



„GOD HELP US STAY“:  
INTEGRATION STRATEGIES OF  
RELIGIOUS UKRAINIAN  
IMMIGRANTS IN THE CZECH  
REPUBLIC

*Denisa Sedláčková*

*PhD Candidate*

*Masaryk University*

*Sedlackova.denisa@gmail.com*

# Outlook

- Ukrainian migration to the Czech Republic
- About integration potential of the Churches (theoretical background)
- Methodology issues
- Involvement of migrants
- Integration through Churches
- Conclusion

# Economic migration or migration with memory?

- Tendency to explain Ukrainian migration to Czech Republic by economic motives
- Culture of migration
  - Migration habituses
  - Social networks
- Migration with memory
  - Established connection
  - Imagined community

# Current Ukrainian migration in CR

- Predominantly labor migration
- Partly circular
- Significant illegal component
- High work effort
- Religiosity
- Tension between „old“ Diaspora and newcomers



limit possibilities of integration

# Welcome, integrate, and keep in touch

- Classic tasks of immigrants' Churches
- Migration as theologizing experience (Smith 1978)
- Ethnic/immigrant Churches – engines of assimilation:
  - Community building
  - Social networks, social capital
  - Economical support
  - Alternative identities
  - Cultural reproduction
  - Contact with homeland

# Researching Ukrainians

- Qualitative research
- In-depth interviews with religious immigrants, Churches' representatives and other involved persons (plus other methods)
- Four Christian Churches – Greek Catholic, Orthodox, Apostolic and Jehovah's Witnesses
- South Bohemian and South Moravian region

# Involvement of immigrants: position of faith in their lives

- Active believers
  - Faith as central part of lives
  - Faith as heritage, chain of memory
- „Alternative“ believers
  - Migration allows for changes
- Non-active believers
  - Census believers
- Free believers
  - Migration as possibility how to „escape“ the Church

# Go and Integrate: integration potential of the Churches

Several factors that influence the interaction of clergy with Ukrainian churchgoers:

- Differences in doctrines – understanding of salvation
- Ethnic composition of churchgoers, capacity
- Structure of the Church, its „flexibility“
- Position of the Churches in the Czech „religious market“

optimal conditions for being



# Orthodox Church: religion as panethnicity

- Multiethnic composition
- Downplaying national interest
- Religious training and guidance as the main task of the Church
- Orthodoxy as binding force

# Greek Catholic Church: doing integration on the hot soil

- Ethnically more homogenous
- Openness towards immigrants
- Quick integration into community of believers X obstacle to integration into hosting society?
- Interconnection of Greek Catholicism and ethnic/national consciousness

# Apostle Church: open to changes

- „Brothers and sisters“ - quick admission to community of believers
- Trust based on belonging to Church
- Open to changes
- Flexible structure for immigrant accommodation
- Space for alternative identities

# Jehovah's Witnesses: aiming at immigrants

- Doctrine based on the active spread of the Bible
- Active search for immigrants
- Language and other competences
- Bonding not bridging (position on the religious market)

# Conclusions and discussion

- Religious immigrants can use religion and church's affiliation as a mean of integration
- Integration potential of the Churches is not fully utilized
- Different understanding of Church's role in the lives of believers influences the interaction between clergy
- Ethnic makeup of churchgoers affect Churches' activities
- Churches integrate immigrants into community of believers; they do not bridge the difference between immigrants and members of majority