

## The denominational space of modern Sweden: christianity

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THE DENOMINATIONAL  
SPACE OF MODERN  
SWEDEN:  
CHRISTIANITY

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*This article considers spatial and temporal diffusion of Christian values in Sweden and examines the features of the country's confessional space. The work aims to identify historical and geographical characteristics of the formation of Sweden's Christian space and its current transformation. Another objective is to introduce data on the economic activities of large religious organisations into scholarly use. The relevance of this work lies in the fact that Christianity is the most popular religion in Sweden, given that it is religion that has a profound effect on worldview in a society. The article describes the transformation of the territorial and canonical structure of Christian denominations in Sweden. It is argued that, despite secularisation of Swedish society, religion remains a key component in both host and immigrant cultures, which requires a study of the denominational space. Special attention is paid to recent changes in Sweden's Christian space. The authors emphasise a growing role of the Russian Orthodox parishes of the Moscow Patriarchate, which is manifested in a rising number of religious facilities and territorial presence. This study is the first of its kind to analyse data on the economic organisation of a foreign country's denominational space. The authors establish a connection between migration processes in the Swedish society and changes in the internal structure of its Christian space.*

**Key words:** geography of religions, confessional space, economic activity of religious organisation, administrative church structure

### Introduction

Confessional geography or the geography of religions is one of the most interesting but at the same poorly developed directions of socio-economic geography. Research works in confes-

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sional geography in modern Russia have been conducted since the 1990s. They were mainly focused on the traditional religions of Russia. The interest in the manifestations of religious life including its territorial organisation was objectified in a number of works by S. G. Safronov, I. U. Filimonova, and others [1; 2]. Domestic research in this field, in most cases, concerned the confessional space of Russia in general [3; 4] or its individual regions [5; 6]. Scientific works devoted to the study of the geography of religions in other countries are less common; in fact, there are only separate articles exploring the topic [7; 8]. K. Y. Eidemiller's research is an exception: the author's articles are devoted to the role of Islam as a factor of transformation of the sociocultural space in the Nordic countries [9; 10]. Fundamental works by Y. V. Zudov reflecting the specifics of the confessional space of Denmark are another exception [11; 12].

The main problems of the development of religious geography are connected with the fact that the traditional socio-economic geography research methods are either weak, or not applicable at all. The exact number of people belonging to a religious affiliation cannot always be calculated. State statistical bodies in most countries of the world, including Russia, do not collect such data. Statistics reported by representatives of different confessions are not always accurate and reliable. The totalitarian and pseudo-religious organisations like "Jehovah's Witnesses", "Church of Scientology" and others keep accurate records of their followers because their main activity is to collect donations. However, they do not intend to share this information with researchers or with the state. The study of the characteristics of church infrastructure gives little information because there are many "non-spatial" factors that have to be taken into account.

For example, the construction of new Russian Orthodox churches, reparation and reconstruction of the existing ones (excluding the reconstruction of those that are monuments of history and culture) are done at the expense of parishes. Since most of the parishioners are not able to raise the money for these purposes, finding solution to this problem depends on the presence or absence of major donors. Provided there are donors, parishes can build even a big church even in relatively sparsely populated places. If there are no donors, territories with large numbers of population and its high density either do not have any churches at all, or have only very small chapels. In European countries churches, especially Christian ones that can potentially receive hundreds of people, can be closed for weeks and even months because of the lack of worshipers.

The cartographic method of research used in geography proves to be insufficient for confessional geography studies, since it helps to analyse the dynamics in the number of churches, but not the number of congregation. With a certain proportion of conventionality, it is possible to calculate the number of adherents of a particular confession, but it is not always possible to identify which churches they visit or if they visit them at all.

It should be mentioned that the data on religious affiliation does not always show the real impact of this or that religion on society. Before the 1917

revolution, Russia had been one of the most religious countries in the world: in 1897, the proportion of the Orthodox believers in the total population was about 70% [13]. Big Orthodox churches were built even in fairly small settlements. Currently, even bigger cities cannot afford to build them. However, the initial period of the Soviet history of Russia showed that the actual percentage of both Christian and, in general, religious population was much less than it was thought earlier: millions of believers became atheists literally overnight and the majority of churches were turned into clubs, warehouses, and workshops or were simply ruined.

Representatives of all religions in Yugoslavia — Orthodoxy, Catholicism and Islam — were persecuted during the Socialist era. In the 1980s, it seemed that there were no religious differences in the Soviet Federative Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY) any more. In 1984, Sarajevo, the capital of the most multi-confessional Yugoslav Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina, hosted the Winter Olympic Games. The country vividly demonstrated the brotherhood and unity of the peoples of the SFRY. But less than ten years later, Sarajevo became one of the main hotspots, where the civil war in Bosnia and Herzegovina broke as a result of religious confrontation.

In 1967, Albania, Yugoslavia's neighbouring country, was declared 'the first atheist state in the world'. Officially, there were no believers of any confession until the end of the 1980s in this country. But with the collapse of the socialist system in Albania, religious life quickly revived. According to the 2011 population census, the proportion of the country's religious population was over 80% [14]. Moreover, the conflict in Kosovo can be regarded as a confrontation between Orthodoxy (Serbs) and Islam (Albanians). But it is very unlikely that this point of view is correct, since a significant part of ethnic Albanians are Christians, including Orthodox Christians. According to the same census in 2011, the proportion of Catholics in the population of Albania was 10%, and Orthodox — 7%.

Studies in confessional geography present an interesting field of research. Religion is essential for the formation of civilizational differences. According to G.M. Fedorov, who describes a methodology for classifying countries and territories into civilizational groups, '...religion is considered to be the first typological characteristic, the second is language community (language, language group, language family) and the third characteristic is the historical type (staying in one state or in its colony for a long time' [15, p. 67].

The impact of religion on the formation of civilizations is mainly determined by the man's place in the world. The key question is the attitude to the freedom of man's will. It is resolved differently in the main world religions. Based on the place of man in the system of the world order, there are three main groups of civilizations: civilizations of freedom (Christian civilizations), civilizations of obedience (Islamic, Buddhist, Confucian, Shinto, etc.) and civilization of predestination (Hindu) [16].

Building on this, the growth of non-religiosity and the increase in the number of non-believers in modern Europe do not indicate that the European

civilization, which is based on Christian values, begins to disappear. It may disappear one day, as many other civilizations have done, but in the near future, this is very unlikely to happen. That fact that the overwhelming majority of the European population is becoming less and less religious is a manifestation of their will of freedom which is given to every person from birth: ‘Everything is allowed to me but not everything is useful; everything is allowed to me but nothing should control me’ (1 Kor, 6—12).

### Sweden: historical retrospective

Sweden is one of the European countries, where the diffusion of religious values is historically connected with Russia. There have been very few research works on the geography of religions in Sweden. The only article, which reflects the history of Christianity in Sweden, was published in the *Journal of the Moscow Patriarchate* in 1982 among other research works devoted to the history of Orthodoxy abroad [17]. The history and geography of religion in Sweden have been completely ignored in the scientific literature for the last 35 years.

The history of Christianity in Sweden is more than ten centuries old. Christianity replaced pagan cults described in German-Scandinavian mythology. Sweden was the first country in the world where Lutheranism became a state religion at the beginning of the 16th century and preserved this status until the early 2000s. It is believed that the first Christian missionaries came from the West in the 9th century. At the same time, there is an opinion that the ancient population of modern Sweden was familiar with the eastern tradition of Christianity. We should be thankful to Vikings who found the way to Constantinople [17]. The Swedish researcher and Orthodox Priest H. Classon, claims that after baptism Sweden was influenced by both Western (later Catholic) and Eastern (now Orthodox) traditions. As one of the arguments, the researcher describes the orientation of political, commercial, and sociocultural connections of Sweden to the East in the 10<sup>th</sup>—11th centuries. The centre of these connections was Novgorod in Russia and Sigtuna in Sweden. The first Orthodox Church in Sweden was built in Sigtuna [17, P. 51]. Towards the turn of the 9<sup>th</sup>—10th centuries, active missionary work of bishops and monks from Germany, Scotland and Ireland gave good results and the Swedish King Olof Shetkonung accepted Christianity. In 1000, the Christian history of Sweden began, although manifestations of paganism and religious duality existed for a very long time.

Sweden had adopted Christianity before the split of Christianity into Catholicism and Orthodoxy/ During the first two centuries the specificity of the Christian cult was shaped by the influence of both religions (married priesthood, etc.) [17]. After the split of 1054, the question about the confessional affiliation became particularly important. In 1248 the Council of the Swedish ecclesiastical region gathered in Shenning for a meeting. After this historic



event, the whole Sweden became Catholic. The only exceptions were Gotland, the central point of trade with Novgorod, and the Hanseatic Visby, having Orthodox churches for Novgorod's merchants. Soon, in the second half of the XIV century, the Danes conquered Gotland and the Orthodox tradition was interrupted for centuries.

Sweden remained Catholic until the beginning of the Reformation in the 16th century, when Catholicism was replaced by Lutheranism. King Gustav Vasa is often described as the driving force of the spread of Lutheranism in the country [17, 18]. Owing to his efforts, Lutheranism was accepted in Sweden *de jure and de facto*. The state status of this primary Protestant denomination was fixed in 1593, when the Rikstag session in Uppsala decided that only Lutheran worship could be performed on the territory of Sweden.

There was a law introducing a ban for individuals to hold meetings and religious discussions without a Lutheran priest. The ban was lifted only in 1858. Soon, in 1860, Swedish citizens were granted the right to withdraw from the Swedish Lutheran Church if they wanted to join another Christian confession.

### Christian denominations of Sweden today

Despite a high degree of secularization of society, the Church of Sweden is currently the biggest religious community in the country. The Church of Sweden has the most developed network of administrative division. In 2014, the Swedish Lutheran Church had approximately 6,292,264 parishioners, accounting for 64.6% of the population [19]. In 2014, the Swedish Lutheran Church provided about 410 thousand religious services (baptising, confirmations, weddings, and funeral services). It means that Lutheranism remains an important part of Swedish culture. All these ordinances (except the wedding), can be performed only once in life, and even though Sweden has a population of just over 8 million people, 410 thousand of sacraments are performed annually.

The primary church-administrative unit of the Swedish Lutheran Church (SLC), as in all others Christian denominations, is an eparchy which is headed by a bishop. There are 13 dioceses on the territory of Sweden, which consist of 1,364 parishes on the country's territory and 31 abroad (current number of parishes inside of the dioceses is stated in brackets) with centres in such cities as Uppsala (127), Vaxjo (168), Västerås (75), Visby (84), Gothenburg (178), Karlstad (85), Linköping (103), Luleå (57), Lund (167), Skara (117), Stockholm (about 60) Strängnäs (45) Härnösand (98).

Diocesan parishes are divided into two categories — independent units and parishes that are united into parsonages. For example, Uppsala Archdiocese includes 127 parishes, 89 of which are combined into 26 parsonages, and 41 units are independent churches. In the Finnish Lutheran Church there

is a division into similar types of parishes [8]. The diocese with the centre in Visby stands out from many similar ones. Parishes on the island of Gotland and parishes of the SLC located in different countries and continents of the world (including Australia and the Americas), are subject of the bishop of Visby.

A specific feature of the religious infrastructure of the SLC is the Lutheran Ostanbeck monastery (Östanbäck monastery in Swedish), not far from Sala. Generally speaking, monasticism is not typical of Lutheranism. However, since the beginning of the twentieth century, as a result of the ecumenical movements and conversion of primary Protestant denominations to Catholicism as a reformed Protestantism, Lutheran monastic orders began to appear both in Europe and in the United States. The history of the monastic Lutheran community began on February 14, 1960 with the initiative of four students of theology in Uppsala and Lund universities, who gave monastic vows and formed the Brotherhood of the Holy Cross under the guidance of an Anglican priest, a representative of the Order of the Franciscans. Later, in 1975, the monastery moved to the Statutes of the Benedictine Order.

Activities of the Swedish Lutheran Church are financed by donations of believers (compulsory church tax was abolished in 2000). Every year the SLC receives a state subsidy for the preservation of monuments of cultural heritage. The Church also receives deductions from various funds and publishes an annual financial report [19].

Having analysed the SLC data, we can say that the overall level of financial independence of the Swedish church from external sources is above the normative value (above 0.5). The bulk of the SLC assets is formed by its own sources.

The profit that the Church makes (824 million SEK in 2014) suggests that the Church has been maintaining an effective financial policy. Increasing revenues show a steady growth of the financial independence of the Church. In addition, an increasing number of securities (financial credit documents) led to an increase in the equity capital of the Church. This is a positive effect. Expenditures from the core activities of the Church have slightly increased, although it did not result in a decrease in the net profit.

The increase in accounts receivable (indebtedness of economic actors to the Church) also suggests that in the nearest future there is a possibility of increasing gross income through the refund of facilities to the Church. Overall, the financial condition of the SLC is quite satisfactory; the financial policy is well-planned and rightly implemented.

The second largest number of believers and parishes of the Christian religious denomination in Sweden are Catholic ones. In fact, Catholicism was the beginning of the Christian history of the country, interrupted by the Reformation and renewed after 1860. Thanks to the already mentioned opportunity to convert to another Christian denomination, people turned to Christianity from Lutheranism. The first post-reformation Catholic Church was built in 1865, in Gothenburg. The Catholic community, formed in 1861,



initially comprised 50 people, mainly Catholics from Germany, France, and Italy who lived in Sweden. In 1837, the Church of St. Eugenia was built in Stockholm. Nowadays, there are over 10 thousand parishioners there. The Church of St. Eugenia is the oldest Catholic parish in Sweden after the Reformation.

In 1900, there were about 2,500 Catholics in Sweden; they were parishioners of the churches of Stockholm, Geteborg, Gävle and Malmö. Later, Helsingbourg and Erenbru built their own churches.

Currently, the number of parishioners of the Roman Catholic Church in Sweden is around 150 thousand people with a tendency to further increase due to the migration inflow from the Catholic countries of the Eastern Europe and, to a much lesser extent, as a result of transition of ethnic Swedes from Lutheranism to Catholicism [20]. Administratively, from 1953, the territory of Sweden has been a separate Roman Catholic diocese of Stockholm, including 44 parishes. These parishes appeared in different years. For example, the Island of Gotland (Visby parish) was the first post-reformation Catholic Church, opened in 1982.

Several parishes have monasteries, for instance, Jonkoping (Franciscan), Landskrona (Carmelite) and in Ystad (Benedictine). There is also a sisterhood in Uppsala.

Among Catholic missions in different countries and continents (African, Croatian, English, Eritrean and Ethiopian, Filipino, French, Italian, Slovenian, Spanish, Ukrainian (Greek-Catholic), the largest one is Polish. Almost all parishes of Sweden conduct masses in the Polish language. In recent years, the number of parishes of the Polish missions have been increasing — there are new communities and churches in the cities of Haninge (1999), Göteborg (2005), Marsta (2009), Fittjas (2012).

Generally Catholic parishes of Sweden are multinational: this fact is indicated by use of national languages during services. For instance, Jarfalla parish, which became an independent clerical unit in 2003, separated from St. Eugenia parish in Stockholm, has approximately 1600 of registered parishioners from 60—70 countries. Masses are held in Swedish, Arabic, Sinhalese, Spanish, Indian and Polish. Eastern Catholics attend services at this parish too.

Ethnic Swedes form a minority in Catholic parishes, although there is a tendency of transition from Lutheranism to Catholicism of those who disagree with the reforms in Swedish Lutheranism (female priesthood, etc.).

As Catholic churches appeared in Sweden after the reform of 1860, Orthodox parishes also had their predecessors in the country: "In the XII—XIII centuries, when the trade route "from the Varangians to the Greeks" existed, in the ancient Swedish capital Sigtuna and the Hanseatic city of Visby on the Island Gotland, there were Russian trading posts, where merchants of Novgorod's Russia had their own Orthodox churches" [21, C. 329]. These churches were destroyed in the XVI century. The Orthodox Church and its community reappeared in Stockholm in 1617, when Novgorod and Moscow

merchants got the opportunity to build a church following the “Stolbovskiy peace Treaty”. Orthodox priests did not stay in Sweden permanently; they were sent there on missions from the Novgorod Metropolis during summer trading seasons [21]. The end of the Northern war and the restoration of diplomatic relations between Russia and Sweden resulted in the change of status of the Orthodox Church, which is considered as the first parish of the Russian Orthodox Church founded abroad — it turned from a merchant parish into an ambassadorial one.

This meant that it was transacted from Novgorod Metropolis to the St. Petersburg ecclesiastical Consistory and the Ministry of foreign Affairs. Strained political relations and constant wars made the worships in this church erratic during the XVIII century. It was the main reason for the relocation of the church: "Until 1710 Russian prisoners of the war were kept mostly in Stockholm and its suburbs. In 1710 they were sent to different places within the country, in 1715 all the prisoners were transported to a small island, Visingsö, on lake Vättern. The Orthodox Church mission moved there too, together with the two priests, who were in Sweden at that time "[17, C. 53].

The Spaso-Preobrazhenskiy ambassadorial cathedral in Stockholm existed until 1917, and then it became a parochial church for immigrants following the aftermath of revolutionary events in Russia. In ecclesiastic-administrative terms such cathedrals developed according to the route proposed earlier in Paris; shortly after the revolution a big part of parishes moved under the omophorion of the Patriarchate of Constantinople. It is difficult to estimate the number of Orthodox Christians in Sweden, but it is believed that it had increased from one to twelve thousand people by the end of the Second World War (due to the presence of immigrants).

In Sweden, Russian Orthodox church established itself in 1944—1947. Before it was represented by the only parish of the Russian Orthodox Church, constantly changing its location. The formation of another Estonian Orthodox Church (EOC) under the jurisdiction of the Patriarchate of Constantinople was linked with the wave of Estonian immigration (35 thousand people with 6 thousand Orthodox among them) [17] in Sweden. The Orthodox expanse in Sweden widened in the late 1940s, when the Estonian Orthodox parishes formed rapidly in Stockholm, Gothenburg, Norrköping and Halmstad (by 1980 there were only two of them continued to exist — in Stockholm and Gothenburg).

The community of Orthodox Finns consisted of the immigrants, who left Finnish Karelia, in the second half of the 1940s. Although they could communicate with the Finnish Orthodox Church, a crucial role in the organization of religious life of Orthodox Finns in Sweden was played by the Estonian Orthodox Church. Thanks to the efforts of the Finnish-speaking priest EOC Martin Ohkama, the parish of the Orthodox Finns was consolidated in Stockholm, with communities in Gothenburg, Norrköping, Eskilstuna and Visby. Orthodox Finns in Sweden became subject to the Metropolitan of Stockholm (Patriarchate of Constantinople).

A new stage in the spread of Orthodoxy in Sweden and the formation of new Orthodox jurisdictions occurred in 1960—70s. It was associated with labour immigration mainly from South-Eastern Europe, where Orthodoxy was a traditional confession. The number of the Orthodox in Sweden increased dramatically (up to 70 thousand people) [16] and four Orthodox priests were not able to meet all the religious needs of such a large congregation. In addition, there was a problem of languages. In 1966, there was only one ordained Orthodox priest, an ethnic Swede, who made the first attempt to create multinational parishes, where the main liturgical and spoken language was Swedish but other languages were possible as well. The first parishes of this model were created in Stockholm and Kristianstad.

By 1980 the general features of the Orthodox expanse had become quite visible in Sweden (Table 1). They show the diversity and lack of unity of the canonical space.

Table 1

#### The Orthodox Churches in Sweden (1980)

The name	Cities (Parishes)	Number of parishes	Number of priests	Number of parishioners
<b>The Patriarchate Of Constantinople</b> The Greek Metropolitanate of Sweden and Scandinavia	Gothenburg Malmö Stockholm Uppsala	3	4	16,000 (de jure), 8,000(de facto)
The Estonian Orthodox Church (abroad)	Gothenburg Stockholm	2	2 (1 is off the state)	cannot be estimated
The Finnish Autonomous Orthodox Church	Stockholm	1	1	4,000 (de jure)
The Western European Exarchate of the Russian Orthodox Church (abroad)	Stockholm	1	1	2,000
<b>The Romanian Patriarchate</b>	Stockholm Gothenburg Malmö	3	3	1,000
<b>The Serbian Patriarchate</b>	Gothenburg Kristianstad Malmö Stockholm Eskilstuna	5	5	35,000 (de jure), 8,000 (de facto)

To date, Sweden has increased the number of Orthodox parishes and created a representation office of the Patriarchate of Antioch with the parish in Malndal.

The number of parishes of the Romanian Patriarchate increased sixfold and reached 19. Nowadays, the Romanian Orthodox Church is present in

Stockholm (3), Borås, Växjö, Västerås, Gothenburg, the Island of Gotland, Jönköping, Kristianstad, Linköping, Malmö, Sölvesborg, Umeå, Uppsala, Halmstad, Helsingborg, Hillerstorp, Erebro [21]. In 2007, all parishes of the Romanian Patriarchate of Northern Europe were united and formed the North European Diocese, with the center in Stockholm.

The Finnish Autonomous Church is in a very difficult position [22]. Formally, the parish is listed in Stockholm, having communities in Gothenburg, Hofors and Eskilstuna. Regular services are not performed and a priest is occasionally invited from Helsinki or Turku.

The first parish of the Russian Orthodox Church of Moscow Patriarchate in Stockholm opened in 1992. By 2007 the number of parishes of the Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate in Sweden had increased, and this allowed the deanery to officially register as a religious organization. Currently, there are 11 parishes of the Russian Orthodox Church in Sweden but only Stockholm, Gothenburg, Västerås and Umeå parishes are officially part of the deanery, registered with the Chamber Board. There are Orthodox communities in Arboga, Gävle, Karlstad, Luleå, Uppsala, Jönköping, Eskilstuna. According to the Swedish law, they represent a religious group. Regular religious services are held only in large parishes, and small communities are attributed to them. For instance, the Orthodox parish of Stockholm gives guidance to Gothenburg, Karlstad, Uppsala, Arboga, and to Luleå, the most remote community located 900 km away from Stockholm.

## Conclusions

Sweden is generally regarded as one of the brightest examples of secularization and de-Christianization of Europe. However, the analysis revealed this secularization is partly fastidious. A large proportion of the Swedes belong to the Swedish Lutheran Church (SLC), which, though no longer a state religion, influences the life of the country. The importance of the SLC declined for a variety of reasons but definitely not because the SLC had failed to follow the changeable mood of the Swedish society. Rather, just like other Protestant denominations, the SLC was too fast to respond to the demands of the time. The fact that women can become bishops of the Church, the recognition of same-sex marriages and other ‘innovations’ of the same kind alienated many of religious people both in Sweden and in other Protestant countries. A growing number of parishes and Swedes belonging to other Christian confessions — Catholicism and Orthodoxy is an indirect proof of this conclusion.

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