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**THE INNOVATION DIFFUSION THEORY IN STUDIES ON  
CONTACTS OF THE AUSTRALIAN COMMUNITIES  
OF POLISH ORIGIN WITH POLAND**

The subject of the paper are contacts established by the part of the Australian nation which originates from Poland, with the Society "Polonia", located in Warsaw, Poland.

Circumstances in which the contacts were established as well as their further course are specific. On the one hand, there is an institution in a middle-European country, with over 1000 years of national and religious tradition, and on the other hand, individual persons dispersed over the Australian continent or organized groups of persons who were born in Poland or brought up in Polish traditions and living in a multi-ethnic society of a country with relatively short historical traditions.

In the years 1957—1977 2,152 letters from the Australian Union were sent by 419 correspondents to the Society "Polonia". The letters show that the establishment of correspondence with the Society "Polonia" is an expression of a need to be in touch with broadly understood Polish culture and to keep contact with the Old Country, the need expressed in the desire to read Polish press, Polish books, to possess products of Polish folk culture, to visit Poland etc. 2,152 letters were sent from various parts of Australia and they were arriving with different frequency. It was the differentiation of the correspondence in time and space, as well as the fact of Polish "novelty", reaching Polish communities through the established correspondence, that determined selection of the method of research. Implementation of the innovation diffusion theory made it possible to properly arrange the rich research material. Studies on innovation diffusion are conducted by contemporary scientists from many scientific disciplines: ethnologists, sociologists, economists, psychologists, and geographers. Geographical studies concern mainly the so-called spatial diffusion of innovation; they analyse the process of idea diffusion occurring in geographical space. Studies on innovations were conducted i.a. by: E.M. Rogers

1962, T. Hägerstrand 1967, M. Makarczyk 1968, P. Gould 1969, J. C. Hudson 1972, P. Hagget 1972, J. Łoboda 1974.

The notion of innovation diffusion means a process of the acceptance of an idea over a certain period of time, or practices or objects by accepting individuals (persons, groups of persons etc.) located in space, connected with communication channels to form a social structure and having an axiological cultural system (Pedersen 1970). Referring the above to studies on contacts of Australian Polish communities with the Society "Polonia" in Poland, the following assumptions can be introduced:

(1) Innovation is the news about establishment in Poland of the Society for Relations with Poles Abroad "Polonia" through which press and folkloristic materials, films, books, information about Poland etc. can be obtained — that is contact with the "old country" can be established through an institution operating there. The idea and material objects distributed by the Society are subject of diffusion.

(2) The distance between the starting and final points is the way of movement and interaction covered by the innovation.

(3) Poland, and more precisely, the "Polonia" Society is the original place of the innovation.

(4) A representative of Australian Polish communities who has not yet established contact with the "Polonia" Society is the target of the innovation. The place is identified in the closest time interval.

(5) The time of diffusion observed in the period 1957—1977, for the sake of generalization, was divided into phases: years (1956), 1957, 1958—1962, 1963—1967, 1968—1972, 1973—1977.

(6) The fact that the innovation has been accepted is confirmed by letters from the Polish correspondents in Australia.

(7) The area, or surrounding in which the diffusion takes place is a group of population born in Poland, or of Polish origin, living in Australia. The number of Australians of Polish origin was estimated in 1966 by S. Otok at about 136 thousand people and by Ruth Johnston (Perth) at about 184.2 thousand people. Australian censuses give the figures for ethnical groups only by the country of birth. According to the censuses, in 1971 there were 59.7 thousand persons born in Poland who were living in Australia. The sex structure in this immigration groups is characteristic. There is a surplus of men, particularly men in the production age, which is a factor exerting considerable influence on the course of assimilation process. Such large surpluses of men over women are registered only in those national groups in which mostly individuals emigrate; while in those groups where entire families emigrate, the sex proportions are more or less equal.

Distribution of Polish immigrants in Australia is very irregular, just as the distribution of the whole nation in the country. The people born in Poland mostly live in three states: Victoria (39.60%), New South Wales (30.30%) and South Australia (11.80%). Totally in the three states of the south-eastern part of the continent in 1971 there were over 80% of all Polish immigrants living in Australia. It is very characteristic that the main concentrations of Poles are in large towns, state capitals of the Australian Union. In most metropolises there are about 80% of all Polish-born people in the given state. In the remaining area of the states Polish immigrants live rarely and they make concentrations around industrial centres.

Each member of the Polish community in Australia exposed to the innovation coming from Poland, upon receiving information about the innovation, can either accept or reject it. He can react in a personal way, manifesting rejection, indifference, interest or enthusiasm. All such reactions occur among the Poles in Australia after receiving the information about a possibility to establish contact with the Society "Polonia".

The beginnings of the studied Polish innovation in Australia date to 1957. This was first accepted and confirmed in letters, thus establishing contact with the Society "Polonia", by persons living in capitals of Australian states in the southern part of the continent. Tables 1 and

Table 1

## Subjects of Correspondence

Subjects	Number of letters		
	initial period		period of full development
	1957	1958-1962	1973-1977
Magazines subscription	13	327	81
Reconstruction of Royal Palace	—	—	13
Books for schools and associations	—	102	48
Children's Health Centre	—	—	4
Slides, films, materials on Poland etc. for associations	6	63	74
Trips to Poland	—	24	44
University studies and courses in Poland	—	4	34
Search for family and friends in Poland	—	5	4
Return to Poland	—	6	5
Books and materials for private individuals	—	45	14
Celebrations of 1000 years of Polish state	—	10	14
Various	2	77	142
Bringing family to Australia	—	1	2

Table 2

## Number of Correspondents and Their Spatial Distribution

Year	Number of correspondents	Place of residence of correspondents
1957	9	Hobart, Perth, Melbourne, Adelaide, Sydney
1958—1962	191	Hobart, Brisbane, Albany, Northam, Perth, Ballarat, Geelong, Wangaratta, Melbourne, Port Augusta, Whyalla, Adelaide, Cooma, Newcastle, Wagga-Wagga, Sydney, Canberra
1972—1977	419	Launceston, Hobart, Brisbane, Albany, Bunbury, Geraldton, Northam, Perth, Ballarat, Bendigo, Geelong, Morwell, Wangaratta, Melbourne, Port Augusta, Whyalla, Adelaide, Cooma, Murray, Newcastle, Queanbeyan, Singleton, Wagga-Wagga, Sydney, Canberra

2 contain figures for selected periods: at the beginning — covering the year of 1957 and years 1958—1962 as well as periods of full development of innovation diffusion in the years 1973—1977.

As the tables show, distribution of persons in contact with Poland via the Society "Polonia" is of insular character and is usually limited to capitals of the particular states and other large urban or industrial centres. Large distance from the mother country makes it impossible for the majority of Poles in Australia to visit the "old country" since costs of the trip to Poland, in relation to the wages, are very high. Thus the letter contact is the most popular one. The fact that it was undertaken by a relatively small number of people does not mean that only correspondents make use of the material innovation sent by the Society "Polonia" to Australia. The correspondence shows that information on the possibility to obtain information or required materials through the Society "Polonia" directly from Poland, reached the Poles living abroad through the radio, magazines or correspondence. The undertaking of the first contact with an institution in the "old country" was direct or indirect. In the case of a direct contact the interested person, having received the information about possibility to establish such a contact, made the decision personally, mailing a letter with a request concerning the subject-matter of his interest (e.g. request to send the Almanac of Poles abroad). An indirect contact was made through a third person. The letter of a person who had decided earlier to establish correspondence with the Society, included addresses of a few persons who, in the correspondent's opinion, would be interested to receive e.g. the Almanac but they have an unidentified fear to start correspondence. Usually, after some time, the persons whose addresses

had reached Poland in an indirect way, established direct contact making use of the Society's services as well as visited Poland on tours organized by local travel agencies — which was later described in letters. It also happened that as a result of an indirect contact there came letters with insults against Polish character and Poland; these were however infrequent cases. Sometimes the Polish innovation was passed over in silence and the contact was not established. As correspondence shows, after covering the distance from Poland to Australia, the Polish innovation was accepted usually by more than one person maintaining correspondence with the Society "Polonia". The propagators (conveyors) of the Polish innovation in Australia were mainly Polish institutions, organizing numerous mass events (balls, presentation of Polish films, lectures, exhibitions, folklore festivals), Saturday schools with lessons of the Polish language and propagating information about culture, history and geography of Poland, Polish libraries existing at schools, clubs and other institutions. Addressees of the innovation conveyed by institutions often lived in settlements and towns located hundreds of kilometers from the institutions' seat, but out of their own will and at their expense they covered the distance to participate in the organized events. In Australia we observe a contact diffusion (secondary) in dissemination of the innovation from Poland. This results from the contents of the correspondence. However, difficulties in identifying secondary receivers make further analysis impossible.

A great role in presentation of the Polish culture is played by Saturday schools located in all larger concentrations of Poles; sometimes there are a few such schools in larger cities.

Regardless of institutional activity, private individuals, both laic and clergy, continued to propagate the Polish innovation during the period under study. On the basis of personal contacts those persons lent out Polish books and magazines from their private collections to friends and neighbours of various ethnic groups, but primarily to Poles.

Recognition of the contact with the Society "Polonia" as an innovation — a new method to satisfy the need to contact Polish culture and keep in touch with the Country by the Polish communities abroad is justified by the following features:

- (1) It has relative advantages, not possessed by other channels. It is characterized by better organization connected with specialized function of the institution, larger range and practical possibilities to satisfy possible needs of Poles abroad.

- (2) With regard to difficulties it is not different from other ways of

contacts with Poland and Polish culture (low complexity of the innovation).

(3) It can be quickly tested on a limited scale (large divisibility).

(4) It is marked by a high degree of transferability, i.e. it is relatively easy to demonstrate the advantages of acceptance of this form of contact with Poland to other members of Polish communities.

(5) Conformity of this method of contacts with Poland and Polish culture is undoubtedly limited by political views of some members of Polish communities, which does not necessarily mean that this method must encounter strong resistance and barriers.<sup>1</sup>

Although the development of contacts of Polish communities abroad with Poland was influenced considerably by assimilation conditions in the country of residence, sometimes hampering it, nevertheless in the years under study 1957—1977 there was an increase in correspondence with the Society "Polonia" which was proportionate in time. The development concerned the growth of the number of correspondents, the number of letters and expansion of their contents.

Application of the theory of innovation diffusion allows to conduct geographical studies simultaneously in a few spaces: in geographical space, in time space, in social space and others.

It also permits to discover and define barriers and accelerations (secondary innovation) in the occurring processes.

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<sup>1</sup> Speaking about weak conformity of this innovation it is necessary to remember that the establishment of the Society "Polonia" is connected with some easing of international tension on a global scale. Simultaneously, Australian emmigration remained under a strong influence of emmigration circles in Great Britain which were hostile to socio-political changes in Poland after World War II. As results from the correspondence, the issues of establishing contact with the Country were subject of disputes in Polish communities. In the early period of correspondence, the service by the earlier innovators of more "timid" neighbours was an interesting phenomenon — the latter did not have the courage to make use themselves of the services of the Society "Polonia".