



© Centrum för kulturpolitisk forskning  
Nordisk Kulturpolitisk Tidsskrift,  
ISSN Online: 2000-8325  
vol. 21, Nr. 1-2018 s. 5–24

RESEARCH PUBLICATION

# Preserving Churches for Future Generations: Central values in Swedish Policies on Church Heritage

Tobias Harding

Tobias Harding is the professor of cultural policy and cultural organization at University of South-Eastern Norway. He holds a Ph.D. in Culture Studies from University of Linköping, and the title of Docent in Cultural Policy at University of Jyväskylä. His research interests focus on how values and narratives of identity are institutionalized in cultural policy.

[tobias.harding@usn.no](mailto:tobias.harding@usn.no)

## ABSTRACT

Religious buildings in self-identified secular states are often treated as heritage objects within the context of a narrative of secularization, a narrative in which religion becomes a part of the past. In this paper, the values ascribed by Swedish government policies 1920–2013 to Church of Sweden's church buildings as built heritage are described and analyzed in terms of heritagization and secularization; as identity values, aesthetic values, historical values, and spiritual values. All churches constructed in Sweden before the beginning of 1940 are now protected by law. Churches constructed later have no such automatic protection. In legitimizing this protection, the state has referred primarily to historical values, but often understood these within the context of a wider cultural policy aiming to create good living spaces for the people, anchoring their daily life in local identity and history. Even after the separation of Church and state, the churches play a central role in the heritage preserved by this policy.

## Keywords

religious heritage | heritage policy | cultural heritage | national identity | heritagization | secularization | sweden | church heritage | church of sweden

[The church buildings are] a living cultural heritage which has been continuously used throughout the centuries, and is still in use for its original purpose. This is also a cultural heritage which is accessible for everyone, regardless of, for example, religious affiliation, age, sex and citizenship. Everyone is able to experience the church buildings and their interiors as historical and antiquarian monuments, take part in appreciation of art and architecture, listen to church music, and seek a moment of peace and tranquility. Church archives are open to all. It is of great importance that this common cultural heritage is preserved for future generations (Government Bill 1998/88:38).<sup>1</sup>

While Sweden, much like the other Nordic countries, can be described as a highly secular society, it is also a country where the relationship between church and state has remained close (e.g. Casanova 2015, Harding 2016). As exemplified by the above quote from one of the government bills preparing for the separation of church and state, which took place in 2000, the religious heritage of the former state church also forms a significant part of the national cultural heritage protected by law and government policies, as well as financially supported by the state. The main examples of this government protection is automatic legal protection of all Church of Sweden churches built before 1940, and the annual government grants to the Church of Sweden for the protection of its cultural heritage, grants which amount to a significant part of the Swedish national budget for heritage and conservation (Government Bill 1995/96:80, Government Bill 1998/99:38, Harding 2017).

This article presents an analysis of the values ascribed to Church of Sweden church buildings as built heritage in Swedish government heritage policies 1920–2013. Its aim is to describe and understand these values in terms of heritagization and secularization. While some significant changes took place during this period, the material is characterized by a remarkable stability in terms of the values attached to church heritage as reasons for its preservation. This appears remarkable considering the transformation that Swedish society went through during this period, such as the establishment of a modern welfare state, and the separation of church and state. In order to describe the values ascribed to church buildings, I classify them into four categories, as values of (1) local and national self-identity, (2) aesthetic values (including the aesthetic roles of religious buildings in the cityscape), (3) historical values (heritage as representing a particular point in time), and (4) spiritual values (churches as holy places). This categorization is not intended to cover all possible types of heritage values, but as a description of the major types of values used as sources of legitimacy in the policy documents discussed in this paper.<sup>2</sup>

This paper is based on an analysis of key policy documents concerning Swedish government policy produced and published from 1920 to 2013 and concerning the preservation of churches as cultural heritage. The time period covered by this article starts in 1920, when the predecessor of the current heritage legislation was established through a royal ordinance (SFS 1920:744, cf. Hillström 2017), and it ends thirteen years after the establishment of a new relation between the state and the Church of Sweden, which is now no longer consid-

1. All quotes from sources in Swedish have been translated by the author of this article. The reports of Swedish government commissions, laws, and government bills are referred to by their numbers in the official SOU series, SFS series, and as government bills, respectively.
2. It should be noted that the term *kulturhistoriskt värde* (“cultural-historical value”), especially in more recent official documents, has been used as an overall term for the values protected in Swedish heritage legislation and could thus be considered to cover all of the values discussed here (cf. Wetterberg 1992, 2011), with the possible exception of the spiritual values. In the context of this article, the term ‘historical values’ is used in a narrower sense.

ered a state church. The documents include 13 reports from government commissions and seven government bills. These documents concern the most important policy choices made in establishing the current heritage regime concerning church heritage in Sweden. As such, they have been deemed the most relevant for analyzing the values used to legitimize the establishment of the current system, at each formative moment during the 20<sup>th</sup> century (cf. Harding 2016, Harding 2017, Hillström 2017, Ekström 2003). These documents concern (1) heritage policy, (2) general cultural policy, and/or (3) government policy concerning the Church of Sweden. Many of these reports concern the issue of further separating Church and state, an issue which has been discussed throughout the period, until the changes in the relationship between church and state enacted in 2000.<sup>3</sup> In each case, the issue of preserving the heritage of the Church has been given at least some priority.

In the following, I will start by looking specifically at the connection between religious heritage and identity, as it was framed during the first part of the 20th century, in a context characterized by nationalism. I will then continue by discussing aesthetic and historical values attached to religious heritage, and then end this description by looking at the continued reference to specifically spiritual values. However, first I will discuss heritagization and secularization as central concepts in this analysis.

## HERITAGIZATION AND SECULARIZATION

Cultural heritage can be defined as “culture named and projected into the past, and simultaneously, the past congealed into culture” (Kirshenblatt-Gimlett 1998). Heritage is thus viewed as constituted in a continuous process of heritagization. In projecting the present into the past, and congealing the past into culture, a selection process necessarily takes place in which objects from the past are chosen, with references to certain values. This process may include a reinterpretation, or a complete change, of their symbolic meanings, and thus of the values attached to them. The resulting national heritage protected and displayed by states can be interpreted as telling a narrative and displaying values presented as part of the self-understanding of the nation and the state. When displayed in a national museum, heritage has been described as a kind of cultural constitution of the state protecting it, representing and displaying its self-identity and core values. Such cultural constitutions may be less strictly defined than legal constitutions, but they may also prove at once more resilient and more flexible. Studying the meanings and values attached to heritage is thus also a way of studying the self-understanding of societies and states (Aronsson 2015). This article presents an analysis of the institutionalization of church heritage through legislation and government policies, i.e. of the legal protection of a cultural heritage often compared by governments and

---

3. For a discussion on the legal and organizational relationship between church and state in Sweden, see Harding 2017.

government commissions to that collected in the museums (see below), and strongly connected to national identity (Blückert 2000, Harding 2015).

When religious heritage is presented as a part of national cultural heritage today, it is often presented within the context of a narrative of secularization (Byrne 2014, Paine 2013, Hyltén-Cavalius & Svanberg 2016), i.e. in support of a narrative where the state presents its national community as going through such a process. Religious buildings and objects are then treated as heritage objects, officially valued primarily for aesthetic and historical reasons. Heritagization could thus, in these cases, be seen as a process whereby religious objects are secularized into cultural heritage, even though they may, simultaneously, also be seen by others – or indeed by the same people – as religious objects and understood in a religious framework. (Byrne 2014, Paine 2013, Hyltén-Cavalius & Svanberg 2016).

On a more general level, the process of secularization can be separated into several different aspects (Taylor 2007, Casanova 1994). Some of these aspects, such as decreasing belief in God form a background for the issues discussed in this paper. The most important aspect in this context may be the differentiation of society into different spheres, relegating religion to the private sphere and civil society, and separating it from the public sphere and the state. This aspect was first described by Max Weber (1993), as a part of his general analysis of the process of modernization. Later analysis has suggested that processes of secularization are more complex and less one-directional than imagined by early sociologists. As shown by the developments in the Nordic countries, privatization of religion can be combined with – even increased by – a close relationship between church and state (Casanova 1994, 2015), i.e. by a relatively weak separation between the sphere of religion and the political-administrative sphere of the state (cf. Harding 2017).

For our purposes, the differentiation thesis appears useful as a way of understanding a central aspect of secularization, as long as it is kept in mind that secularization of one aspect of social life may not follow from secularization of another. Concepts of cultural heritage appear to have been separated from religious issues, with heritage becoming a responsibility of the state, and religion a responsibility of the church. Yet, this narrative also brings with it a risk of underestimating the influence which religious narratives and symbols may have on the self-identity of the nation-states when they become secularized through processes of differentiation and heritagization. The relationship between heritagization and secularization is a complex one. On the one hand, the religious heritage of established and formerly established religious institutions still play a significant role in the self-understanding of many officially secular nation-states (cf. Smith 2003). On the other hand, it can be argued that the values ascribed to religious objects and built heritage have changed in a “migration of the holy” (Cavanaugh 2011), from religious veneration to the veneration of history, identity and aesthetic values, thus making heritagization and secularization mutually reinforcing processes.

## IDENTITY VALUES

In the decades around the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Church of Sweden and its church buildings were closely associated with national identity. The already strong identification of the Kingdom of Sweden with the cause of Lutheranism developed into a nationalist identification of the imagined community of the church with that of the nation (Blückert 2000, Harding 2015). Within the Church and in the nationalist movements, the influential Young Church Movement argued that Lutheran Christianity was the core of Swedish identity, and that the Church of Sweden was the form which Christianity had taken in the Swedish national context, thus ideally characterized not only by Lutheranism, but also by Swedish culture (Blückert 2000, Harding 2016, Mitchel & Tergel 1994). Central to this understanding were the local parishes and their structures of local democracy, which were considered to be heirs of the pre-Christian and early medieval local *ting* assemblies, and thus to an ancient tradition of local democracy and community. The local parishes thus became a representation of the nation's agrarian past and its ancient freedoms, while parish churches came to be viewed as a symbolic manifestation, or microcosm, both of the Church, as such, and of the agrarian past of the nation (Eckerdal 1988, Blückert 2000, Harding 2016).

It was in this ideological climate that academic research in the conservation of material heritage developed (cf. Bedoir 2013, Hillström 2006, Wetterberg 2011). One of the more ambitious government commissions dealing with heritage conservation in early 20<sup>th</sup> century Sweden noted in its final report 1922:

In our country, conservation of cultural heritage emerged only as an aspect of a more general effort to awaken and preserve patriotism, among other things by referring to the great things, which our ancestors have left us as heritage (SOU 1922:12, 6).

At that point, academic and civil service expertise were already moving away from a total identification of conservation with patriotism. Heritage preservation was increasingly seen as academic and professional, rather than ideological or political. The commission instead emphasized patriotic and scientific interests as supporting each other in this area, at a time when the influence of professional antiquarians over Swedish heritage policy was becoming increasingly established (Wetterberg 1992, 2011, Hillström 2006).

In later government bills and reports of government commissions dealing with cultural heritage, there has almost never been any mention of national identity as a positive value to be protected by heritage policy. This is also in line with the general tendency, especially from the post-War years and onwards, to de-emphasize such values in cultural policies (cf. Frenander 2014, Harding 2007). During the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, all identity-based arguments were in fact rare in Swedish heritage policy, as well as in the main documents dealing with the separation of church and state. Instead, the importance of preserving the built

heritage of the Church of Sweden was largely taken for granted in these documents, or argued with reference to other value categories.

Much as in other parts of the world, cultural policy discussions in Sweden in the 1960's and 1970's were largely focused on other matters than on identity and heritage (Frenander 2014, Harding 2007). Swedish self-understanding has been described as changing from an ethno-cultural and state-centered identity to one where the state was understood as a driving force in a process of modernization, and where ethno-cultural homogeneity was largely taken for granted (Harding 2006). The documents concerning cultural heritage policy stand out in this context. If any arguments were used for heritage preservation, these still tended to be about identity, as for example in the first general government bill on cultural policy in 1974:

When the individual, in this way, is deprived of his connection backwards in time, his feelings of insecurity and alienation grows. The preservation of historical continuity in the physical cultural environment is thus of fundamental importance to the individual's feeling of security and anchoring in existence (Government bill 1974:28, 301).

This time focus was on local identity, not on national identity. While local identity returned as a central value, national identity has barely been mentioned as a positive value in these documents since the middle of the 20th century. In 1995, the general cultural policy commission made a similar argument for the role of heritage policies in modern society, specifically emphasizing the need for history to be made visible in the everyday environment of each individual through the conservation of the physical heritage of the place (SOU 1995:84, 298). Considering the understanding older understanding of the local church as a symbolic representation of both, the Church and the nation (Harding 2016), this could be understood as an implicit representation of the nation, but this is never mentioned explicitly, possibly because this would conflict with the now established modernist self-understanding of the nation-state.

When the new heritage law of 1988 was written to include legal protection for the conservation of all Church of Sweden churches built prior to 1940, the arguments included a reference to the importance of most of these churches to local identity, as well of their aesthetic and historical value:

Considering, among other things, the historical importance of the churches as the heart of the parish and as examples of the architecture or past times, most of our older churches have to be recognized as being of great importance from the standpoint of cultural history. [...] When the building of churches increased again, in the 1950's, the character of the churches had changed in a way which motivates my proposal to abolish the requirement of government permission for the construction of new churches. [...] Most churches constructed after 1939 are also different from churches in a traditional sense (Government bill 1987/88:104, 57).



Churches built in post-war times, and thus not associated with pre-industrial and pre-welfare state agrarian society was not awarded the same protection as those built before 1940. New churches were not considered to have the same identity value (although, as we shall see, some of them were still ascribed aesthetic value).

In the discussions and investigations preparing for the separation of church and state, the value of churches for local identity was emphasized, in a similar fashion. During the – ultimately failed (Harding 2017) – attempt to separate church and state in the 1970's, the government commission situated local church buildings in the context of local communities, emphasizing their importance to local identity and the right of the local population to have continued access to them:

[Pre-1940 parish churches] often originate in times when “the parish church” was seen as the property of the entire population [of the parish]. The Church of Sweden should, according to what we propose, also in the future have full disposition of these buildings – as well as of all other Church property – which originates in the Church's time as a public institution and which have been paid for by the entire population of the area. We assume that the Church will accommodate reasonable requests for access, so that state legislation on access to churches is not necessary. (SOU 1972:36, 177f).

When the issue was taken up again in the 1990's, the government commission investigating the possibility of separating church and state also returned to the need for preserving the connection between parishes, parish churches, and continuity in local identity;

The local connection is important to maintain the current broad engagement with the church as a cultural milieu. There is also a value in supporting the preservation of the parish, which has existed since the Middle Ages (SOU 1992:9, 417).

This argument was stated again when the principal decision to separate church and state was made. Local identification with parish churches was now considered at the same time as a strength for the Church of Sweden, and as an argument for continued legal protection of pre-1940 church buildings (government bill 1995/96:80). Among the central issues of the official discussions concerning the relationship between church and state taking place in the last decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was determining who would be responsible for churches and other Church property after a separation of church and state (Ekström 2003, Harding 2017). The old parish churches were considered to be of high value to both church and state, not something to which only the members of the future independent Church of Sweden should have a right to. In the 1990s, it was taken for granted both that the Church of Sweden should have full disposition, and that the state should guarantee the continued conservation of

church heritage and public access to the churches (e.g. SOU 1992:9, government bill 1995/96:80).

### AESTHETIC VALUES

While the previously mentioned government commission on national heritage was preparing its 1922 report, the government acted in 1920, issuing a statute which would, in many ways, provide the foundations for later Swedish heritage legislation (Wetterberg 1992, 2011, Harding 2016). With this statute, the government instituted special legal protection for public buildings (including churches), which were, “due to cultural historical or artistic value, to be considered memorials” (SFS 1920:744, §18). The statute thus covered two value categories: “artistic” and “cultural historical”. These concepts are likely to have been understood in the context of thinkers such as Alois Riegl, who was central to Swedish conservation and architecture debate at the time (Wetterberg 1992, 2011, cf. Riegl 1982, Lamprakos 2014). “Cultural historical values” would later become the dominant term in Swedish heritage policies, while professional antiquarians with an educational background in the humanities would come to dominate the field (Wetterberg 1992, 2011). The heritage commission, which submitted its report in 1922, had been formed due to a stronger influence from a different professional group – architects. The Royal Academy of Arts – and particularly its member the architect Ferdinand Boberg – had been a driving force behind the appointment of the government commission in 1913. The views the commission received from the Academy, via Boberg, can be seen as representative of the views of experts – especially architects – dealing with restoration issues in Sweden at the time (SOU 1922:11, Bedoir 2013):

In cases when additions and changes are unavoidable, these should, in the view of the Academy, be made in such a way as to be in artistic harmony with pre-existing designs, but without need to slavishly follow the dominant historical style, or styles, of the building, and making the confusion of old and new avoidable, so that the old should be left untouched in character, side by side with the new. However, it was also the view of the Academy that if old and interesting details or decorations were found hidden beneath the additions of later days, these could, as an exception, be brought to light, and regain the place which they had had from the beginning (SOU 1922:11, 73).

The commission emphasized the need to sometimes conserve furnishings because of their impact on the visual interior of protected buildings. While the commission emphasized visual aspects, it should be noted that aesthetic aspects tended to take second place to what this article refers to as historical values, i.e. conservation as a way to preserve material heritage as a source of information. This tendency would be even more pronounced in policy documents produced in the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, when heritage policy came to be dominated by an increasingly professionalized heritage field.



Outside of the heritage field – e.g. in reports dealing with the responsibility for religious heritage in the context of a separation of church and state (rather than in the context of heritage policy as such) – aesthetic values remained a source of legitimacy for heritage protection. The 1972 report of the Church and State Commission, for example, emphasized the need to continue to protect aesthetically and architecturally valuable churches, regardless of their age:

It is [...] of high importance that it will, also in the future and in a similar manner, be possible to let new aesthetically and architecturally valuable ecclesiastical buildings be covered by protective legislation, regardless of which religious denomination they belong to (SOU 1972:36, 179).

When mentioned at all in more general heritage policies in the later part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, aesthetic aspects of heritage conservation tended to be mentioned as an aspect of a broader vision of creating environments conducive to the good life of citizens, very much in line with the previously discussed ambitions to create environments emphasizing historical continuity and groundedness.

Aesthetic values have been more prominent when heritage issues have been discussed by government commissions dealing with cultural policy in general, rather than with heritage policy in particular. This tendency can be connected to the previously mentioned view of heritage as part of the lived environment of citizens, emphasizing continuity and identity. The 1972 report of the cultural policy commission which came to shape much of Swedish cultural policy for the following decades (Harding 2007, Frenander 2014) stated as a general view that cultural policy is

part of society's environmental policy undertakings at large, which, among other things, includes physical planning, societal planning, landscape architecture and education, as well as issues concerning the work and leisure environment. (SOU 1972:66, 168).

This commission also related heritage policy to the ability of the art sector to renew itself, since “activities in several of the artistic forms of expression build significantly on their heritage from earlier eras” (SOU 1972:66, 301). The same year, the government commission investigating the possible separation of Church and state argued the need for protection of “aesthetically and architecturally valuable church buildings to be covered by conservation law, regardless of which religious denominations they belong to” (SOU 1972:36, 179). When cultural policy was revised in the 1990's, aesthetic aspects of city planning, as well as its role in creating public spaces, was again used as an argument for heritage protection and for an active policy on architecture (SOU 1995:84, 439). Similar views were retained in the latest revision of cultural policy, in 2009 (government bill 2009/10:3). Specialized heritage policy has come to increasingly emphasize the need to conserve whole environments, rather than merely individual buildings. In this, broader sense, aesthetic aspects have become

increasingly important in Swedish heritage policy while this policy has become increasingly integrated in the larger field of cultural policy.

## HISTORICAL VALUES

[A]ll monuments are not [...] of the same importance. Objects originating in later times are of interest primarily to the extent to which they can serve as typical illustrations of the historical narrative and serve as especially illustrative expressions of what the time of their origin wished for and was able to produce. [...] The more distant the era of origin of an object is, and the more sparsely the written sources from these epochs flow, the more such demands on quality has to step back, so that when it comes to eras so distant that the monuments themselves are our only source of knowledge, any product of human activities has been drawn into the sphere of interest of conservation (SOU 1922:11, 1).

The 1922 report of the government commission on conservation starts out with one of the clearer examples of an argument for conservation where the value of heritage objects as a source of knowledge is central, especially when dealing with prehistoric times, i.e. as representing a particular point in time (cf. Riegl 1982). When dealing with more recent periods in history, the main argument was instead the function of heritage as a pedagogical aid in the transmission of historical narratives. This is, in other words, not about the subjective associations attached to heritage objects and environments, but about using them as reified examples to illustrate or prove statements and narratives concerning particular points in historical time. Identity and aesthetic values have always played a role in heritage policies, but the value category most often referred to explicitly in heritage policy, during the period discussed in this paper, is what I describe as historical values. The dominance of this view of cultural heritage can be understood as a part of the professionalization of heritage conservation and related academic disciplines (cf. Hillström 2006, Wetterberg 1992, 2011, Grundberg 2000).

At least since the 1970's, an increasing awareness of the contextual nature of cultural heritage can also be seen in the policy documents (e.g. SOU 1979:17). This view is also closely connected to the concepts of a public responsibility for continuity and the aesthetic aspects of the environments where the citizens live their lives (see above). Yet, when defining the values protected in heritage law, the main policy documents have tended to focus on the historical, and especially the documentary, aspects:

A fundamental principle should be that the building should have something to tell about its time, i.e. that it transmits knowledge about the commerce, society, building and living conditions, labor conditions, social conditions and aesthetic ideals of earlier day. The building should, in other words, have documentary value (SOU 1979:17, 133f).

Rather than viewing objects, or buildings, as representing continuity throughout the time during which they had existed, this government commission viewed them as representing only their time of origin. The rarity of the object was also considered an important factor, as was the preservation of objects which had survived unchanged over time, but much like to earlier commissions (e.g. SOU 1922:11, cf. Wetterberg 1992), buildings which could be used to illustrate several stages of development were also considered to be of special value. Since the main aim of conservation was to conserve sources and illustrative examples of times different from our own, the need for preservation was also considered to increase as the speed of societal change increased. In 1979, the conservation of functionalist architecture was, for example, already considered an important issue (SOU 1979:17).

Connected to the idea of heritage preservation as a way to illustrate and document history was also an often extensive view of what should be preserved; not just individual buildings, or objects of a particular type, but heritage representative of the full variety of history. As early as in the heritage report of 1922, the need for preserving the heritage of all parts of the country and of knowledge of the traditions of every part of it was emphasized (SOU 1922:11, p. 78). In the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, a government commission on national heritage policy noted, with approval, a general trend towards preservation of a broader range of buildings, as well as of entire heritage milieus:

As the commission has noted elsewhere, cultural historical views on buildings in our country, has, in the last few decades, gone through significant change. From primarily focusing on a limited number of single buildings of especially significant nature, interest has come to include also simpler constructions of various kinds typical of our building tradition. Simultaneously, the importance of entire environments consisting of older buildings is now better understood (SOU 1956:26, 82f).

While earlier, the only heritage-protected building in a village was likely to have been the parish church, priorities now changed, but not to the extent that previously protected buildings – such as churches – lost their protected status. Over time, policies have increasingly emphasized the need for cultural heritage to be representative of heterogeneous society and its history (cf. Government Bill 2012/13:96), thus also connecting to a more pluralistic understanding of identity. For the protection of Church of Sweden churches, this has changed less, considering that the legislation continues to protect all churches constructed before 1940. This rule could also be considered to be in line with the ambition to protect churches from the entirety of the country, providing a large sample of buildings and styles. It also contrasts with the present priorities in that it privileges a specific type of building and its surrounding context.

Another central idea in government approaches to church preservation developed in the later part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, is that heritage should not only be conserved, but also be made to come alive, or be “invigorated” (Swe. *levande-*

*görs*), to use the term used in the first general objectives for Swedish government cultural policy, set in 1974. In its general cultural policy, the same government bill emphasized the ambition to enable the entire population to take part of high quality culture (Government Bill 1974:28). When the implications of these objectives for heritage policy were discussed by a government commission in 1979, it was connected to the idea of preserving the heritage of the entire society:

As a general objective for the cultural policy of the government, it should, among other things, guarantee that historical culture is preserved and invigorated. Conservation should include the history of the entire society, and not only so called upper-class culture. The heritage of the historical farming society, the emergence of industrialization and the popular movements, also have to be passed on (SOU 1979:17, 24).

This view became central to the new law on heritage conservation enacted in 1987, and has continued to be influential in later policies and documents. The ambition that protected cultural heritage should be representative of the class structure of society had now been complemented by a similar ambition that it should also be representative of an ethnically heterogeneous society (Government Bill 1987/88:104). The idea that cultural heritage should be kept alive, be invigorated, and play a role in the lives of people today, also appears to have played a significant role for the continued protection of church heritage after the separation of church and state in 2000.

When the relationship between church and state became the subject of a number of government commissions in the 1990's, it was largely taken for granted that the religion of the people could no longer be considered a legitimate concern for the government. At the same time, the preservation of the material cultural heritage held by the Church was still considered to be an important responsibility for the government. The main public issues still managed by the Church of Sweden were thus heritage preservation and the maintenance of cemeteries (Harding 2007, 2017, 2016, Ekström 2003, cf. SOU 1992:9, SOU 1994:42, SOU 1997:43, SOU 1997:55, Government Bill 1996/97:3, Government Bill 1998/99:38). The main government commission preparing the separation described the material cultural heritage of the Church as central to the national cultural heritage:

The Swedish parish churches are a cultural heritage built during nearly a millennium. There are over 3000 church buildings, representing the architecture, building history and building technology of numerous epochs. Church interiors are, taken together, a cultural treasure which in richness and scope surpasses that which is collected in Swedish museums. The church buildings represent fundamental aspects of Swedish social, economic and political history. From medieval to modern times, the parish has been the framework of local society (SOU 1994:42, 125).

The commission thus espoused the established idea of the central importance of parish churches in local identity and history (discussed above). Similar arguments had been used a few years earlier in the government bill introducing the new heritage law (Government Bill 1987/88:104). Note also the comparison between the collections of the churches and those of museums. An earlier government commission in 1992 (to which this report referred) had added that public support for museums equaled 885 million SEK, to be compared to the 400 million SEK it suggested as government support for the Church of Sweden for its work with maintaining cultural heritage (SOU 1992:9, 431).

The government bill proposing the final decision to separate church and state reaffirmed these positions, but added an emphasis on the continued use of the church buildings “for the same purpose” as a part of what made them relevant as heritage:

This is a living cultural heritage, which has, throughout the centuries, been continuously used, and is still used, for the same purpose. It is also a cultural heritage which is accessible for everyone, regardless of, for example, religious affiliation, age, sex and citizenship. [...] Church archives are available to all. It is of great importance that this common cultural heritage is preserved for future generations (Government Bill 1998/88:38).

The central value connected to the continuous religious use of the churches was not a religious value. Instead, it appears to be matter of continuity as an identity value connected with the concept of authenticity, and combined with understanding the activity as making the original purposes of the buildings more evident to present and future visitors. While the emphasis on accessibility builds on older concepts of the Church as the Church for the whole of the people (cf. Blücker 2000, Harding 2015), the church is here presented as a heritage; the emphasis is not on the continuity of religious practice as such (which the government viewed in a positive light, but primarily as a responsibility for the Church), but on continued use as an illustration of history for the benefit of visitors, regardless of faith. The government commissions and government bills laying out the principles for the separation of church and state thus reaffirmed the view that the cultural heritage of the church, unlike religion, is ultimately the responsibility of the state, even though they add to its value that it is continued to be used, owned and managed by the church, and especially by its parishes. Together with the idea that all of older churches belonging to the Church of Sweden were worthy of preservation, this view was reaffirmed in the government bills separating church and state.

## **SPIRITUAL VALUES**

It would be easy to expect that concern for churches as sacred spaces would play a role in the legislation of a nation-state with a state religion. The sanctity of church buildings was indeed legally protected as long as until the separation

of church and state, in 2000. The need for such protection appears to have been mostly taken for granted in the main policy documents, at least until the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In 1949, for example, the government commission preparing the new legislation on the freedom of religion (enacted in 1951) successfully argued the need to maintain legal protection for the sanctity of churches (SOU 1949:20). All ritual activity taking place within a church had to be conducted according to the liturgy of the Church of Sweden, as approved by parliament. Only in special cases could exceptions be made, e.g. if a funeral service was to be made for a member of another religious denomination, or a non-religious person, and there was no other appropriate space available in the relevant geographical area. Even in such cases, the commission emphasized the importance of maintaining the sanctity of the building:

The church should, of course, not be opened to a non-ecclesiastical funeral, except when the vicar in question has made sure that nothing will occur that could, in any way, violate the sanctity of the room (SOU 1949:20, 168).

After 1950, most of the policy documents dealing with these issues have mainly been concerned with the sanctity of the cemeteries often surrounding church buildings. In the cases when this aspect has been considered relevant, the relationship between heritage conservation and the sanctity of the place has also tended to be a close one. As late as when the issue of separating church and state was revisited in the early 1990's, the government included arguments relating to the dignity of cemeteries in its government bill, even though it never mentioned any other aspects of the sanctity of churches or religious sites:

For every cemetery it is stipulated in Chapter 3, 12§ that it should be kept in a dignified state. It should also be attended to that the sanctity appropriate for the resting place of the dead is always maintained (SOU 1992:9, 295).

A decade later, after the separation of church and state, the concept of sanctity was already removed from Swedish legislation. In most parts of the country, cemeteries are still owned and maintained by the Church of Sweden. Regardless of who is responsible for them, this is considered a responsibility delegated by the national government (Harding 2007, 2017), and the special legislation, as well as the associated heritage legislation, is entirely devoid of any explicit references to the sanctity of the place. Unlike in the days of the legally established church, this special legislation becomes relevant when a cemetery is taken into use, not when it is opened by a ritual act from the liturgy of the Church of Sweden, and the respect offered to it is legitimized with reference to respect for the dead, and their families, not with reference to the place as such (Government Bill 1998/99:38).

Rather than as a matter of sanctity, the current separation of church and state could, when it comes to legislation concerning the use of church buildings, be seen as a division of labor where the state is ultimately responsible for



issues of heritage conservation and the maintenance of cemeteries, while the Church is responsible for the activities still considered to be religious in nature (church heritage buildings are maintained by the Church, within the framework of heritage legislation and with financial support from the government). A predecessor of this division of labor could be seen in the government directives to the commission re-translating the Bible to Swedish in the 1970's, 1980's, and 1990's, when the Church of Sweden was still the legally established church. These directives included three main criteria: the new translation should be as close as possible to the oldest known original documents, it should be written in easily understood Swedish, while still maintaining the stylistic characteristics of the original, and it should be adapted for use in the approved liturgy of the Church of Sweden (SOU 1974:33). The same could now be said about the use of church buildings: the main issues are that the buildings are preserved as close to their original looks as possible (historical value), that they are accessible for the public, and that it is useful for the liturgy of the Church of Sweden. These have also become the main concerns of the heritage authorities and the Church, respectively – the heritage authorities have come see the first aspect as its responsibility, while the bodies representing the Church, when answering the official documents studied in this article, appear to have viewed churches primarily as buildings in which church services are performed. For example, both the Law on the Church of Sweden, and the statutes of the Church, states that “The fundamental responsibility of the parish is to celebrate church services, teach, and perform diaconal work”, making all other activities, such as maintaining church buildings, secondary to these (SFS 2009:1234, 4§, *Kyrkoordningen*, 5, Harding 2017).

Accessibility has become a value recognized by both the Church of Sweden and the state, closely connected both to central norms in national heritage policy, and to the self-understanding of the Church as a People's Church (cf. Blücker 2000, Harding 2016). None of the main actors appears to view sanctity of place as a central issue. Yet, it is worth noticing that the definition of the churches as a heritage which should be accessible to all has been broadened enough to also include aspects which could previously have been seen as aspects of sanctity, as well as aesthetic values:

Everyone is able to experience the church buildings and their interiors as historical and antiquarian monuments, take part of art and architecture, listen to church music and seek a moment of peace and tranquility. [...] It is of great importance that this common cultural heritage is preserved for future generations (Government Bill 1998/88:38).

Here, in the government bill separating church and state, it appears that the spiritual value attached to church buildings in the policy documents has changed, from recognizing the institutionalized liturgy of the established church, to recognizing the subjectively spiritual values which may be attached

to them by individual visitors.<sup>4</sup> This appears to be typical of how the issue was viewed in the discussions that preceded the separation of Church and state.

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

In general, the values ascribed to churches as built heritage in Swedish heritage policy have been relatively constant since the 1920's, but changes in emphasis can be noted. The most dominant group of values is, perhaps not surprisingly, historical values. This can be tied to a professionalization of heritage conservation, which had already come far by 1920. Heritage preservation as the preservation of historical sources and documentation has been an increasingly established value throughout most of the period. However, this is not necessarily the form of historical value most often referred to in the material. Instead, the overall argument for heritage preservation has, especially during the last half century, been a view of churches and other built heritage as a material display supporting a historical narrative, anchoring the landscape in which citizens live their daily lives in history. This understanding comes close to efforts to strengthen local identity, as well as to an emphasis on the environment as a living space, which has been central to Swedish cultural policy since the early 1970's. During the decades following the 1970s, this understanding appears to have increasingly emphasized the historical aspects of the environment, but it has ultimately been legitimized as an interest in creating a healthy living space for citizens. Towards the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, policy documents have increasingly emphasized that cultural heritage is not constant, but is something which will always continue to change.

The dominant perspective in the documents studied here, is thus closely tied to values of identity. In this area, there has been significant changes in the approaches to heritage supported in official policy. While local identity has always been central to Swedish heritage policy – as well as closely tied to the local church buildings as manifestations of the parish and the local community – national identity has virtually disappeared as an authoritative value in the heritage policy documents studied in this article. National identity has gone from being a central value, locally manifested in local identity, to hardly being mentioned at all in the documents. In terms of legal protection for actual church buildings, there has been a development from discussions regarding which churches were worthy of preservation to a general legal protection for all churches built before 1940. While the heritage report of 1922 primarily viewed church preservation as an issue of preserving historical documentation and significant examples of architecture, the heritage bill of 1987/88, as well as later documents, have considered all older churches to be worthy of preservation. This way of thinking can be tied to the already established strong association of parish churches and local identity, which, when combined with an

---

4. I will discuss the relationship between the concept of heritage, including immaterial heritage, and this broader – or secularized – understanding of sanctity further in a future article.

interest in creating healthy, aesthetic and historically anchored environment for citizens all over the country, appears to have made all pre-1940 parish churches relevant to preserve, since every parish church could be considered to be significant to its own local environment.

All churches constructed before the beginning of 1940 are now protected in law. Churches constructed later, have no such automatic protection. This suggests that churches are protected as a heritage of the Swedish society which existed before the post-war buildup of the modern Swedish welfare state. The religious nature of the churches is relevant mainly as a feature of this imagined pre-welfare-state pre-secular Sweden, not because of any special sanctity of the churches as such. The understanding of the common past supported by present day Swedish heritage policies can thus be described as an understanding of secularization contrasting the an agrarian religious pre-welfare-state Sweden to its later secular welfare society, and thus connected to a national self-understanding as a secular and modern nation-state. The above-mentioned concerns with anchoring life and identity in history appear to be based in an understanding of society as having been fundamentally transformed and of citizens as alienated from history.

Parallel to this development, legal protection of the liturgy of the Church of Sweden and the sanctity of the church buildings as the religious spaces of an institutionalized church, have largely disappeared from the public documents. This concept of sanctity has been replaced by a more generalized emphasis on common individual access to spaces which may, or may not, be considered sacred to the individual, combined with a continued support for the respectful treatment of the dead, again without any reference to a specific institutionalized doctrine. This could be seen as an increased institutional separation of the sphere of government from the clerical sphere, where the Church is made legally responsible for the exercise and teaching of Evangelical-Lutheran Christianity (cf. SFS 1998:1591), while the government remains responsible for the providing a secular-historical narrative giving meaning to the daily lives of the people. In Weberian terms, this could be viewed not only as an increased separation of spheres of administration and meaning, but also as a kind of disenchantment of both Church and state, where the sanctity of the space is viewed as increasingly subjective, as something read into it by individuals, not as something provided through ritual.

It appears clear that while the clerical sphere is now relatively separate from the secular responsibilities of the state, those secular responsibilities still include much which could have been seen as spiritual, such as “[t]he preservation of historical continuity in the physical cultural environment [providing a] feeling of security and anchoring in existence” for each individual in Swedish society (Government bill 1987/88:104, 301). Swedish policies on church heritage – and Swedish cultural policy in general (cf. Harding 2015) – could thus be described as the state taking a far-reaching responsibility for the spiritual welfare of its citizens.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The research behind this article has been made possible by a grant by the Swedish Research Council to a research project headed by professor Ola Wetterberg (Vetenskapsrådet, dnr. 2013–1908). Previous versions of this article has been presented at the international conference of the Association for Critical Heritage Studies in Montreal 2016, and in the research network Religious Heritage in Transition (RHIT). I take this opportunity to thank all those who have commented on the text in these contexts, as well as the anonymous referees of this journal, and Veronika Possek, who has edited and commented on this article.

## REFERENCES

### Literature

- Aronsson, P. 2015. "Introduction" in Peter Aronsson & Gabriella Elgenius (eds.) *National Museums and Nation-Building in Europe 1750–2010: Mobilization and Legitimacy, Continuity and Change*. London: Routledge.
- Bedoire, F. 2013. *Restaureringskonstens historia*. Stockholm: Norstedts.
- Blückert, K. 2000. *The Church as Nation*. Frankfurt: Peter Lang.
- Byrne, D. 2014. *Counterheritage: Critical Perspectives on Heritage Conservation in Asia*. New York: Routledge.
- Casanova, J. 1994. *Public Religions in the Modern World*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Casanova, J. 2014. "Two Dimensions, Temporal and Spatial, of the Secular: Comparative Reflections on the Nordic Protestant and the Southern Catholic Patterns from a Global Perspective" in Breemer, R. van den, J. Casanova & T. Wyller (eds.) *Secular and Sacred? The Scandinavian Case of Religion in Human Rights, Law and Public Space*. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht.
- Cavanaugh, W. 2011. *Migrations of the Holy*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing.
- Eckerdal, L. 1988. "'Fädernas kyrka' och Guds: Kyrkosyner i Svenska kyrkans psalmböcker" in *Svensk teologisk kvartalskrift*, nr. 64.
- Ekström, S. 2003. *Makten över kyrkan*. Stockholm: Verbum.
- Frenander, A. 2014. *Kulturen som kulturpolitikens stora problem: Diskussionen om svensk kulturpolitik fram till 2010*. Hedemora: Gidlunds.
- Harding, T. 2006. "Det breddade kulturarvet och den oromantiska nationalismen" in A. Alzén & P. Aronsson (eds.) *Demokratiskt kulturarv? Nationella institutioner, universella värden, lokala praktiker*, Norrköping: Tema Kultur och samhälle, Linköpings universitet.
- Harding, T. 2007. *Nationalising Culture: The Reorganization of Swedish Cultural Policy 1970–2002*. Linköping: Linköping University.
- Harding, T. 2015. "Bildning as Central Concept in the Cultural Policy of the Swedish Government – From Arthur Engberg to Alice Bah Kuhnke". *Nordic Journal of Cultural Policy*, 2015:2, pp. 162–181.
- Harding, T. 2016. "The Dawn of the Secular State: Heritage and Identity in Swedish Church and State Debates 1920–1939". *International Journal of Cultural Policy*, 22(4), pp. 631–647.
- Harding, T. 2017. "From State Church to Third Sector Organization? The Separation of Church and State in Sweden", International Association of Third-Sector Research Conference Working Paper Series, vol. X. *The Third Sector in Transition: Accountability, Transparency, and Social Inclusion, 12th International Conference*.

- Hillström, M. 2006. *Ansvar för kulturarvet: Studier i det kulturhistoriska museiväsendets formering med särskild inriktning på Nordiska museets etablering 1872–1919*. Norrköping: Linköping University.
- Hillström, M. 2017. "Staten, kyrkan och ansvar för kyrkobyggnaderna" in M. Hillström, E. Löfgren & O. Wetterberg (eds.) *Alla dessa kyrkor: Kulturvård, religion och politik*. Göteborg: University of Göteborg.
- Hyltén-Cavallius, C. & F. Svanberg 2016. *Älskade museum. Svenska kulturhistoriska museer som kulturskapare och samhällsbyggare*. Stockholm: Nordic Academic Press.
- Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, B. 1998. *Destination Culture: Museums, Heritage and Tourism*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Lamprakos, M. 2014. "Riegl's Modern Cult of Monuments and the Problem of Value" in *Change Over Time: An International Journal of Conservation and the Built Environment*. 4.2, 2014, pp. 414–435.
- Mitchel, S. & A. Tergel 1994. "Chosenness, Nationalism and the Young Church Movement" in W. R. Hutchison & H. Lehmann (eds.) *Many are Chosen: Divine Election and Western Nationalism*. Harvard: Harvard theological studies.
- Paine, C. 2013. *Religious Objects in Museums*. London: Bloomsbury.
- Riegl, A. 1982. "The modern cult of monuments: its character and origin", Transl. K. W. Forster & D. Ghirardo, *Oppositions* 25 (1982), pp. 20–51.
- Smith, A. 2003. *Chosen Peoples: Sacred Sources of National Identity*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Taylor, C. 2007. *A Secular Age*. Harvard: Harvard University Press.
- Trägårdh, L. & Berggren, H. 2015. *Är svensken människa? Gemenskap och oberoende i det moderna Sverige*, Stockholm: Norstedts.
- Weber, M. 1993. *The Sociology of Religion*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Wetterberg, O. 1992. *Monument och miljö: Perspektiv på det tidiga 1900-talets byggnadsvård i Sverige*. Göteborg: CTH.
- Wetterberg, O. 2011. "Conservation and the Professions: The Swedish Context 1880–1920" in Melanie Hall (ed.) *Towards World Heritage. International Origins of the Preservation Movement 1870–1930*. Surrey: Ashgate.

### Primary sources

- SFS 1920:744. *Kungl. Maj:ts kungörelse med föreskrifter om det offentliga byggnadsväsendet*. ["His Majesty's proclamation with instructions concerning public buildings"] Stockholm: Kungl. Maj:ts kansli.
- SFS 1998:1591. *Lagen om Svenska kyrkan*. ["Law on the Church of Sweden"] Stockholm: Regeringskansliet.
- SOU 1922:11. *Betänkande med förslag till lag angående kulturminnesvård samt organisation av kulturminnesvården*. ["Considerations with proposals concerning law on the preservation of cultural heritage, as well as concerning the organization of conservation"]. Stockholm: Kungl. Maj:ts kansli.
- SOU 1922:12. *Betänkande med förslag till lag angående kulturminnesvård samt organisation av kulturminnesvården*. ["Considerations with proposals concerning law on the preservation of cultural heritage, as well as concerning the organization of conservation"]. Stockholm: Kungl. Maj:ts kansli.
- SOU 1949:20. *Betänkande med förslag till religionsfrihetslag m. m.* ["Considerations with proposal for a law on the freedom of religion"]. Stockholm: Kungl. Maj:ts kansli.
- SOU 1956:26. *Byggnadsminnen*. ["Built heritage"]. Stockholm: Kungl. Maj:ts kansli.
- SOU 1972:36. *Samhälle och trossamfund*. ["Society and religious denominations"]. Stockholm: Kungl. Maj:ts kansli.
- SOU 1972:66. *Ny kulturpolitik*. ["New cultural policy"]. Stockholm: Kungl. Maj:ts kansli.

- SOU 1974:33. *Att översätta Gamla Testamentet*. [“Translating the Old Testament”]. Stockholm: Kungl. Maj:ts kansli.
- SOU 1979:17. *Kulturhistorisk bebyggelse*. [“Cultural historical buildings”]. Stockholm: Regeringskansliet.
- SOU 1992:9. *Ekonomi och rätt i kyrkan*. [“Finances and law in the Church”]. Stockholm: Regeringskansliet.
- SOU 1994:42. *Staten och trossamfunden*. [“The state and the religious denominations”]. Stockholm: Regeringskansliet.
- SOU 1995:84. *Kulturpolitikens inriktning*. [“The direction of cultural policy”]. Stockholm: Regeringskansliet.
- SOU 1997:43. *Den kulturhistoriskt värdefulla kyrkliga egendomen och de kyrkliga arkiven*. [“Church property valuable in cultural history, and the ecclesiastical archives”]. Stockholm: Regeringskansliet.
- SOU 1997:55. *Staten och trossamfunden. Sammanfattningarna av förslagen från de statliga utredningarna*. [“The state and the religious denominations: Summary of proposals from the government commissions of inquiry”]. Stockholm: Regeringskansliet.
- Government Bill 1974:28. *Om kulturpolitik*. [“On cultural policy”]. Stockholm: Riksdagen.
- Government Bill 1987/88:104. *Om kulturmiljövård*. [“On heritage conservation”]. Stockholm: Riksdagen.
- Government Bill 1995/96:80. *Ändrade relationer mellan staten och Svenska kyrkan*. [“On cultural policy”]. Stockholm: Riksdagen.
- Government Bill 1996/97:3. *Kulturpolitik*. [“Cultural policy”]. Stockholm: Riksdagen.
- Government Bill 1998/99:38. *Begravningsverksamheten, kulturminnena, personalen, avgiftsbetalningen, m.m.* [“Funeral services, cultural heritage, personell, fees et cetera.”]. Stockholm: Riksdagen.
- Government Bill 2009/10:3. *Tid för kultur*. [“Time for culture”]. Stockholm: Riksdagen.
- Government Bill 2012/13:96. *Kulturmiljöns mångfald*. [“The diversity of cultural heritage.”]. Stockholm: Riksdagen.