

Changing Cities – Changing Churches

Sweden has in the last decades transformed rapidly. The country is in the third millennium heading towards a multi-cultural globalized and urbanized country with economy based on high tech industry and services. Increasing migration and greater diversities in incomes, educations and faiths are getting the population more heterogeneous. Swedish mentality is also transforming, with changing values, involvements and priorities.

A changing society means the church must change. In 2000 the Church of Sweden, for many centuries a state church, became an independent congregation and Swedish children are no longer born into membership. Though the church still has as many as 6.5 million members, the number decreased 1999-2010 with 800 000 and will probably shrink with a million the next ten years. Accelerating urbanization is also making deep impacts on congregations. From 1995 to 2005 the Swedish rural population decreased by almost 10 percent. In remote areas the membership base is now too small to maintain the parish services and to manage the churches.

Like rural churches, city churches are changing, caused by secularization, growing multi-faith population and even lack of housing in city centers. The Great church (Storkyrkan), in historic Old Town, is Stockholm's oldest church and cathedral in the diocese of Stockholm. In 1989, due to declining membership and shrinking economy, the congregation merged with the nearby congregations of St Clara and St Jacob. With less than 3000 members, the congregation now owns three major churches. But fewer members do not necessarily mean fewer visits. Increasing mass tourism is raising the number of visits, in 2007 over 750 000 in the three churches. The congregation has now steadily increasing visits but fewer members and shrinking incomes. This causes problems in managing the churches and financing the congregation's work. In 2008 the financial result was negative; - 640 000 Euros. To adapt to this situation, the congregation is now developing increasingly diverse profiles for all three churches:

- The Great church is the main church where most services and other activities are held and a tourist church of national and international importance with increasing visiting numbers.
- The St Clara church, an old monastery church, rebuilt in the 16th and 19th centuries, is still owned by the congregation, but used by an evangelical organization called Friends of St Clara, focused on social work involving marginalized groups in the city.
- The 16th century St Jacob church is where services in English are held. In a part of the church hall there is now an exhibition area and there have also been larger art exhibitions, using the whole church space.



The Great Church at the Royal wedding in June 19, 2010. Photo: Wikimedia Commons.



St Clara Church, March 2005, Photo: Håkan Svensson, Wikimedia Commons.



St Jacob Church, June 2007. Photo: Wikimedia Commons.

The decrease in members and the increase in mass tourism will probably accelerate in the future, causing needs for more changes in use and management of the churches.

Based on this development a number of questions could be raised:

- What happens to cultural heritage values when the use of churches transforms from traditional to contemporary diverse religious or secular and the congregation changes or diminishes with new groups visiting the churches?
- What tools are there for assessing changing values and how can traditional and new stakeholders be identified and involved in these assessments?
- How can assessed values be integrated in management planning to support development of the churches?
- Can the Great church's heritage values be used as resources to improve the congregation's economy, without making negative impacts on the integrity of the church and the identity of the congregation?
- Can heritage values of churches function as assets for local urban socio-economic and cultural development and improvement of quality of life, without reducing those values?

Are there any tools available in Sweden today for this kind of broad and integrated assessments? From 2002 the assessment tool has been the *Cultural Historic Characterisation and Assessment of Churches*, developed by the Swedish National Heritage Board. In 2010 were 2600 churches (out of 3 400) assessed. All statements were evaluated in the project *Evaluation and Development of Statements of Significance of Churches (2007-2010)*. According to the project's results, the method in use and existing statements do probably not qualify as tools for identifying and integrating changing church values in a broad societal context. Most statements made 2002-2010 are entirely expert generated, focused on tangible art, architectural and historic values and generally used by state officers for allocation of grants and judgments of alterations in churches. They could be taken for objective statements of "characteristics", but are in fact subjective opinions by a few conservation officers and do not include interests and knowledge of other stakeholders. The statements do not seem to concern congregations and local stakeholders, as they do not understand the statements and do not feel they have ownership of the values. Thus, most statements are insufficiently used in the congregation's activities and in the church management. Cultural values are not seen as assets but as obstacles for the congregation's development.

Due to these results, the National Church office has developed a new policy, where statements of significance of churches:

- Must be relevant to all stakeholders and include intangible and local values.
- Must be integrated in management plans as tools for preserving but also developing church buildings and the congregations' work.

- Must identify all stakeholders, involve these in the processes of assessing values and in setting up goals to protect, use and develop the values.

Based on this policy, new guidelines, more adequate to assess changing church values in cities and communities in rapid transformation, are now being developed.

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