

## Old Churches – New Values?

### Evaluation and Development of Statements of Significance

#### 1. Introduction

In 2007, the Church of Sweden initiated a project aiming to evaluate and develop the statements of significance regarding churches. This article gives information on the background of the project, summarizes other relevant studies pertaining to the values of churches and finally presents some preliminary conclusions, exemplified by a few studied statements.

#### 2. Changing Society – Changing Church

After the reformation in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the Church of Sweden gradually became a national church and an official part of the Swedish state. Membership of the church was required by law until 1860. Though the final religious freedom act was established in 1951, the church remained a state church until 2000.

In the 20<sup>th</sup> century Sweden could be described as a “one-culture-one-religion-one-nation-state”. It was a recently predominantly rural country with an economy based on natural resources as iron and timber. During the last decades Sweden has transformed rapidly. Now, in the third millennium, the country is heading towards a multi-cultural globalized and urbanized country, with an economy based on high tech industry and services. The experience economy, such as tourism and entertainment, is becoming more and more important. Due to increasing migration, and a greater diversity in incomes, educations and religions, the population is getting more heterogeneous (Swedish National Heritage Board (NHB) 2006). And the Swedish mentality is transforming as well, with changing values, involvements and priorities. From being a rather traditional country with, from an European perspective, average attitudes, Sweden has in recent years become more extreme. According to the World Values Surveys the Swedes’ values are the fastest changing in the world. Swedes are for example significantly more tolerant, secular and self-centred than the average world citizen (Inglehart).

A changing society means that the relation to the state, and also the church itself, must change. Thus, in the year 2000, the Church of Sweden was divided from the state to become a self-governing congregation. As a consequence, Swedish children are no longer born into membership. Though the church still has as many as 6.8 million members (2007; 74 % of the total population of 9.1 millions), the number is decreasing with around 80 000 every year, or a half million 1999-2006 (Svenska kyrkans medlemsutveckling 1972-2007). The loss of members is most likely a result from the societal trends and also from the separation in 2000. To leave the church could even be a decision based on a members private economy – since the annual fee now appears on the notice of the tax assessment.

Even more striking than the loss of members is the urbanization and its consequences for the rural congregations. Between 1995 and 2005 Sweden’s rural population decreased by almost 10 percent, while in the same period the population of densely populated urban centres increased by just over 3 percent (NHB 2007). In many remote and sparsely populated areas the congregations’ membership base is now too small to maintain the regularly parish services and to manage the church and other properties.

The migration and the diminishing church has already changed the economy, the need for and use of church buildings as well as the management resources. And in a near future the changes will probably accelerate. Based on this development, could it be assumed that the attitudes on churches has changed as well?

### 3. Citizen Inquiry

The Church of Sweden has recently made a national inquiry, interviewing 4 000 randomly selected citizens, church members as well as non-members (see summary in Svenska kyrkans redovisning för år 2007). The results, considering the mentioned societal trends, are interesting:

- Over 80 % agreed that churches symbolize important events in life
- 70 % believed that church buildings represent cultural values
- 77 % of members and 70 % of non-members objected to demolishing churches
- A large majority agreed that “a church is a church”; it can be used for religious, cultural and social events (but not as dwellings, shops or restaurants) and should be preserved

The World Values Survey has indicated that Swedes have the most modern values in the world. However, concerning attitudes on religious heritage, Swedes can be seen as rather conservative. This could be taken for a counter-trend in the development. But it probably also shows the importance of traditional heritage and its values in a society that is changing very fast. Another reason for these attitudes could be that the church was a part of the state for many centuries and therefore considered a common heritage and property. The importance of churches as public centres in vast and sparsely populated areas should also be considered.

### 4. Protection and Grants

There is still a broad political will to preserve the religious heritage. The approx. 3 000 Swedish churches built before 1940, ecclesiastical inventories and burial places, are protected by the Heritage Conservation Act (HCA). According to the act they are to be preserved and cared for in order to maintain their cultural values. Any changes require special permission from the County Administrative Board.

According to the first paragraph in the HCA; “The historical cultural values inherent in church buildings, church sites, ecclesiastical furnishings and cemeteries are protected...”. And further on; “Church buildings and church sites shall be cared for and maintained in such a way that their cultural historic value is not diminished and their appearance and character are not debased.” However, what is to be regarded as cultural historic values are not defined in the act. That these values are tangible and based on the fabric are usually taken for granted by the experts.

The 2000 separation of church and state resulted in an economic agreement between the Church and the state. The Church is, to cover the extra costs of restorations and conservations designed to comply with the HCA, entitled to a yearly state grant. The sum of the grant has according to the plan increased every year to a maximum of 465 million kronor (49 million Euros) in 2009. The year 2009 is also the last year of the agreement and the effects and the sum of the grants are now to be evaluated and reconsidered by the government.

### 5. Conservation Management Plans

To receive state grants, the parishes must provide a conservation and management plan. The first plans were made in 2002. In May 2008 there were 2625 complete plans. Every plan includes a statement of significance, which the management goals and conservation decisions should be based on. The statements are important tools for allocation of state grants, as well as for judgments of changes in churches. The congregation, or a larger administrative unit often managing several churches, is responsible for producing and implementing the plan, generally under supervision by the diocese. The plan is usually coordinated by a contractor, while the county museum, or more rarely a private heritage consultant, is performing the section on cultural history and significance.

A method for identifying cultural heritage values in churches was developed by the NHB, in collaboration with the regional heritage sector, and published in the 2002 handbook *Cultural Historic Characterisation and Assessment of Churches (Kulturhistorisk karaktärisering och bedömning av kyrkor*. Since it was developed for the protected churches, the characterisation method is not supposed

to identify the general values of the churches, but to assess the specific (predominantly material) elements characterising the individual church. This method (I) has been used widely in most dioceses (see below). However, another already established method, also developed by the NHB, was published the same year in the book; *Cultural Historic Valuation of Buildings (Kulturhistorisk värdering av bebyggelse)*. The referred method (II), though like the former principally expert oriented, is relatively broad. It includes for example aesthetic or “experience” values and could be applied on all built heritage. The consequence is that some consultants have applied method II instead of I, and many heritage officers have used a combination of both methods (below).

## **6. The Management Plan Study 2005**

Three years ago the Church commissioned a nationwide evaluation on the management plans made between 2002 and 2005. The study, performed by the NHB, focused on a sample of 44 management plans including statements of significance. The outcome of the brief analysis of the statements is of importance to the present study.

The 2005 study indicated that few of the plans were based on the statements of significance. They were entirely expert generated (often made by regional conservation officers) not sufficiently integrated in the plans (generally performed by other contractors) and focused on the church buildings, ecclesiastical artefacts and related tangible values. Local use, traditional beliefs and intangible values were typically not considered. The parish and other local stakeholders were sometimes consulted, but rarely involved in the assessments and sometimes not even in the overall planning process.

The focus on the fabric and the tangible values is in part caused by the formulation of the more than 20 year old cultural heritage act (above). The statements are generally performed by one, or sometimes a group of professionals; art historians, architects or conservators, from the county museum, the county administrative board and the diocese. Since they are all trained in identifying tangible values, the material focus is emphasized.

## **7. Evaluation and Development of Statements of Significance**

From 2002 and onwards approx. 2600 statements of significance of churches have been produced nationwide. The main objectives of this new evaluation project are to:

- Study the content and how statements are created and applied
- Analyse and conclude identified national, regional and local values
- Develop methods for including more stakeholders and increasing local participation in assessing and managing values
- Update the method for statements of significance into a modern and more inclusive model
- Develop a system for priority setting of values on local, regional and national levels; for allocation of grants and decisions on for example changed use of churches

The project is managed by the Central Church Office and carried out in collaboration with the dioceses and the county museums in Göteborg, Karlstad, Skara and Linköping, which now are concluding the statements of significance made in their dioceses. Connected to the project is a “reference network” including heritage experts, property managers and researchers from for example the National Heritage Board, The National Property Board, universities, county museums and the church. One goal of the network was to organize and attend a workshop on theory and practice in heritage valuation, performed in June 3, 2008 with 25 participants. Preceding this conference was also a “pilot workshop” in April 2008 with the heritage officers in the 13 Swedish dioceses.

## **8. Preliminary Results**

The next phase of the project will be an analysis of the workshops performed in April and June 2008, as well as completing a report on the studied statements. However, the analysis of the statements and the discussions during the workshops have resulted in a relative consensus. The project groups and reference network have largely agreed on the importance of broadening and improving the statements, identifying and including more stakeholders in the valuation process and integrating the statements in

the management plans (on management planning and valuing processes, see Mason 2002, 2006 and Turnpenny 2004). Following are some basic facts and preliminary results:

- In May 2008 there were 2625 completed statements of significance nationwide
- Eleven dioceses (out of 13) have produced statements of significance using the characterisation method (I), or a combination of method I and II (Cultural Historic Valuation of Buildings)
- The diocese of Lund is applying method II only. The statements are performed by conservation officers from several different (private) contractors and are of a more differing quality compared to the statements in other dioceses. They are, however, more integrated in the management plans since they generally are made simultaneously and by the same contractor.
- The small diocese of Visby, consisting of 92 well preserved medieval churches, has, regarding their churches presumed high values, decided to not produce any statements for their management plans
- Half of the dioceses have made their statements accessible in the NHB's built heritage database. Since the remaining statements are not available from any national database the general accessibility is low.
- Four dioceses (Göteborg, Karlstad Skara and Linköping) are compiling their own reports or conclusions which will support the national project's work
- In some dioceses have a number of museums, or other consultants, defined the churches' level of significance using the terms "Important at *national, regional or local* levels". Since this is not consistently done and the criteria for defining the levels are vague or differing, it is virtually impossible to get a national picture of the churches' values.
- The performance, quality and usability differs according to the orderer's (the diocese or the parish) and contractor's ambition and competence. There are some statements of high quality, though many are either too descriptive or too subjective.
- A preliminary conclusion of the project, based on results of the study and the workshops, is that the following prerequisites need to be fulfilled to get a functional statement of good quality:
  - A consistent and well structured valuation model and terminology
  - A distinct assignment from the property manager (diocese and/or parish)
  - Experienced contractors (museums or private consultants) with sufficient overview of regional and national church values
  - Stakeholders identified and included in the valuation process, which should regard diverse groups, values and priorities
  - A broad and simultaneously specific statement with more focus on intangible values and with more distinct conclusions
  - Statements should be integrated in the management plan
  - Statements should be quality assured (for example through peer review), regularly evaluated and updated (for example every five or ten years)

## 9. Case Studies – Examples

### Frösö Church

The Swedish composer Wilhelm Peterson-Berger had his second home by a medieval church on the island of Frösö in north-western Sweden. Around 1900 he composed several very popular national-romantic tunes inspired by this impressive Nordic natural and cultural landscape. The composer was finally buried on the cemetery by the church. The statement of significance, performed by the regional museum, mentions Wilhelm Peterson-Berger, but the composer's and his music's connection with the church is not considered a national value, or a value at all, since the statement is entirely focused on the architecture of the church.

This intangible value could be connected to several other values, related to nature, recreation and learning. In presenting such values, immigrants and visitors from other cultures and religious backgrounds, would get a deeper understanding of recent Swedish history and mentality – where natural values often still are considered more important than cultural values.



*Fig. 1. Frösö Church in the Nordic landscape. Photo: Pål-Nils Nilsson.*

Examples of intangible values not identified in the statement:

- National identity (& history of)
- Symbol (regional, national, international symbol of Sweden)
- Music (national composer)
- Spiritual (for example in nature)

Examples of use/other values not identified:

- Nature (ecosystem, recreation)
- Social (non-religious)
- Experience/tourism/local economy
- Learning (new groups, cultures, religions)



## Gustav Vasa Church

In 1958 the Church Assembly took the historic decision that women could become priests in the Church of Sweden. In 2008 the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary is nationally celebrated.

However, as can be seen on the front page of the leading Swedish newspaper Dagens Nyheter, already in 1911 the American Methodist minister Anna Shaw preached in Gustav Vasa church in central Stockholm in front of several hundreds of spectators.

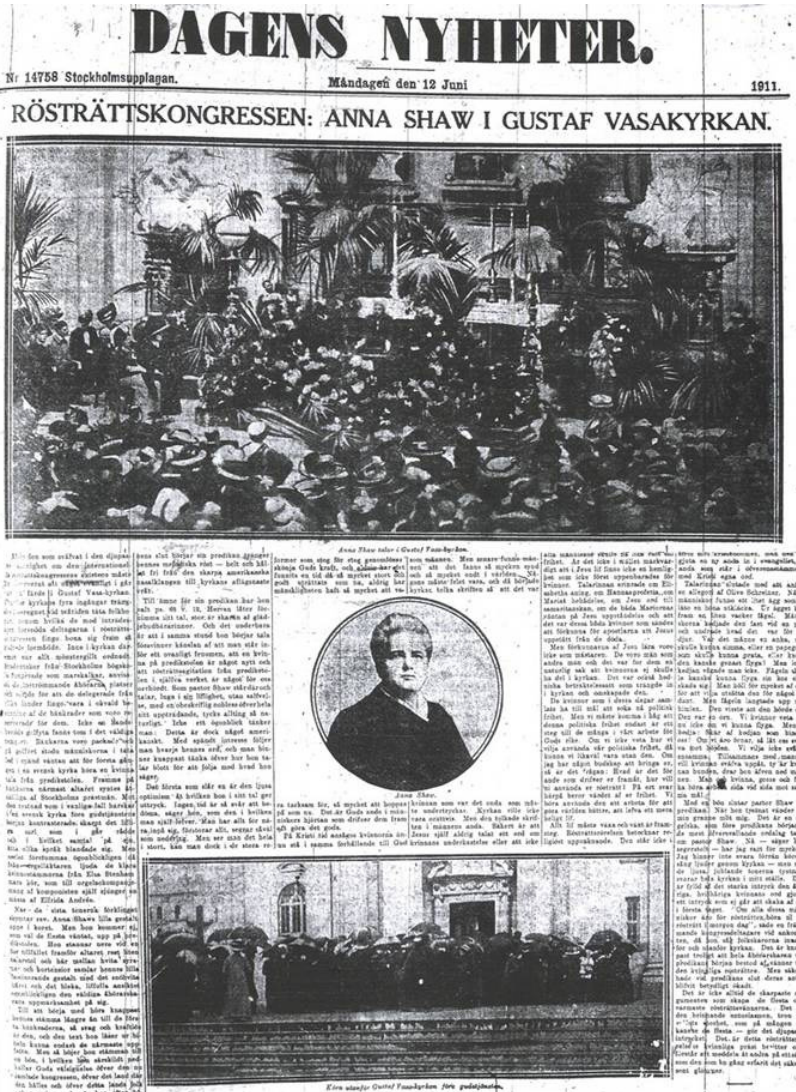


Fig. 2. Anna Shaw preaching in Gustav Vasa Church. Dagens Nyheter, June 12, 1911.

This is the first known female sermon in Sweden, and a milestone in the Swedish history of women's liberation and voting rights. This story is not told in the history of this particular church and a good example of an intangible value that should be identified and acclaimed.

## Dalby Church

The statement of Dalby church in northern Värmland, built 1928 as the fourth church on this site, is entirely focused on the architecture of the building. This beautiful and well preserved church, in a stunning forest setting, is indeed of regional and maybe even of national value – especially for art historians and architects – but local and intangible values are not identified.

It is for example not mentioned that the church is situated by the medieval pilgrim way to Nidaros in Norway (St Olav's grave in Trondheim Cathedral). In recent years the route has been restored and is now a regionally, nationally and even internationally popular walking trail (Nilsson 2007). The act of walking the trail, the trail itself and its context and values associated with this should be considered as important intangible and tangible values related to the church.



*Fig 3. On the Pilgrim Route, Dalby Church, Northern Värmland. Photo: Peter Nilsson.*

### Identified values:

- The fourth church on this site; a masterpiece in wood from 1928
- Regional/national architectural values

### Other values not mentioned in the statement:

- On the pilgrim route to Nidaros:
  - Place history - local identity
  - Community/social significance
  - Spiritual experience/significance
  - Nature (recreation)
  - Nature (ecosystem)
  - Economy (local trade, service)

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