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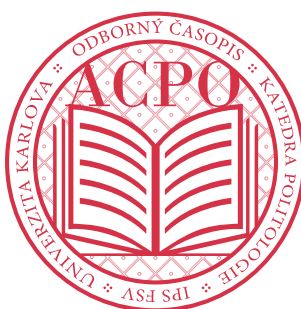
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## Shattered Spaces of Political Geography

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### Abstract:

*Political geography is a field located at the frontier between geography and political science. Considering this, one could expect that cross-fertilization occurs across the two fields. Unfortunately, what we see is rather a different picture – that of mutual neglect, or worse implicit antipathy. This paper aims to discuss deeper cleavages that separate the field and to suggest some possible remedies. The key cleavages we analyse are: the broader goals of the social science; epistemological preferences; preferences for nomothetic vs. idiographic knowledge and preferences for description and interpretation vs. explanation; and attitudes towards methodologies. The paper illustrates these cleavages via a short comparative analysis of two papers (one written by a geographer, the other by a political scientist) that have similar research goals and general research designs. Greater attention to counterfactuals on the side of geographers, and greater willingness to consider more ideographic and descriptive pieces on the side of political scientists, are among the suggested ways to overcome this unproductive separation of political geography and political science.*

**Key words:** *political geography; epistemology; methodology; critical geopolitics; counterfactuals*

### Introduction

Political geography, as its name suggests, is positioned at the frontier between geography and political science. In addition, the field has existed for almost a century (see Jehlička et al. 2000). Considering this, one could expect that cross-fertilization occurs across the two fields and that the realm of political geography serves as a bridge between human (social) geography on the one hand and political science (PS) on the other. Yet this assumption is rather false. Yes, here and there, we can see contacts and bridges where individual researchers can reach audience across disciplinary boundaries (notably Buhaug, Rod 2006; Agnew 2011). Nevertheless, quite often we can see a different picture – that of mutual neglect, or worse, implicit antipathy. Unless we believe that the social sciences will be separated from each other (to their benefit), one wonders how to overcome this situation. Assuming that political geography is not only an interesting subfield but a potential bridge between the two disciplines, our aim in this special issue was to promote cross-disciplinary dialogue.

We believe that there is potential for higher cross-disciplinary dialogue among geographers and political scientists, yet it remains unfulfilled. The goal of this paper is to discuss (and empirically illustrate) some possible causes of the aforementioned separation and to address some ways those gaps could be closed or at least locally bridged. More specifically, we ask which are the key cleavages separating the subfields and whether

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they are correlated with broader disciplinary boundaries. The subsequent question is this: might there be some tools for enhancing cross-disciplinary dialogue? The paper focuses on Western political geographies; nevertheless, as there is strengthening pressure towards internationalization of tertiary education as well as research, Czech political geography will be increasingly affected by processes structuring Western political geography.

There are some caveats to mention here. First, as this paper focuses rather on cleavages and gaps, to some extent it neglects existing collaboration. Second, the paper focuses on Western political geographies as these are increasingly more relevant for Czech political geography. There are indeed political geographies in other countries (Brazil, Russia); nevertheless, their academic significance is limited<sup>2</sup>. Third, this paper must seek to reveal broad tendencies within (political) geography and PS, thus necessarily underplaying existing diversity among both geographers and political scientists. Nevertheless, without a willingness to abstract from individual peculiarities, we would have to pretend that there are no meaningful differences between political science political geography (PSPG) and geographical political geography (GPG).<sup>3</sup> Such argumentation, however, could not explain the relative isolation of the two subfields. Finally, there is an important asymmetry when speaking about GPG (political geography as a subfield of geography) on the one hand and PSPG (political geography as a subfield of political science). Political geography within geography is a recognized and institutionalized subfield with its own prestigious academic journals – *Political Geography* and *Geopolitics*. On the other hand, political geography within political science does not exist as a fully institutionalized subfield. It lacks its own prestigious journals and there are no chairs of political geography. What we can see instead are individual studies clearly focused on spatial-political phenomena yet dispersed in different journals (e.g. Stasavage 2010; Theisen et al. 2011; Johnston 2008; Fazal 2007; Mearsheimer 2001; Herbst 2000).

The rest of this paper is organized as follows. The first section explains why Czech political geography – while still different from Western political geographies – will be affected by processes occurring within Western political geographies. The next section briefly describes the subfields of political geography within the context of Geography and Political Science and discusses four key cleavages producing barriers to cross-disciplinary dialogue. The third section compares two papers dealing with the same puzzle – one written by a prominent geographer and a second by a political scientist – to illustrate how the cleavages affect actual research. The final section proposes suggestions on how to bridge the two political geographies.

## Czech Political Geography: Marching West

While the underlying assumption of the article is that the cleavages within Western political geography are highly relevant for Czech political geography, it is fair to mention that Czech political geography is not a perfect reflection of Western political geography. Czech political science was established just after the end of the communist era in 1990. It is no exaggeration to say that Czech political science is a rather young and still rapidly developing discipline (see Kouba, et al. 2015; Šanc 2009; Drulák 2009). While geography has

<sup>2</sup> Current governmental policies prioritize Anglo-Saxon and West-European journals and publisher houses.

<sup>3</sup> In this paper, the term political geography denotes the whole subfield, including its geographical and political science part. Plural forms are used sometimes to highlight existing differences between geography and PS varieties of the subfield. The term “(political) geographer” is reserved for geographers.

a long tradition in the Czech academic environment, political geography, while vibrant in the 1920s and 1930s (see Korčák 1938; Dvorský 1918 and 1923), essentially ceased to exist under the communist regime. Therefore, even GPG has had to be reconstructed after 1989. This relative novelty of the field undoubtedly affects many traits of Czech political geography, as it continues to evolve.<sup>4</sup>

Firstly, Czech political geography is much smaller than US, UK or European political geographies. While causing problems for the community in the sense of establishing national journals or professional organizations, it makes it possible for individuals to know personally other scholars with similar interests across disciplinary boundaries. This is probably why Czech political geographers (political scientists as well as geographers) tend to publish in national and international journals belonging to another field (see Hoch et al. 2012; Kofroň 2016; Ouellette, Weiss 2015; Drulák 2006). Some Czech political geographers (political scientists as well as geographers) have close affinities to regional studies (e.g. Hoch, Rudincová 2015; Hoch et al. 2012; Riegl, Doboš 2014; Romancov 2009; Jelen 2009). It is remarkable that even Czech sociologists are producing research that can be labelled as political geography as well and which appears in national geographic journals (see Bernard 2012). Notably, the head of the Czech sociological department at the Academy of Sciences is a geographer by training (Kostelecký), while some political scientists have been employed by geography departments and geographers by political science departments. In sum, it seems that Czech social science has not been overly sectarian when it comes to institutional boundaries. Considering this, one could argue that so far there has been rather one – albeit diverse – political geography in Czechia.

Second, while political geography is a rather new field in Czechia, speaking institutionally, it has fared surprisingly well. Several independent programmes have been established. It is perhaps no coincidence that political geography (or Geopolitics) programmes have been institutionalized within broader geographical programmes (at the faculties of social sciences at the University of Ostrava and at Charles University in Prague) as well as within political science programmes (Prague, Charles University, Faculty of Social Sciences). Beyond that, political geography is taught as a course at many Czech departments of geography or political science. Considering this, it seems that political geography is well rooted in the Czech educational system – something unparalleled in many Western countries.

Third, most founders of modern Czech political geography, in most cases, were influenced by different epistemological and theoretical streams than were their counterparts in the US or UK.<sup>5</sup> Similarly, their personal political experiences, and thus possible political biases, have been very different – making certain ideas more or less attractive than for their Western colleagues. Having said this, a critic might say that the cleavages within Western political geography are irrelevant for Czech political geography as it is too distinct from Western political geography. But this argument would be gravely mistaken, for three reasons.

First, while generation of founders of modern Czech political geography had – *vis-à-vis* their Western counterparts – very different lives and academic experience, this source of otherness becomes increasingly less relevant as a new generation (raised and educated after the collapse of communism) of political geographers takes their places in institutions of higher education. This is not to say that the older generation of Czech scholars (consider

<sup>4</sup> The relative novelty of political science has led to neglecting methodological education in political science programmes (see Kofroň, Kruntorádová 2015).

<sup>5</sup> Access to Western books or journals (even those more technical) was limited before 1990.

geographer Martin Hampl) has become irrelevant, rather that the influence of foreign authorities has become undeniable. In addition, even among founders of modern Czech political geography there were émigrés – e.g. Petr Dostál and Bořivoj Hnízdo – scholars well socialized into Western intellectual traditions.<sup>6</sup> Especially Dostál's papers have referenced Western political geography throughout his career (see Dostál et al. 2011; or Dostál 1998). So, while these authors might not be enchanted by say neo-Marxism or post-structuralism, they knew Western traditions well enough to teach them to their students.

Second, it is evident that Czech political geographers have incorporated Western literature and ideas into their works. And this tendency to incorporate foreign intellectual traditions is clearly visible even when focusing on papers and books written in Czech. For example, Kurfurst, Baar 2016; Laš, Baar 2014; Mácha et al. 2015; Kofroň 2016; Hoch et al. 2012; Hoch, Rudincová 2015; Romancov 2009, or in this issue Vogt 2017; Rudincová 2017 and Stauber 2017) – they all used predominately Western literature – especially in theoretical or methodological sections. Simply put, while Czech political geography might have been somewhat insulated from contemporary Western streams of thought in the 1990s, today's story is different. What might differ significantly is the relative popularity of some ideas, theoretical positions or methodologies. While neo-Marxism has been quite popular among Anglo-Saxon (political) geographers (see Harvey 1973; Massey 1995; Taylor 1992; Taylor 2011), it has been rather neglected by Czech (political) geographers. On the other hand, it is quite remarkable that Czech political geographers – even when employing an interpretivist tradition or critical geopolitics viewpoint – are willing to cite leading political realists without attacking them (see Laš, Baar 2014: 364).

Third, for better or worse, there is increasing pressure to internationalize Czech higher education – be it in the form of student and faculty international mobility or – more importantly – in the form of incentives to publish in respected foreign journals. If nothing else, this (mostly positive) internationalization pressure makes Western intellectual streams and cleavages highly relevant for both Czech geographers and political scientists. Without good knowledge about preferred theoretical positions or acclaimed methodological fashions in a (sub)discipline, it is more likely that a scientific output will be ill-received; therefore, socialization into international scientific communities is almost inevitable. There is, however, a risk that by closely imitating foreign idealized models, Czech political geographers will internalize even their pathologies – pathologies creating obstacles for cross-disciplinary dialogue.

## The Four Cleavages Separating Political Geographies

Geography and political science are distinct fields – not only topically but even institutionally. As there are separate departments of political science and geography as well as professional organizations and academic journals, it is only logical that we will find some barriers to interdisciplinary communication. Hand in hand with this, there are more or less integrated or isolated national varieties of the two fields with their specifics (methodological, topical, sociological, etc.). It is worth mentioning that while geography is represented at most European universities, in the US, most elite universities often have not seen the separate department (or implemented a programme) of geography. Contrary to this pattern, political science is well and alive at elite universities in the US (see Kofroň 2012). Simply put,

<sup>6</sup> Both were key figures in establishing geography and political science programs of political geography.

it is only logical that encounters of political scientists and geographers will be affected by the aforementioned issues. Nevertheless, it seems that there are probably more fundamental differences that can account for the lower-than-expected level of mutual cross-fertilization.<sup>7</sup>

The following paragraphs identify four key cleavages that work as profound obstacles between PSPG and GPG. While these cleavages affect the sub-field of PG, in most cases they are not generated within the subfield. In fact, they tend to be produced by different sociologies of the two broader disciplines – Geography and Political Science. It is important to highlight that neither geography nor political science (including their subfields) are homogeneous. Nevertheless, there is some level of overlap between cleavages and disciplinary boundaries. The first two of four key cleavages are: (i) the goal of a science and related (ii) epistemological preferences.<sup>8</sup> The remaining two cleavages are driven by (iii) preference to study either individual cases or broader populations and about willingness to pursue either descriptive or explanatory analyses, and by (iv) preferred methodologies and methods and general attitude toward methodological issues.

### ***I. Differing Goals of Science***

At the first sight, science (even social science) should be motivated by the goal of broadening and deepening our knowledge. Yet, for what purpose does this knowledge gathering occur? Mainstream political science works under the traditional viewpoint that science should be value neutral (see Chernoff 2007, Maliniak et al. 2012: 32). Yes, even social science should be policy relevant (Gerring, Yesnowitz 2006; Avey, Desh 2014); nevertheless, for political scientists, this policy relevance is achieved through theoretical advancement leading to models able to predict. And ability to predict means that they can provide advice to policy circles. While some political scientists might vociferously oppose governing elites or specific policies (see Mearhsiemer 1981, 1982; Mearhsiemer et al. 2002), their ambition in most cases is to make the current system better, to alter existing policies (without urge to destroy or radically transform the system). It is not considered inappropriate to give advice to governing elites even in matters of war and great power competition (see Rosato, Schuessler 2014; Mearhsimer 1982). In this regard, mainstream political scientists resemble mainstream economists.

Geographers – especially political geographers – on the other hand, abandoned the aforementioned approach long ago. From the 1970s onward, many geographers started to practise critical or emancipatory social science (see Harvey 1973; Hepple 1986; O’Toal 1999). In their viewpoint, science is no neutral game – it is in fact a tool that empowers (see Lacan 1976). Traditional science empowers elites (political, military or economic), as it seeks to improve existing system and its policies. Geographers, instead, seek to use knowledge to empower those exploited, disempowered, or marginalized by the current system (O’Toal

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<sup>7</sup> This less than satisfactory cross-fertilization can be illustrated at two levels. Firstly, data regarding the citation pattern from ISI WOS clearly indicates that the two geographical journals devoted to political geography (*Political Geography* and *Geopolitics*) communicate only rarely with journals in political science or IR. Interestingly, these political geography journals are for political scientists less important than elite economics or sociology journals. Secondly, as we will discuss later, it is remarkable how limited is the transmission of methodological tools from political science to political geography.

<sup>8</sup> We leave aside the question whether one changes epistemological preference because of changed goals or vice versa.

1999; Megoran 2011; Dodds 2008). Thus, the goal is much more radical – it aims at the thorough transformation of an existing system or its entire dismantling. As we will mention in the following section, this radical, critical or emancipatory approach has coincided with an epistemological shift towards interpretative epistemologies. Nevertheless, the tendency of many geographers to pursue emancipatory science cannot be explained solely with reference to popularity of interpretativist epistemologies, as there has been influential (neo) Marxist community of geographers as well (see Harvey 1973; Massey 1995 or Taylor 2011).

One can ask if these differences produce obstacles to communication. Unfortunately, they do. From the perspective of traditional science, emancipatory or critical social science in its extremes might be viewed as political activism – not as a true science (see Haverluk et al. 2014; Kurfurst, Baar 2016). On the other hand, proponents of an emancipatory or critical programme will tend to accuse traditional social scientists as supporters of oppression, militarism or imperialism (Kearny 2009; O’Toal 1999). Actually, critical geopoliticians (as well as radical constructivist within PS) have voiced exactly this kind of critique *vis-à-vis* classical and neoclassical geopoliticians (see Megoran 2010 or O’Toal 1999; Ashley 1984). The key problem with this cleavage is that it basically turns scientific struggle into political one – thus leaving little space for compromise or willingness to hear arguments from the other side of the hill.

## **II. The Epistemologies**

Closely related to previous cleavage is the issue of epistemologies. Epistemology tells us what we can know, what will remain hidden from our cognitive faculties, and how to achieve knowledge (or scientific progress). For better or worse, while epistemologies produce quite often strong and bold claims and their implications affect our methodological preferences as well as preferences about the primary goal of social science, so far there has been little consensus achieved regarding the plausibility of individual epistemologies (see Monteiro, Ruby 2009). It seems that we will be condemned to live in a world of multiple epistemologies.

Political scientists – at least when talking about the mainstream in the US – prefer naturalism, or more specifically, neo-positivism or scientific realism (see Monteiro, Ruby 2009; Maliniak et al. 2012: 32). These epistemologies assume that social issues and natural issues can be studied in a similar way. There are discernible causes and consequences which can be discovered by empirical inquiry. Scientific discovery should be approached as a value neutral – and apolitical – enterprise (Chernoff 2007). These epistemologies expect that we will be able to build case-specific theories and more general theories (simplified causal models) explaining behaviour (or development) at the aggregate level of a population (or class events). These explanatory theories will lead to an ability to produce predictions, which in turn might help us to guide policy choices (Chernoff 2007).

Most political geographers, on the other hand, have rejected positivism and the idea of value neutral science (Wyly 2009; Kwan, Schwanenn 2009). Their epistemological preferences go for either a variety of critical or interpretativist viewpoints, or to a more moderate critical realism approach (Mamadouh 2003; O’Toal 1999). These approaches are much more sceptical about the chances of building universal theories and strong predictive models in social science. While critical realism retains the goal of explanation (not so much prediction – see Sayer 1992 and 2000), interpretativist approaches, as their label suggests, have

abandoned explanation and instead search for interpretation. Interpretation, however, cannot be achieved through scientific procedures of natural science (Chernoff 2007).

In addition, critical realism, as well as many interpretivist and critical approaches, not only rejects value neutral science but also believes that science should pursue an emancipatory goal (see Sayer 1992; Megoran 2011; Monteiro, Ruby 2009) – meaning it should aim at the emancipation of oppressed or disadvantaged people. The most pronounced variety of this epistemological position is (so-called) critical geopolitics (O’Toal 1999, 2000; Mamadouh 2003; Kurfurst, Baar 2016).<sup>9</sup> According to these authors, science should serve certain policy goals. These policy goals are (in most cases) antithetical to interests of traditional power holders. It means that those who support traditional power-holders are at least implicitly seen as political enemies (see Megoran 2010).

Further, these epistemologies have been preoccupied with ideas and language as the key drivers of the social world. While ideas, language and discourse can be studied by more traditional researchers, it is only logical that they play a more prominent role in interpretivist research. Conversely, partisans of interpretivist approaches have a lesser interest in the material aspects of political issues. This duality creates a somewhat awkward situation when mainstream political scientist tend to study space, distance and geography as objectively existing physical entities, while (political) geographers prefer to focus on geography as a socially constructed entity.<sup>10</sup> However, this is not a unique situation as we can observe striking similarity in the case of economic geographers and spatial economists (see Rodriguez-Pose 2011).

It would be however a grave mistake to think that all research done within GPG is affected by this worldview; nevertheless, it is possible to argue that this leitmotif is much stronger among (political) geographers (Mamadouh 2003; Fendrych 2015). Similarly, it would be a mistake to assume that no political scientist has adopted these critical and interpretivist approaches – in fact, there is a growing body of critical or constructivist scholars (especially in Europe – see Ruggie 1993; Der Derian 2000; Drulák 2006; Pouliot 2010; Dytrich 2013).

### ***III. One Case or Many – Description or Explanation***

The aforementioned epistemological differences are reflected in another set of subtler cleavages. The first is the tendency to produce either idiographic (case specific) or nomothetic (universal) knowledge. As noted earlier, political scientists place high value on grand and middle-range theories which can explain more or less bounded classes of events. This is well illustrated by the situation in International Relations, where (successful) theorists are widely considered to be the top figures of the field and their work is reflected in curricula (Maliniak et al. 2012: 48). While political scientists often study individual cases (see Rosato 2011; or Shiffrinson 2016; Stauber 2017 in this issue, etc.), their ultimate goal (in most cases) is to test or build a theory that could be applied to broader set of cases. Certainly, here and

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<sup>9</sup> It seems, however, that intra-geographical debate about the success of critical geopolitics has begun regarding its proclaimed goals. Some authors such as Haverluk et al. (2014) criticize this approach heavily, while others demand a higher methodological sophistication and willingness to accept at least some causal arguments (Fendrych 2015 or Kurfurst; Baar 2016).

<sup>10</sup> A reader might compare e.g. Herbst 2000; Mearsheimer 2001; Green 2012; Johnston 2008; Stasavage 2010 with Dalby 2008; Mamadouh, Dijkstra 2006; Kuus 2008; Robinson 2004; O’Toal 2000, etc.



there we can see single case studies even in top journals; nevertheless, the heights of the field are usually reserved for more theoretical works (see Gerring 2013). Considering the abovementioned, it is unsurprising that explanation is the dominant goal of political scientists, and the same holds for those interested in political geography. Sure, there is a growing body of those pursuing interpretation; nevertheless, the mainstream is still preoccupied with causal analysis (it holds even for unique case studies, see Maliniak et al. 2012). Somewhat more surprising might be that political scientists have eschewed description in the past few decades (see Gerring 2013: 730). It is telling that the number of descriptive pieces in top political science journals is much lower than numbers for natural sciences (Gerring 2013: 731).

Contrary to this position, political geographers and geographers in general are more welcoming to unique case and descriptive pieces. There are even well-established journals – such as *Eurasian Geography and Economics* – that publish predominantly descriptive pieces. And even journals such as *Political Geography* or *Geopolitics* publish many papers that are strongly case driven (see Scott 2009; Dodds 2008; Dalby 2009; Robinson 2004). It is important to highlight that this willingness to engage in description or single-case study without strong theoretical ambition is visible even in the case of authors who do not subscribe to interpretivist epistemology (see Scott 2009; Dostál et al. 2011 for political geography or Pavlínek, Ženka 2011 for economic geography). Nevertheless, even modern geography values papers aiming at explanation or interpretation more than papers offering pure description. The most visible difference lies, however, in attitude towards theories – or class-wide explanations. As noted, an important part of (political) geographers has adopted interpretivist epistemologies (see Mamadouh 2003). These epistemologies are rather unfriendly towards grand theories, and even middle-range causal theories are seen as highly susceptible (for general discussion, see Chernoff 2007; Monteiro Ruby 2009; for a geographical argument, see Matoušek 2013). Instead of explanation, these geographers aim at interpretation, which is, however, connected with just a single case or very small number of cases. Thus, it comes as no surprise that political geographers tilt towards the idiographic pole. Still, it is important to highlight that even political geographers aiming at explanation are not eager to build or test general theories (see Scott 2009; Dostál et al. 2011).

Interestingly, this differing mindset can be observed – if in a milder version – even in the case of Czech political scientists and Czech (political) geographers. We guess it is no coincidence that only Stauber (2017) – a political scientist – in this volume attempted to explicitly test a theory. While he studied a single case, that case was selected because of its theoretical leverage (being almost ideal most-likely case – see Gerring 2007). On the other hand, both geographers in this issue (Vogt 2017 and Rudincová 2017), while mentioning broader theories as well, were rather interested in particular cases than in theory-building enterprise. Leaving aside which attitude is better (rather a moot point here), one can easily see that the two fields disagree over preference for idiographic vs. nomothetic science. It means that a political scientist will often see geographical papers as theoretically underdeveloped and perhaps as lacking broader significance (for similar argument regarding economic geography, see Krugman 2011). On the other hand, geographers (even those embracing explanation as a key goal) might consider PS papers as empirically superficial, too abstract or even distanced from complex reality. Interpretivist political geographers would add that these general theories are not only wrong in their empirical validity, but that they even promote policies which are antithetical to emancipatory goals of modern geography.

#### IV. Methods

Metatheoretical differences tend to be visibly reflected at the level of methodologies and methods. For better or worse, methods are progressively gaining an ever more central place in social science research. Partly, this is driven by enhanced possibilities of computers and statistical software, thus enabling real-time big data analysis – something impossible thirty years ago. Interestingly, the development of quantitative methods has motivated qualitative scholars to enhance the methodology of qualitative research. Thus, even qualitative researchers have started to formalize their procedures and have developed new methods (see Tetlock, Belkin 1996; Van Evera 1997; Brady, Collier et al. 2004; George, Bennett 2005; Gerring 2007; Ragin 2009; Checkel, Bennett et al. 2014, etc.).<sup>11</sup>

Political science – at least as its mainstream is considered – is surprisingly keen on methods. There is one high-impact journal devoted to methods (*Political Analysis*) and the key (generalist as well as specialized) journals in PS have published a great number of methodological papers from both the qualitative as well as quantitative tradition. Quite often these papers rank among the most cited in each journal (e.g., Fearon 1991; Braumoeller 2004; Lieberman 2005). In addition, many subfield journals (*Security Studies*, *Comparative Political Studies*, etc.) have sponsored monothematic issues dealing with a variety of methodological issues. Currently, methodological development stemming from political science has found fertile ground in other social sciences as well. For example, Brambor, Clark Godler's (2006) article on interaction terms has been cited 247 times (out of 1,562 total citations, according to WOS) by quantitatively strong economists. Gerring's (2007) book on case studies has been well received, among others, by public administration and management and business studies (117 WOS citations out of 748).

Having said this, three notes are in place. First, while qualitative scholars try hard, they are – if slowly – being replaced by quantitative scholars, at least within some subfields of PS. Specifically, American politics is totally dominated by quantitative scholars and comparative politics is slowly being hegemonized by quantitatives (Pierson 2007). Even within International Relations (IR), there are subfields which are predominantly quantitative – still, IR remains, outside of a handful top tier journals, predominantly qualitative (see Maliniak et al. 2012: 28). Second, while the aforementioned is relevant for those aiming at explanation (epistemological naturalists), it seems that in the past decade there has been ever growing interest in fine-tuning analytical approaches (methods) even among interpretivists (see Slater 2013; Banta 2012; Pouliot 2015, etc.). Finally, increased attention paid to methods does not bring only positives (Graham et al. 2014; Pierson 2007; Schrodt 2014). As Mearsheimer and Walt (2013) claim, there is a tendency to eschew theories and instead aim at simplistic hypothesis testing. According to these authors, a method-driven shift is detrimental especially to subfields where data are sparse and natural experiments are ethically or otherwise problematic. Paradoxically, exaggerated interest in methods may undermine theoretical work (the very kind of scientific output that methods should help to pursue).

Political geographers, on the other hand, are less concerned when it comes to methods. First, while methodological education plays a big role in modern PS programmes, in case of geography, methods are a significantly less pronounced part of education (Hamnett 2003). Even in actual research there is a smaller tendency to cite methodological papers or books (see Fendrych 2015), and at least in political geography it is not uncommon to produce

<sup>11</sup> It merits our attention that these books received extreme citation response (well into hundreds and thousands, see Kofroň 2014).

a qualitative paper without a methodological section (e.g. Scott 2009, Dalby 2008). Purely methodological articles are rare at *Political Geography* and *Geopolitics*, rather they can be encountered in generalist journals (*Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, *Progress in Human Geography*). This situation can be partially explained by the fact that geographers are less interested in theory testing and development, and more interested in analysing singular cases (where especially quantitative methods are of lesser importance). What cannot be explained so easily is that (political) geographers have not tried to fine-tune methods for description, conceptualization or unique case (causal) explanation. To be fair, an important part of the field is dominated by interpretivists, which logically leads to lesser interest in methods designed for causal identification (Chernoff 2007). Given that political geography is a much smaller subfield than political science, it is logical that very specialized and technically demanding research on methods faces greater obstacles; still, one can perceive a striking difference *vis-à-vis* modern political science.

Perhaps more important and interesting, political geographers have rather neglected methodological developments in political science (see Kofroň 2014; 2012). It is remarkable that willingness to adopt various quantitative as well as qualitative methods has been very low if compared with sociology or economics (see Kofroň 2014). This is most surprising when it comes to methodology of case studies, process tracing of ideas and counterfactuals – as these methods would be easily applicable even to more idiographic and inductive research agenda of geographers. While sociologists and even some economists have been eager to implement methods fine-tuned by political scientists, political geographers – although they face similar topics and methodological obstacles – have hesitated to adopt these methods (something we will illustrate in the next chapter).

Again, considering how influential methods are in modern political science, it is not surprising that geography papers are sometimes seen as analytically weak by mainstream political scientists. Geographers, on the other hand, might be tempted to consider some political science papers too technical and lacking sufficient depth and complexity (as there is great difference between case study aimed at description vs. theory testing). This mutual neglect or disregard is unfortunate at best; at worst, it effectively separates many (political) geographers from mainstream political scientists. It is fair to say, however, that this problem is most salient when it comes to studies in geopolitics. There are many – methodologically – superb papers written by (political) geographers dealing with voting behaviour, civil wars, etc. that can easily captivate political scientists.

### **Cleavages in the Actual Research: An Empirical Illustration**

One thing is to abstractly speak about cleavages in research, the other thing is to demonstrate this assertion empirically. One way to do that would be to measure citation patterns and the occurrence of key words or to analyse various curricula. As noted, such comparison would have been easy if the unit of analysis had been whole (social or human) geography and political science. Given that political geography is (albeit small) an institutionalized subfield within geography, while political geography within political science is a rather loosely connected cluster of research papers and books, it seems that a different research strategy is needed. One way to demonstrate the cleavages is to compare actual research done by geographers and political scientists. Ideally, compared papers should be as similar as possible

regarding the research puzzle, and they should employ similar research design. Simply put, what we are looking for are the most-similar cases (of research).

The problem with most-similar cases is that nature (or the social world) offers them only rarely. Fortunately, there are two papers – one written by a prominent political geographer and another by a political scientist – that are extremely similar in both the research puzzle and research design they use (Dodds 2008 and Harvey 2012).<sup>12</sup> Both papers focus on causes of the Iraq War in 2003. More specifically, both papers analyse whether neo-conservatism (represented by G. W. Bush and the Republicans) was responsible for the war, and if it could have been avoided had Al Gore and the Democrats won the election in 2000.<sup>13</sup> In short, both articles deal with the same (or very similar) research question, consider the same key independent variable (the influence of neo-conservatism) and, quite importantly, employ counterfactual analyses as the main method.

As far as authors are considered, Klaus Dodds is a highly regarded scholar embracing a critical geopolitical approach (see Dodds 2008: 75–76). Despite this interpretative epistemological leaning, Dodds decided to pursue causal analysis (*ibid.* 75) of a single case (something deserving appraisal). Frank Harvey, on the other hand, is a political scientist with extensive expertise in history. Therefore, it is safe to say that Harvey is not, so to speak, a theory guy (like most top stars in IR or political science) and he is closer to the idiographic pole than majority of political scientists. In this sense, both authors (or their papers) are probably more similar than would be typical for PSPG and GPG.

When analysing the texts, the first striking difference emerges at the very beginning of the papers. Dodds (in contrary to Harvey) not only tries to solve the research puzzle, he wants to promote counterfactuals as an analytical approach (pp. 75–76). This is a logical and worthy effort, given that counterfactuals have been rather neglected within geography until recently (see Gilbert, Lambert 2010). The most striking difference, however, comes in methodological sections. Numerous articles and books have been written about counterfactuals and counterfactual analysis (especially in PS, philosophy, etc.). Yet, Dodds has mentioned only a few of them, and in most cases only in passing. Instead, Dodds rather explains that counterfactual theorizing is not conspiracy theorizing (Dodds 2008: 74, 75 and 79), and that “what if” thinking is not the same as “if only” thinking (Dodds 2008: 74).

In the next step, Dodds categorizes counterfactuals as conservative or critical (76–80). Critical counterfactualism (rather neologism) is left without sufficient definition. His category of conservative counterfactual is represented by Ferguson (1999). It seems that this categorization is to some extent driven by the political leanings of a given author. The main problem here, however, is that Ferguson’s counterfactuals have been strongly criticized by (prominent) political scientists (Lebow 2000). The criticism was not directed at the political leanings of Neil Ferguson, rather the critics mentioned numerous methodological problems contained by Ferguson’s counterfactuals. Interestingly, Dodds is silent about this criticism as well as about general methodological rules governing counterfactual analyses.

When it comes to actual empirical analysis, Dodds based it only on Al Gore’s public speeches – some of them given after 2003 – after the Iraqi war went south. After 2003,

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<sup>12</sup> Harvey’s article originated from his 2008 conference paper. Suggesting that differences between the papers cannot be explained by time lag.

<sup>13</sup> Gore won the popular vote, and his non-presidency was essentially decided by a few hundred ballots in Florida. It means that Gore’s presidency was a real possibility and not some miraculous counterfactual (see Tetlock, Belkin et al. 1996).

Gore was indeed highly critical of the war and claimed it was a mistake. Dodds takes these arguments at face value and (implicitly) argues that these post-2003 speeches, hand in hand with much less conclusive pre-2003 speeches, provide good predictors for a counterfactual Gore administration's behaviour after 9/11 and the two subsequent years. Thus, Dodds concludes that the counterfactual world where Al Gore had been elected president would have not experienced war with Iraq. Even a sympathetic observer must be somewhat sceptical about the analytical strength of the article. If nothing else, one is surprised that a critical geopolitician takes ex-post Gore's speeches at face value without considering that Gore might have been just reacting to the bad development of the war, or that he wanted to appear as a farsighted politician.

In striking contrast to Dodds, Harvey cites the key methodological literature on counterfactuals and problems connected with analysing necessary conditions, process tracing, etc. Subsequently, he builds a very strong research design specifying the kind of evidence needed for rejection of a neoconist hypothesis (that war was caused by neocons). Instead of relying on a single aspect (such as Gore's speeches alone), he tries to analyse other lines of observation (public support for war, Gore's attitude during his vice-presidency, etc.). It is evident that Harvey carefully considers the validity of a different kind of data. For example, he rejects Gore's post-war speeches as irrelevant and instead looks at speeches made during the Iraqi crisis and during Gore's term as vice-president.

The following empirical analysis is well organized, step-by-step providing key information relevant to a counterfactual world. In the end, Harvey concludes that had Gore become president in 2000, he also would have (most likely) invaded Iraq. This claim – if controversial – is supported by his careful analysis, and it is as persuasive as a counterfactual can be. This is not to say that Harvey is right and Dodds is wrong, rather that research done by Harvey is much more compelling.

The point of this short comparison is not to claim that (political) geography pieces are inferior to political science pieces, as it would be easy to find a political science paper where exaggerated methodological concerns killed any substance (not to mention accessibility). We do believe, however, that the two papers nicely illustrate some of the aforementioned cleavages. Harvey, as a political scientist, places high value on methodological issues and clear research design. He leaves aside moral-normative questions and tries to separate analysis from his political viewpoint. Dodds is obviously less concerned about methodology (which strongly undermines his conclusion). It is quite surprising and supporting of the main assumption of this paper that he is little interested in works on counterfactuals done within political science. While he does not promote some political ideology, it is quite evident that he rejects (neo)conservative political leaning. This is most evident – and perhaps most detrimental – when it comes to his categorization of counterfactuals. Classification of counterfactuals into critical and conservative is at best awkward from a methodological point of view; at worst, it is unnecessary politicizing of social science. This part especially must be striking when encountered by any mainstream political scientist. It is telling that Dodds' paper has not been criticized by other geographers interested in counterfactuals and actively citing his paper.

The point here is not to bash Dodds' article (in fact, we praise his willingness to analyse causality). The point is rather to show that had Dodds adopted methodologically more sophisticated tools (which was possible), his 2008 study might have been applauded

by both geographers as well as political scientists. Instead, Dodds' paper becomes an unfortunate reflection of existing cleavages separating the two disciplines.

### **Instead of a Conclusion, Where to Look for Intellectual Bridges**

Cleavages among mainstream geographers and mainstream political scientists are real, and they run deep and wide. Traditionally, geography has welcomed descriptive and single case studies, while political science has evolved towards more theoretical and nomothetic science – yet it seems that this cleavage is the least problematic. Differences in epistemological preferences which are logically correlated with differences in the broader goal of social science play a much more divisive role. These metatheoretical differences tend to be reflected at the level of research methodologies and general attitudes toward methods. Similarly, researches affected by interpretivist tradition tend to be more focused on the role of ideas. In sum, these differences create a gap that is hard to bridge and thus (unfortunately) isolate the two fields.

The logical question remains whether there are possibilities for building bridges. To be sure, the simplest – yet unlikely and awfully dictatorial – solution would be to change the metatheoretical leaning of either PSPG (towards interpretivism) or GPG researches (towards naturalism). Leaving this possibility aside, we see three potential bridges.

The first one goes with single case explanation (or description). Single case explanation and description has often been overlooked by political scientists, yet as Harvey's article demonstrates (along with empirical articles of Rosato 2011, or Shiffrinson 2016, Byman, Lind 2010), there is growing potential for studies of this kind (provided that a single case is theoretically or politically relevant). Similarly, single case studies are inevitable for identifying case specific microrealizations of macroeffects (something that quantitative PS studies have ignored). It is, however, important to be very clear about the significance of a case and about research design – otherwise mainstream political scientists will be tempted to consider a paper of marginal relevance. When it comes to descriptive pieces, the potential is probably even higher. Considering awareness of political scientists of their own deficiencies in descriptive studies, (political) geographers might easily fill the lacuna. Even here, however, it will be essential to relate a descriptive paper to some policy-relevant event or theoretical dispute within political science. On the other hand, those political scientists who try to sell rather descriptive articles could find a willing audience among geographers.

Hand in hand with the previous goes the process-tracing of ideas (identification of their causal impact). Ideas, norms and ideologies (including geopolitical imaginations and discourses) might be important in political life. Yet, it is not enough to say so: we need some evidence. Without the ability to empirically support claims suggesting influence of ideas or norms on political action, these claims are just speculative assumptions at best. It is only logical that interpretativists should be eager to study the difference that ideas make. Unfortunately, tracing causal impact of ideas is demanding. Fortunately, solid works on the subject have emerged over the past decade (see Jacobs 2014; Collier 2011). Especially critical geopoliticians would be well advised to try to apply this methodology. With solid empirical evidence in hand, their position *vis-à-vis* neoclassical geopoliticians and IR folks would be stronger, and vice versa; for neoclassical geopoliticians, the best way to communicate with critical geopoliticians might be via demonstrating that ideas play a surprisingly small role

under certain conditions. Last but not least, such research would be welcomed in modern political science.

Finally, it seems to us that paying greater attention to counterfactual reasoning might be a viable strategy for promoting mutual understanding.<sup>14</sup> Counterfactual reasoning is not only a prerequisite for grand theories, it is even more important for single case explanations (where comparison to similar cases is most problematic – Lebow 2000, Tetlock, Belkin et al. 1996). On a more theoretical level, counterfactual questions are essential for causal arguments in general (List, Kai 2013; Brady 2011). What is perhaps somewhat more surprising, counterfactual questions are even at the bedrock of constitutive arguments (Ylikoski 2013) which are quite often recalled by interpretivist authors. Considering this, we do believe that direct engagement with counterfactuals would enable (political) geographers to better communicate their research with political science audience.

Whether these bridges will enable cross-disciplinary dialogue is yet to be seen. We would like to see political geography rather as a space of intellectual cross-fertilization than a reminder of mutual isolation of geography and political science. Hopefully, Czech political geography will play active role in building cross-disciplinary bridges.

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<sup>14</sup> It is no coincidence that famous economists such as Krugman (2011, 3) criticize geography papers for failing to solve “what if” questions.

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