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## “Cognitive Economic Geography” – Evolution of Regional Strategies

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### Abstract

The aim of this article is to present the role of cognitive approach in economic geography and regional innovation strategies based on theory evolution as well as the case of regional development strategies evolution for an old industrial region in emerging economic spaces.

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*Keywords:* cognitive science; regional development; innovation strategies.

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### 1. Introduction

The aim of this paper is to introduce the role of cognitive approach in economic geography. The article is based on evolution process as well as the case study of regional development strategies. The evolution of approaches to regional policy adapted for an old industrial region in emerging economic spaces will be presented. The notion “cognitive economic geography” is understood as a “metaphor” of current tendencies in theory and practice of regional policy.

In the first part, the theoretical approaches will be presented as an overview of economic geography theories in the regional development. The second part, as case study will focus on practical issues of the regional innovation strategies evolution.

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## 2. Methodology

The research methods used are based on: desk research; case study research; the historical-comparative analysis, qualitative analysis in the framework of participatory action research on Silesian Regional Development Strategy and Regional Innovation Strategy and a few stages of strategies' actualization in the period 1998 – 2012.

## 3. Evolution of regional development theory - towards “cognitive conceptualization”

The approach to the development and competitiveness of regions can be seen on the basis of examining economic concepts, starting from classic economics. In the classic economic theories, regional competitiveness was associated with the phenomenon of the division of labour and differences in productivity across nations. In this concept the fundamental issue is comparative advantage. It's connected with competitiveness referred to the benefits of international trade gained by particular countries or regions. Similarly, in neo-classical theory trade is deemed to be the engine of growth.

Whereas classic economists treated capital and labour as two independent production factors, the Keynesian theory assumes capital and labour to be complementary. The Keynesian theory assumes that governments can successfully intervene in the cycles of the economy. This theory is of greater importance in the case of the policy of creating competitiveness of regions as state interventionism is evident and the convergence of regions can be achieved through economic policy (Pachura 2008).

In the past decades the theory based on accumulation and the use of knowledge, frequently called the endogenous growth theory has been popular. Endogenous growth theory purports to provide a theory of economic history, in the sense that it tries to explain why some economies have succeeded and others have failed. The key assumption of the endogenous growth theory is that the accumulation of knowledge generates technological progress and economic growth. It is acknowledged that investments in human capital and research and development are crucial for regional endogenous development.

Another approach to the creation of competitiveness in a region is that which is based on the theories of economic geography, particularly the theory of locating business activities. The Marshallian industrial districts and the theorems of the economies of location are the most important. The formation of geographical concentrations of industrial specialization is a part of the organic development of the industrial economy. Furthermore, in this approach, knowledge and know-how are accumulated and become locally socialized into a local industrial “culture” and local “innovative environment” (Pachura 2008).

The models exposing the role of knowledge and innovation to a large extent get their inspiration from the evolutionary economics, evolutionary theory of technological changes, as well as theories of innovation assuming a non-linear nature of the process of innovation. This topic was undertaken by the Nordic school which introduced the term of the learning economy as well as on regional level was observed by such authors as: Florida, Cooke (Kozak, 2011). According to it, the keys to these processes are learning and transferring knowledge, sharing knowledge and creating innovation, interaction and trust arising from the cultural context and the local environment. The Nordic school also underlines that the spatial essence of the proximity of firms and units facilitates the accumulation of knowledge towards to innovative environment with networks of social relations. This type of structure of an organic nature strengthens local innovativeness and the collective process of learning. The development of cognitive approaches has been raised, in particular, by the conceptualization of a knowledge cycle. (Nonaka, Takeuchi, 1995). Researchers argue that on the one hand, agents absorb knowledge either by the internalisation of codified knowledge, with the help of tacit knowledge acquired earlier, or through socialisation involving the exchange of tacit knowledge. On the other hand, agents contribute to the knowledge flow either by converting tacit into codified knowledge or by recombining knowledge of various types to make new knowledge.

Various authors regard the present nature of knowledge circulation as a key factor behind the continuing significance of the region. Due to spatial proximity and social embedding, regions help to reduce cognitive distances between different actors and groups, facilitating shared practices and collective strategy-making. Reducing cognitive distances defined as “buzz” is seen as the information and communication ecology created by face-to-face contacts, co-presence and co-location of people and firms within the same industry and place or region (Bathelt, Malmberg, Maskell 2004). This buzz is matched by 'network pipelines', i.e. linkages with external

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