

Maciej Witold Kędzierski

Social Exclusion from a Geographical Perspective

Doctoral Dissertation Abstract

This dissertation examines the phenomenon of social exclusion from the perspective of regional geography. Although social exclusion has been extensively studied in sociology, economics, political science, and social policy, it has received only limited attention within geographical research. The principal aim of the dissertation is to address this research gap by developing a geographical concept of social exclusion that incorporates the civilizational diversity of world regions and enables their systematic comparison using a common analytical framework.

The study is founded on the assumption that social exclusion is a multidimensional phenomenon that cannot be adequately explained solely through economic, political, or cultural factors considered in isolation. It argues that civilizational determinants, understood as enduring patterns of collective social organization shaping institutions, systems of values, and social life, play a fundamental role in the emergence and persistence of exclusion. Consequently, the region is treated as the primary unit of geographical interpretation, while the state serves as the basic unit of empirical analysis.

The theoretical framework combines the achievements of classical geography and regional geography with Feliks Koneczny's theory of civilizations. Particular emphasis is placed on his understanding of civilization as a method of organizing collective life and on his fivefold conception of existence, consisting of Good, Truth, Health, Prosperity, and Beauty. The dissertation proposes the application of this framework as the basis for a new interpretative model of social exclusion. The theoretical discussion is complemented by a critical review of existing definitions of social exclusion and an assessment of the dominant approaches adopted in previous research. It is demonstrated that contemporary interpretations are frequently reductionist, focusing on individual aspects of exclusion—such as poverty, political participation, or social rights—while overlooking their broader geographical and civilizational context.

The principal objective of the dissertation is to develop an original concept of social exclusion and to construct a tool enabling the quantitative assessment of its level across different regions of the world. To achieve this objective, the Social Exclusion Index (SEI) was

developed. Its structure is based on four quantitative dimensions: Good, Truth, Health, and Prosperity. The category of Beauty is treated qualitatively as an integrative dimension that complements the interpretation of the remaining components. The proposed index provides a basis for interregional comparisons and facilitates the identification of the principal factors influencing the level of social exclusion.

The study addresses the main research question concerning the impact of a region's civilizational affiliation on the level of social exclusion. Additional research questions examine the spatial differentiation of exclusion, the social groups most vulnerable to exclusion, the relationship between prosperity and social exclusion, and whether social exclusion may be regarded as an inherent characteristic of particular civilizations. Four research hypotheses were formulated to evaluate the influence of democratic quality, globalization, the welfare state, and the limitations of the dominant research approaches.

The empirical research is based on a comprehensive methodological framework combining qualitative and quantitative methods. The study employs literature review and critical analysis, idealization and concretization, deductive reasoning, hermeneutics, comparative analysis, indicator-based analysis, geographical analysis, case studies, and methodological triangulation. Empirical data were obtained primarily from international reports and statistical databases. The variables were standardized using the min–max normalization method, enabling the aggregation of individual indicators into a common measurement scale.

The empirical analysis covers eleven world regions distinguished according to civilizational criteria: Europe, Eurasia, the Islam Region, India, Japan, East Asia, Southeast Asia, Australia and Oceania, North America, Latin America, and Sub-Saharan Africa. Each regional chapter includes a geographical characterization, an analysis of the level of social exclusion across the individual dimensions, and a case study illustrating specific mechanisms of exclusion. This approach makes it possible to identify both the universal characteristics of social exclusion and its regional diversity resulting from differences in civilizational traditions, religion, political systems, and cultural heritage.

The findings demonstrate that social exclusion is not randomly distributed across space but is closely associated with civilizational and institutional conditions. Regions characterized by high-quality democratic institutions, well-developed welfare systems, and high levels of social capital generally achieve lower values of the Social Exclusion Index. Conversely, regions affected by political instability, armed conflicts, limited access to education and healthcare, and weak public institutions exhibit significantly higher levels of social exclusion. At the same time, the analysis demonstrates that economic prosperity alone does not fully explain regional

variation in social exclusion, as societies with comparable levels of economic development may display substantially different outcomes depending on their civilizational background.

One of the principal contributions of the dissertation is the development of a new geographical interpretation of social exclusion that integrates the regional perspective with civilization theory. The study demonstrates that geography provides an appropriate analytical framework for examining social exclusion not only as a social phenomenon but also as a spatial one. The proposed model combines quantitative and qualitative evidence within a coherent analytical framework designed for interregional comparison.

The findings confirm the value of civilization theory as an interpretative framework for the study of social exclusion. The dissertation seeks to restore geography to a more prominent position in research on one of the major challenges facing the contemporary world while highlighting new opportunities for the further development of regional geography through the application of civilization studies. The proposed model may be applied both in future academic research and in public policy analyses aimed at reducing social exclusion. The dissertation contributes to the development of regional and socio-economic geography by offering a new perspective on the interpretation of social exclusion and by introducing an original instrument for its measurement on a global scale.