

# Cognitive Values of the “Patchwork Capitalism” Category: Advantages, Limitations and Research Challenges

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## Abstract

*This article contributes to a discussion of selected aspects of Juliusz Gardawski and Ryszard Rapacki's extensive study presenting a new version of the concept of “patchwork capitalism” in Central and Eastern Europe [2021]. The article discusses the differences in the theoretical and methodological assumptions of the “old” and “new” conceptualizations of the “ideal version of patchwork capitalism”, which focuses on the specific institutional architecture of post-communist European Union countries. Questions and suggestions are presented, highlighting the strengths and weaknesses of the authors' attempt to develop their own innovative approach to the subject matter. The aim of the article is to contribute to strengthening the cognitive value of the concept of “patchwork capitalism”, making it a more useful theoretical and methodological perspective in the debate on the development directions of Poland, other countries in our subregion, and the EU as a whole. A new conceptualization of “patchwork capitalism”, along with tools for analyzing its various dimensions, has significant cognitive potential that goes beyond conclusions about the “hybrid” or “mixed” nature of the institutional systems of some EU countries. Such a more adequate conceptualization, however, requires some refinement, including incorporating at least some answers to the formulated research questions and suggestions.*

**Keywords:** new applications of Weber's ideal-type method, capitalism in the EU, specificity of capitalism in Central and Eastern Europe, patchwork capitalism

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I treat the following comment as a voice in the discussion on selected aspects of an important article, significantly going beyond typical academic texts, both in terms of volume and substantive content. An extensive study prepared by Juliusz Gardawski and Ryszard Rapacki [2021] – nearly eighty pages long! – it can be expanded to the size of a book relatively easily, and this will probably happen soon. Although the researchers emphasize certain differences in their intellectual contributions in the discussed text, due to their close cooperation in its creation, for simplicity I use the collective term Authors. The study is a deepened and extended conceptualization of research on “patchwork capitalism” in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE). It is the result of discussions and projects carried out since 2015 (together with colleagues from SGH), which combine analyzes from the circle of new institutional economics, sociology and economic anthropology, comparative political economy and related disciplines. It develops the concepts contained in two monographs presenting theoretical assumptions and results of empirical research published by researchers related to projects dealing with these issues<sup>1</sup>.

The main theses of the study were presented and discussed during the seminar Patchwork capitalism – a new conceptualization, organized at the Collegium of Socio-Economics of the Warsaw School of Economics on December 14, 2022. The authors consider “patchwork capitalism” to be a new research category in comparative studies on the economies of post-communist countries, different from the models of Western European capitalism coexisting in the European Union (EU). They pose a strategic question, not only for their concept: what features of the institutional architecture make the socio-economic orders in CEE particularly susceptible to instability and “hybridization”, often chaotically combining elements of different political systems? They correctly point out that these features have led many researchers dealing with comparative studies to abandon the interpretation of post-communist capitalism through the prism of coherent Western-type models and look for new theories explaining the specificity of this region.

The above issue became one of the main reasons for introducing the category of “patchwork capitalism”. How is this category defined? What new content does it bring to the study of CEE? What does he pay most attention to? What are the advantages and limitations of using it? What research challenges does it create? An in-depth answer

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<sup>1</sup> See Rapacki [(ed.) 2019a]; in a significantly broader version, see Rapacki [(ed.) 2019b]. The authors have already discussed this issue in many studies on the specificity of capitalism emerging in CEE after the disintegration of the communist system. Manifestations of such searches included, among others: research on the participation of labor relations actors in economic transformations, e.g. Gardawski [(ed.) 2013]; Gardawski [(ed.) 2009]; Rapacki [2018].

to this type of questions requires indicating the most important added value of the discussed study compared to the authors' previous publications. For the purposes of this text, I indicate three main areas in this respect: 1) updated and organized author's characterization of the literature on the subject; 2) introducing a specific dimension of post-communist capitalism into the typology of capitalism in the CEE countries, and 3) modifying the interpretation of the category “patchwork capitalism”.

The presented article contains a very good review of the theoretical and empirical literature on post-communist capitalism, along with an extensive, competently selected bibliography. It critically characterizes various concepts and typologies of capitalism, with particular emphasis on those relating to CEE. This review anchors the study's narrative more theoretically, also providing new tools for analyzing the issues discussed. At the same time, it is an excellent compendium of information and knowledge on the state of research on this issue, which, among other things, contains extensive comments on the definition and application of the Weberian ideal-type method in relation to selected, key features of capitalism in the CEE countries. By organizing theoretically the extensive literature on the subject, the authors develop their own original division of the presented concepts into three groups: 1) those directly using the standard frame of reference, i.e. the Varieties of Capitalism (VoC) perspective, consistent with the concept of Peter Hall and David Soskice; 2) using the VoC approach with some changes and 3) using non-standard approaches, the vast majority of which develop their own methodology and criteria for classifying capitalism in CEE. Although the criteria for this division and the distinction between three groups of research on the discussed issues have already been presented in previous publications, in the new conceptualization they have become more clear and include more literature. An illustrative and useful summary of the main theoretical findings regarding the types of market economies in CEE is Table 1, which contains a comparative picture of the most representative studies on post-communist capitalism. This table details the author or authors of important publications, the dates of their publication, the sample of compared countries, the theoretical reference point (mainly VoC), the most important typological results and the distinct variants of capitalism in the compared countries.

The analysis of the content of Table 1 became the basis for the authors to formulate a number of conclusions of an important theoretical nature, generalizing the current state of research. For example, direct application of standard analytical frameworks tends to lead to misleading or ambiguous results that do not identify a distinct model or models of post-communist capitalism in CEE; often comes down to a general conclusion about their “hybrid” or “mixed” institutional nature. In turn,

the thesis that new types of capitalism in this region are distinct from the patterns established in studies of Western European capitalism appears in some approaches that modify the standard frame of reference (as in the concept of “dependent market economies”) and in all non-standard approaches. However, a question arises here: why did the authors not classify their two publications into any of the categories of research on post-communist capitalism they proposed, and therefore, did they not decide to include them in Table 1?

In earlier works, they refer to the theoretical assumptions and methodology of “varieties of capitalism” in Bruno Amable’s variant, which fall into the category of applications of standard frames of reference with some changes or extensions. Especially since the works of Beata Farkas, who refers to the same theoretical and methodological inspirations, were included in this group of concepts (analogously to Cernat’s text on Romanian “cocktail capitalism”). Perhaps this omission is motivated by the evolution of their theoretical identifications, articulated in the new conceptualization of “patchwork capitalism.” This possibility is suggested by the last book, which notes that the authors “made an attempt at methodological emancipation and the use of their own approach and methods of analysis” [Rapacki (ed.) 2019b: 82]. However, in a new conceptualization of the specificity of capitalism in CEE, they note that for many reasons (primarily high political volatility and institutional instability), the study of economic systems in this region “requires the use of tools that are missing in most theoretical frameworks of mainstream economics, but also lack in the toolbox of the new institutional economics.”

Against this background, the remarks about “limitations of the conceptual framework taken from theories interpreting Western political economies” as well as “entering new institutional areas” and opening to “other research perspectives” can be understood in various ways. For example, as an announcement of a far-reaching revision or change of views that goes beyond “deepening and developing” the current achievements, or as a manifestation of the inconsistency of assumptions and methodologies between subsequent conceptualizations of “patchwork capitalism”. So, does the new conceptualization only supplement existing typologies of capitalism (and if so, which ones) with a new dimension? Do the authors want to develop their concept using theoretical tools that they criticize as inadequate to the study of capitalism in CEE? However, if they introduce modifications or make more far-reaching theoretical changes, it is advisable to justify to what extent the new concept of “patchwork capitalism” provides better tools for research on these issues and in what way it is expressed. This situation also raises important questions about the deeper theoretical relationships between the earlier and new conceptualizations of “patchwork capitalism.”

The validity of such reservations is confirmed by references to the concepts that the authors used to prepare a new version of “ideal patchwork capitalism.” Based on the overview in Table 1 and the author’s narrative of the study, one may get the impression that the new conceptualization of “patchwork capitalism” in CEE is moving from a modified and extended standard frame of reference to a non-standard approach, evolving towards its own methodology that goes beyond the previously adopted research perspective. Such a change can be seen as one of the possibilities for the development of research on “patchwork capitalism”, which, especially in the case of the development of long-term projects, would not be surprising. However, the discussed conceptualization does not provide clear answers here. As a result, it seems that the authors are trying to add to the “old” research on similarity coefficients the results of research undertaken from a different theoretical perspective, based on different assumptions, methodology, conceptual framework and problems. This reception brings into focus the issue of theoretical and methodological coherence of the new conceptualization of “patchwork capitalism” compared to the previous version. The theoretical inspirations to which the new conceptualization refers can be considered the basic premise of the above interpretation. The authors cite the recent publication of Claus Offe as a significant impetus for further research characterizing the main beneficiaries of privatized production assets, the creation and staffing of political institutions, the role of “external players” in political changes (including the Western “conquest” of CEE) and the legacy of the state-socialist past. Taking up such issues, however, radically departs from the study of similarity coefficients comparing, using a set of selected variables, the institutional architecture of post-socialist countries and the models of capitalism of the “old” EU countries. For example, the legacy of the state-socialist past or the scale of privatization of production assets in CEE do not have adequate equivalents in the institutional variants of Western countries. Similarly, the share and role of foreign capital in the economies of most post-socialist countries is unprecedentedly large, as is the party’s takeover of the state burdened with post-nomenklatura traditions and patterns.

In some aspects (e.g. the role of “external players” in CEE), the new conceptualization of “patchwork capitalism” refers to the issues defined in the authors’ previous publications using the category of the so-called integration anchor – variables explaining the heterogeneity of institutional architecture, which is a mixture of elements of different varieties of capitalism coexisting in the same country. However, research to date has not paid much attention to the impact of the rules for adapting national institutions to EU requirements or the role of foreign capital in the transformation of CEE. Hence, the analyzes of “patchwork capitalism”, although very interesting

and stimulating, but which did not take into account such aspects of building a market economy, raised, in my opinion, fundamental doubts, as they ignored issues of strategic importance. Especially since the special role of “external players” as one of the key participants in economic changes, as well as various other consequences of their activities (political, regulatory, structural, etc.) have become, according to many researchers, a systemic distinguishing feature of post-communist capitalism. The importance of this issue was well expressed by Tony Judt, who recalled a joke describing the two main threats facing the Czech Republic in the early 1990s: “that the Germans will make huge investments and buy out the local economy, and that they will not make any investments and the economy will stagnate.” [Judt 2012: 151].

Due to different assumptions, the earlier conceptualization of “patchwork capitalism” significantly ignored the issue of foreign capital, despite extensive literature indicating the importance of this issue. Yet, at least since the global financial crisis, the belief that “capital has nationality” has become widespread, and the management of its flows strengthens the influence of the transnational business class and countries skillfully taking advantage of the opportunities of globalization, which also has significant implications for countries receiving foreign investors.

In such a context, it is worth noting that the new interpretation of “patchwork capitalism” refers – unlike the previous version – to conceptual schemes that situate the position of CEE in a different way in the international political economy. The perspective of varieties of capitalism in Amable’s modified version, like other concepts within the new institutionalism, are located in the mainstream of neoclassical economics. However, the original typology of post-communist capitalism, constructed by Martin Myant and Jan Drahekoupil, cited as particularly inspiring by the authors, is definitely closer to varieties of neo-Marxism and other critical theories, such as the world-systems analysis introducing the division into core countries, semi-peripheries and peripheries of global capitalism. This typology combines the characteristics of the economic diversities of the studied countries with selected dimensions of institutional architecture compared with the forms of their international economic integration. The use of these forms (along with several other criteria) made it possible to distinguish five varieties of capitalism in the CEE countries.

A common feature of these varieties of capitalism was the subordination of CEE countries to entities and rules transferred from highly developed countries, which supported political changes in this region, giving them (as between World Wars I and II) a peripheral character. It is puzzling why this type of inspiration only appeared in the new conceptualization of “patchwork capitalism”, since its authors had long known the works of Myant and Drahekoupil (the book was published in 2011)? Ear-

lier we find the statement that Myant and Drahokoupil’s typology “does not allow for capturing the factors determining the specificity of institutional architecture, e.g. Poland, compared to the Czech Republic or Hungary” [Rapacki (ed.) 2019b: 76]<sup>2</sup>. Subsequent developments in some countries in the region have questioned the rationale behind this approach. For example, second-class market economies dependent on foreign investors, which in Myant and Drahokoupil’s concept were characterized by a democratic political system and an institutional matrix modeled on EU countries, are evolving towards a new authoritarianism<sup>3</sup>. This also applies to the typology of Dorothee Bohle and Bela Greskovits from 2012, who referred to the Visegrad Group countries as “embedded neoliberal type.”

Political changes in Hungary and Poland have questioned the validity of the typological findings mentioned. They also make us wonder to what extent neoliberalism was actually rooted in these countries, since it became relatively easy to introduce anti-systemic political and institutional changes. Frequent political and systemic changes taking place in opposing directions in a relatively short period of time raise questions about the theoretical status of “patchwork capitalism.” Is this a medium-range category adequate in a specific space and at a certain time, or can it be useful in a more long-term manner? Or maybe it is also useful in relation to other countries located on the periphery or semi-periphery of modern capitalism?

To illustrate the validity of such a question, in the discussion about fabric and “patchwork capitalism”, it is worth recalling Robert Putnam, who wrote in the early 1990s: “Many of the former communist societies had weak civic traditions before the advent of communism, and the communist governments abused these limited resources of social capital. Without norms of reciprocity and networks of civic engagement, the Hobbesian Mezzogiorno situation – amoral familism, clientelism, lawlessness, ineffective governance and economic stagnation – seems more likely than successful democratization and economic development. Palermo may represent the future of Moscow. If this view is also considered as a warning diagnosis, the question arises: what is the difference between «patchwork capitalism» in CEE Europe

<sup>2</sup> In this context, it is also unclear why the authors, although they refer to the book edited by David Lane and Martin Myant [2007], omit it from Table 1.

<sup>3</sup> On September 15, 2022, Members of the European Parliament (EP) officially described Hungary as a country of “electoral autocracy”, i.e. a constitutional system in which elections are held but there is no respect for democratic norms and standards [European Parliament 2022b]. EP presents similar, although slightly milder, assessments towards Poland. Both countries are associated in the EP with the risk of “serious breaches of EU values”, which means that national plans under the Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF) should not be approved “until progress is achieved” [European Parliament 2022a]. At the time of writing, Hungary and Poland have not received PRF funds.

and similar phenomena and tendencies in the Mediterranean capitalist countries? Especially since one of the most important results of previous research on patchwork capitalism was the claim that most of the CEE countries<sup>11</sup> were closest to the Mediterranean model of capitalism in terms of the values of output variables (economic factors), but they were much more similar to the continental model in the values of input variables (solutions). institutional). This statement, which also has a prognostic value (especially if the CEE countries will become similar to the Mediterranean model), suggests the need to clearly distinguish the concept of “patchwork capitalism” of our region from the “mixed economies” of Southern Europe. Perhaps it should be emphasized more strongly that the concept of “patchwork capitalism” applies only to CEE. This is what Nölke and Vliegenthart did, whose concept of dependent market economies is mainly associated with the Visegrad Group countries, although it may also apply to other European post-communist countries.

This issue is even more important because, along with globalization trends, specific problems have appeared in many regions and countries, resulting from historical events and local conditions. Eastern Europe is an example. These trends mean that modernization processes have become more complex, they go beyond imitation of the West and are taking place in various directions. In turn, since the global financial crisis, subsequent crises, erosion and transformation of national models of capitalism have been increasing, also in countries that were reference points in cross-country comparative studies, and the changes combine institutional convergence and divergence in various ways. Capitalism, not only in CEE, is becoming more labile and changeable politically and in terms of the socio-economic order. The transition to the fourth industrial revolution, the coronavirus pandemic and the war in Ukraine from 2022 in a new way undermine the coherence of institutional logics, demonstrate their dysfunctionality and fragmentation, as illustrated by new manifestations of the growing role of the state, climate and energy policy, and changes in labor relations forced by the crises, social policy, etc. In such a context, it is worth noting the importance of the cognitive impulse provided by research on Asian countries in the field of contemporary capitalism. They point to the limitations of Western concepts and their conceptual network, as well as many research findings developed in the discussion about the diversity of capitalism, including: among others, within the typology of Amable, who distinguished Asian capitalism. Amid the growing interest in “new industrialized countries”, some researchers claim that almost all Asian forms of capitalism (except Japan) are fundamentally different from Western variants. This means that their characteristics require going beyond established theoretical frameworks, developed in a completely different historical and cultural context. A manifestation

of such searches are the results of comparisons of the main Asian economies and the distinction of five of their models: post-socialist, highly developed cities, South Asia and highly developed North Asia and Japan [Witt, Redding 2013].

The above comments additionally reinforce the need for research on the “patchwork” nature of capitalism; some leaders of the neoliberal changes in the 1990s turned into model examples of “illiberal democracies” or “right-wing populism” in CEE. The “rapid” dismantling of the authoritarian-socialist institutional framework using top-down “state liberalism” has its contemporary populist equivalent in reversing the direction of political changes – in subordinating institutions to the arbitrary will of the party leader, abolishing the principles of division and balance of powers, extreme instrumentalization of law, media control, building counter-elites, limiting the freedom of scientific research and art, as well as regulating the activities of non-governmental organizations [Sadurski 2022].

However, a fundamental question arises: does the category of “patchwork capitalism” allow for a precise capture of the factors determining the specificity of institutional architecture in the CEE countries? This seems unlikely to be the case in the current version. There are still no clear grounds for classifying countries or groups of countries into the categories of types specified in the patchwork perspective. At the same time, this category seems too narrow in some respects.

Although the authors aim to outline a specific type of ideal capitalism distinct from the patterns adopted in studies of Western European capitalism, at the current stage of work on the new conceptualization it is not clear how the typology in the patchwork perspective (Table 3) translates into the empirical possibilities of classifying individual countries as one of the four specified categories – coherent type, mixed type, etc. There is no indicator instrumentation enabling such a procedure. For example: what indicators will we use to include Poland, Slovenia and Estonia in the appropriate categories of the “patchwork capitalism” typology? Does classifying countries into one of the varieties of such a typology make it possible to characterize their differences or specificity also in terms of subregional similarities, e.g. the Baltic republics or the Western Balkans?

The possibility of defining this category too narrowly results from its significant deepening and detailing. Compared to previous publications, the interpretation of “patchwork capitalism” and the institutional fabric as the fundamental rules of the game has been significantly enriched. The characteristics of the ideal type conceptual scheme present many aspects that expand the meanings associated with this category. The ideal type of patchwork contains references to various definitions of institutions, Merton’s theory of anomie and the category of embeddedness of economic

institutions taken from Polanyi. The new “ideal type” includes Williamson’s four-level concept of institutional stratification, the analysis of dual stratifications of “fabric” and “threat”, long-term deep structures that constitute the “second nature” of societies. As a result, the extensive conceptual scheme of “patchwork capitalism” and its typology introduce so many concepts related to this idea and its concretizations that the question arises how to characterize the dimensions, what indicators to measure, and how to distinguish different types of this capitalism? Doesn’t such analytical multidimensionality limit the possibilities of using the mentioned category? The multitude of dimensions necessitates the use of data that may be difficult to access in many countries in the region or will require special research. It may probably be useful to narrow down the indicators to a smaller group of the typologically most important ones, with the greatest cognitive load.

Another point of discussion. Previous empirical tests of institutional similarity were carried out according to a different methodology and served different research purposes aimed at international comparisons. There is a clear theoretical and empirical disconnect between previous research on “patchwork capitalism” and the new conceptualization. Additionally, the new empirical material is based largely on Polish research, which may raise accusations of generalizations that do not take into account the specificity of CEE countries or geographic subregions. In such a context, there may be a lack of distinction between generalizations regarding Poland and other countries in the region (perhaps more precision in the narrative in this regard or reference to more research on other countries in the region is advisable). For example, the described aspects of TNC’s activities occur with varying intensity in the countries of the region, and the effects of their activities are gradual and multidimensional; the distribution of benefits, costs and consequences of TNC activity in different countries and subregions of CEE varies. The concept of “patchwork capitalism” should provide clear criteria for characterizing its specificity and place in the hierarchy of the international division of labor.

From the point of view of the assumptions of the concept of “patchwork capitalism”, it is also worth adding that the characteristics of the role of foreign capital in CEE go beyond adding another distinguishing feature to the “ideal type”. Rather, they herald a fundamental change in the theoretical and methodological framework. This feature has a unique significance compared to other features of “patchwork capitalism”. Previous research focused on measuring the institutional similarities of 11 CEE countries to selected models of capitalism in the “old” EU member states. The influence of “external players” on the systems of CEE countries (studied in political science and sociology as part of the discussion on “Europeanization”) was not significantly

taken into account. However, due to the resources of these “players”, in practice also other features of “ideal patchwork capitalism” change their nature and it is advisable to formulate research questions such as: How do “external players”, i.e. the rules in force in the EU influence basic institutions that create the socio-economic order? How do connections with the “core” countries influence the institutional architecture of the CEE countries?

For example, it can be assumed, based on the results of previous research, that their impact was significantly different in the sphere of investment financing, industrial relations or education and vocational training. The cited research results regarding the consequences of the activities of such “players” rooted in the standard Amable methodology do not refer to the variants of capitalism as conceived by Myant and Drahokoupil, the concept of which is of a different nature; which the authors emphasize in comparative analyzes of research on post-communist capitalism. The issue of the influence of “external players” is part of a larger whole of needed modifications. The rise of authoritarian, populist and nationalist tendencies in recent years requires paying more attention to party leaders and political actions transforming institutions. To a large extent, these trends are a response to the region’s dependence on deteriorating external conditions (weakness of domestic capital in relations with foreign capital, consequences of economic emigration, transfer of various crises from the EU, limited efficiency of the Union weakened by centrifugal tendencies, crises of national identity, etc.). In the post-communist CEE countries, as a remedy to such challenges, the historically rooted tendency to build an autocratic state and statism has been revived. It is a new version of the search for development economics discussing the resources necessary to accelerate economic modernization as a substitute for the weak private sector and wealthy middle classes (see the works of Gerschenkron or Galtung or analyzing various versions of the “developmental state”). Especially since the increasing role of the state. It is also common in the most developed Western countries, which was accelerated on an unprecedented scale by the response to the coronavirus pandemic, strategic competition between the US and China, as well as the war in Ukraine and challenges related to energy and climate policy.

The perspective of varieties of capitalism assumed the stability of institutional architecture, which gave it a technocratic, functionalist and static character both in the dimension of nation states and international relations. The events of recent years confirm the need to focus more on the “actors” of politics and economy changing this architecture: characterizing the role of leaders and ideologies, dominant coalitions of interests, models of conflict regulation, etc. One may get the impression that although the new conceptualization of “patchwork capitalism” pays more attention

to social -political dimensions of the specificity of the region resulting from the behavior of the main actors of institutional changes (elites of the breakthrough and elites of adaptation, “beneficiaries” of the transformation, supporters and opponents of modernization, etc.), in the current version it is mostly focused on Poland. There is a need to extend this type of analysis to other CEE countries, including: drawing attention to the processes of “oligarchization” in the region based on the mechanisms indicated by Offe, such as the creation and appointment of key political institutions or references to statist traditions and the state-socialist past.

Due to new geopolitical challenges, especially the war in Ukraine, the importance of connections between the nation-state policy and international politics (in this region, usually significantly and sometimes decisively influencing political changes) is also growing significantly. In such a context, an important part of the authors’ research project is to answer the question why there has not been a wide internalization of cultural values supporting the capitalist framework?

However, the thesis about the durability of cultural patterns and their multi-generational reproduction, as well as the stability of the class structure, require verification taking into account new generational and social trends (e.g. in the sphere of moral issues, the decline of the working class, the erosion and stratification of the peasant class or precarization).

It seems justified to take into account the almost completely omitted role of the Catholic Church, other religious institutions and religions in the construction of “patchwork capitalism”.

To sum up, the new conceptualization of “patchwork capitalism” has great cognitive potential. However, it requires clarification, including answers to the questions and doubts formulated. It confirms the important value of crises, which foster openness to new research perspectives emerging in connection with the criticism and weakening of dominant views, sometimes considered to be unquestionable dogmas. The conclusions presented within it are much more critical than in earlier versions of this concept, an example of which is the thesis on the entropic “development drift” of patchwork capitalism (with optimistic emphasis on the high potential of adapting this variant of capitalism to radical external and internal changes). Further development of the concept may play an important role in the debate on development opportunities and threats for Poland and other CEE countries in the transition to the fourth industrial revolution, reindustrialization of the EU after the pandemic, or taking advantage of the region’s frontline location in the face of the war in Ukraine and the prospects for rebuilding that country.

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