

Religious Landscape in Liberec: the Post-Socialist City in the Sudetenland

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ABSTRACT

The submission is focused on the religious-geographical research of the city of Liberec, the fifth most populous city in the Czech Republic, a country known as one of the most secularized in the world. Liberec, predominantly German city Reichenberg before 1945, is located in the historical border region called Sudetenland. The main aim of the paper is the analysis of the trends in the religious landscape of Liberec primarily after the fall of communism in the country. However, the expulsion of the German population after the Second World War and the arrival of Czech and Slovak immigrants with its wider context cannot be overlooked.

Crucial actual trends in Liberec are secularization of people and landscape, sacralization of the landscape as well as diversification of religious institutions and communities. The paper outlines the main reasons and consequences. The methodology is based on the analysis of the data from the censuses run by the Czech Statistical Office and the field research in the city of Liberec. The field research was focused on the identification and localization of sacred objects and religious activities. It was based on observation and information from websites or advertisements. The study attempts to summarize actual and historical information about religious life in Liberec spaces contains table and map additions.

INTRODUCTION

Liberec is the fifth most populous city¹ in the Czech Republic, and it is a capital of the Liberec administrative region and the seat of the Euroregion Neisse-Nisa-Nysa. Liberec lies on the Lusatian Neisse, and it is surrounded by the Ještěd-Kozákov Ridge and the Jizera Mountains. Liberec is located in the north of the historical land called Bohemia near the borders with Germany and Poland. This border region is known as the Tri-Nation Area (*Trojzemí*). Moreover, Liberec is a part the historical region of Sudetenland (*Sudety*), mountainous rim, inhabited predominantly by the Germans since the Middle Ages, around the core of the historical Czech state with the capital city of Prague. Together with the suburb Vratislavice nad Nisou, enclave village Stráž nad Nisou and neighboring city Jablonec nad Nisou Liberec create an urban and relatively industrial agglomeration with more than 150 000 inhabitants, but there are also rural, arboreous and poorly accessible areas within the city. Liberec is only 100 km far from Prague, and it is reachable by the highway. It has a university,² Regional science library,

¹ 103 288 in 2016, from *Population and Housing Censuses 1991, 2001, 2011* (Prague: Czech Statistical Office, 2017).

² Technical University of Liberec (TUL) with seven faculties and the students from the different parts of the world. European students study usually for one or two semesters under the Erasmus+ programme, but there are also students especially from Asia or Africa who complete their studies in Liberec.

museum and it is an attractive place to live with the growing population and cultural life. Liberec is catchy for foreign people, especially workers from Eastern Europe, with their specific religious background.

The current shape of the city and its religious landscape are the results of how the political, economic, and cultural development of the whole Liberec and Sudetenland region was in the last century. During that turbulent time, Liberec has undergone many changes which influenced the identity and religion of its inhabitants and the distribution and state of religious architecture. Nowadays, Liberec is even more secular than is the average in the Czech Republic, one of the most secular and religiously deinstitutionalized countries in the world. Generally, believers are considered to be a minority in the Czech Republic. The share of believers has decreased, especially in the last 30 years, but the reasons for the secularization can be found even in the periods of reformation and recatholization in the country.

This text is grounded in the so-called new geography of religion³ and examines still more complex and diverse religious landscape. Growing diversity is, among other phenomena, connected with global migration and a growing number of identities. In Western societies, including the Czech one, there are two contradictory trends, the decline of religiosity and traditional churches and the counter-reaction efforts made by these churches as well as new or immigrant religious groups. Large cities with their cosmopolitanism are great examples of the transformation of the religious landscape. Liberec epitomizes a large city in terms of the Czech Republic.

METHODOLOGY

This paper attempts to characterize the actual religious landscape in Liberec and its evolution. The research is based primarily on the analysis of historical and statistical information, concretely population data from censuses from the Czechoslovak Statistical Office/Czech Statistical Office for 1991, 2001 and 2011.⁴ The religion was part of the Czechoslovak/Czech

³ Branch of human or social geography focusing on the influence of geography on society according to Lily Kong, "Geography and religion: trends and prospects," *Progress in Human Geography* 14, no. 3 (1990): 355-371 or Michael Pacione, "The relevance of religion for a relevant human geography," *Scottish Geographical Journal* 115, no. 2 (1999): 117-131.

⁴ All data about the demography of Liberec come from one source – *Population and Housing Censuses 1991, 2001, 2011* (Prague: Czech Statistical Office, 2017).

censuses in 1921, 1931, 1950, 1991, 2001 and 2011, between 1950 and 1991 the religion was not monitored because of communist ignorance. This article is focused on the information from modern censuses in 1991, 2001, and 2011 because, in the older past, the territory of Liberec was not the same as in the last 28 years. The information from censuses is considered as the only complex source of information for spatial analysis of religion in the Czech Republic, although there are also general data from sociological surveys such as European Value Study or International Social Survey Programme oriented more on the values of people.

The data in censuses show the portion of adherents of religious organizations, non-believers, and since the 2011 census also defines believers without adherence to a specific religious organization. These people without specific adherence often consider themselves as super confessional Christians or Roman Catholics, but they are not official members of any religious organization. There is a problem of how to classify people who did not answer the question because it was voluntary. To simplify the research, these people will be considered as a part of the category called non-believers. Some Buddhists do not consider Buddhism as a religion, but as a philosophy and a way of life, and therefore, they did not answer the question. Some Jews did not answer the question because of the tragic experience of the abuse of information from Czechoslovak censuses by Nazis during the occupation. Some categories were merged, specific Buddhism of the Diamond Route Karma Kagyu, which has the state registration since 2007, was incorporated into category Buddhism.

It is difficult to distinguish formal believers from active ones. The Roman Catholic Church in the Czech Republic organizes counting of attendees of worships in five-year intervals. However, it is not easy to get concrete data for cities for researchers, and some data are even secret.⁵ The easier way, in the case of small areas of interest, is to contact leaders of religious communities. Nevertheless, interviews with them were still not finished. Related information is also based on the observation of the authors and analysis of internet sources or ads in local newspapers in cases of smaller religious groups.

The next method is a geographical analysis of the location, availability, state, age, and use of religious buildings and religious and missionary activities in the city. Sacral

⁵ This unresponsive approach may indicate the effort to cover the steady decline of active adherents according to “Sčítání účastníků katolických bohoslužeb v Česku,” accessed November 27, 2017, http://www.katopedia.cz/index.php?title=S%C4%8D%C3%ADt%C3%A1n%C3%AD_%C3%BA%C4%8Dastn%C3%ADk%C5%AF_katolick%C3%BDch_bohoslu%C5%BEeb_v_%C4%8Cesku.

objects in Liberec can be divided into these categories:

- multicultural and multireligious centers
- sacred buildings for one purpose – churches, synagogues
- usually one-room objects – chapels, meeting houses, spaces for alternative religiosity
- small sacral objects in a landscape – crosses, stations of the cross
- small sacral objects on buildings – small statues and pictures
- cemeteries

RELIGIOUS LANDSCAPE AND ITS RESEARCH IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC

The term religious landscape is quite frequent in contemporary geography of religion, cultural geography, as well as other social sciences, and it means the influence of religious matters in territory and society of some geographical unit.⁶ A religious landscape may define the character of the landscape of a given region. Religious landscape as a spiritual phenomenon can be strongly connected with memory. This memory can be associated with positive feelings as well as loss and despair.⁷ In the case of Liberec, the landscape reminds painful stories of local Jews and Germans who had to leave their religious objects, cemeteries, etc.

The research on religion and religious landscape⁸ in the Czech Republic started after the fall of communism, and it is connected with the post-positivist cultural turn in geography. The main focus of the research in the Czech Republic is the secularization of the people, secularization, sacralization of the landscape, and the influence of European or global religious trends on the country. Secularization is a process of reducing the importance of religious institutions and symbols.⁹ The secularization of the landscape means removal or transformation of sacral objects in the landscape, and it is traceable in the Czech landscape since the 1950s when it was often forced by the government. Nowadays, it is a natural process influencing primarily sacral buildings of traditional Christian churches. Sacralization, desecularization, is the opposite of secularization and means the return of religion to public life. The current sacralization of the landscape is a

⁶ Ceri Peach and Richard Gale, “Muslims, Hindus and Sikhs in the New Religious Landscape of England,” *Geographical Review* 93, no. 4 (2003): 469-490; Hans Knippenberg ed. *The Changing Religious Landscape of Europe* (Amsterdam: Het Spinhuis, 2005) and Conrad Hackett et al., *The Changing Global Religious Landscape* (Washington: Pew Research Center, 2017).

⁷ Ken Taylor, “Landscape and Memory: cultural landscapes, intangible values and some thoughts on Asia,” in 6th ICOMOS General Assembly and International Symposium: *Finding the spirit of place – between the tangible and the intangible*. Quebec, 2008.

⁸ E.g. Tomáš Havlíček and Martina Hupková, “Geografický výzkum religiózní krajiny Česka,” *Miscellanea Geographica*, no. 13 (2007); Tomáš Havlíček, Kamila Klingorová and Jakub Lysák, *Atlas náboženství Česka* (Prague: Karolinum, 2017).

⁹ David Václavík, *Náboženství a moderní česká společnost* (Prague: Grada, 2010).

trend of the last fifteen years, and it is not spontaneous. It is not connected primarily with religious reasons, but with economic and cultural issues represented by the subsidies from the European funds, German or Austrian projects, donations of German and Austrian individuals with roots in the Czech lands, state funds and with growing tourism.¹⁰ This sponsored sacralization is typical for the Czech borderlands. It predominantly means renovation or reconstruction of existing religious sites. Another type of sacralization is the transformation of secular buildings into religious ones typical for new religious organizations. Creation of new larger religious objects is not frequent in the Czech Republic nor the Liberec Region. Globalization brought not only foreigners but also new religions to the Czech Republic.

RELIGIOUS LANDSCAPE AND RELIGIOSITY OF THE PEOPLE IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC

Despite the existence of many sacral buildings, the Czech Republic occupies lowest levels of religiosity in international sociological surveys and epitomizes specific case in terms of Central Post-Communist Europe. Nevertheless, Czech society cannot be regarded simply as atheistic, and many Czechs believe in spiritual phenomena. The Czech religiosity is characterized by privatization, individualization, and distrust towards traditional Christian churches. Changes in religion were influenced by historical events, social and political development and activities of religious communities in the Czech lands as well as in Europe. The Czech lands were Christianized in the 9th and 10th century, and over time Latin Christianity pushed Byzantine Christianity of the country. Roman Catholicism was connected with the Holy Roman Empire and also German colonization of peripheral areas of the Czech lands (Sudetenland).¹¹ Roman Catholic dominance was questioned during the era of the Protestant reformation represented by preacher Jan Hus.¹² After so-called Hussite Wars, there was an era of relative religious tolerance and even a Protestant, Jiří z Poděbrad, was elected as a Czech king by Czech nobility. The situation has deteriorated under the reign of Catholic Habsburgs, especially after the Battle of White Mountain in 1620, where the Protestants were defeated by the Catholics. All kinds of Protestant communities¹³ were expelled from the country or converted to Roman Catholicism.

¹⁰ Tomáš Havlíček and Martina Hupková, "Geografický výzkum religiózní krajiny Česka," 161-166.

¹¹ Leoš Jeleček, "Sudety a Sudetští Němci," *Geografické rozhledy* 14, no. 5 (2005): 119.

¹² Petr Čornej, *Kdy, kde, proč a jak se to stalo v českých dějinách: sto událostí, které dramaticky změnilly naši historii* (Prague: Reader's Digest Výběr, 2001), 128-190.

¹³ E.g. Hussites, Lutherans, Calvinists

The counter-reformation connected with massive sacralization varying from building cathedrals to erecting small crosses of a landscape started. Religious oppression was also connected with the Germanization of the Czech lands. Roman Catholicism became a dominant religious force in public life and landscape. Roman Catholicism was perceived as a tool of German oppression by Czechs.

The Czechoslovak Republic was established in 1918. Its ethos was based on secular humanism and distrust towards religious institutions. The state was anti-Catholic, although the majority of the population still adhered to Roman Catholicism, in particular in the eastern part of the state. The new national Protestant church was established and named Czechoslovak Church.¹⁴ This church was founded by nationalist Roman Catholics led by Karel Farský, followed the Hussite tradition and took almost 20 % of believers from the Roman Catholic Church, especially in Bohemia. These believers were ethnic Czechs; Germans stayed loyal to Roman Catholicism.¹⁵ Another important Protestant subject was the Evangelical Church of Czech Brethren, which was formed by the union of Augsburg and Helvetic faith in 1918.

Nazi occupation meant the suppression of religious life and the annihilation of the Jewish community and the destruction of synagogues. Approximately 2,6 million of Germans were deported from Czechoslovak borderlands after 1945.¹⁶ Germans were predominantly Roman Catholics, but there were also adherents of the German Evangelical Church, New Apostolic Church, and Old Catholic Church. The borderlands were almost depopulated, and new settlers were usually sympathizers of communism and members of the lower social class without affinity with traditions, the memory of landscape, religion and sacral objects. The exceptions were ethnic Czechs from Volhynia in Ukraine belonging mostly to Eastern Christianity or Czechs from Poland belonging to Protestantism. The landscape of Sudetenland changed, and sacral architecture dilapidated or was intentionally destroyed, especially in the guarded border zones. During the era of the communist regime, many people were violently as well as voluntarily secularized. Participation in religious activities declined, and religion was not investigated in censuses since 1950. Communists cleverly used existing anticlericalism in Czech society and combined it with Marxist ideas. Religious sites were neglected or even destroyed. Religious organizations became

¹⁴ Since 1971 the Czechoslovak Hussite Church.

¹⁵ Jaroslav Kadlec, *Přehled českých dějin 1-2. díl* (Rome: Křesťanská akademie, 1987).

¹⁶ Václav Kural, *Češi, Němci a dějinná křižovatka* (Prague: Karolinum, 2002).

important symbols of dissent during the Communist era, but they were under the surveillance of the secret police.

In the period of total religious freedom after 1989 religious plurality in the country grows what is obvious from the number of states registered religious communities since the founding of independent Czechoslovakia and also from the scientific research.¹⁷ In the census in 1991 44 % of the population declared a religious affiliation in the post-revolutionary euphoria. Since 1991 the total number of believers has decreased, Czech society became the society of consumption and demographic changes happened. Numbers from last three censuses in [Table 1](#) speak for themselves. Largest Czech traditional churches such as the Roman Catholic Church, Czechoslovak Hussite Church and Evangelical Church of Czech Brethren have experienced the loss of believers. There is a growing trend of religious privatization and a rise of immigrant religions such as Orthodox Christianity, Buddhism and Islam, and progressive evangelical communities. Buddhism is becoming popular among Czechs as a modern alternative to consumer society as well as traditional European religions. Another Eastern practice popular among Czech people is yoga with many yoga centers in larger Czech cities. Alternative religiosity and occult practices such as astrology, fortune telling, or numerology are also very popular. Churches are made to follow present-day trends to be attractive. More than 700 000 Czechs are believers not identified with certain religion due to the last census.

Table 1 Evolution of religious adherence of the population of the Czech Republic between 1991-2011
Source: Czech Statistical Office, 2017

Religion or belief	Number of adherents in 1991		Number of adherents in 2001		Number of adherents in 2011	
	Abs.	%	Abs.	%	Abs.	%
No religion	5 778 481	56,1	6 941 972	67,9	8 267 608	79,2
Adherents of a religious organization	4 523 734	43,9	3 288 088	32,1	1 463 584	14
Believers without adherence to a specific organization	-	-	-	-	705 368	6,8
Roman Catholic Church	4 021 385	39,0	2 740 780	26,8	1 082 463	10,4
Czechoslovak Hussite Church	178 036	1,7	99 103	1,0	39 229	0,4
Evangelical Church of Czech Brethren	203 996	2,0	117 212	1,1	51 858	0,5
Total number of inhabitants	10 302 215	100	10 230 060	100	10 436 560	100

¹⁷ Zdeněk Nešpor and Zdeněk Vojtišek, *Encyklopedie menších křesťanských církví v České republice* (Prague: Karolinum, 2015).

There are disproportions between Czech regions in terms of religion. The highest share of believers can be found in the southeast of the state, and the lowest share is in the northwest, in Sudetenland, which includes Liberec. Former Czech-German language border is still noticeable in religious, economic and political statistics. We can distinguish differences in religiosity in two axes, borderlands – inland axis and West-East axis.¹⁸ Other inner borders in terms of religiosity are connected with polarities between urban and rural areas or industrial and agricultural areas.¹⁹ The Roman Catholic Church is still the most popular religious community, but the share of the Catholics regularly attending the worship services is about 30 % of all Catholics due to inner church information from the Census of participants in services in 2014. In spite of low numbers of believers, the Czech landscape is full of religious objects. The vast majority of sacral objects in Czech landscape is Roman Catholic. However, we can observe growing heterogeneity of religious sites and the emergence of a new kind of small objects such as roadside memorials.

HISTORY OF THE URBAN DEVELOPMENT OF LIBEREC

The history of the city goes to the 14th century, to the times of resting place on merchant path from Bohemia to Lusatia. A small town was transformed into a vibrant city with industrial, residential, palatial, and religious architecture in the 19th century with the growth of textile, glass and engineering industry. It was the second biggest city in Bohemia at that time and the political, cultural and economic center of the north of the Czech lands. Historical city with a chateau with its Chapel of the Helper Virgin and large churches was still preserved, and it forms a core of the city. The city also contains medium and small-sized religious sites. Nowadays, after economic changes connected with the end of communism in the Czech Republic, the city is focused on the automotive industry, services, and tourism. The modernity of the 19th century also brought the ideas of nationalism and in a lesser extent, secularization to the city. Liberec was inhabited predominantly by the Sudeten Germans,²⁰ and when it was a part of Austro-Hungarian Empire, there was not a bigger problem with their cohabitation with Czechs until the nationalistic tendencies emerged. Sudeten Germans supported the idea of the connection of Czech borderlands to imperial Germany and opposed introducing the Czech language to

¹⁸ David Václavík, *Náboženství a moderní česká společnost*.

¹⁹ Tomáš Havlíček and Martina Hupková, “Geografický výzkum religiózní krajiny Česka,” 161-166.

²⁰ Around 90 % of Germans at the turn of the 19th and 20th century

bureaus and courts. Roman Catholic Church tried to take advantage of the linguistic situation in predominantly German territories and promoted ceremonies also in the Czech language.²¹

The situation got worse after the involvement of Liberec, with only 7 % of the Czech population into newly established Czechoslovakia. There was an unsuccessful uprising of Germans in 1918 and Germans never became loyal to Czechoslovakia. Czechoslovakia supported migration of the Czech people to Sudetenland, and in the census in 1930 there were almost 17 % of Czechs in Liberec.²² When the Nazis came to power in Germany, Sudeten Germans became more active towards their reunification with Germany until their expulsion in two years after the Second World War. This forced migration was followed by the Czech resettlement and the revival of the industry. Almost complete change of population influenced the position of religion in the city. In 1939 “Great” Liberec in almost similar extent as nowadays was created because the historical city incorporated surrounding smaller towns and villages.^{23 24} During the 1960s and the 1970s, the city changed its face and expanded because of the socialist building block of flats in the districts Rochlice, Ruprechtice, and Františkov. The communist regime attempted to remove religious concepts from public life. After the fall of communism, the era of massive suburbanization came and also the building of large factory halls and warehouses of the automotive industry on the outskirts of the city. Another phenomenon of the last twenty years is an extreme increase in the number of supermarkets in the city.

THE RELIGIOUS LANDSCAPE OF LIBEREC

Religious demographics

This chapter is focused on the information from modern censuses in 1991, 2001, and 2011. The share of believers in Liberec significantly decreased since 1991, as is shown in [Table 2](#). Surprisingly positive numbers in 1991 with more than one-quarter of adherents of religious organizations in the city, after 41 years of the communist rule, were caused by newly acquired freedom and the desire for something forbidden, mystical, Western and opposing to communism.

²¹ Miroslava Melanová et al., *Liberec* (Prague: NLN, 2017), 155.

²² Roman Karpaš et al., *Kniha o Liberci* (Liberec: Dialog, 2004), 682.

²³ E.g. Františkov, Rochlice, Ruprechtice

²⁴ Roman Karpaš et al., *Kniha o Liberci*, 336-337.

Moreover, Liberec is not far from Germany. This enthusiasm soon ended, and the numbers of believers of the traditional Czech churches such as the Roman Catholic Church, the Czechoslovak Hussite Church or the Evangelical Church of Czech Brethren are constantly declining. Every ten years the number of believers drops approximately by half, even when a new category of believers without adherence to a specific religion was established in the census in 2011.²⁵ In contrast to this, the number of people with no religion or people who did not want to answer the question about their religious affiliation is rising and in 2011 was more than 86 %. There are two reasons of mentioned processes; believers usually belong to older people who die with the passing of time, and many believers simply cease to declare themselves as the members of churches for various reasons. However, many believers from statistics are only formal and do not attend the ceremonies. This phenomenon of formal believers is typical for large churches as those mentioned above, where religious adherence is usually a family tradition. The author assumes on the base of the data from the counting of attendees that one-quarter of Roman Catholic believers declared in the census in 2011 in Liberec regularly attends worships.²⁶

There is a constant rise in the number of believers of the Orthodox and Greek Catholic Churches connected with a steady influx of immigrants from the post-Soviet space. Greek Catholic believers usually come from Western Ukraine. Westernmost Ukraine was a part of Czechoslovakia as so-called Carpathian Ruthenia until 1939, and some memories and ties of this region to the Czech Republic still exist because 50 % of Ukrainian immigrants come from former Carpathian Ruthenia.²⁷ The relatively high share of adherents of the Unity of the Brethren, in comparison to the stats of the whole state, is connected with the location of its current headquarters in Liberec. The Unity of the Brethren is a church based on the traditions of Jan Amos Komenský's teaching and the Moravian Brethren ideas. Relatively high percentage of adherents of the Czechoslovak Hussite Church, although they do not have any classical church in Liberec, is probably caused by the proximity of the areas with traditionally highest popularity of this church in the Czech Republic²⁸ connected with the founder of the church Karel Farský and by the migration of people from

²⁵ Unfortunately, there will not be a possibility for new comparison in 2021 because religion will not be investigated in the next census.

²⁶ “Sčítání účastníků katolických bohoslužeb v Česku.“

²⁷ Dušan Drbohlav, Eva Janská and Pavla Šelepová, “Ukrajinská komunita v České republice“, in *Menšiny a migranti v České republice*, ed. Tatjana Šišková (Prague: Portál, 2001), 90.

²⁸ E.g. districts Semily, Turnov, Železný Brod located east of Liberec

these regions to Liberec after the expulsion of the German population. Smaller Christian groups such as Jehovah's Witnesses, Church of Brethren or Seventh-day Adventist Church have a relatively stable number of believers in the last ten years. A decreasing number of adherents of Buddhism is presumably connected to the attitude of Buddhists who do not consider Buddhism as a religion, not to the decreasing popularity of the religion. This attitude became stable and observable, especially in the last ten years and was confirmed by the interviews with Buddhists in Liberec made within one bachelor thesis.²⁹ All of these smaller communities usually include a high percentage of active believers.

Table 2 Evolution of religious adherence of the population in Liberec between 1991-2011 Source: Czech Statistical Office 2017

Religion or belief	Number of adherents in 1991		Number of adherents in 2001		Number of adherents in 2011	
	Abs.	%	Abs.	%	Abs.	%
No religion	75681	74,2	82 189	82,9	88 645	86,3
Adherents of a religious organization	26 286	25,8	16 913	17,1	7 678	7,5
Believers without adherence to a specific organization	-	-	-	-	6 421	6,2
Roman Catholic Church	20 689	20,2	11 610	11,7	4 027	3,9
Czechoslovak Hussite Church	2 459	2,41	1 186	1,2	497	0,5
Evangelical Church of Czech Brethren	1 757	1,7	740	0,7	308	0,3
Unity of the Brethren	297	0,3	446	0,4	356	0,3
Orthodox Church	214	0,2	248	0,2	453	0,4
Church of Brethren	40	0	135	0,1	136	0,1
Buddhism	-	-	101	0,1	53	0,1
Jehovah's Witnesses	56	0,1	124	0,1	88	0,1
Greek Catholic Church	135	0,1	125	0,1	139	0,1
Unity of Brethren Baptists	88	0,1	102	0,1	62	0,1
Seventh Day Adventists	96	0,1	74	0,1	72	0,1
Total number of inhabitants	101 967	100	99 102	100	102 754	100

²⁹ Kateřina Podářilová, *Buddhismus v České republice – religiozně-geografická analýza* (Liberec: TUL, 2018).

Religious sites and religious activities in public space

Sacred buildings usually shape the city centers of the Central European cities and increase their attractiveness for tourism. Liberec is no exception, although the city center is quite small and German urbanism preferred high but not so large building. Grand churches in the center of Liberec are complemented by several smaller churches, chapels, crosses and cemeteries all around the city and also someone or two-room objects of small religious groups or alternative religious activities. Buildings or rooms in the city center are expensive to buy or rent, so except the traditional churches with their old buildings, new religious groups usually rent only rooms, sometimes even for occasional meetings. There is a map of the churches and meeting houses of main religious communities in Liberec in Figure 3. (See [Appendix](#))

Liberec survived Hussite raids and remained Roman Catholic in the 15th century. The change came after Luther's reformation in Germany when Liberec citizens had to convert to Lutheranism at the direction of the nobility.³⁰ Lutheranism was replaced by Roman Catholicism after the Battle of White Mountain in 1620. In the 17th century, after the death of famous general Albrecht from Valdštejn and the arrival of Gallas noble family from Italy, the systematic recatholization of the city and the region began. Many people of non-Catholic belief had to leave the region if they did not want to convert to Catholicism or become oppressed second class citizens. All Protestant symbols were removed from a public space and churches were newly sanctified. Czech Sudeten Germans in the modern era were predominantly Roman Catholics, although, in Germany, the former Holy Roman Empire, and especially in Saxony Lutheranism dominated. Massive sacralization of Liberec and the construction of new churches and religious objects are connected especially with baroque and to the lesser extent with classicism and romanticism.

Basic level of religious tolerance was established by Joseph II. in 1781 when Protestant Augsburg and Helvetic confessions were permitted. There was a premise that many former Lutherans will return to their original (Augsburg) faith, but it was not fulfilled because of the lasting dominance of the Roman Catholic Church. Protestants had their religious ceremonies in forests around Liberec or neighboring Jablonec nad Nisou. In 1861 Protestantism was made equal to Catholicism by the Protestant Patent, and this step meant the real development of Protestant churches.³¹ Lutherans in Liberec built their church in

³⁰ Miroslava Melanová et al., *Liberec*, 23-35.

³¹ Jaroslav Kadlec, *Přehled českých dějin 1-2. díl.*

the center of the city on the Czech Brethren Square in 1868. The period of the late 19th and the beginning of the 20th century was also connected with growing secularism of the society. Germans were leading forces of secularism in the Czech lands because they had connections with modernization ideas from imperial Germany. The first crematory was built in Liberec in 1912 as the first crematory in the Czech lands, and it was inspired by the first crematory in the world in German city Gotha. This testifies to the liberal spirit of the city. Liberec was predominantly Roman Catholic, and Roman Catholicism strictly forbade cremation. Judaism was an integral part of the society in Liberec for centuries. The Jewish community in Liberec was German-speaking and the second largest in Bohemia due to the census in 1921 and made almost 4 % of the population of the city. Problems for Jews in Liberec came with the annexation of Sudetenland by Nazi Germany. Since 1938 they faced discrimination and later transports to concentration camps. The synagogue was burned down during Crystal Night. After the end of the war, only a few Jews returned to Liberec, and most of them emigrated to Israel or the United States of America.

The state of sacred buildings got worse during the communist era; many of them were closed or transformed into warehouses. Some of them were even destroyed³², and some were destined for disposal but fortunately were saved.³³ These churches were originally connected with German churches or German adherents and communists wanted to erase monuments connected with the German spirit. There were also cloisters in Liberec, which were closed and monks were sent to work in heavy industry or health services. Newest cloister in the Czech lands, the Capucine cloister within the Church of Saint Mary Magdalene was turned into the warehouse and villa, the Vincentine cloister within the Church of Saint Vincent of Paul was left unused, and the Ursuline cloister was turned into policlinic. These were the consequences of violent communist secularization in terms of urbanism. Most of the originally religious buildings were returned to the Roman Catholic Church after 1989. However, the church at that time did not have money. So many of them stayed secularized or even dilapidated.

Nowadays, the Roman Catholic Church in Liberec is divided into four parishes³⁴ which are under the jurisdiction of the Liberec Vicariate and the Diocese of Litoměřice. The oldest and the most important church in Liberec is the neo-Gothic archdean Church of

³² E.g. the Evangelical Church in Liberec located on the Czech Brethren Square was blasted.

³³ E.g. the Church of the Mother of God next to the Picture and the Church of Saint Boniface

³⁴ Liberec, Rochlice, Ruprechtice and Vratislavice nad Nisou

Saint Anthony the Great. This church survived Swedish raids during the Thirty Years' War and was rebuilt after the fire.³⁵ The vicarage is located next to the church. There is also the Church of the Finding of the Holy Cross not far from the church mentioned above. The exterior of the church includes the stations of the cross, the plague column and the copy of the Chapel of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem from the 18th century. These copies are typical for central Europe, and their purpose was to enable poor people to see the chapel without the need to travel to Jerusalem. The Liberec chapel was inspired by near chapels in German city Görlitz and Polish city Żagań. Another well-known church is the Church of the Mother of God next to the Picture located on the outskirts of the city near the sacred spring and connected to the stations of the cross surrounded by the rows of buckeyes. The spring has supposedly the power to cure various diseases. The Art Nouveau church is also the only pilgrim site in Liberec, and the Marian pilgrimage takes place every September. Concerts, roundabouts, and stalls are connected with the pilgrimage and also attract non-believers. Interesting is the existence of the Roman Catholic chapel in the home for the elderly in Františkov with regular worships for the clients of the facility. Roman Catholic Church also organizes special ceremonies for university students once a week.

The Greek Catholic believers in Liberec are under the jurisdiction of the Liberec-Chomutov Deanery. The Greek Catholic Church in Liberec is connected with the community of Ukrainians who immigrated to Liberec because of the possibilities of employment, has a Ukrainian priest, and it has its ceremonies every Sunday in the Church of the Finding of the Holy Cross in the center of the city. The Greek Catholic Church in Liberec also has its charity focused on the help of Ukrainians immigrants with practical issues of stay in the Czech Republic. The Church of the Finding of the Holy Cross is a property of the Roman Catholic Church, but the relations between Roman Catholics and Greek Catholics are friendly. Both churches respect the supremacy of the Roman Pope. There is similar cooperation of Roman Catholics with the Orthodox Church, which may use the Church of the Lord's Divine Heart, although the relations between these two churches are far from ideal on a global level. This cooperation shows ecumenical trends on the local level. Mentioned church buildings are in fact multireligious centers.

The Evangelical Church of Czech Brethren and the Czechoslovak Hussite Church, national churches, did not originally have a strong position in predominantly German

³⁵ Josef Dobiáš, *Liberecké chrámy* (Liberec: Severografia, 1983), 7.

territories. The situation has changed slightly after 1945 with the arrival of Czech adherents from Central and Eastern Bohemia, strongholds of the Hussites and Czech Brethren, and from Zelov³⁶ in Poland, where Czech Protestants lived for centuries after the expulsion from the Czech lands during the Recatholization. The Evangelical Church of Czech Brethren managed the property of German Evangelical churches, including the church which was blasted in 1976. Nevertheless, there is only one place of worship of Czech Brethren as well as Hussites. These buildings are not classic church buildings, but civilian buildings transformed into sacred places. The Evangelical Church of Czech Brethren in Liberec is under the jurisdiction of Liberec Seniorate. The Czechoslovak Hussite Church is under the jurisdiction of the Liberec Vicariate and the Diocese of Hradec Králové.

There are also smaller Christian organizations represented in Liberec, and some of them are very active in public space. In the center of Liberec with a high concentration of people, as in other Czech regional capitals, you may meet the members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons). These young people usually come from the state of Utah in the USA, and they come to the Czech Republic for a few years to gain experience with evangelizing. They quickly learn the basics of the Czech language; they stop people in public places and attempt to talk with them about the meaning of life and God. They usually offer free English lessons at their headquarters in the city center. Another visible group is the members of the Jehovah's Witnesses. They are publicly active in our country since the 1990s. In the past, they walked from house to house and tried to evangelize people and irritated many Czechs in the process. Nowadays, they are focused more on passive standing on the streets with their Bibles, religious books, and journals. In the last years, they even use tablets and show people videos from the production of the church.

Another small Christian community, which are not so active in public space as the groups mentioned above, are the Brethren Church, the Apostolic Church, the Seventh-day Adventist Church, the Christian Church Community, and the Evangelical Free Church. The

³⁶ There was and still is large Protestant community in Zelov (in Polish Zelów). In 1945 ethnic Czechs from Zelov came back to Czechoslovakia, especially to Liberec because of the possibility to resettle Czech borderlands and because of growing clashes with Roman Catholic Polish majority in Zelov. These ethnic Czechs became members of the Evangelical Church of Czech Brethren, Unity of the Brethren, Unity of Brethren Baptists on the basis of their religious preferences connected with the existence of mentioned churches in Zelov according to Edita Šteříková, *Zelów. Česká exulantská obec v Polsku* (Prague, 2002).

headquarters of the Unity of the Brethren for the Czech Republic is located in the civilian building in the center of Liberec, and there are also three smaller communities in Rochlice, Růžodol I and Vratislavice nad Nisou. The church has its nursery and elementary school named after Jan Amos Komenský in the city. The church is very active in economic issues and owns its café and bakery. The Unity of Brethren Baptists is a church following the tradition of German missionary activities in the 19th century and logically was present primarily in the border regions with a German majority. There is still quite a high share of adherents of this church in Liberec, although the Germans were expelled in the past. The reason was the return of ethnic Czechs from exile in Zelov. The Baptist church in Liberec owns a gathering house in the broader center of the city.

Concerning non-Christian religions, there is still a small Jewish community in Liberec, part of the Federation of Jewish Communities in the Czech Republic. This community uses reconstructed synagogue next to the public research library within the so-called Reconciliation Building, modern multicultural center.³⁷ A Jewish cemetery was preserved until today and is located approximately one kilometer from the synagogue. Its ceremony hall was secularized and rebuilt to the Holocaust memorial. Buddhism has two branches in Liberec. The first is Tibetan Buddhism of Rabten Choeling represented by the religious center, created by the sacralization of the profane building, with the garden for meditation and the only stupa in the Czech Republic. The center allows the study of Buddhism under the leadership of spiritual teachers from cloisters Rabten Choeling and Tashi Rabten.³⁸ The stupa is presumably the only bigger religious object newly created in the last thirty years in the city. The second branch is Tibetan Buddhism of Karma Kagyu with the place of worship in the block of flats in the city center. Islam in Liberec is the religion of foreign students³⁹ of the Technical University of Liberec and a few Muslims who operate kebab fast foods in the city. They have their Muslim meeting house in Harcov dormitories leased from the university with daily prayers and occasional Friday preachings. The Baha'i community is present in Liberec and has its meeting room in the city center.

Smaller religious communities have their worships usually once or twice a week, but

³⁷ Jaroslava Mannová, "V Liberci stojí nejmodernější synagoga v České republice," *Český rozhlas*, March 20, 2014, accessed November 7, 2017, <https://regiony.rozhlas.cz/v-liberci-stoji-nejmodernejsi-zidovska-synagoga-v-ceske-republice-7427027>.

³⁸ "Centrum – Historie," accessed November 29, 2018, <https://www.rabten.cz/inpage/historie>.

³⁹ Predominantly Sunni Muslim students of engineering from Pakistan, India, and Egypt

many Roman Catholic churches in the outskirts of Liberec are used very occasionally. The most important archdean Church of Saint Anthony the Great performs worships 13 times a week, the dean Church of Saint John the Baptist in Rochlice 6 times a week and the parish Church of Saint Anthony of Padua in Ruprechtice 7 times a week. Another relatively used churches are the Church of Saint Boniface in Dolní Hanychov, Church of the Mother of God next to the Picture and all churches and chapels in Vratislavice nad Nisou.

The unsatisfactory or controversial state of the churches in Liberec was not just a matter of the communist era. Neo-baroque Church of Saint Mary Magdalene dilapidated since the 1960s, and it is still closed to the public. It serves as a shelter for homeless and drug-addicted people, although it is a cultural monument of the Czech Republic protected by the National Monument Institute. The reconstruction of the church was planned, but nothing was realized. There is suspicion of embezzlement, and the matter is being investigated by the police. Another sad case is the transformation of the Church of the Saint John of Nepomuk into the warehouse of spirits (Figure 4). Neo-Romanesque Church of Saint Vincent of Paul was saved by the Seventh Day Adventists who bought the church from the state in 1972. The church was built in 1887 as a church for workers from a textile factory owned by Liebieg family.⁴⁰ They reconstructed the church, and the interior was changed because of their religious reasons. The altar and the cross were replaced by the large baptismal font. The church is a cultural monument since 2003 and therefore all modifications in the church must be consulted with the conservationists. Seventh Day Adventists lend the space of the church to the Apostolic Church for Sunday worships.⁴¹ It points to the good relationship between these two small churches.

The author found during his field research only two small sacral objects, specifically Roman Catholic religious statues, on houses in whole Liberec. They were located on two houses in the outskirts of Liberec in rural districts Radčice and Rudolfov. This finding confirms the assumption of low active religiosity in the city. Nevertheless, there are several small historical Roman Catholic crosses in all city districts, but the state of these monuments is diverse. Generally, it is better in richer districts of the city and near tourist routes, where we can sometimes see flowers, candles or small statues in front of the

⁴⁰ Roman Karpaš et al., *Kniha o Liberci*, 169.

⁴¹ “Věž Severu: Ten červený cihlový kostel na Peštýně,” accessed November 17, 2018, <https://www.genusplus.cz/zblizka/veze-severu-ten-cervený-cihlový-kostel-na-perstýne>.

monuments, and worse in poorer districts and industrial zones.

It is important to mention several sites of alternative religiosity such as astrology, numerology, or fortune telling. These sites are usually identical with the residences of soothsayers and are located all around the city. There are also many activities and societies bordering on religion with their special spaces such as yoga centers, Eastern martial arts centers, or the centers of alternative medicine and homeopathy. New Acropolis, the worldwide non-profit organization, is active in Liberec and promotes its lectures about philosophy and religion.

There are more than ten cemeteries in Liberec, but eight of them are still being used. Modern cemeteries are the property of city administration, and they are not connected with a specific belief. However, they may include chapels or small religious objects. They are located predominantly in peripheral areas of the city. A cross on the top of the highest mountain in the city, Ještěd, is very famous and has a tradition from the 18th century which was interrupted by communist oppression. Old churches had their graveyards next to church buildings in the past, and there were also military cemeteries connected with war events. Sumptuous tomb of Liebieg family in the former city cemetery converted into a park is quite a popular tourist destination in the wider city center, but surrounding sepulchral buildings are used by homeless people for sleeping or alcoholic sessions. Mountain memorials epitomize specific form of religious sites in the city area. They are typical of the whole Jizera Mountains in an unusual amount. They are usually composed of an iron cross, and stone memorial or they are wooden. These old memorials predominantly from the 17th century to the first half of the 20th century were popularised especially by Czech author Miloslav Nevrlý,⁴² and civil association Patron cares about them. Memorials usually remind some tragedy, and they can be divided due to the events associated with them⁴³. There are also memorials connected with happy moments of life savings etc. One of the most famous mountain memorials in Liberec is displayed in [figure 5](#). However, there are also memorials associated with Roman Catholic belief. The foothills of Jizera Mountains are located in Liberec, concretely districts Ruprechtice and Starý

⁴² Miloslav Nevrlý et al., *Připomínky zašlých časů – pomníčky Jizerských hor* (Liberec: Jizersko-ještědský horský spolek, 2008).

⁴³ E.g. lumberjacks, hunters, smugglers and poachers cenotaphs

Harcov with their memorials.

CONCLUSIONS

Liberec follows general trends in religion in the Czech Republic. The fall of the numbers of believers in the censuses, as well as believers attending worships, can be explained by the triumph of materialism in the Czech society and by growing living standards which move away from the people from faith. Even the church leaders say that during the era of communist oppression, people were closer to each other, stronger in their faith and mutual support. There were also not so many attractions that keep people from religion. Liberec Region is the third most irreligious region in the Czech Republic after the Ústí nad Labem Region and Karlovy Vary Region. Among the regional capitals, Liberec is on the second place after Ústí nad Labem. All these regions and cities belong to the historical area called Sudetenland, the mountainous rim around the heartland of the Czech state, where the traditions were interrupted with the expulsion of the Sudeten Germans and many religious monuments were damaged or destroyed in last 70 years.

Liberec religious statistics are unique in some aspects, primarily high religious heterogeneity. There are more than twenty active churches and religious groups in the city. It is necessary to point to a high relative number of believers of the Unity of the Brethren, which is the highest among Czech cities or quite a high share of believers of the Czechoslovak Hussite Church, what is not usual in the former German territories. Another interesting aspect is the high share of believers of Eastern Christianity which is in the Czech Republic usual in popular destinations among Ukrainians, Russians such as Prague and Karlovy Vary. We can expect growing numbers of these immigrants from Eastern Europe and the adherents of branches of Eastern Christianity, due to the globalization, demographic crisis of ethnic Czechs and high demands of the factories in the country for employees. However, this influx cannot reverse the general trends in religious demographics in the city.

Regardless of negative religious demographics, Liberec has many religious sites of different types. Both secularization and sacralization are observable in the city, but the author concludes that secularization is currently a stronger trend with more examples. The majority of the Roman Catholic church buildings are used only sporadically, especially in the peripheral parts of Liberec unattractive for tourists. Secularization threatens traditional churches; new and immigrant churches are energetic and fully use their buildings or rooms.

There is no tension or hatred among Liberec churches and religious groups; they are heading towards cooperation, ecumenism, and interreligious dialogue. There are no conflicts in public space, and some religious communities even share their buildings.

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APPENDIX

Map of main religious sites in Liberec 2018

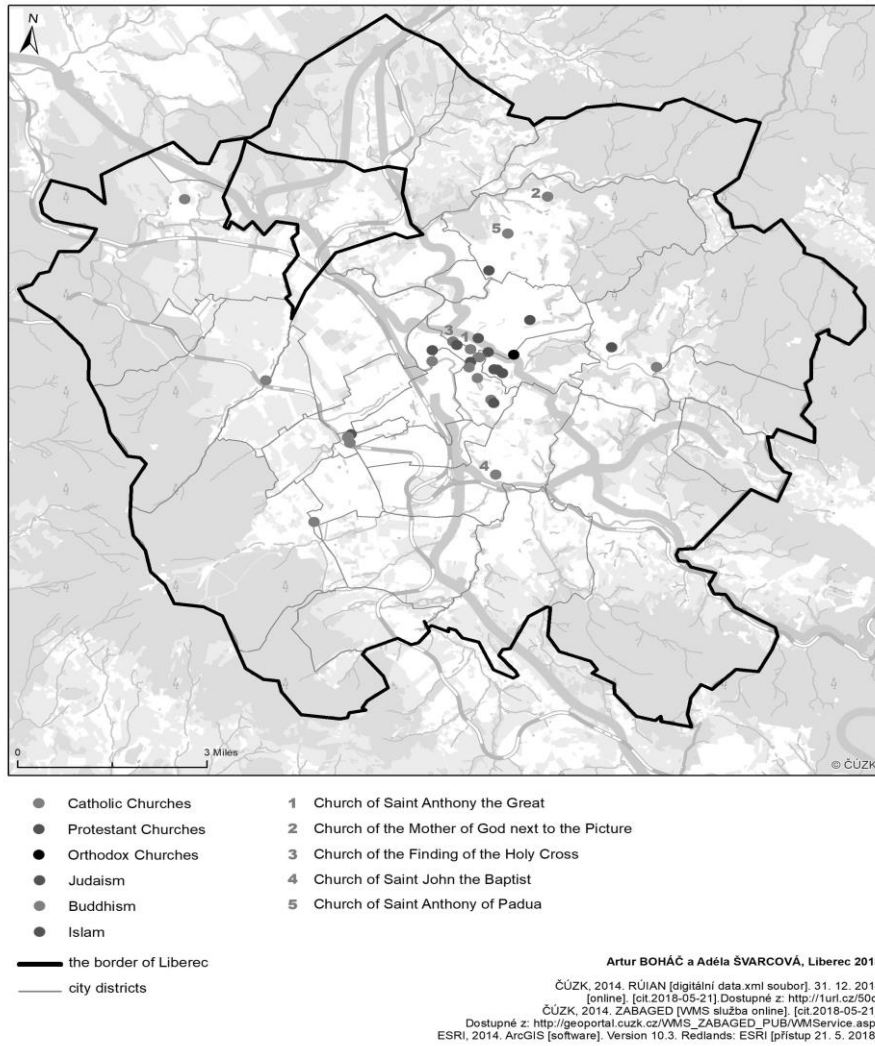


Figure 3 Map of main religious sites in Liberec Source: Author, 2018



Figure 4 Current state of the Church of the Saint John of Nepomuk Source: Author, 2018



Figure 5 A cross in memory of the death of miller Anton Jäger in 1864. Source: Author, 2018