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## Orthodox Migrants in Poland in the Light of Spatial Diffusion Theory - A Research Concept

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**Abstract:**

**Purpose:** Outline the theoretical concept of the study of the influx of Orthodox migrants to Poland in the light of the theory of spatial diffusion. Detailed considerations include a discussion of the adopted algorithm of the research procedure, including the purpose and significance of the research, the research design and plan, and the research methodology.

**Design/Methodology/Approach:** The observed process of spatial diffusion of Orthodox religious ideas to Poland requires reflection on how to research this phenomenon. It seems that social science methods, such as surveys and semantic profiles, are the most appropriate. But the study should also use materials and available statistical sources in order to be able to make comparisons between spatial units. The proposed research path is an attempt to develop general mathematical assumptions, which is important because the observed migration processes will increase not only in Poland, but also throughout Western Europe.

**Findings:** The proposed research path is a response to a relatively new phenomenon in Poland, which is the inflow of Orthodox migrants from Eastern Europe. Embedding the research in the theory of spatial diffusion seems justified..

**Practical Implications:** Due to its universality, the proposed algorithm of procedures together with its theoretical justification can be widely used in migration research.

**Originality/Value:** The influx of Orthodox migrants to Poland, explained by the theory of spatial diffusion, will allow us to designate places defined as primary places of residence and will enable us to identify current places of residence, which may be the result of previous experiences and local traditions, habits and local cultural patterns.

**Keywords:** Spatial diffusion, relocation diffusion, hierarchical diffusion, Orthodoxy, migrants, Poland.

**JEL Classification:** Y20, O15, A14.

**Paper type:** Research article.

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## **1. Introduction**

The proposed research issues lead to the designation of a three-element set of goals. The first of them is the cognitive goal, which is to expand the existing knowledge about the form and scale of functioning of the Polish Autocephalous Orthodox Church (PAOC). The spatial dimension of the Church's activity was recognized as a novelty in this case. It should be emphasized that the number of Orthodox believers in Poland has been growing in recent years. The largest increases do not apply to areas historically associated with the Orthodox religion, i.e., the region of Podlasie.

It is rather a moderate growth tendency, relatively proportional to the regional settlement network. Significant increases concern the "new" areas which have not been identified with Orthodoxy so far. Importantly, the number of followers in these areas initially grew in large cities, but now they are increasing in numbers in medium and small towns, and partly also in rural areas.

Therefore, it is possible to discuss the process of hierarchical spatial diffusion (dissemination) of religious practices within the framework of PAOC, combined with relocation diffusion. More precisely, there is a process of transferring religious ideas through their expansion from Eastern Europe (mainly Ukraine) to larger towns, and then they are transferred further down the hierarchical ladder.

While both hierarchical and relocating diffusion are largely random in nature because they take place in a spontaneous, not always predictable manner and more and more often not constant as to place. Signalized increases in the number of Orthodox believers are not uniform throughout the country because they depend on many factors of external and internal nature, which additionally enter various relationships with each other, strengthening or weakening each other.

The diffusion of religious practices is primarily conditioned by the historical past, contemporary state and Church policy, the processes of integration and globalization, and the diffusion barriers are determined by geopolitical, geostrategic, and geographical conditions, including the problem of proximity, neighborhood, spatial accessibility, etc. It is also worth emphasizing that the spatial diffusion of Orthodoxy in a narrow sense concerns the followers themselves, while in a broad sense it also concerns their material and spiritual activities closely related to religious practice and broadly understood social, cultural and market activities.

The observed process of spatial diffusion of Orthodox believers requires reflection on how to study this phenomenon. It seems that the most appropriate methods would be in the field of social sciences, such as surveys, and semantic profiles. However, the study should also make use of materials and available statistical sources to be able to make comparisons between spatial units. Depending on the level of detail of the data, spatial analyzes will concern the regional (voivodeship) or local (county, municipality) scale. It seems, however, that the main part of the reporting will relate

to the administrative units of the PAOC, dioceses and parishes. And these do not correspond to the administrative divisions of the country.

To avoid errors when comparing the phenomenon, the subject of research is the choice of measurable factors, such as the size of the congregation, the level of parish development or the hierarchical structure of the diocese. The research will be carried out on the territory of the Republic of Poland within the current borders, and the time scope of the research will cover the period 1990-2022. The research will also determine the direction of Orthodoxy's spread – the path from the places considered to be the initial (primary) to the current state.

The second cognitive element will be the results of empirical social research conducted on the target group - the followers of the Orthodox Church. Group A is made up of permanent residents of the surveyed unit, regardless of their nationality, but with a clearly defined residence status. It seems, however, that in this group several subgroups could be distinguished related to waves of Orthodox migrations from Eastern Europe, ranging from the one in the late 1940s and ending with the one from the period of the "Orange Revolution" in Ukraine.

Group B will consist of all newcomers, who are people who came to Poland after the events of 2014 in Kyiv, Ukraine, regardless of their country of origin and nationality. And a special subgroup of group B will be people who crossed the Polish border after February 24, 2022. It seems that the perception of religious practices, due to cultural differences, may significantly differ from the patterns and stereotypes of the country of origin and current place of residence, which will be an additional cognitive goal.

In view of the above, the main research goal will be to identify the directions and ways of disseminating religious practices within the Polish Autocephalous Orthodox Church, with particular emphasis on the relocation diffusion, which has recently determined the whole process. The research will also determine the direction of Orthodoxy's spread, i.e. the path from the places considered to be the initial (primary) to the current state. An attempt will also be made to explain the scientific process based on two different theoretical assumptions.

According to the first assumption, all processes are linked by a cause-and-effect relationship, so they are unambiguous (deterministic model). According to the second, the course may depend on some random factor or factors (stochastic model). An open question is whether the classical deterministic and stochastic models are applicable when studying the diffusion of religious practices since the course of diffusion is unsure.

The adopted cognitive goal of the research requires a number of additional detailed questions, for example: how the spatial diffusion of Orthodox religious practices affects local communities formed mostly in the spirit of the Catholic religion; are

there any significant intergenerational differences in religious practice and in the entire process of Orthodox spatial diffusion; what is the significance of the respondents' hitherto (primary) place of residence in spatial diffusion; what is the impact of international, national, regional and local conditions on the assessment of the diffusion process; is there a spatial differentiation of spatial diffusion in relation to its different categories; what are the positive and negative elements of disseminating PAOC; where is the concentration, and where the dispersion of the activities of the Orthodox Church, etc.

The second of the three-element set of goals is the methodological goal. The methodological goal of the thesis will be the construction and testing of the proprietary research tool (questionnaires for conducting exploratory interviews), which will be built in accordance with the general principles proposed by A.N. Oppenheim (1992) and the author's comments resulting from the specificity of the research, considering the works of Grabowska (1989), Krak (1983) and Rubin, Rubin (1997).

It is worth adding that the choice of the interview method should allow for a better understanding of the thoughts and feelings of respondents regarding such a sensitive topic as religious practices. The second important methodological goal is an attempt to apply the innovation diffusion model in research on the spatial diffusion of religious practices of the Polish Autocephalous Orthodox Church, based on the findings proposed by Łoboda (1977).

Verification of the applied methodological foundations, and indirectly the results themselves, are to be a premise for the evaluation of the applied method, its validity, and the possible need for modification. A secondary methodological goal will be the possibility of using the spatial diffusion method in the valorization of public religious spaces.

As in the case of the cognitive goal, the methodological goal requires several additional detailed questions, for example, the importance of the time and place of the research in the perception and evaluation of space; whether the perception and evaluation of space should be considered jointly or separately; what spatial image spatial diffusion can take, etc.

The third of the three-element set of goals is the application goal. It is based on the development of recommendations for controlling diffusion, which will allow determining the size and directions of flows of the Orthodox population, and, consequently, conduct targeted activities in specific places. The possibility of comparing and verifying the adopted assumptions in specific locations, and on this basis, various types of grouping, can be considered particularly valuable.

Based on the obtained data, it will also be possible to create a detailed cartographic study, which will include the conceptual elements to be created, addressed mainly to

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selected external groups, and studies on the local community, e.g., research characterizing local Orthodox religious practice in spatial terms. In addition, the conclusions from the thesis can be used in building the PAOC development strategy.

## **2. Importance of Research**

Religion as a concept and subject of research is a research field in which the paths of many sciences, including socio-economic geography, meet. Geographic research on religion in Poland has rich traditions and achievements and belongs to the well-developed subdisciplines of human geography (Jackowski 2003). However, most of the studies concern the Catholic Church.

So far, the post-war history of the Orthodox Church in Poland has had only a few studies. The best works are by Wojtkowiak (1995), Urban (1996), Mironowicz (2001, 2006) and Dudra (2004a, 2009). However, there is no study that would present the latest history of the Orthodox Church in Poland, especially in the dynamically changing reality.

All authors devote a lot of space to the general characteristics of Orthodoxy: history, relations with the state and other Churches, religious life and - most often very briefly - geography, limiting themselves only to the classical geographical description. A significant number of authors devote a lot of space to the local approach, creating monographic studies on individual parishes (e.g., Ackiewicz 2007, Pelica 2010, Wiszniewski 2002 and many others).

From the point of view of the research project implementation, the geographical study by Mielnik (2012), partly based on the work by Łukaszewski (2003), should be considered particularly interesting. In this work, the author undertook an analysis of the territorial structures of the PAOC, which are perhaps the most credible determinant of the situation of the Orthodox Church - especially their distribution, numbers, and religious life (as in the case of other denominations).

The facts presented there could become a reference point for the current situation. The work, however, is mainly descriptive and statistical in nature and does not refer to the analysis of religious practices by the faithful, but rather to the characteristics of church infrastructure and administration.

The work of a historian S. Dudra (2019) should also be considered important, in which the author carries out a very in-depth analysis and positioning of the Polish Autocephalous Orthodox Church in denominational policy and the national policy of the People's Republic of Poland and the Third Republic of Poland.

Also interesting are the works dealing with the identity thread related to the natural place of Orthodox religious practices relating to a specific region of Eastern Poland, most often Podlasie and Podkarpacie (including Litak 2014, Sadanowicz 2020), but

also to the so-called Regained lands to which after World War II the Orthodox population was partially resettled (Dudra 2004b).

Finally, the work of Rosińska (2016), who took up the characteristics of the historical, legal, and organizational conditions of the Orthodox Church's activity in Poland, should be considered important for the prepared project.

All these works, although important from the point of view of the application of the deterministic model of explanation, do not take up the threads considered important for the author of the project. It is about the dynamic characteristics of the functioning of PAOC with a clear analysis of spatial shifts in the light of the theory of spatial diffusion.

Therefore, it can be assumed that there are several studies on the research of individual parishes using the monographic method as a method of partial observation, but there are no approaches that preserve the time-space continuum. The direction of current regional research, which would refer to the research of the Orthodox Church in regional (diocesan) systems, is also poorly represented.

Most of them are historical in nature and do not relate to the spatial dimension (including Giba 2016). Therefore, it seems that carrying out original research relating to the spatial diffusion of the Orthodox Church in Poland seems to be a desirable action because it will fill the gap that exists between basic research in the field of the history of the Church, its legal and administrative framework, and individual research on the functioning of small (parish) Orthodox religious communities.

However, they do not raise the issues of shaping communities and the reasons for their spatial differentiation. Therefore, it is difficult to point to a publication that would take up the proposed research thread, i.e., the study of spatial shifts within the functioning of PAOC in the light of the theory of spatial diffusion.

### **3. Research Methodology**

The basic research method used in the project will be the field method, which is characteristic of geographical sciences. Thanks to the use of the field method, the original empirical material will be obtained, and the conditions of direct research will have an additional impact on the cause-effect relationship as well as the reliability and objectivity of the obtained results.

The basic method used in the field research will be a questionnaire for conducting exploratory interviews, which will be built according to the general principles proposed by A.N. Oppenheim (1992) and the author's comments resulting from the specificity of the research, considering the works of Grabowska (1989), Krak (1983) and Rubin, Rubin (1997).

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Based on the individual responses of the respondents, a synthetic image of the parish community in the spatial dimension will be created. The main part of the research will be for each respondent to answer the questions in the questionnaire and then create an input matrix. The most important elements of the questionnaire will concern the already signalled elements, i.e.:

- Primary places of residence, places of formation of Orthodox religious practices. It is allowed that such places may be located outside our country, e.g., in Ukraine, Belarus, etc.
- New, current places of residence, and places of current religious practices. These may result from previous experiences and local traditions, habits, and the local cultural pattern.
- The path that the respondents travelled between the above-mentioned points. Particular attention will be paid to its length and possible interactions that may have occurred while overcoming it.

With the help of the above categories and the links between them, it is possible to concisely, quantify and thus objectively characterize spatial shifts within a parish/diocese and compare them with others. The listed elements are of material nature and are easily visible in space, influencing the imagery of the area, but they do not consider, *inter alia*, the function or history of the settlement unit in which the seat of the parish is located - in fact, a place of religious practice. The proposed path will be used in all PAOC units qualified for the research, and the obtained results will be compared.

The choice of the spatial diffusion method results primarily from the rather general assumption that it is a very useful method in the study of spatial shifts, and since space is an attribute of geography, also geographic shifts. The method based on the interview questionnaire allows for determining the place of conceptual anchoring. Thanks to it, we can identify relationships between various elements of space that may affect spatial behaviour, including religious practices. The advantage of the method is also the active role of the respondent, as it allows to avoid suggesting answers to questions.

The possibility of graphical presentation of research results on a map is also important. Maps are also a universal tool so that neither age, gender, education nor even language constitute a significant barrier, as Lynch (1977) wrote about. Of course, like any other method, this method has its drawbacks, such as the lack of a uniform research methodology. However, this should be treated as a research challenge, and the author's assumptions can be considered as a voice in the discussion on the standardization of the research procedure.

The questionnaire method will be supported using the method of statistical analysis, which will allow for supplementing, explaining, and verifying the content of the interview sheets.

The acquisition of primary data will be preceded after appropriate preparation in terms of content, i.e., it will apply to the methods of selecting samples for the study, including determining the dependence on the type of study, sample size and self-control of the obtained results, etc., and in terms of organizational determination of the time and place of the study.

After the field research stage is completed, further stages of the research procedure will take place, i.e., processing, preliminary analysis and evaluation of the received messages and their final selection. Subsequently, detailed studies will be carried out. An important methodological problem at this research stage will be to determine the relationship between the applied quantitative and qualitative methods.

Subsequently, the quantitative material will be processed based on advanced statistical description methods using the Statistica software package. All the obtained results will be subjected to the process of inductive explanation, which, after positive verification of inductive generalizations, will be finalized with the construction of the theory.

The entire research process does not require the use of specialized tools and advanced research equipment. In the field part, it is crucial to prepare research sets that will be filled in manually by the respondents. Simple devices for audio-video recording are complementary. In the auditorium part, the research process requires the use of MS Office software to collect and organize data, while the Statistica and SPSS software allow for the processing of most of the received data, their verification and generalization. The entire study also requires the use of a graphic program for creating thematic maps.

#### **4. Conclusions**

Due to the wide application of the diffusion of innovation model in socio-economic geography, an attempt was made to adapt it to research in the geography of religion, choosing the example of research on spatial diffusion of religious practices of the Polish Autocephalous Orthodox Church. Since the diffusion of religious practices is conditioned by several social, political, legal, and environmental factors, including geographical ones, it seems necessary to use the methods of individual sciences falling within a wide spectrum of social sciences.

Hence the use of questionnaires, interviews, and measurements of attitudes in the research to explain individual cases, and on their basis, an inductive generalization will be made as far as possible regarding the causes and effects of spatial diffusion of the Orthodox Church in Poland. An analysis of the structure of the PAOC system was also selected to present the diffusion process. The behavioural method will be helpful in studying the actions of individuals influencing the diffusion process.

On the other hand, to develop the differentiation of selected system elements, a comparative method can be used. Here, the key issue will be the correct selection of the subjects of comparison. To avoid errors when comparing the phenomenon, the subject of research is the choice of measurable factors, such as the number of faithful, the level of parish development or the hierarchical structure of the diocese.

For the purposes of researching the phenomenon of diffusion, it was determined that the area of research will constitute the territory of the Republic of Poland within its current borders, however, noticing the spatial continuum of the area of occurrence of such socio-cultural phenomena as religion.

The adopted time scope of the research is the period 1990-2022, which results mainly from reporting, as well as the comparability of external conditions (environment). In studies of the diffusion process, the route of the phenomenon and the interaction between the initial (primary) place of occurrence and the current one is also important.

Currently, there are three basic types of deterministic diffusion: source, contact and source-contact. In the case of research on the diffusion of religious practices, the source model meets the condition of the constant influence of the information source. The contact model initially assumes cautious adoption of innovation as religion, which, after being accepted by opinion-makers, finds new followers.

However, in reality, there is almost no occurrence of the contact or source model in the classical form, therefore the contact-source model is most often used. A more important element of the research will be the reference to stochastic models, in particular an attempt to identify the meaning of expansive diffusion in which ideas are conveyed by one person to another and recognizing the role of relocating diffusion, in which the idea is transferred by the person changing the place of stay. A separate problem will be trying to define the so-called contagious diffusion by direct contact.

The research of diffusion of innovation traces its roots back to the first works of Ratzl (1891), who developed the diffusion theory during his archaeological and anthropological work. These were continued by Taylor (1937) in his work on the study of race dispersion, Dickinson (1951) in his study of the organization of urban systems, and Sauer (1952) in his study of changes in crop movement.

However, a decisive breakthrough in theoretical studies of diffusion was undoubtedly the work of Hagerstrand (1966), who proposed several new models of diffusion processes. A detailed elaboration of diffusion methods in Anglo-Saxon countries was presented in the work of Brown (1965), while in Poland they were developed in the 1970s by Łoboda (1977; 1983). For the purposes of researching the phenomenon of diffusion, it is necessary to define the area in which we study the phenomenon, the time range of the research, the object subject to diffusion, the place

of origin of the innovation, the process path and the destination of the innovation. In studies of the diffusion process, the route of the phenomenon and the interaction between the starting and ending sites of the subject's passage are also important. All of this has been defined previously.

In the light of the above, the author assumed that the image of the spatial shifts of the Orthodox Church believers in Poland, explained by the theory of spatial diffusion, will allow designating the places defined as the original places of residence, and in this case, the places of formation of Orthodox religious practices. It is allowed that such places may be located outside of Poland, e.g., in Ukraine, Belarus, etc.

As a result of the research, new, current places of residence will also be identified, and in our case places of current religious practice, which may be a result of previous experiences and local traditions, habits, and the local cultural pattern. This, in turn, may become a premise for further work on determining the path that the respondents traveled between the above-mentioned points.

Particular attention will be paid to its length and possible interactions that may have occurred while overcoming it. The comparison of research results for the BB, X, Y and Z generations, whose religious practices, due to the processes of changing the analogue world to the digital world, may be significantly different.

Research, due to its multidimensionality, requires the use of a large variety of methods to fully present the discussed issues. The course of all studies can be characterized in three stages:

- field studies and their initial selection,
- processing, preliminary analysis and evaluation of received messages and final selection,
- detailed studies, synthesis of collected results.

The first stage will be preceded by the collection of all available literature and other materials, including statistical data on PAOC. After their initial analysis and selection, the stage of conceptualization of basic concepts will begin and field research will be made more specific in terms of content, space, and time.

The first, fundamental stage of the research will be field based. It will consist in collecting information from respondents in selected dioceses/parishes in established age groups on religious practices using the method of the author's research tool (questionnaire for conducting exploratory interviews). The first stage will end with the organization of the results obtained in the field and their initial selection.

In the second stage of the work, the received data and the results of the interviews will be arranged, the evaluation and final selection will be carried out, and a

database will be created which will be the basis for further stages of the research procedure.

The third stage will be characterized by a detailed study, where, depending on the topic, both statistical description methods and methods of spatial analysis with the use of geographic information systems tools will be used. Then, a comparative analysis of the obtained results for individual spatial units will be made.

The research concept as well as selected elements of the research methodology were tested in 2019 in the study of the Parish of St. Nicholas in Szczecin (West Pomeranian Voivodeship). This example can be considered a case study and the obtained results are preliminary research results. In the conducted research, a questionnaire was used to conduct exploratory interviews.

The obtained research results allow for the adoption of an optimistic scenario both in the cognitive and methodological aspects of the research. Despite the initial distrust, the respondents finally provided satisfactory answers due to the sensitivity of the subject. Thus, the assumed goal of the preliminary research was achieved.

Despite the initial research success, attention should be paid to the risks of the planned project. The most important problems that should be considered during the implementation of the entire research process are:

- Research should be carried out with a clear, previously signalled division into groups A and B and according to clearly adopted age (generation) groups.
- The principle of representativeness of the sample in question should be observed in the research.
- Many people do not have full spatial imagination and deep theological knowledge; therefore, the control of the researcher is needed.

Conducting in-depth interviews is time-consuming. It requires the conditions and time needed to conduct the study. It can lead to logistical difficulties in carrying out the survey on a larger scale, although representativeness in qualitative surveys is not particularly required. Older people, ignoring the semantic field (understanding the language used), may have additional difficulties in communication, which extends the time of the study. Currently, research-based on artificial intelligence and neural networks is a novelty in the world of science. If this thread were developed in this paper, it would constitute an additional value.

In-depth interviews have a high degree of interpretation difficulties. For research to be successful, an evaluation template must be constructed. The template should include guidelines, e.g. translating the responses. This would allow the quantification of the research material and its statistical processing. An interview questionnaire based on the works of Nachmias (2000) and Lutyńska (1983) will be

the tool that will serve the implementation of the basic method. An interview questionnaire containing the guiding questions assigned to specific thematic modules will be created. The structure of the questionnaire will be divided into two parts - questions about facts (record questions) and - questions about subjective experiences (attitudes, opinions, feelings).

The idea of segmenting the surveyed people into generational groups seems good, only qualifying these people to a given group is difficult, because the age frames are fluid here and often overlap. There are no universally recognized sharp intergenerational boundaries.

Data from in-depth interviews should be confronted with the socio-demographic data of the diocese/parish for the purpose of correlation, looking for a relationship, e.g., between religious practice and the conditions and quality of life, etc.

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