

Historical oral traditions are difficult to analyze - they relatively rarely leave direct traces in material culture. Even if their relics have survived, it is extremely difficult to assess their age and determine how they have changed over the centuries. The study of cultural evolution, therefore, requires finding and analyzing even indirect information about how the old traditions have formed and transformed.

The subject of my project is to study the historical oral tradition that was the transmission of folk tunes. An indirect insight into her picture is given by the Oskar Kolberg collection, numbering about 10,000. various music records. Kolberg's notations can be treated as a variety of samples of historical peasant musical culture taken in the specific period of time (1839-1890). The collection gives two pieces of information that should allow us to answer not only what the folk music was in different regions of Poland in the 19th century, but also to indirectly infer what mechanisms of its evolution were. On the one hand, it provides records of different variants of the same melodies (the information about melodic variation), and on the other, it gives information about geographical locations of the places from which these variants were to come. The variation of cultural traits is a derivative of their transformations that took place during their transmissions. In turn in a world without electricity, the geographical distance was strongly associated with the frequency of cultural contacts or the length of the chains of cultural diffusion. The purpose of my project is to test what can be said about the evolution of folk music, taking into account to a larger extent than in the current research studies, the spatial dimension of how oral traditions have been transmitted.

To answer this question, I want to create a database matching the selected notations of tunes of the Kolberg's collection with the places from which they were supposed to come. Next, I will use quantitative measures related to various musical characteristics, statistical methods applied, among others, by biologists to study the diversity and evolution of living organisms, and a computer simulation method. The latter allows checking how various assumptions about the mechanisms of cultural transmission are reflected in the frequency and spatial distribution of cultural traits. Having an image of the spatial differentiation of variants of folk tunes from Kolberg's time, one can try to find those assumptions and mechanisms that could form such a picture, and thus indirectly answer how the folk music could have evolved.