

## TYPOLOGY REGARDING THE DYNAMICS OF RELIGIOUS STRUCTURE OF THE POPULATION IN IAȘI COUNTY (1930-2011)

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**Abstract:** The aim of this study is to observe the denominational structure dynamics of Iași county population and also to highlight areas of concentrations of these religious communities, having as an year range 1930-2011. The research methods are bibliographical study, census results and statistical data processed with Xlstat program, subsequently, the obtained cartographical material was processed with Adobe Illustrator. The research results validate the manifestation, during over eight decades included in the study period, of different processes regarding territorial reorganization of different denominational communities.

**Key words:** Iași county, dynamics, denominational structure, typology, communities,

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### INTRODUCTION

The interest for the religious structure of the population from the geographic perspective is not recent, the relationship between religion seen as a cultural matrix of a civilization, the social life and the space organization being for a long time observed, either in terms of concepts such as *kulturlandschaft* in the classical German literature or *genre de vie*, in the French literature. An advanced substantiation of this relationship is one proposed by Paul Claval for which "*sharing the same religious or metaphysical beliefs and the participation in the rite brings closer the believers, this being considered a solid binder*" (1995, p. 86). Thereby, the role of religion in ensuring the social cohesion became indisputable and, in consequence, the territorial/regional cohesion depends in great measure by the heterogeneous/homogeneous character of the religious structure. The time dynamic of this structure can explain, through the manifested tendencies, some socio-economical transformations; some forms of adaptations to the rigors of a society exposed to the effects of globalization or, on the contrary, exposed to processes of marginalization, territorial identity muster, and economical peripheralization.

In this context, the current study proposes a substantiation of the territorial structures analysis marked by the dynamic of different religious communities in Iași county, sufficiently large

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administrative unit (5481 km<sup>2</sup>), with a numerous population (772348 inhabitants registered in the 2011 october census or 907 979 inhabitants registered by INS at 1st January 2015) and with a past profoundly marked by their presence. The primary objective of this step consists in highlighting the dynamic trends of the main religious communities and their emerging territorial disparities, correlated with the evolution of some territorial processes like urbanization, expansion of suburban areas, and the demographic decline in peripheral rural areas etc. Secondary, there will be monitored the highlighting of different areas with preferential concentration or changes that occurred during the study period (1930-2011) regarding the religious communities.

### LITERATURE REVIEW

As Rubenstein said (1983), religion can be studied as a geographic process, taking into account the point of origin, diffusion model and the present distribution across the globe. Geographers study the process by which religion, as any other cultural characteristics, is spreading from a region to another, resulting in a distinctive spatial distribution. Religion should be seen as a criteria for understanding social relationships and society, and its omission, as an identity axis, together with race, social class, nationality and gender, would be a mistake (Reeves, 2009).

Globalization encourages interaction between people from different cultures; thereby they become conscious about differences in culture. Modernisation and changing society led to the loss of national and local identity of a community. Religion is an important source of values, symbols and identities. Different religious groups create distinct communities that people want to belong to. It is almost impossible to create homogeneous religious territories, since they could act as areas where sub-national identities will persist, leading to fragmentation (Knippenberg, 2001).

Diversification of religious groups is continuously increasing. The impact of globalization with its new methods of communication and migration flows introduces new religious movements. After Henkel (2011), religion works like economy: religious needs lead to demands that must be met by adequate resources.

The territorial development of each religion is determined by 2 aspects which intertwine:

- endogenous, which follows the evolution of each denomination, from the incipient phase until it stagnates;
- exogenous, political, economical and demographic factors which can influence the territorial expansion of a certain denomination (Krindatch & Vedenin, 1995).

An important factor in changing the distribution of denominations is represented by believers migration to another region, country or continent. Also, missionary migration can determine a change in the religious structure of a region if they manage to convert the population of that region to another denomination, this process playing an important role in history. We can talk about the deliberate relocation of a religious group in a certain region. Other religious groups were determined, after persecution, to leave their old settlements to restore new ones, having as a priority to preserve and strengthen the religious state. In history, merchants were as important, spreading ideas, values and religious beliefs in their network of merchants (Park, 1994). The state starts to lose control and influence over the territory and population, this including, implicitly, churches and religion. The global flux of money, goods, ideas and people dispute the territoriality of a state (Henkel & Knippenberg, 2005).

Some geographers ask themselves questions about how religious belief influences the spatial behaviour of people, but also the space utilization, how religions expanded territorially and how religious expansion influenced the population. The geographic implications of certain social consequences are those through which groups that are isolated from other groups tend to unify in the same geographical space, to interact and to protect them. Religion has divided people, not only social status and race. Also, religion has social consequences over migration. Devoted believers of a religion could locate with their residence wherever they feel free to practice their belief (Austin, et al., 1987).

## MATERIALS AND METHOD

This paper is based on bibliographical study, but also on census result regarding 1930-2011 time range, data collected from statistical sources published by official statistical institutions of Romania. Pieces of information regarding the religious structure of the population in Iași County were aggregated in conformity with the actual administrative structure. The obtained database was processed with Xlstat program and for cartography was used a cartographical support based on official topographic maps, adapted in Adobe Illustrator program.

As an analysis model for creating a typology, we chose ascending hierarchical classification of percentage values for each denomination with significant presence in the county. These values were reported to the total population, proceeding from the 4 census records type which published information on the religious structure of the population, those from 1930, 1992, 2002 and 2011. Although the succession of information may seem in discordance, being preferred to include the interwar period just to capture the changes incurred during the approximately 45 years of the communist regime.

To obtain homogenous classes, was indicated as a parameter the dissimilarity between the 98 administrative units, based on Euclidean distance and as method of aggregation, Ward method, thereby minimizing the loss of information (Țarcă, 1998). The diversity of concrete situations determined the retaining of a significant number of classes (8), compared to the number of statistical units. This option is based on the complete need to observe specific situations, being preferred to customize certain communities with a discreet presence, but important at a local level, with distinct graphic signs. Therefore, the cartographic result has gained the allure of a synthetic cartodiagram sufficiently expressive to signal certain territorial solidarities.

## RESEARCH RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

### History regarding the religious structure of the population in Iași County

Even if Moldova has been since ancient times a country with a Christian Orthodox majority (Toderășcu, 2007), the religious diversity was noticed since XIV-XV centuries when the rulers offered land to foreigners who wanted to establish their homes in Moldova, especially in towns. Immigration was a collective one, and mostly encouraged by authorities because of economic reasons, building important communities which occupied vast territories (Bădărău, Caproșu, 1974). A review of the historical evolution it is much needed, as shown below (see table1).

**Table 1.** Evolution of religious structure of the population in Iași County  
(Data Source: National Institute of Statistics)

<i>Total Iași County</i>	1930	1992	2002	2011
Total population (inhabitants)	420876	811342	816910	772348
Orthodox	352749	758757	757298	663313
Catholics (incl. greek rite)	19866	40292	40789	35508
Old-Rite Christians (lipoveni)	1227	2325	3611	3561
Protestant	667	329	190	115
Neoprotestant	279	8030	13597	13791
Mosaic	45732	653	417	257
Muslims	100	105	659	677
Other denominations, without religion or undeclared	256	851	349	55126*
<i>*In 2011, for 53 412 inhabitants, the information was unavailable</i>				

The expansion of Catholicism in Iași County is based on Polish and Germans, but mostly on Hungarians (Bogdan, 1997), especially in the medieval period, subsequently being significant the contribution of the Italian communities. In the principalities, numerous catholic communities were sustained by Hungary and Poland, countries that have predominant catholic population, they

built churches (Toderaşcu, 2007) or they founded episcopates like ones from Milcov (1227), Siret (1371), Baia (1418) and Bacău (1607) (Almanahul Presa Bună, 2015). In the XVII century, Vasile Lupu comes to the aid of Catholic Church, organizing a Synod in Iaşi followed by an attempt to organize a “*diocesan*” Synod in Cotnari convened by Bartolomeo Bassetti who wanted to align the Catholic Church of Moldova to the established rules by the Council of Trent. Thereby, he gathered all representatives of Catholic churches of Moldova, to even all forms of ritual introduced by foreigners (Hungarians, Polish etc.) and to acquire a Romanian character, even if missionaries were of Italian origin. They chose an Italian bishop to reside permanently in Moldova. After this Synod, Bassetti returns to Rome to confirm certain decisions. Unfortunately for them, the interest for Moldova was reduced, although an archbishop (Marcianopol) established a residence in Iaşi to observe the situation closely (Pilat, 2007).

Old-Rite Christian cult is confirmed by the historical sources as a visible cult in the XVIII century, when more and more followers of Philip Pustoriat fled to Moldova because of the persecution to which they were subjected during the reign of Empress Catherine II. Named lipoveni (short from “*filopoveni*”, Philip’s followers), they already had a wood church in Iaşi in 1780, and in 1830 they will rebuild it from bricks, but the fire started in 1866 determined the actual construction of the church on the Bahlui shore (Vasilii, 2008). Dispersed throughout the county, since XVIII century (communities from Brăteşti, Băluşeşti, Lespezi) or through allotment in the later part of XIX century (communities from Tg. Frumos, Focuri), Old-Rite Christians became a significant presence in Iaşi County.

Protestant communities are present in Moldova since XVI century, and they were tolerated by the reign. The Lutheran Despot Voda was the precursor of Protestantism encouraging reforms and assuming the role of missionary. He comes to the aid of Protestantism by founding a school in Cotnari wishing it to be an institution of religious conversion, but he also founded a typography to publish books in Romanian language promoting Protestantism. He provoked anger among the Orthodox Church because he has shown hostility toward traditions (Toderaşcu, 2007). Discreet and almost exclusively urban presence of their ascent is somewhat opposite to the recent ascent of neo-Protestant communities, inserted through proselytism, particularly among poor rural communities, thus constituting an essential phenomenon in the separation of distinct evolutionary trends.

Armenian communities had, since early on, in Iaşi County, a constant presence. After the conquest of Armenian capital by Byzantines in XI century, an important flux of emigration was directed towards the regions of northern Black Sea, including the region of the future Moldovan state. Some communities came later, from Galicia, because of political or economical reasons (Iutiş, 2007), testimony of their seniority being the Armenian Church, supposed to have been built in 1395 (Bădărău & Caproşu, 1974). The good relationships with authorities, their specialization in trade ensured their permanence, helped them in keeping their nationality, belief and traditions (Toderaşcu, 2007), and even if now they became almost remembrance, being largely assimilated.

Jews are another religious community which has made its mark on religious structure of the population in Iaşi County. Their presence was signaled since XVI century but they were few. Starting with XVIII century, their number increased rapidly once Moldova accepted the trade flows from Central Europe. Authorities came in their aid with numerous benefits (Toderaşcu, 2007), in the context of poor development regarding the urban life in the principality. Now their number is reduced (257 believers) because of migration, particularly after 1945, but their cultural importance and, foremost, spatial memory is pervasive not only in cities but also in many fairs in the past.

### **Typology regarding the dynamics of religious structure of the population in Iaşi County**

As they emerged from the statistical processing of information aggregated at locality level, the ascending hierarchical classification is used as a basis for the typology regarding the dynamics of religious structure of the population and highlighting eight distinct types and we can add four specific phenomena which reveal strictly local particularities. These eight types separate two distinct categories: the first five consist of administrative units in which the majority of the

population is orthodox; the last three consist of administrative units with mixed population of different denomination or with a Catholic majority. These two categories are sufficiently clear when it comes to territoriality, the mixed communities or Catholic majority being present in a continuous space, in the south-west and central-north-west of the county, and sporadically elsewhere. The specific phenomena which highlight strictly the local particularities are present only in the first category, in various combinations which can be explained through diffusion of newer religious communities in some areas (see figure 1).

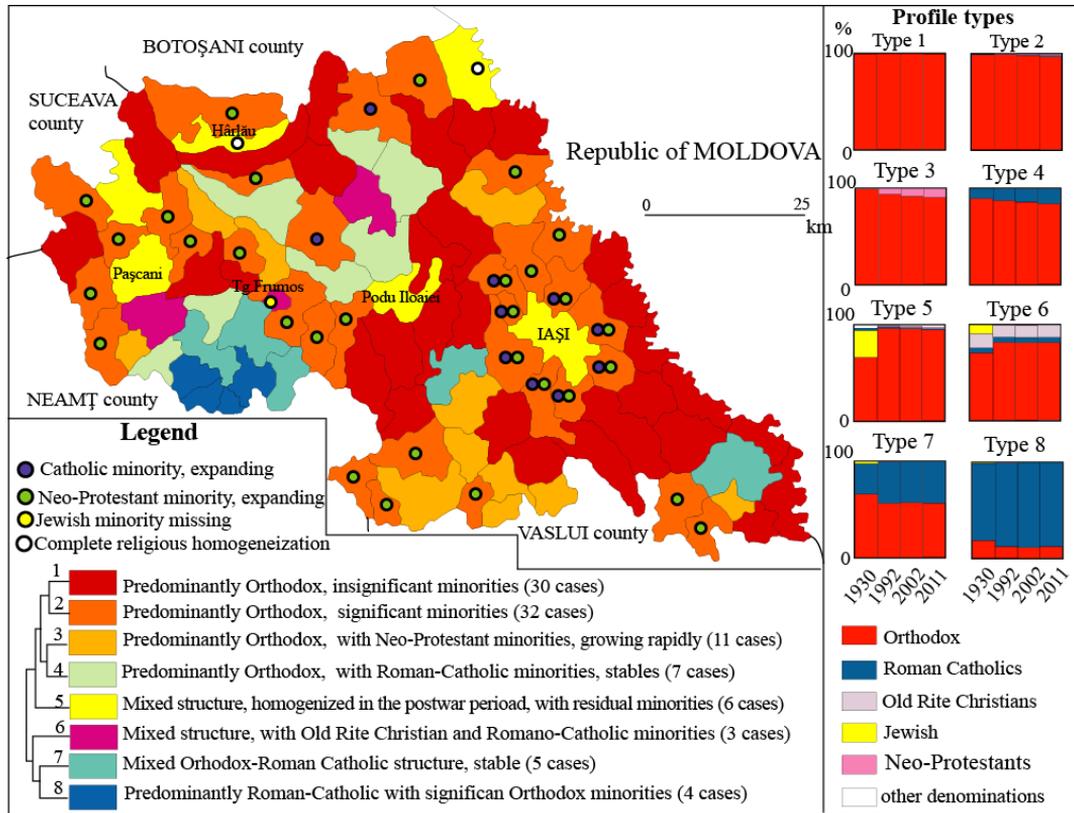
Type 1 highlights 30 communes, especially south-eastern part of the county, otherwise dispersed, having as a predominant trait an Orthodox majority. The peripheral position towards urban centers explains the poor diffusion of some denominations. Rare cases of communes situated in the close proximity of smaller cities (Scobinți near Hârlău, Costești near Târgu Frumos for ex.) can be explained through the clustering tendency of religious communities, both in the past and nowadays.

Type 2 is barely different from the previous one, grouping 33 communes, based on an orthodox majority there were inserted significant minority religious communities, or in the past (the case of a dynamic catholic minority, like in Sipote and Belcești), or recently, as an effect of population migration toward suburban area of Iași municipality, being noticed a significant increase in the percentage of traditional communities as the catholic one, especially the neo-Protestant communities, due to greater openness to modernity and cultural diversity. With a spread less regionally (outside of metropolitan Iași) this is distinguished from the previous one through the diversification trend, even if is poorly sketched. Communities other than the majority religion, stand out through their dynamism, the possibility of evolution toward a complex typology specific to other types.

Type 3, initially undifferentiated by the previous two types (in 1930 the population was overwhelmingly orthodox), is characteristic for the southwest of the county (Țibănești, Mironceni, Șcheia, Drăgușeni, Scânteia), forming a distinct area. Isolated, this type is characteristic for the east of the county (Moșna, Țigănași) or for the west (Todirești, Balș, Ciohorăni). What differentiates this group of 11 is the insertion, often early (as Scânteia), of neo-Protestant communities, thus leading to a situation where their share is up to nearly a fifth of the total population (in Voinești and Șcheia), and with a profound analysis, they are a majority in some villages. Frequently, this phenomenon of mass conversion of the population from several villages is strongly tied to the ethnic structure of the population, the presence of Roma communities are strongly correlated. Even if it is difficult to specify what were the diffusion directions, the promoters of these cults (especially the Pentecostal one, Adventist and Evangelicals) and the reasons that generated their renunciation of Orthodox confession, the phenomena is strongly correlated with the wealth of these communities. Without creating, for now, concentrations as important as in Banat, Transylvania or Bucovina, these communities recently imposed (in 1992 were barely sketched) can lead to the emergence of disjoint areas, like the one from the southwest of the county, with the possibility to be extended in some neighboring villages, where the diffusion phenomenon is of recent date.

Type 4, less representative but sufficiently well structured from the geographic perspective, comprises seven communes from the central-north part of the county (Cotnari, Bălțați, Erbiceni, Gropnița and Fântânele), and two from the west part of the county (Mogoșești-Siret and Heleșteni) which have in common an Orthodox majority relatively stable, with a significant presence of the Catholic minority, older (in Cotnari or Mogoșești-Siret) or newer, result of the agrarian colonialism from the end of XIX century, in other cases. Cotnari settlement was one of the most important centers of Catholicism in Moldova since the XVII century, and after some archeological excavations performed on the site of the ruins of a catholic church, they discovered religious objects which attest the catholic presence since XV century (Gherghel, 1993). With a percentage which could get up to a quarter of the total population, these communities stand out until recently

through their sustained dynamic toward the community with an orthodox majority, thanks to keeping a traditional demographic behavior (Muntele & Atudorei, 2011).



**Figure 1.**Typology regarding the dynamic of religious structure of the population in Iași County (1930-2011) (Source: National Institute of Statistics)

Type 5, representative for the urban environment (Iași, Pașcani, Hârlău and Podu Iloaiei cities) but also for former fair, once very dynamic (Bivolari and Lespezi), they distinguish through a massive homogenization, almost brutally, of the religious structure, from a significant presence of several communities even in the case of Jews, to an Orthodox majority. A complete remodeling of the structure can be seen as an effect of an ultimate world conflagration, the presence of some minorities could be seen as residual (Jews, Armenians for ex.), others have known a significant expansion, like neo-Protestant cults, with a longer duration of implantation than in rural areas and with a stronger diversification, especially in the case of Iași city. The two communes mentioned earlier are distinguished through complete homogenization of the religious structure having an identical typology with communes from type 1. In the case of cities we have to take into account the postwar demographic expansion, so that in the case of other communities even if the percentage decreased, in absolute values the increase was significant (situation specific to catholic communities). Iași city is distinguished to some extent through an increased percentage, even if it is a low level increase, of some communities without a traditional presence, like Muslims or of those who declare to be atheist or without religion, his demographic dimension, his cultural importance and his active insertion in the global circuits are likely to lead to a rapid growing, distancing himself from other cities.

The ultimate 3 types comprise communes in which, traditionally, the religious structure of the population was and still is heterogeneous.

Type 6, although it only includes three localities (Focuri, Stolniceni-Prăjescu communes and Târgu Frumos city), distinguishes through the secular juxtaposition of multiple religious communities, from which the majority is Orthodox besides Old-Rite Christians or Catholics. This mix is also marked in the landscape, through the presence of religious elements (churches, cemeteries), but also through specific activities, which lead to the specialization of some of these communities (the case of Old-Rite Christians specialized in cultivating vegetables in Targu Frumos). The importance of these communities justifies the status of some of them, for example Moldova Old-Rite Diocese being based in Targu Frumos. Examples of harmony and interdenominational cohabitation, these localities deserve a depth study, even if it is about a clear separation of them (as in Stolniceni Prăjescu, where every community is in majority in a village) or live in separate neighborhoods (as in Târgu Frumos and Focuri, this last locality being founded after the allotment in 1884).

Type 7, dispersed in the south part of the county, as Valea Siretului (Al. I. Cuza, Strunga, Oțeleni), or to the northern edge of the Central Moldavian Plateau (Horlești and Răducăneni), comprises communities with an old and stable orthodox-catholic mixed religious structure. Some Catholic communities date from the Middle Ages, others were the result of a recent expansion toward east, from the traditional area of concentration, the surrounding areas of Bacău and Roman cities. In Raducăneni commune it is not known the exact moment of Catholics arrival, only data on Catholic wooden church, built in 1829 (Solomon, 1993) can be an indication. In other cases, it is commonly accepted that they resulted because of migration from Transilvania, secondarily from the Polish Empire, around 1600 year (Romilă, 1992), or at the end of XVIII century. A part of them are from a second migration wave, generated by forming new settlements, through allotment (Gabor, 2004). Most often, communities are mixed, this meaning that in the same village live Catholics and Orthodox (Horlești, Răducăneni, Oțeleni, etc.), and in some other situations, existing a clear majority (as in Strunga and Al.I.Cuza). The mixed character is obvious in the built space, by joining religious churches, even though from an ethnic point of view it is an almost perfect homogeneity.

Type 8, is closer to the previous type, comprising localities as Hălăucești, Mircești, Răchiteni and Butea, part of a western area, positioned north and north-west of Roman municipality from Neamț County, where the population is predominantly Catholic with an orthodox minority, even if they are significant and old, often, they are decreasing in numbers, their presence is no longer so visible, as for the previous type. The presence of Catholics in this region was signaled for a long time, one of the earliest references being made by the Catholic Mission prefect in Moldova, Iosif Cambioli, in a letter addressed to the Congregation of Rome, two centuries ago. Some authors believe that these communities came in successive waves, unsatisfied by the Hungarians kingdom policy, later of the Habsburg Empire, in Transilvania (Blăjuț, 1996).

## CONCLUSIONS

In compliance to the objectives set in the first part of the step, the presented results validate the manifestation, over the last eight decades comprised in the studied period of time, of several processes of territorial reorganization of distinct religious communities. Some religious communities had their presence massively restricted and they manifest residually, their memory being subject of a rich heritage, others communities recently made their presence felt and they are expanding, in the wake of a manifested nationwide phenomenon (the case of neo-Protestant communities) and in the case of those with century-old presence, strongly anchored in the territory can be noticed a certain stability of territorial structures, inclusively through the angle of relations between them, in the situations of mixed denominations. The intense urbanization from the studied period, especially in the case of Iași city, introduces a breach in the previous structures, requiring the immediate neighboring area, suburban, a process of heterogeneity regarding the religious structure, through migration of some communities already present in the region, or through recent insertion as a result of proselytism practiced by different cults or because of international

migration. This process of heterogeneity, specific to conurbations, even if it is only in the beginning, it makes its presence felt significantly from one to another statistical record, after 1992. The obtained results can be subsequently analyzed within some complex studies, for validating some correlated observations and empirical reports.

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