the first stage of its accelerated development, i.e. in the period 1970—1985. Thus Huejutla was transformed into an important regional centre, dominating economically, socially, religiously and politically in an area inhabited mostly by Indian population. If the current developmental trend continues, this function will be consolidated and further developed.

CONCLUSIONS

As already mentioned, the research had an approximate character. Nevertheless, allowed to grasp clearly (in the authors' opinion) symptoms of development and progress. Here are the most important of them:

1. Growth and specialization in agricultural production of the region permitting to utilize better the values of the natural environment.
2. Interception by the city of surplus manpower in the countryside and possibility to offer them jobs in the city (building, administration, services).
3. Development of the road network facilitating transport of agricultural produce, trade and exchange.
4. Stopping labour migration to large cities (Mexico) and abroad.
5. Development of education and health services.
6. Growing integration of the region.

If the above-mentioned phenomena can be regarded as positive, one must also mention some negative ones. They are as follows:

1. Disappearance of traditional handicraft, ousted by frequently trashy industrial products.
2. Disappearance of traditional cultural models, customs, etc.
3. Progressing disappearance of Indian languages (children usually speak only Spanish).

Nevertheless, Huejutla can be recognized as a positive model of city transformations, meeting requirements of concepts stimulating development of small and medium-sized cities as centres of development and innovation diffusion.

