

Andrzej Rykała*

5. NATIONAL, ETHNIC AND RELIGIOUS MINORITIES IN CONTEMPORARY POLAND¹

5.1. Introduction – about the meaning of geographical considerations of national and religious minorities in Poland

Poland is considered a nationally and religiously uniform state. The index of ethnic cohesion, amounting in recent years to more than 97%, places it on one of the first places not only in Europe (for example, in Greece, the ratio stands at 98, and in Bulgaria – 84%), but also in the world. In contrast to many European countries, Poland is also characterised by the clearly dominant position of one denomination – Roman Catholicism, followed in 2011 by more than 85% of the population (for comparison, in two other Catholic countries, Ireland and Hungary, it was 84% and 37%, respectively).

The preponderance of people of Polish nationality who are followers of the Roman Catholic Church does not make Poland a state

* Andrzej Rykała – University of Łódź, Faculty of Geographical Sciences, Department of Political Geography and Regional Studies, Kopcińskiego 31, 90-142 Łódź, Poland, e-mail: aaronbund@gazeta.pl

¹ The project was funded by the National Science Centre based on decision number DEC-2011/01/B/HS4/02609.

of one nation and denomination. In addition to the national and religious majority, Poland also includes national and religious minorities. Their presence is stressed not only because in democratic countries such as Poland the protection of these groups is very important. In the case of Poland, it is crucial that throughout its history it has been a multicultural country with representatives of various national and religious groups living together. Minorities occurring in contemporary Poland, despite their numerically small share in the overall population, are a testament to the unique national and religious heritage of Polish land.

The problem of the existence of these groups, in itself important since it touches the lives and activities of people belonging to less numerous communities, became very current in today's globalised and heavily laicised world. It also takes on special importance in the Polish social reality, where the Poland-centric and Christian, or Roman Christian, views and system of values dominate.

The general aim of this study is to present the communities that kept their national and religious identity in this special cultural context, differing from the majority of Poles in their national or denominational affiliation. This general objective will be achieved through several detailed objectives including: the identification, determining the number and location, as well as an analysis of legal positions of national, ethnic and religious minorities.

5.2. Geographical and historical determinants of ethnic and religious transformations in Poland (10th–20th century)

In the introduction to the analysis of the formation of the national and religious map of Poland, it is worth noting that the Latin Christianity played a dominant state- and nation-forming role via various cultural factors (periodicals, literature), as well as a number of geopolitical and religious conditions. This cultural process was initiated

by the acceptance of Christianity² in 966 by prince Mieszko the First, the first historical ruler of the Polans tribe and a creator of Polish statehood. The presence of ethnic and religious minorities in contemporary Poland is, to a large extent, the result of the territorial formation of the state, mainly its expansion to the east and north-east (Figure 5.1). The territorial development of Poland eastwards, following several earlier episodes, began in the 14th century with the expansion of King Casimir the Great to the Kingdom of Galicia-Volhynia and Podolia. As a result, the state borders included fragments of the neighbouring ethnic ecumene inhabited mainly by Orthodox and Ruthenian population – the ancestors of today's Ukrainians and Belarusians. It meant a divergence of political borders and the borders of Polish national ecumene, that were the same since the first Piasts.

Changes in Polish spatial parameters concerning minorities also happened due to different political alliances with other countries. These included the personal (1385) and real (1569) unions between the Kingdom of Poland and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, which contributed to the deepening of the process of territorial formation and cultural impact of Polish state in the east. The process of integration brought about not only permanent foundations of a strong state, but also solidified the diversity of social and cultural space of the Commonwealth, where Lithuanians became the second political nation apart from Poles.

Concentrations of immigrant population formed among the native (indigenous) population in Poland. When Jews arrived in Poland in late 11th and early 12th century, seeking shelter from the persecution and pogroms occurring in Central and Western Europe, a period of their permanent settlement started. In contrast to the Orthodox areas national annexed by Poland (in the tributaries of Oder and Vistula), the oldest concentrations of Jewish population were formed within the Polish ecumene. Unlike the highly concentrated Orthodox population, they were mostly scattered.

² This act should be understood as a conventional name for the beginning of the Christianisation of the population of Poland.



Figure 5.1. Territorial growth of Poland from the 10th to the 20th century against the background of contemporary political map of East-Central Europe

Source: A. Rykała (2008a)

The turn of the 12th and 13th centuries saw an influx of German population initiating colonisation (settlement) and activating economic activity in Poland. The gradual influx of new groups of immigrants from Germany allowed them to maintain ethnic and linguistic distinctiveness, which was further reinforced in the 16th century by their adherence to the Protestant religion. The German colonisation process and the development of Protestantism were mainly impacted by the geographical and political circumstances, including the changes in state affiliation of Polish land. The loss of Western Pomerania and Silesia to Polish neighbours (chronologically: Bohemia, Austria, Prussia and Germany) started in 1138 with feudal fragmentation lasting until 1945 made it an area of overlapping ethnic, cul-

tural and religious influences. Similarly, the area conquered in the 13th century by the German Order (originally populated by Baltic tribes) was partially annexed by the Kingdom of Poland (Warmia) in 15th century, and partially remained a fiefdom. Gradually freeing themselves from the jurisdiction of the Commonwealth, the former Duchy of Prussia (which officially ceased to be its fiefdom in 1657) formed the Kingdom of Prussia in 1701, which further intensified the process of German colonisation and diffusion of German culture into the area.

German colonisation became especially intense after the Commonwealth fell and part of its territory found itself under the rule of Prussia, and then united Germany (1871). The invader started intense unification of the newly annexed areas (Royal Prussia and Greater Poland) with the rest of the country. The main elements of this process, already tried in areas annexed earlier, were: the settlement of German population and a mass Germanisation of Polish population. The intended effect of changing the ethnic structure of these lands was achieved. At the beginning of the 20th century, people declaring their affiliation with Polish culture or any culture other than German were in minority (apart from Greater Poland).

In addition to Jews and Germans, immigrant population also included Tatars and Karaites. The former were refugees from the Golden Horde and prisoners captured by the ruler of the Grand Duchy. They were settled in Lithuania at the end of the 14th century with Karaites brought in from the Crimea, derived from the Khazars assimilated with other Turkish-speaking peoples (mainly Kipchaks). We can also find immigrant origins in Armenian merchants settled in Ruthenia, as well as mountain shepherd Vlachs, who were Ruthenised over time (Lemkos).

This complex ethnic structure was reflected in the religious diversity of the Commonwealth (Figure 5.2). More precisely, this structure formed on the basis of religious diversity. Changes that occurred during counterreformation in the national identity in Poland led to the development of the idea of Catholic nation, while its gentry

content still existed. This meant that a Catholic nobleman was considered the proper representative of the Polish nation. Thus, as J. Topolski (2000) notes, the rule of equality between Polishness and Catholicism taught by the Jesuit school became more and more binding for the noble nation. In many cases, it excluded people of other denominations from being Polish, thus deforming the social consciousness. National (ethnic) consciousness among the inhabitants of the Polish-Lithuanian lands began to take shape in the 19th century. This was a period of budding group identity in national

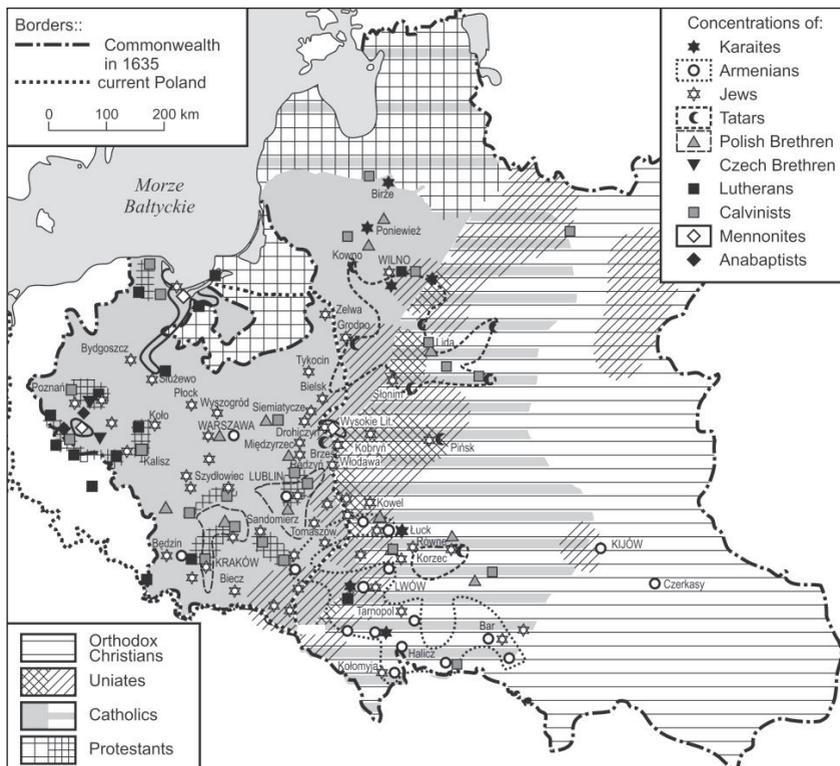


Figure 5.2. Concentrations of religious minorities in the 17th century Commonwealth

Source: own elaboration

terms in other Central and Eastern European peoples. Religion was one of the most important elements of this process. Besides, it usually was the foundation of the feeling of identity, while serving as a source and core for values and ethical stances and, above all, culture and tradition.

The fact that many minorities also formed separate religious groups made Poland significantly diverse in terms of religion. The common belief connected the two most politically important nations: Poles and Lithuanians and, until the Reformation in Poland, also Germans. The latter, however, mostly accepted the new faith (Lutheran). Ruthenians dominating the east part of the country were Orthodox Christians. Part of them switched to the new unitarian rite after the union between Catholicism and Orthodox Christianity of 1596. In the so-called eastern borderlands, the ethnic divisions overlapped, but not completely, with national divisions. Vast majority of Poles belonged to the Roman Catholic Church, while Belarusians were mostly Orthodox and Ukrainians – Greek Catholic (Uniates). This model of convergence solidified most strongly during the partitions of Poland. Russia, which took over the lands inhabited by Belarusians and part of Ukrainians (Volhynia), led to the liquidation of the Uniate Church, incorporating it into the Orthodox Church. Austria, in support of the Ukrainian national and cultural movement at the cost of weakening Polish influences, chose to retain the Uniate rite. It began playing a fundamental role in the 19th-century awakening of national consciousness among Ukrainians and Ruthenians (Lemkos). The overlapping of ethnos and denomination was seen in the case of Jews (followers of Judaism), Tatars (followers of Islam) and Karaites.

At the end of the Commonwealth (18th century), Poles constituted about 45% of the population (Maryański 1994). This number was expressed predominantly in Polish-speaking Roman Catholics. By regaining independence in 1918 after 123 years of bondage, Poland once again became a multinational country. The Second Republic, although politically a single-nation state, included over 30% of national and religious minorities (Table 5.1).

Table 5.1. National-religious structure in Poland in 1931

Nationalities	Number		Religion	Number	
	in thousands	%		in thousands	%
Poles	21 993	68.9	Roman-Catholic	28 827	64.8
Ukrainians	4 442	13.9	Greek-Catholic	3 362	10.5
Jews	2 733	8.6	Judaism	3 137	9.8
Belarusians	990	3.1	Orthodox	3 787	11.8
Germans	741	2.3	Protestant	842	2.6
Other	1 017	3.2	Other	152	0.5
Total	31 916	100.0	Total	32 107	100.0

Source: own elaboration based on J. Tomaszewski (1985b, 1991), H. Chałupczak and T. Browarek (1998), A. Gawryszewski (2005), P. Eberhardt (2010), A. Rykała (2008a, 2011a).

Data from the census conducted in independent Poland in 1921 and 1931 were, however, subject to many errors. The first one missed: Upper Silesia, an area of the Polish-German struggle for affiliation of this region, as well as the Vilnius Region, which was not a part of the Polish state back then. The results of the second census, while conducted under more favourable conditions, are also not fully reliable. There were numerous forgeries, especially in the south-eastern provinces. They were used as an attempt to weaken the Ukrainians' aspirations to express their identity in national categories.

The national structure of interwar Poland mostly overlapped with the religious structure. Most Poles were Roman Catholics, while other churches and religious associations were formed by minorities.

World War II (1939–1945) brought about radical spatial, ethnic and denominational transformations in Poland. They happened mainly because of the extermination of approx. 90% of the Jews living in Poland in the interwar period by the Third Reich. This national (common, both Jewish and Polish) tragedy also led to the destruction of the culture that had been created by them for nearly a 1000 years, and had been unique in the history of life in the Dias-

pora. The Holocaust was also accompanied by migrations, massive both in scale and demographic complexity, caused by the expansive policies of Germany and the Soviet Union. According to P. Eberhardt's calculations (2010), these were one of the largest migrations in the history of the world and included approx. 30 million people between 1939 and 1950. The participants of the top-down movements during the final phase of the war with approval from the winning powers, i.e. United States, Great Britain and, after the war, Polish government, included certain ethnic groups, mainly Poles, Jews, Germans and Ukrainians. This selective, ethnically based migration started a process of religious transformation, as ethnicity and denomination often converged.

One factor that intensified these movements, while affecting an ethno-religious change in Poland was the relocation of political borders. The victorious powers, under the provisions of the Yalta (1943) and Potsdam (1945) agreements, drew them in an arbitrary manner, without regard for individual national oecumenes. However, they forced ethnic groups to adjust to these borders, which resulted in the aforementioned migrations.

Due to these shifts, Poland lost the eastern part of its interwar territory (Figure 5.1). The loss of the so-called Eastern Borderlands was partially made up for by gaining some territories in the west and in the north (the so-called Recovered Territories), that belonged to Germany before that. The post-war, and thus contemporary, Polish territory took the shape referring to the original territory of Poland from the 10th–12th century. Thus, Poland returned to the area of Polish oecumene as defined by nature.

The ethnic composition of Poland travelled a course similar to its borders, i.e. from ethnic uniformity, through multiethnicity to clear quantitative dominance of one nationality (Rykała 2009, 2011a). From a geographical point of view, there was a change in demographic trends dating back many centuries: during the past 1000 years, the Polish and German populations gradually moved east to finally agree on the ethnic boundary similar to that of the early Middle Ages. As a result of shifting borders, as well as

migrations largely stemming from them, almost all Germans were displaced from the territories taken by Poland (some of them evacuated even before the war ended, fearing the incoming front line), replaced mostly by Poles and representatives of other ethnic and religious groups.

As a result of territorial changes, the westernmost part of the borderland of Polish and Ruthenian (Belarusian and Ukrainian) oecumenes, along with its Orthodox and Greek Catholic religious legacy, remained within Polish borders. The clear ethnic and religious distinction of the Polish-German border, was not reflected in eastern Poland. However, this central-eastern and south-eastern part of the country, densely populated with Orthodox Christians and Greek Catholics, lost its religious uniqueness over the next few years. This happened as a result of the resettlement of the population living there: externally, to the Soviet Union (1944–1946) and internally, as part of Operation “Vistula” (1947), to the so-called Recovered Territories. The Operation was performed in 1947 using religious criteria (membership in the Greek Catholic or Orthodox Church) and involved the elimination of concentrated settlements of Ruthenians (including Ukrainians, Lemkos) in south-eastern Poland, which was aimed at preventing further activity of the underground Ukrainian movement in favour of including these territories in Ukraine (Rykała 2011a). As a result of internal and external resettlement, the territories in central-eastern and south-eastern Poland densely populated by Orthodox Christians and Greek Catholics have lost their religious uniqueness over the next few years.

The newly formed Poland included only a few clusters of others, “borderland” ethno-religious minorities: Muslims of Tartar origin, Karaites and Armenians. The largest of these clusters were outside of Poland.

Many members of these communities who, to a large extent, assimilated Polish culture, decided to abandon their “small homelands” and settle in Poland.

Most immigrants settled in the so-called Recovered Territories. Huge damage to the rest of the country, coupled with the implemen-

tation of the settlement and development programme in the newly acquired area have left the immigrant scarce choice of places to live. Due to the higher standard of building, richer infrastructure, potential jobs, as well as preserved religious buildings, these lands were an attractive place to settle (Rykała 2013).

In these new circumstances (territorial, ethnic and political), Polish communist authorities implemented the concept of a single-nation state, created by a new socialist type of society. Politics based on such assumptions stifled any aspirations in other national, ethnic or regional (indigenous) groups to stress their own identity.

By implementing the concept of a single-nation state, Polish authorities allowed the existence of traditional ethnic minorities such as Belarusians, Germans, Tatars or Jews. Their small size, resulted in the recognition of these groups from the government. A most telling proof of a positive attitude of Polish state towards a given minority was the approval of the functioning of organisations representing the interests of such minority. Such organisations were mostly superficial. Since the beginning, they functioned within the rather rigid confines of “leading” party’s (Polish United Worker’s Party), which had a huge influence on their activities. Even if these organisations realised the guidelines of party and state authorities concerning “minority matters”, often at the cost of protecting the interests of groups they represented, it should be said that they nonetheless served an important role in maintaining the identity of these communities in Poland.

In this concept of ethnically uniform state that allowed traditional minorities to voice their problems there was no place for social groups that aspired to be anything more than a mere ethnographic group within the Polish nation and leaned towards regional, non-Polish identities. This was especially true in the case of attempts to assign Polish provenance and character to groups with complex history, such as the influence of German culture (Silesians, Masurians, Warmians). This does not mean, however, that the negative attitude of the government was the sole reason they did not

have an opportunity to emancipate. In the absence of acceptance, the perception and location of Silesians in the social and political reality were equally important.

People's Poland also implemented a religious policy with varying forms of repression towards religion. Its main feature was the development of instruments for government insight into the activities of churches and religious associations and changing these activities to suit government's wishes. The attitude of state government toward such communities, as well as toward religion as a whole, evolved from administrative and eradication solutions used in the second half of the 1940s and early 1950s to the liberalisation that came in late 1980s.

Transformations that occurred after 1989 gave the opportunity to reformulate the cultural code of various social groups, which stemmed from the possibility of ideological and national self-identification.

5.3. National and ethnic minorities in Poland at the beginning of the 21st century

Since the end of World War II, it was impossible to accurately answer questions about the national identity of the people of Poland. Any data were therefore only an estimate and did not have greater cognitive value. It was not until the National Census of 2002, which included a question concerning this issue for the first time after the war, that serious statistical data was available for the national identification of Poles. In order to verify the sense of national identity in people subjected to the census procedure, the question was worded as follows: "What nationality do you consider yourself as?", which meant that almost all people who identify with any ethnic group took advantage of the opportunity to point to the one that serves as a basic reference group for them. The question was so open, that it gave the person answering the census questionnaire a chance to reply according to their own understanding of

the term, even when observing the definition used to construct the survey (Rykała 2011a).³

Even when using such subjective criterion as national affiliation, pointing to the right one was hard for people whose emotional, cultural or genealogical bonds with a given nation were not as unambiguous.

The census showed that Polish nationality was declared by 36 983.7 thousand people (96.74% of the Polish population), other than Polish by 471.5 thousand (1.23%), while the relationship with a particular nation could not be determined for 774.9 thousand (i.e. 2.03%).⁴ A groups of people of undetermined nationality was thus much larger than the group of people who declared non-Polish identification.⁵

Data obtained during the census showed that previous estimates of the number of ethnic minorities were significantly overstated. In addition, they confirmed the thesis that people originating from minorities underwent the process of gradual assimilation throughout the whole post-war period. Contrary to many opinions, the influx of immigrants from other countries did not have a significant impact on the increase in the number of “traditional” minorities, but showed that these communities are getting smaller (Table 5.2).

³ This definition states that: “nationality is a declarative (based on a subjective feeling) characteristic of every individual, expressing their emotional, cultural or genealogical (due to their parents’ origins) relation with a particular nation”.

⁴ Central Statistical Office calculations show that among 109 categories distinguished on the basis of the declarations of nationality 91 included less than 1000 people, half of them – less than 100, and one third – less than 50. The census workers reported approx. 40 thousand people who had a hard time showing any affiliation to a certain nationality. Among the people identifying with a different nation, 25.7 thousand (5.45%) had non-Polish citizenship (we can safely assume they were immigrants). Others – 444.6 thousand people (94.3% of this group) – had Polish citizenship. 14.79 thousand (0.04%) people were in the group declaring Polish nationality without Polish citizenship. In this case, we can assume they were people applying or repatriate status, staying temporarily in Poland as citizens of other countries, as well as specialists working in Polish offices of foreign companies, who were sent here due to their Polish descent (and often their knowledge of Polish language).

⁵ Among the permanent residents of Poland in 2002, over 98.2% were citizens of the Republic of Poland.

Table 5.2. National and ethnic minorities in Poland in 2002

National and ethnic minorities	Estimates before the 2002 census	Declared belonging to a nationality in the national census of 2002			Declared language of Polish citizens		
		total	% of total Polish population (38 230.1 thous.)	with Polish nationality	% of Polish citizens (37 529.7 thous.)	in thousands	%
Belarusian	200 000	48 737	0.128	47 640	0.127	40 226	0.107
Czech	3 000	800	0.003	386	0.002	1 226	0.003
Karaite	150	45	0.001	43	0.001	-	-
Lithuanian	20 000	5 846	0.016	5 639	0.016	5 696	0.015
Lemko	60 000	5 863	0.016	5 850	0.016	5 605	0.015
German	400 000	152 897	0.400	147 094	0.392	196 841	0.524
Armenian	8 000	1 082	0.003	262	0.001	321	0.001
Roma	20 000	12 855	0.034	12 731	0.034	15 657	0.042
Russian	10 000	6 103	0.016	3 244	0.009	12 125	0.032
Slovak	10 000	2 001	0.006	1 710	0.005	794	0.002
Tatar	5 000	495	0.002	447	0.002	9	0.000
Ukrainian	250 000	30 957	0.081	27 172	0.073	21 055	0.056
Jewish	7 000	1 133	0.003	1 055	0.003	243*	0.001
Total	993 150	268 814	0.709	253 273	0.681	299 798	0.798

* Hebrew or Yiddish.

Source: elaboration on the basis of own estimates and data from the Central Statistical Office (CSO).

Population with non-Polish identification was mainly concentrated in three provinces: Silesian with 186.3 thousand people with nationality other than Polish (39.5% of the overall population with non-Polish nationality), Opole – 133.3 thousand (28.3%) and Podlasie – 55.2 thousand (11.7%). In the province of Silesia more than one in ten residents was not a Pole, while in the other two regions, this percentage was much lower, as the non-Polish people there did not exceed 5% of the total population (Figures 5.3–5.4).

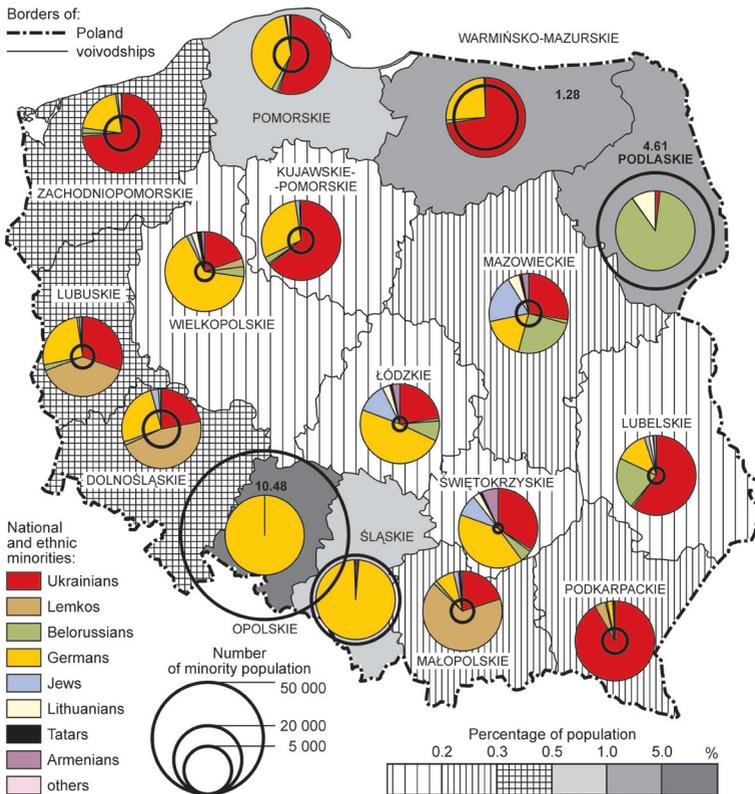


Figure 5.3. National and ethnic minorities in Poland by province in 2002

Source: own elaboration

Census data from 2002 revealed that the so-called traditional national minorities (such as Germans and Ukrainians) were experiencing a decline. Strong regional identity was a cultural and social phenomenon.

Census results showed that there were 173 148 people in Poland with Polish citizenship and declaring Silesian nationality (0.5% of all Polish citizens). It was the largest group of non-Polish national identification.⁶ The population declaring Silesian nationality was concentrated in two provinces: Silesia and Opole (Figure 5.4). Almost all such declarations, 99.7%, were registered in these two provinces. Highest concentrations were located in large cities of the eastern, most industrialised part of Upper Silesia within the Silesian province.

The identity transformation of native people in Silesia, based on the experiences and images of the past (dating back to their German statehood) confronted with Polish reality led to the formation of the feeling of identity and identification with Silesia, which served as a foundation for the Silesian national identity in the changing political conditions.

The results of that census were also one of the reasons for quick commencement of works on the issue of regulating the legal situation of minorities existing in Poland. The culmination of these actions was the adoption in 2005 of a Law on National and Ethnic Minorities and Regional Language, according to which Poland has 13, so-called traditionally inhabiting national and ethnic minorities (i.e. characterised by a centuries-long presence in Polish society of at least 100 years). National minorities (identifying with nations organised in their own countries) are: Belarusian, Czech, Lithuanian, German, Armenian, Russian, Slovak, Ukrainian and Jewish communities, while ethnic minorities (so called stateless minorities) include: Karaim, Lemko, Romani and Tatar (Rykała 2008b).

Obtaining the status of a national minority was dependent not only on the “watershed time” of the group’s presence in Poland, but was also contingent on other conditions. Under the Act, national

⁶ Based on data from the CSO.

and ethnic minorities should be aware of their own historical national community, and be focused on its expression and protection, and also differ from other citizens in language, culture or tradition, striving at the same time to preserve them.⁷

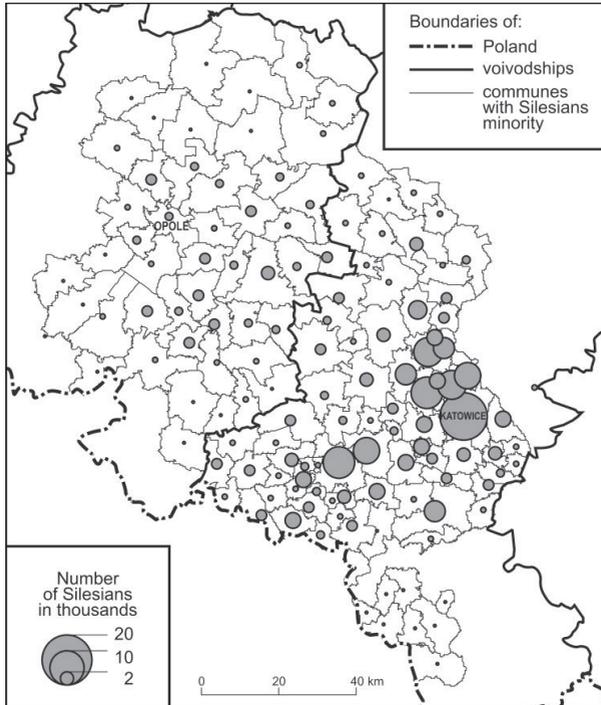


Figure 5.4. Distribution of people declaring Silesian nationality by municipalities in 2002

Source: own elaboration

As the act directly states, language is one of the most important cultural and social indicators showing the affiliation with a given national or ethnic community. The census data showed 563 thousand

⁷ Journal of Laws 2005, 17, item 141.

communicating at home in languages other than Polish (with 52 thousand using only other language).⁸ Polish language was used at home by group of people larger (97.8% of the overall population) than the group declaring Polish nationality. The same applied to the majority of legally recognised national and ethnic minorities (Table 5.2).

Various minorities also made attempts to express and protect their identity, as mentioned in the Act on national and ethnic minorities. These efforts were, among others, institutional, strengthening and supplementing the group identity while also forming its legal and administrative framework. The political changes in Poland after 1989 that the transmission of national, religious and regional self-identification towards various activities became possible (Figure 5.5).

One of the most important rights of minorities provided the law is the ability to use minority languages as an auxiliary in dealings with municipality authorities. However, auxiliary language can be used only in those municipalities where the number of people belonging to minorities is not lower than 20% of the total population of the municipality. Based on the census, this condition is met by only four national minorities: Belarusian (in 12 municipalities), Lithuanian (1) and German (27), as well as one linguistic minority – Kashubian (10).

The law also guaranteed the right to use minority languages, alongside established Polish names, in traditional geographical names (town, physiographic objects and streets – Photos 5.1–5.2).⁹ At the end of 2012, additional names were used in 798 villages (German in 397, Kashubian – 335, Lithuanian – 30, Belarusian – 27, and Lemko – 9) (Barwiński 2013).

⁸ In general, people living in the country used as many as 87 languages, with 20 languages having no more than a thousand users each. The most popular foreign language among the Polish population was German, which was spoken at home by 204.6 thousand people.

⁹ The names of inhabited and uninhabited towns, physiographic objects, streets etc., can be given in minority languages only in those municipalities where the minority represents at least 20% of the population. Additional names may also be applied to inhabited towns situated in municipalities that do not meet the quantitative requirement. In such case, using an additional name requires consultation and a vote in favour by more than 50% of inhabitants.

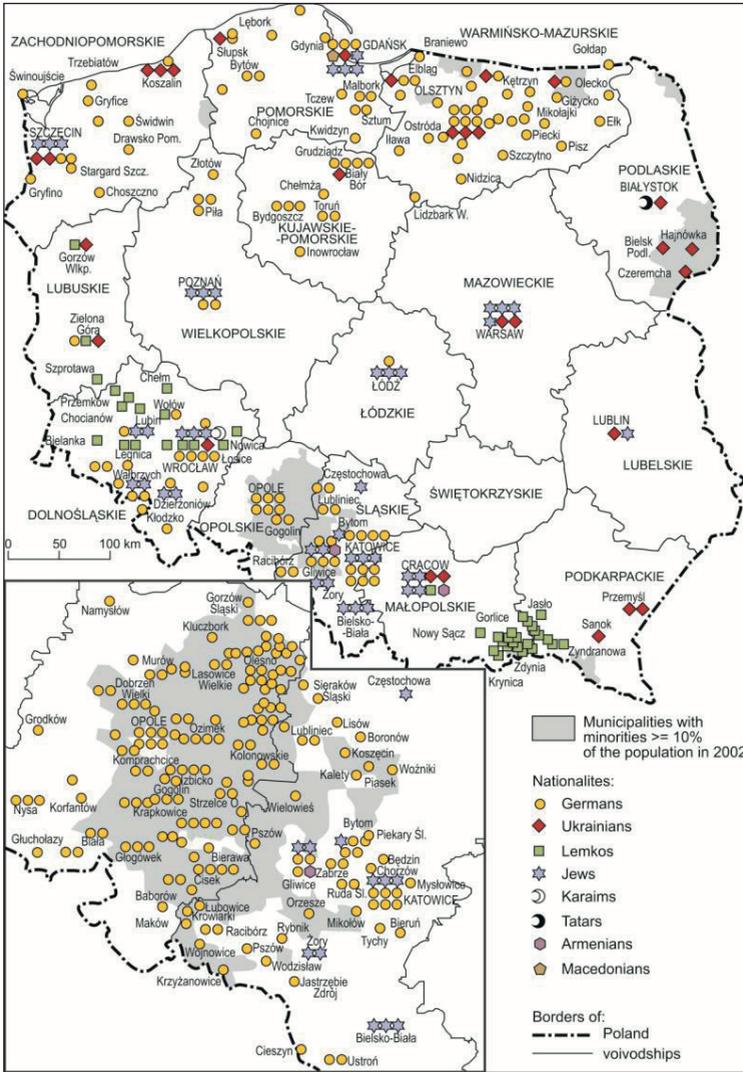


Figure 5.5. Main seats and branches of chosen national and ethnic minorities organisations in Poland in 2002

Source: own elaboration



Photo 5.1. The sign with the name of the town in German

Source: phot. by A. Rykała



Photo 5.2. The Jewish cemetery in Cracow

Source: phot. by A. Rykała

Although largest in number, the population declaring Silesian nationality is not recognised as a minority in a legal sense, and thus is deprived of the ensuing benefits (such as the use of their own language as an auxiliary one in dealings with the municipality. This language cannot be used in the spelling of geographical names either).

5.4. Religious minorities in Poland at the beginning of the 21st century

Religion was an important factor in the formation of many nations and the maintenance of national consciousness by some minority groups. The course of such relationships was similar in Poland. The religious structure of the population forming over the centuries was closely related to the national and ethnic structure (Sobczyński 2000).

Religious communities differ in the origins of their presence in Poland. They appeared, among others, due to the transfer of religious ideals and/or foreign experiences related to a given religious system, divisions within a given denomination, expansion of borders to include concentrations of people belonging to different de-

nominations or the influx of immigrants (political or economic). In the first three cases, when a religious tradition came to Poland as a result of the transfer of ideas and experiences with a particular concept gained abroad or the internal divisions in the country, religious minorities (including Buddhists, some Protestants, Catholics) are not separate nationality or ethnic group. They are usually parts of the religious mosaic of people of Polish nationality. The latter two types of origins are the closest to the model of convergence between denomination and ethnos. For the members of these communities involved in the territorial development of the Polish state or immigrant, religion was the basic type of bond that unified them in a period of life in the Diaspora and remained the most important signifier of their identity and separateness as a group.

However, this relationship, weakened as the period of life in the Diaspora got longer. Under the influence of foreign surrounding, the minorities began to assimilate characteristic cultural norms, which usually lead to the loss, partial or total, of ethnic and/or religious identity.

In the context of religious minorities, we cannot fail to mention the majority of the population involved in religious practices, the ones belonging to the Roman Catholic church, which had 34 312.8 thousand followers in 2002, i.e. 97.3% of all members of all churches and religious organisations in Poland (Table 5.3).

Table 5.3. Population by religion in Poland in 2002

Specification	Number of followers	
	in thousands	%
Total Polish population	38 230.1	100.0
Total followers, including: Roman Catholic	35 258.4 34 312.8	92.2 89.7
Other denominations	945.6	2.5
No religion	2 971.7	7.8

Source: own elaboration based on the *Wyznania...* (2003), A. Rykała (2006).

The presence of followers of all major religions of the world in Poland (Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Buddhism and Hinduism) made the local religious scene a very diverse one. The divisions occurring inside most of them, as well as unions between some of the fractions (mostly of Christianity) both in Poland and abroad but transferred back to Poland led to constant decomposition of the religious map of Poland. A complex religious scene formed as a result of centuries of transformations.

Existing Polish legislation uses equivalent terms “churches and other religious associations” meant to signify two types of religious organisations. Later in this study, these terms will be used synonymously to “religious minorities”. In relation to the Poland of the early 21st century (2002), religious minorities will only mean churches and religious associations with legal entity.

As far as doctrines are concerned, we should assume that minorities in Poland represent the following religions: Christianity, including Catholicism, Orthodox and Protestant, Jewish, Karaite, Islamic, Hindu and Buddhist. Furthermore, there are communities in Poland, which refer to other, less common and known religious traditions. They are the “other” (remaining) denominations mentioned above and they populate a different category: not related to any traditional (main) religions or combining elements from various religious traditions. The lack of data concerning the activities or documented knowledge concerning the doctrine of some denominations mean that we should add another category of the so called unrecognised churches and religious associations (Figure 5.6).¹⁰

The Catholic Church in Poland, commonly identified with the Roman Catholic religion is not uniform in terms of the rite. Apart from the Roman Catholic rite, it includes three other Uniate Churches that differ in liturgy and tradition: Greek Catholic (Byzantine Ukrainian Rite), Neo-Uniate (Byzantine Slavic Rite) and Armenian Catholic (Armenian Rite). These Churches entered into unions with

¹⁰ This division is not a result of clear and universally held assumptions, but merely the author’s attempt at systemise the religious affiliations in Poland based on the statistical reports from the CSO.

the Catholic Churches at different points in time, yet all of them, apart from the eastern rites, kept their own liturgic languages and acknowledged papal primacy in Church jurisdiction. They also retained doctrinal agreement with Roman Catholics.

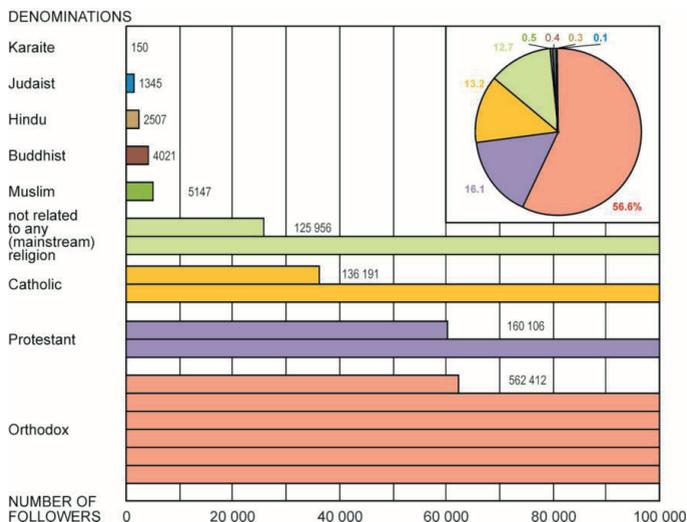


Figure 5.6. Minority denominations in Poland according to their tradition and number of followers (2002)

Source: own elaboration

Quite apart from these, there are other Catholic churches, namely: Mariavite (Old Catholic Mariavite and Catholic Mariavite), Polish Catholic and Old Catholic. With the exception of the Catholic Mariavite Church, all of them continue the rules of Old Catholicism.

Total number of followers of minority Christian denominations in Poland in 2002 was 136 thousand. Most of this group, 64%, belonged to the Eastern rites, mainly Greek-Catholic Church.

Orthodox Christianity, which developed under Byzantine influence and has a long and complex history in Poland, is the second largest denomination in Poland after Roman Catholicism. It is represented

by the Polish Autocephalous Orthodox Church. The Eastern Old Believer Church comes from the same Orthodox tradition. The followers of both Churches amounted in 2002 to 562.412 people, with 99.8% of them belonging to the Orthodox Church.

Protestantism, which was undergoing constant divisions since the very beginning, is most internally diverse. At the beginning of the 21st century, it consisted of the following fractions in Poland:

- Lutheran (represented by the Evangelical and Lutheran Church);
- Calvinist (Reformed Evangelical Church);
- Anglican (Church of England);
- Methodist Church (Evangelical Methodist Church);
- Baptist (including Baptist Christian Church);
- Adventist (including Seventh Day Adventist Church);
- Pentecostal (including Pentecostal Church);
- Bible Student – emphasizing the role of researching *Scripture* (including Bible Students Association).

In addition to these, there are local communities in Poland. This category can include Churches that refer to the rules of various Protestant movements, for whom their location is the primary distinguishing criterion. By emphasizing the location in a given city as a unifying element doctrinally divided Christians, these communities relate to the apostolic tradition of the early Christians, when there were numerous religiously unified communities. The multiplicity of Protestant movements and denominations, however, does not reflect the size of the Protestant community as a whole. There were just over 160 thousand members in all communities in 2002.

An organisation representing orthodox Judaism, which stresses the need to strictly follow the *Torah* is called the Association of Jewish Communities. The Association is the heir of one of the oldest organised religious communities in Polish territory. In 2002, it had approx. 1300 members. The Karaite religion, which stems from the dissent against traditional Judaism is represented by the Karaite Religious Association, which had 150 members in 2002 (Figure 5.7).

The fundamental distinction between different factions of Islam (Sunnism and Shiism) is reflected, albeit indirectly, in the Muslim

faiths present in Poland. It partially overlaps with the ethnic diversity of local Muslims. The Sunni tradition was represented in 2002 only by the Muslim Religious Association. This largest organisation with approx. 5 thousand members includes mostly Tatar and Poles of Tatar descent (Figure 5.7).

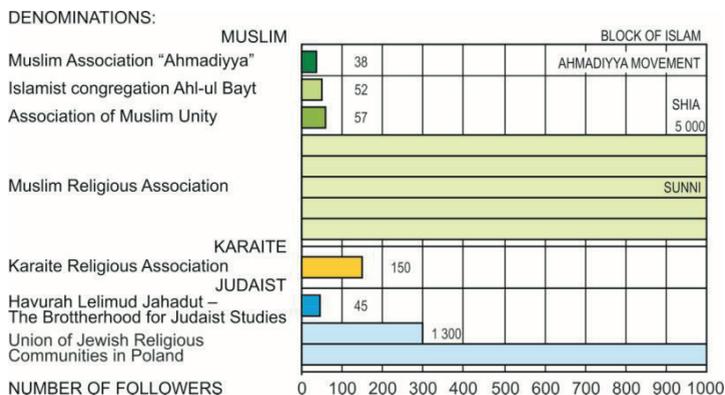


Figure 5.7. Jewish, Karaite and Muslim denominations in Poland in 2002

Source: own elaboration based on *Wyznania...* (2003), A. Rykała (2011a)

The pluralism among Hindu and Buddhist organisations in Poland also reflects traditional divisions. This multiplicity of organisational forms stems from the need to provide the neophyte seeking their spiritual path with the right way to gain skills and knowledge from their teacher. To this end, Hindus and Buddhists form small groups of practitioners around masters. The largest Hindu and Buddhist associations include: the Institute of Knowledge of Identity "Chaitani Mission", International Society for Krishna Consciousness, and the Buddhist Association of Karmic Tradition Kamtsang.

The category of denominations not belonging to any traditional (mainstream) religions or combining the elements of many different religious traditions included in early 21st century:

- neo-Pagans – referring to the beliefs of ancient Slavs (Native Faith);

- Rosicrucians – referring to the Gnostic-Esoteric Christianity and classical Rosicrucians of the 17th century (including Lectorium Rosicrucianum, International School of the Golden Rosy Cross);
- Sufism – a syncretic movement that promotes a combined spiritual practices drawn from Hinduism, Buddhism, Zoroastrianism, Judaism, Christianity and Islam (Sufi Order of the West);
- Baha’i – a religion of universalistic tendencies, which aims to unite mankind and establish universal peace through the transformation of the lives of individuals and the renewal of society (Baha’i Faith);
- Mormonism – a religion which aims to restore the original state of Christianity and promote the belief in constant revelation through which the leader of the Church can guide it in accordance with the will of God (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints);
- Panmonism – panmonistic (non-dogmatic and non-ritual) movement, which combines a variety of religious ideas, expressing belief in the basic unity of Being (God, the Absolute), emphasising the need to raise the ethical level and social commitment of its members (Panmonist congregation).

This broad category also includes the “Watchtower” – Bible and Tract Association (Registered Association of Jehovah’s Witnesses’ Faith), which is the third largest religion in Poland. Jehovah’s Witnesses, whose doctrine is derived from the Old and New Testaments, analyse and literally interpret biblical texts. In order to recruit new members, they proselytise “door to door”.

The category of unrecognised churches and religious associations included in 2002 56 religious communities. Some of them (such as Polish Christian Religious Service, Independent Community of Jewish Faith in Gdansk, Buddhist Association “Khordong”) refer in their general views to the widely recognised religious traditions. This category is characterised by its transience. The number of denominations included in it, assuming there are no new ones, decreases when information about their activities and doctrine is given in more detail.

Only some of the largest Catholic (Greek Catholic), Protestant (such as Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession, Evangelical

Methodist, Pentecostal, Bible Students Association), Islamic (Muslim Religious Union), Jewish (Union of Jewish Communities) and the Jehovah's Witnesses had followers in all provinces. The biggest concentration of "statistically accountable" followers of minority Churches and religious associations was located in Podlasie province, which was clearly impacted by the large percentage (63.3) of Orthodox Christians living there (Figure 5.8). Mazowieckie province was most religiously diverse, with almost all Churches and religious associations present.

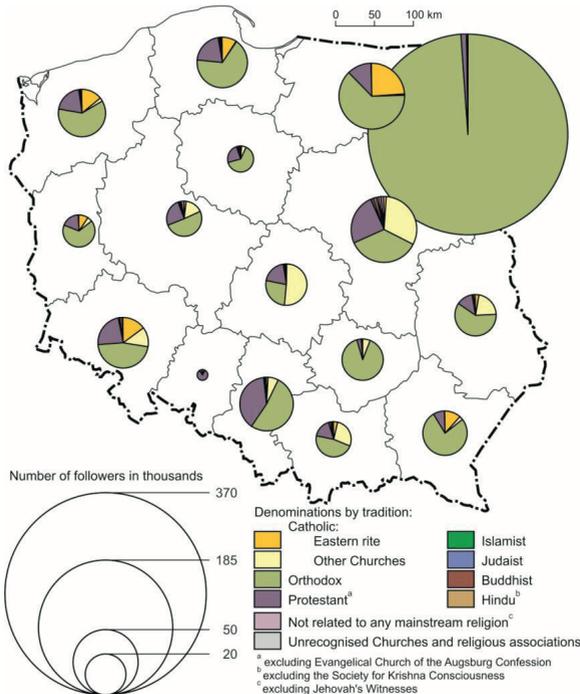


Figure 5.8. The size and structure of religious minorities in Poland by province in 2002

Source: own elaboration

As of October 2003, 158 churches and religious communities in Poland had legal personality and had relationships with the state as

Churches or religious associations. Under current legislation, various Churches and other religious associations in Poland have the following forms and basis for regulating their legal status:

- international agreement (the Concordat between Poland and the Holy See), which refers to the Catholic Church (Roman Catholicism, Greek Orthodoxy, and Armenian Neouniate Church);
- the law concerning the relationship between the state and Church or other religious association, which applies to 15 Churches (including the Catholic Church) and religious organisations;
- the law concerning guarantees of freedom of conscience and religion (a register of churches and other religious organisations), which in 2003 applied to 143 churches and other religious organisations.

It should be noted that equality of churches and religious associations does not interfere with diversity of forms to regulate their legal status.¹¹ Legal basis is not necessary for a given community to practice religion.

5.5. National and ethnic minorities in the light of the results of the national census in 2011

The 2011 census provided more data on the nationality structure of Poland, as well as (after 80 years) partial data concerning religious diversity. Unlike the previous census of 2002, it included 20% of randomly selected households (over 8 million people) with the goal of generalising the data onto the whole population. In addition, the census procedure could be completed online. Due to this census methodology, the data concerning national identity, including religious affiliation, cannot be deemed fully reliable. One novelty in the history of Polish censuses was the ability to express complex national and ethnic identities. This was provided for by two questions: (1) "What is your nationality?", (2) "Do you feel you also belong to another nation or ethnic community?" (Table 5.4).

¹¹ The application for registration may be submitted by at least 100 Polish citizens with full legal capacity.

Such flexible question concerning national and ethnic identity resulted in over 200 identities. Based on the results, we can assume that Polish population is dominated by people with homogeneous Polish national identity (36522 thousand or 94.8% of the population). Only non-Polish identity was declared by 597 thousand people (1.55%), while 46 thousand identified with two non-Polish nationalities.¹² Dual nationality was expressed by 917 thousand people, including 871 thousand (2.26%) expressing both Polish and non-Polish identities.

Table 5.4. The size of national and ethnic minorities in Poland based on the census results in 2011

National and ethnic minorities	Declared nationality				
	total	primary	only	secondary	together with Polish
Belarusian	46 787	36 399	30 195	10 388	15 562
Czech	3 447	1 307	969	2 139	2 176
Karaite	346	(.)	233	(.)	(.)
Lithuanian	7 863	5 599	4 830	2 264	2 961
Lemko	10 531	7 086	5 612	3 445	3 621
German	147 814	74 464	44 549	73 350	63 847
Armenian	3 623	2 971	2 031	652	1 524
Roma	17 049	12 560	9 899	4 489	7 036
Russian	13 046	8 203	5 176	4 842	7 119
Slovak	3 240	2 294	1 889	947	1 114
Tatar	1 916	1 000	665	916	1 112
Ukrainian	51 001	38 387	27 630	12 613	20 797
Jewish	7 508	2 488	1 636	5 020	5 355
Total	314 171	192 758	135 314	121 065	132 224

(.) – no data.

Source: own elaboration based on data from the CSO.

¹² Homogeneous non-Polish identity was declared by 550 thousand people (1.43%).

The census results proved the fact that Silesians are at a phase, as G. Babiński (2004) put it “clear group mobilisation”. Silesian nationality was declared as the primary one by 436 thousand people (only nationality – 376 thousand), secondary – 411 thousand (jointly with Polish – 431 thousand, with German – 40 thousand). Similar to the 2002 census, this was the highest number of declarations with non-Polish identification.

5.6. Conclusions

It must be said that the national, ethnic and religious minorities in Poland have doubtless historical, cultural, and to some extent also political value. They are a testimony to the curious multiculturalism of Poland that has been forming throughout the history. If just for that reason, they should be properly protected by the democratic state. The awareness of this unique cultural and historical legacy of the former Republic can also be illustrated by new studies of national, ethnic and religious minorities. It is worth noting at this point that the aforementioned groups were first discussed in studies by geographers from Łódź. Research on national, ethnic and religious minorities were undertaken primarily in the context of: research methodology of these groups (Sobczyński and Grabowska 1993, Rykała 2011a, Sobczyński 2012, Barwiński 2013), their origins, size and distribution (Sobczyński 1996, Barwiński 2006, Rykała 2006), classification (Koter 1993, Rykała 2011a), national-ethnic structure of Polish population (Sobczyński 2000, 2001, Barwiński 2004, Rykała 2008a), operating on the political and cultural fringes (Koter 1997, Barwiński 2008, Rykała 2008b), the role of national and religious minorities in the organisation of urban space (Liszewski 1991, Dzieciuchowicz et al. 2004, Klima 2011, Rykała 2012), their cultural heritage (Kulesza 2010, 2012). Some religious minorities were discussed in separate publications (Barwiński 1999, 2009, Rykała 2007, 2011b, Kulesza 2012).

The achievements of the geographical centre in Łódź in research on national-religious issues is therefore quite significant in terms of

quantity and has significant empirical and theoretical value.

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