

**Multiple Dimensions of the Integration Process of Eastern Orthodox  
Communities in Switzerland**

**Les dimensions plurielles de l'intégration des communautés  
orthodoxes en Suisse**

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## Introduction

One of the aims of the National Research Programme 58 was to generate new scientific knowledge about the increasingly diversified Swiss religious landscape, which is a consequence of recent migration waves. In response to the National Research Fund's call for proposals, our research team set out to explore a completely under-researched religious community in our country (and in West Europe more generally), that of the Eastern Orthodox Church.<sup>1</sup>

### 1. Research problem

The Eastern Orthodox population in Switzerland nearly doubled over the period 1990-2000, increasing from 71,501 in 1990 to 131,851 in 2000<sup>2</sup> and becoming the fourth-largest religious group in the country (after Catholics, Protestants and Muslims). Despite its growing numerical importance, the Eastern Orthodox community remains a very discrete presence both in the host society and in academic research, which has so far largely overlooked this religious group.

This is part of the generally poor scholarly awareness of Eastern traditions of Christianity in the West, where Christianity is nowadays commonly identified with Roman Catholicism and Protestantism (Hann and Goltz, 2010). It is therefore no surprise that the expansion of the Eastern Orthodox Church outside its historical territories all through the 20<sup>th</sup> century has gone almost unnoticed, except for a few studies in Western Europe (Thöle, 1997; Roberti, 1998; Martikainen, 2005; Ihlamur, 2009) and the United States (Krindatch, 2002; 2006; 2010). Also, in more recent years, religious studies have concentrated heavily on Islam and the socio-political debate it has elicited in Europe, thus overshadowing less-visible migrant religious groups.

If this explains the academic silence on the topic, one can argue that the social invisibility of Eastern Orthodox migrants and their religious institutions derives from a straightforward relation between this community and the host society and from their mutual acceptance of each other. These two elements are commonly considered as proofs of integration. How then do Eastern Orthodox believers approach and manage their integration into Swiss society? It is around this question that we articulated our research problem.

### 2. Research structure

The intricate issue of the integration of a religious community calls for a distinction between, firstly, individual members' strategies to integrate with the host society and, secondly, immigrant religious institutions' adjustment to the local religious landscape.

In analysing the first point, we refer to the integration of *ethnically diverse* Eastern Orthodox believers, emphasising the role of their *religious affiliation* in the process of integration. The ethnic reference (Romanian Orthodox, Serbian Orthodox, Greek Orthodox, etc.) serves to point out the diversity of the various migration contexts and to invite a comparison of the impact of their specificities on integration. To be more concrete, this

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<sup>1</sup> We refer here to four of the so-called Eastern Orthodox churches (Romanian, Russian Serbian and Greek), to distinguish them from the so-called Oriental Orthodox churches (also designated as pre-chalcedonian) situated in the Middle East and North Africa (Armenian, Coptic, Syrian, Malankara Indian, Ethiopian and Eritrean).

<sup>2</sup> The source of these data is the 2000 National Census. More recent data about religious communities in Switzerland are not available until 2012, when the 2010 National Census data are due. We estimate that for 2010 the number of Eastern Orthodox believers in Switzerland could increase to about 150,000.

research reports on the church-based integration strategies of those Romanian/Greek/Russian/Serbian Orthodox migrants who attend services on a regular basis. We examined the role of the social networks grounded in parish life, the integration resources that these parishes offer and the way in which migrants make use of them.

In analysing the second point given above, we refer to the relations Eastern Orthodox parishes have with other religious groups in their proximity and the nature of their attempts to reach out to Swiss society. We compared Eastern Orthodox parishes under the jurisdiction of four major mother churches: the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople; the Romanian Orthodox Church; the Russian Orthodox Church outside Russia, now part of the Moscow Patriarchate; and the Serbian Orthodox Church.

### **3. Research methodology**

We conducted a year's field research in 14 ethnic Eastern Orthodox parishes (of Greek, Russian, Serbian and Romanian origin) in both the French- and German-speaking parts of Switzerland. In the German-speaking part, we focused on Serbs and Romanians, whose languages were used in interviews. But we also visited Russian and Greek parishes, where we had informal discussions with parishioners and some clergy.

We carried out about 60 semi-directed interviews with priests, bishops, parish board members, choir members and regular parishioners. Together with extensive participant observation in 9 of the 14 parishes, these methodological tools allowed us to identify ways of functioning, adaptations to the local religious environment, parish life orientation, integration strategies, etc.

We also interviewed representatives of ecumenical organisations in each canton where a parish is situated. This helped us to put Eastern Orthodox perceptions of their relations with local churches into perspective, as well the way local churches perceive Orthodox churches, their involvement in ecumenical dialogue and their expectations.

We regularly checked the French-speaking press in Switzerland, parish websites and general Eastern Orthodox websites in order to situate the Swiss case in the more global Eastern Orthodox migration and integration context.

### **4. Key concept**

Our research problem coalesces around the idea of integration. This is a challenging issue, as we are confronted with one of those polysemic and semantically dynamic sociological concepts (Bolzman, 1996) like "religion", "culture" or "identity", whose broad scope makes them extremely difficult to grasp and the definition of which scholars do not agree on (Schnapper, 1994; 2007). While avoiding clear-cut definitions and over-complex theorising, we decided to approach the issue of integration in terms of *process* (a phenomenon in progress), *exchange* (between immigrants and locals) and *participation* (of the migrant community in the host society).

Because the issue of integration offers a multifaceted picture that might puzzle the observer, we tried to reduce the effects of this complexity by limiting our research to its economic, socio-cultural and institutional aspects. We selected these three dimensions because of their relevance to a religious group trying to find a home in a socio-political and religious context where it is a minority. Firstly, economic integration is considered to be the essential condition for existence in any receiving society. Whether we refer to individual migrants' access to the labour market or to parishes' strategies to achieve financial

autonomy, empirical research (Van Tubergen et al., 2004; Adami, 2005) shows that this is a necessary stage in achieving other levels of integration, such as social, cultural and political integration.

Secondly, contemporary approaches (Ray, 2002; Adami, 2005) to integration recognise that the cultural dimension is closely related to the quality of interactions between newcomers and their descendents, and the receiving society. In the case of Eastern Orthodox churches, which are well known for their attachment to ethnicity and their original culture, we examined the impact of this attachment on migrant parish members' relations with their new socio-cultural environment. At the institutional level, we explored the assumption that the Eastern Orthodox churches' focus on the preservation of ethnic identity reduces their ability to relate to one another and their participation in the increasingly pluralistic wider society.

Thirdly, one of the central indicators of integration is recognition deriving from the status immigrants achieve in the institutions of the host society and not within subsystems (Penninx, 2003; Penninx and Martiniello, 2004). For a faith-based community, recognition by other religious groups is of paramount importance to finding a place in the local religious landscape. The present research analysed how this perception applies in the case of Eastern Orthodox churches in Switzerland. We also took into account individual parish members' participation in the host country's institutions (associations, organisations, political parties, etc.) and the extent to which this participation derives from involvement with Eastern Orthodox parish life.

Our approach is original in that we use the concept of "segmented integration" as central to our study, which we derived from the American "segmented assimilation" (Portes 1993; Portes and Zhou, 1993; Safi, 2006) and which describes an uneven, irregular phenomenon: successful economic integration can coexist with the deliberate preservation of ethnic identity and migrants' original cultural background; conversely, migrants who have both the will and ability to adjust to the host culture may experience downward professional and economic mobility. As mentioned above, Eastern Orthodox churches are conservative in terms of their cultural and ethnic identities. Thus, we could presume that membership of these religious communities could encourage migrants to stick to their original culture, retarding acculturation and integration into mainstream society. Thus, Eastern Orthodox churches would be places where segmented integration is generated.

This conceptual tool enabled us to illustrate the differentiated patterns of integration as a process in progress, whose different aspects affect one another and relate to religious participation and practice.

## **5. Main findings**

Little is known about the Eastern Orthodox population and the organisation of its religious institutions in Switzerland. This is why we will start this account of our research findings by providing a brief overview of these communities and the main differences between their situation in the French-speaking and German-speaking areas (section 5.1). The report will continue with an analysis of the factors that impact integration (section 5.2), followed by a discussion of the main parish-based resources Eastern Orthodox migrants derive from their religious practice (section 5.3) and how these resources can be mobilised for the purposes of integration (section 5.4). In section 5.5, we examine integration in terms of Eastern Orthodox parishes as institutional actors. The obstacles preventing Eastern Orthodox churches from playing a greater role in migrant integration and the measures taken by

church members and institutions to counter these limitations are described and analysed in sections 5.6 and 5.7, respectively.

## **5.1 Brief overview of Eastern Orthodox communities in Switzerland**

As Table 1 (see Appendix) indicates, 78% of the Eastern Orthodox population in Switzerland is of migrant origin (ethnic Serbs from the former Yugoslavia, Russian-speaking people from the ex-Soviet Union, Greeks and Romanians). The significant number of Swiss Eastern Orthodox does not describe a group of native converts, although it includes them, but refers mainly to naturalised cradle Eastern Orthodox migrants and their children.

Figure 1 shows that most Eastern Orthodox believers live in the German-speaking part of Switzerland around big industrial cities like Zurich, Winterthur, Sankt Gallen and Basel. In the French-speaking part of the country, the Eastern Orthodox presence is concentrated around the Lake Geneva region.

Historically speaking, the establishment of Eastern Orthodox parishes started in the French-speaking part of the country in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century with the Russian Orthodox parishes in Geneva and Vevey, followed by the construction of a Greek Orthodox church in Lausanne in the 1920s. A series of Eastern Orthodox parishes were established during the 1960s–1970s: the Holy Trinity Serbian Orthodox parish in Zurich; the Cyril and Methodius Serbian Orthodox parish in Bern; the Saint Paul-Apostle of All Nations Greek Orthodox parish in Geneva; the Holy Dimitrios Greek Orthodox parish in Zurich; the Saint John the Baptist Romanian Orthodox parish in Geneva; and the Lord's Resurrection Romanian Orthodox parish in Chambésy. Most of the Romanian and Serbian Orthodox parishes were established after the 1990s.

We counted 42 Eastern Orthodox parishes, most of which are organised in terms of ethnic criteria and depend on their respective mother churches: the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople, the Moscow Patriarchate, the Russian Orthodox Church Outside Russia, the Romanian Orthodox Church and the Serbian Orthodox Church (see Table 2). There are also multi-ethnic parishes, some of which hold services in the local language. In the French-speaking part of Switzerland, 7 parishes out of the 17 that we identified hold religious services in French, while the rest preserve the languages of their countries of origin. Paradoxically, in the German-speaking part where the Eastern Orthodox population is more numerous, only one parish (the Russian Orthodox Church of the Resurrection, Moscow Patriarchate, Zurich) offers religious services in German (vespers and liturgy once per month). The issue of the language used in services will be further discussed later in this report (see section 5.5.2).

The population of the Greek Orthodox parishes we studied in our fieldwork can be described as middle class and upper middle class: members of the liberal professions, scientists, employees of multinational companies in the Lake Geneva region and students. Most have already acquired Swiss citizenship and participate in the political activities of their host country. This does not imply disengaging from their relationship with the homeland, which often translates into high transnational mobility (many retain a residence in Greece) and strong social ties with family or monasteries.

First-generation Greek Orthodox migrants are married to co-ethnics, maintain their Hellenic culture and language, and see the church as a place where their identity is preserved. Their offspring engage in intercultural and interdenominational marriages, and reduce their religious practice, yet retain Eastern Orthodoxy as an important identity marker that they wish to pass on to their children by baptising them in the Greek Orthodox Church.

Parish size is somewhat in decline because of the many return migrations of retired first-generation members, the lack of any significant renewal of migration waves and the secularisation process that affects culturally integrated members.

In Romanian Orthodox parishes, we identified two major migratory waves, differentiated along historical lines in terms of before and after the fall of communism. While most of those who fled their home country during communism were highly skilled migrants, the migration patterns and profiles diversified after 1989 from lower middle class to students, artists and highly skilled professionals; temporary or permanent migrants; and, to a lesser extent, pendular ones. While the former group viewed their parishes as places to gather and express their resistance to communism, for the more recent migrations, their parishes are places that preserve their religious and linguistic identities.

The social composition of Russian Orthodox parishes in the French-speaking part of Switzerland is very diverse, containing descendants from the first Russian emigration waves after 1917, ethnic Serbs, Swiss converts and the so-called “new Russians”, i.e. post-Soviet migrants. These actors carry different representations about the Eastern Orthodox Church, its relation to language and culture, and more generally its role in society.

Serbian Orthodox parishes comprise ethnic Serbs from all the countries of the former Yugoslavia. We identified four major generations of migrants: firstly, in the aftermath of the Second World War, a political and social elite arrived who opposed the new political regime in Yugoslavia. Although few of them are still alive, their parishes strive to keep in touch with them and organise activities directed to their specific needs.

From the 1960s to the 1970s, the Swiss economy needed a qualified labour force in the fields of health care and engineering, and ethnic Serb doctors and engineers found a place in these sectors of the Swiss labour market. In the mid-1970s, low-skilled, seasonal workers started arriving. Their migration was not intended to be permanent and their families remained in the homeland. The migration project changed following the outbreak of war in the former Yugoslavia in the 1990s. Family reunification during the war and the deteriorating quality of life after the dissolution of Yugoslavia led to the final settlement of these migrants in Switzerland. A new sociological profile emerged: young people who did not speak the local language and had no education and qualifications recognised in Switzerland.

All these different categories of migrants make use of the parish not only as a place of religious practice, but also as a venue for identity clarification and reconnection to their primary socialisation patterns. This will be further developed in section 5.4.2 of this report.

Apart from attendance at religious services and participation in parish activities, Eastern Orthodox spirituality expresses itself in monasticism. Many practising Eastern Orthodox believers resort to monasteries for spiritual advice and retreat. In traditionally Eastern Orthodox countries, most of which experienced religious persecution during communism, monasteries are going through a renewal and an unprecedented proliferation. In a diaspora context, however, they are less numerous and develop at a slower pace. Unlike France, which has 20 Eastern Orthodox monasteries, Switzerland has only one, situated in Dompierre/VD, under the jurisdiction of the Moscow Patriarchate. The small community is made up of two Swiss monks and a German one; it functions as a regular parish for people who live in the area, but other French-, German- and Russian-speaking believers maintain close contact with the monks.

Yet the monastery has very limited means and small premises, which prevent it from playing one of the traditional roles that Eastern Orthodox monasteries commonly fulfil, i.e. receiving pilgrims or guests for retreats.

A project has been started to establish another Eastern Orthodox monastic community in Romandie under the jurisdiction of the Romanian Orthodox Church. This project has not made any major advances so far.

One noteworthy Eastern Orthodox institution in Switzerland is the Orthodox Centre in Chambésy, which was created by the patriarch Athenagoras of Constantinople in 1966, as a forum for rallying the Eastern Orthodox churches and for ecumenical dialogue. The centre hosts an Eastern Orthodox philanthropic foundation and a theological institute for postgraduate studies, and, most significantly, it is in charge of organising the next Pan-Orthodox council. Although it was very dynamic when it began, its activities have decreased because of insufficient financial and human resources.

There are several differences between the Eastern Orthodox communities in the German- and the French-speaking parts of Switzerland. These differences refer to the following:

- *Outreach to the host society:* Orthodox communities in western Switzerland are more successful in recruiting members among the local population. This is due, on the one hand, to the longer history of Eastern Orthodox parishes in this part of the country and, on the other hand, to the use of French in their services and parish life. This affects relations with the host society's culture and encourages the integration of Eastern Orthodox parishes into the local religious landscape. Moreover, the presence of the Orthodox Centre in Chambésy, close to the World Council of Churches in Geneva, the Ecumenical Institute in Bossey and other international organisations, has given more visibility to the Eastern Orthodox presence in the French-speaking part of the country.
- *Economic integration:* The process of Eastern Orthodox migrants' economic integration develops differently in eastern Switzerland, whose industrial urban areas offered working opportunities to the less-skilled during the 1970s and 1980s, and in the western part of the country, where more highly skilled professionals settled (see Table 3).
- *Cultural integration:* In terms of their personal cultural integration, Eastern Orthodox parish members in francophone cantons feel more easily accepted into society than their co-religionists in the German-speaking part of Switzerland. This may be explained firstly by linguistic reasons: more often than not, Romanians, Greeks and Russians were already familiar with French before they migrated, because their home countries have a long tradition of teaching French as a foreign language and are involved with the French-speaking world.<sup>3</sup> Being in command of the local language is a factor that improves the quality of the dialogue with the host culture.

Moreover, eastern Switzerland challenges migrants with its quasi-bilingualism: in private, people use the local Germanic dialects, which are becoming a strong identity marker; standard German is resorted to only in formal professional situations, the media and in school for writing. Thus, migrants have to acquire double linguistic skills.

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<sup>3</sup> Romania is a member state of the international French-speaking community, while Greece adopted French as the second foreign language to be taught in schools and until 1961 French was the only foreign language taught in Greek public schools. Russia also has a long history of teaching and speaking French.



The second cause refers to the different interpretation and application of the national integration policy: to oversimplify, the Swiss German cantons approach integration within a communitarian paradigm, whereas the French Swiss integration model leaves more space for cultural diversity.<sup>4</sup>

## **5.2 Factors impacting integration**

We found three important aspects that cause variations in parishes' capacity to be actors in the integration process of their migrant members.

### **5.2.1 Reflective positioning**

Firstly, if parishes engage in discussing their relation to the host society, other religious groups, the state, or other social and political actors, they stimulate collective and individual thinking about the local culture (we call this "reflective positioning", in line with Lichterman, 2005). This further encourages individuals to find strategies to accommodate their Eastern Orthodox identity with the local culture, e.g.

- a Serbian priest might explain in his sermons how a member of his parish can be a good citizen in Switzerland;
- the Sunday school in a Romanian Orthodox parish, conceived as a platform for teaching the Romanian language and the Orthodox religion, might develop into a place of debate on the Romanian ethnic/linguistic identity in relation to civic education and social ethics that children receive in Swiss schools or in bicultural families; or
- French-speaking parishes might debate extensively on the place of Eastern Orthodox spirituality and theology in the West.

### **5.2.2 Migration context**

Reflection on the relation to the host society takes different directions in different communities, depending on the migration context that generated these communities. This constitutes the second factor that influences the role that Eastern Orthodox parishes play in migrant integration.

For example, the Russian Orthodox Church Outside Russia (ROCOR) was created by expatriates and refugees fleeing the Bolshevik regime after 1917. It became a diaspora church, separated from the mother church in Moscow, as a reaction to the growing control the Soviet state was exerting over the church back home. This forced migration and split in the church happened very soon after the Russian Orthodox Church had held an important council and revised the model of parish organisation and the concept of the parish. Two important consequences derive from this political and ecclesiastical context of migration: ROCOR developed a reluctance to become involved with political movements and state ideologies, while its main aim was to keep the purity of the Eastern Orthodox faith in its Russian expression and tradition and to implement as accurately as possible the prescriptions of the 1917 council (Nathanail, 1995). Thus, parish life was centred on mystical and spiritual issues. It is therefore through this lens that ROCOR approached the host society, searching for "Orthodox elements" in its culture and history and being less involved in societal problems, ecumenical dialogue and political participation.

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<sup>4</sup> This statement has to be balanced with some details: some French-speaking cantons (e.g. Valais) remain conservative with regard to migrant integration and citizenship granting, whereas other eastern cantons have made considerable progress in political migrant inclusion (e.g. Grisons, Appenzell Rhodes extérieures, Basel Stadt).

The picture is very different in Serbian Orthodox parishes: they are recently implanted in Switzerland and serve a large number of often-low-skilled economic migrants who have an unclear integration project and suffer from a negative image in Switzerland. This migration and reception context explains the need for Serbian Orthodox parishes to engage in social issues and approach integration in more pragmatic terms.

### 5.2.3 Parish “style”

The third factor that determines the role that Eastern Orthodox parishes play in migrant integration is the orientation of parish life, i.e. the parish “style”. We identified four styles, but wish to emphasise that none of them is “pure”, and they all need to be seen in terms of nuances and may overlap in the case of one and the same parish. As with all categorisations, therefore, this one has its own limitations.

- The “*contemplative*” style describes parishes centred on their members’ liturgical life. This is generally the case with Russian Orthodox parishes. All Eastern Orthodox parishes coalesce around the liturgy, since this is the primary reason why they exist; but there are some other characteristics that are prominent in “contemplative” parishes, in particular their reluctance to discuss and attempt to resolve social issues. This does not translate into a lack of empathy with the dilemmas and problems that affect society. However, the solutions proposed to these problems are approached at the spiritual level, which is perceived as being the essence of the church’s message.

The reflective positioning of “contemplative” parishes is thus situated in the area of theology and spirituality. One can argue that this parish “style” does not have much potential for engaging with the host society. Yet, paradoxically, among the Eastern Orthodox ethnic parishes, it is the Russian “contemplative” ones that have had the most successful outreach to local Swiss and have received many converts.

- The “*community builder*” style results in special attention being given by parish leaders and priests to church members as a group, and to their common problems and needs. It is the case with some Romanian Orthodox parishes, some French-speaking ones and most evidently with Serbian Orthodox parishes. The latter develop not only as providers of “spiritual goods”, but also as community centres that offer various socially oriented services, e.g. counselling, libraries, entertainment and cultural activities, thereby stimulating institutional and social integration. The targeted groups are women, the youth and elderly people. Some of the “community builder” parishes orient their activities towards integration and one of them has even formalised this aim by mentioning it in its legal statutes. Their reflective positioning consists in identifying, discussing and solving concrete problems that cause collective concern in relations between the migrant population and the receiving society.

Community building takes on a different meaning for French-speaking parishes, centring around their religious identity: the aim of the community is to nourish and perpetuate the Eastern Orthodox faith through the parish socialisation and theological education of both children and adults. The reflective positioning in this case refers to accommodating the Eastern Orthodox faith to the increasing secularisation or religious pluralisation of the wider society.

The “community builder” style is particularly propitious for engaging in a constructive dialogue with the host society by discussing the social, cultural and religious differences that mark the relations of the community with the wider society.

- The “*networker*” style describes parishes that focus on building co-ethnic transnational ties (particularly Greek and Romanian Orthodox parishes) or simply locally tied inter-Orthodox connections (French-speaking parishes).

All ethnic Eastern Orthodox parishes are involved in co-ethnic transnational ties at the level of the West European diocese to which they belong or with ecclesiastical institutions in the homeland. Although these activities may appear as limiting the parishes to their ethnic church networks, they also give them the opportunity to compare different diasporic contexts and share solutions to certain difficulties. The circulation of ideas is paralleled by the circulation of various types of capital: poor parishes/monasteries or church-based organisations in the homeland benefit from the economic capital of their fellow parishes in Switzerland; conversely, parishes in Switzerland invite religious leaders or bishops in the homeland to support the spiritual lives of their members in a diaspora situation. Romanian Orthodox parishes organise youth camps and pilgrimages in monasteries back to their home country, thus offering children and adults the chance to stay in contact with monastic spirituality, which is a key element in Eastern Orthodox spirituality.

- The “*locally oriented*” style applies to French-speaking parishes that do not have any particular ethnic attachment, despite their ecclesiastical link with a national mother church. Such parishes mainly seek for the enculturation of Eastern Orthodoxy by introducing local culture and language into parish life and thus developing into spaces for straightforward cultural integration of those members who are of migrant origin. “Local culture” here refers both to the early Christian heritage and local saints from the first centuries, and to cultural codes (patterns of social interaction, conduct, dress, humour, boundaries between the private and public spheres, etc.) or values (punctuality, honesty, rigour, etc.).

### **5.3 Integration resources available to individual parish members**

In order to grasp the resources people can access in a parish, we have to start from two essentials of religion: firstly, participation in a worship community (this translates into *social capital*) and, secondly, a shared faith that engenders and structures this community and which consists of spiritual teachings, beliefs, norms of morality, rituals, etc. (we call this *spiritual capital*). This section will only discuss the resources themselves; further consideration of their significance for economic, socio-cultural and institutional integration appears in section 5.4.

#### **5.3.1 Social capital**

Churches are venues for social capital formation because people speaking the same language, and sharing the same cultural codes and religious convictions meet and exchange news and experiences using familiar sociability norms. Several consequences derive from this.

- Parish sociability reinforces already existing relations based on shared values. This is what Putnam calls “bonding social capital”. When this type of social capital results from participation in ethnically centred religious institutions, it tends to be qualified as “negative” (Portes, 1998), because it is supposed to over-expose migrants to the ethnic networks rather than to the wider society.

We argue that even if Eastern Orthodox parishes may develop into “places for creating a *Gemeinschaft*-type identification”, they do not compromise “the *Gesellschaft* logic of the society at large” (Proeschel, 2010).

Why? Firstly, because Eastern Orthodox parishes in Switzerland are rather small (from 20 to 100 attendees at regular Sunday services) and cannot therefore offer a critical mass for individuals to saturate their personal social network. Even when some migrants are plunged into predominantly ethnic networks, these are not grounded uniquely in the church, but rather in the larger ethnic community. Secondly, the social composition of Orthodox parishes includes also Swiss converts and non-Eastern Orthodox/non-ethnic spouses from intercultural marriages. Depending on the latter’s numerical importance, parishes experience different levels of ethnic and linguistic diversity. Lastly, parallel to the efforts to preserve ethnic identity, Orthodox parishes strive to cultivate a climate of openness to the host society and assert the universal vocation of their faith. This implies an effort to accommodate both *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft*.

- The parish population may be homogeneous in terms of religious identity, but at the same time, churches accept people regardless of their social status, age, professional background or cultural horizons. Social categories that would not commonly socialise with one another thus have the opportunity to meet and converse at church, giving rise to what Putnam calls “linking social capital” (Putnam, 1995).

This contributes to extending migrants’ networks of weak ties. Granovetter (1982; 1995) proved that weak ties play a significant role in individuals’ exposure to a more diverse social environment, and to wider sources of information, viewpoints and activities.

- By virtue of their legal status as private-law associations, Eastern Orthodox parishes function democratically: the parish general meeting elects a board, which represents the interface between the parish and the outside world. Each board member assumes a specific task, which puts him in contact with public institutions such as banks, insurance companies, tax offices, hospitals, other religious institutions, social security offices, migrant employment offices, etc. Although there are generally very few of them, these parishioners who are in contact with local institutions gain linguistic and legal knowledge, communication skills, and understanding of Swiss cultural and political values. They subsequently transfer these competences to their community. This is an example of what Putnam calls “bridging social capital” (Putnam, 1995).

Yet Eastern Orthodox parishes are efficient bridges between their populations and the wider society only to the extent that they are engaged in a reflective positioning in such terms, as shown previously in this report.

### 5.3.2 Spiritual capital

Apart from providing a space for social capital formation, churches are there to perpetuate and teach a spiritual tradition, norms of morality and beliefs, and to perform rituals that embody these values: “Religious organizations are repositories of financial, human, social, and cultural capital, but they are also sources of moral teachings and religious experiences that may motivate, channel, and strengthen people to reach particular ends” (Woodberry, 2003).

Initially, the content of Eastern Orthodox spirituality was not part of our research interest, but the data pointed to the substantial role spiritual teachings can play in integration, by providing churchgoers with the means for coping with challenges specific to the migration process. Therefore, the term “spiritual capital” could appropriately describe the resources that people mobilise to face everyday difficulties specific to adjusting to a new socio-cultural reality (Woodberry, 2003).

In analysing spiritual capital, we distinguish between *practices* (prayer, fasting, celebrations of important saints’ days, *slavas*,<sup>5</sup> etc.) and *spiritual values* (repentance, forgiveness, love, humility, patience, hope, etc.).

Dislocated from their cultural, family, social, and geographical setting, migrants find an element of stability in the immutability<sup>6</sup> of religious practice. The liturgy, saints’ feasts and family patrons’ celebrations place individuals in a continuum with their ancestors and their kin relations in the home country. This contributes to the reinforcement of a *Gemeinschaft* logic.

We should add also a principle of Eastern Orthodox theology that was not directly expressed in interviews, but which is transparent in Eastern Orthodox parishes’ agency, namely the principle of economy (*oikonomia*), as opposed to *akrivia* (*akrabeia*). *Akrabeia* is the strict application of church law. *Oikonomia* translates as God’s merciful dealing with humankind, which implies discretionary deviations from church law and the adaptation of its spirit to particular contexts and personal situations. This principle leaves room for flexibility and, applied to the practical aspects of a migrant’s life, can have a positive impact on integration.

## 5.4 How these resources impact economic, cultural and institutional integration at the individual level

It may appear strange that we advocate a meaningful connection between Sunday service attendance in an ethnic Eastern Orthodox church as a part of the migrant members’ path to

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<sup>5</sup> “A *slava* is the celebration of the family’s patron saint. It is ‘passed through the family line patrilineally’. Its observance ... serves to remind emigrés, American-born Serbs, and Serbian children growing up in the area, of their cultural identity. In this way, they contribute to an enduring sense of being Serbian” (Zimmerman, in Bennett, 1981).

<sup>6</sup> The use of this word does not imply that the religious services and religious practice remained completely untouched, but that very few changes were made, which are almost imperceptible to people who do not have a thorough theological background. For instance, many Eastern Orthodox priests started reading aloud the so-called “secret” prayers of the liturgy, which used to be whispered so that the audience would not hear them. This practice used to create an additional barrier between the priest and his flock. Thus, changing this habit in the contemporary Eastern Orthodox diaspora in the West testifies to a changing relation between clergy and laity according to a less-hierarchical Protestant model and therefore to an adaptation to a new sociological and religious environment. But one has to be a connoisseur of the liturgy in order to grasp and understand such details. This explains our use of the term “immutability” to describe the largely accurate perpetuation of rituals and their content.

integration into the wider society, i.e. incorporation into the labour market and the acquisition of knowledge of local institutions, the school system, health-care services, etc. In this section we show how social and spiritual capital constitute resources that prepare migrants to engage in a dialogue with the host society and participate in it.

#### **5.4.1 Economic integration**

We based this research project on the hypothesis that Eastern Orthodox parish networks are very efficient in assisting migrants' integration into the Swiss labour market. We grounded our assumption on a previous short field experience in Romanian Orthodox parishes in Italy, where we noticed that priests played an important role in job searches and the labour regularisation of illegal migrants. We realised that this is not the case in Eastern Orthodox parishes in Switzerland. The causes for this are to be found in the reception context or "destination effect" (Van Tubergen et al., 2004).

Firstly, Swiss migration policy is stricter than that in Italy; it consists of recruitment in areas of the economy needing additional labour and it takes into account the absorption capacity of the labour market. Also, until recently, migrants were selected from countries culturally and geographically close to Switzerland (the so-called "three-circle" immigration policy). This policy seeks to ensure enough labour for the economy, but simultaneously to ensure the preservation of the national identity and social cohesion.<sup>7</sup>

Secondly, the Swiss labour market has developed better protection mechanisms against the problems of an underground economy than has occurred in Italy or Spain: the law is highly restrictive for both employers and employees and supports cantonal and trade union control bodies.<sup>8</sup>

Thus, Eastern Orthodox migrants considered in this research were subjected to selection before they settled in Switzerland, and the acquisition of employment preceded physical migration in most of the studied cases. This explains why our interviewees and their fellow parishioners did not need to operate through social networks based in receiving-country parishes in order to integrate with the latter's economic fabric. Furthermore, Serbian and Romanian Orthodox parishes developed from 2000 onwards, when their members had already made important steps in terms of economic integration.

Yet parish-based linking social capital and weak ties are particularly useful to those situated at the periphery of the process of economic integration in terms of such things as employment mobility, escape from unemployment, or transition from education and training to professional life. Serbian Orthodox parishes tend to be the leading example of this. Informal solidarity in this area also exists in Romanian and Russian Orthodox parishes.

The efficiency of parish-based networks in terms of economic integration is less a matter of the ethnic orientation of the parish than a transversal issue of class: it is the lower skilled who solicit and benefit from the resources that are available through these networks, rather than highly skilled and liberal professionals or the self-employed.

Access to these resources, skills and knowledge is not immediately self-evident because in a parish all people cannot know everything about everybody. In socially diverse contexts, there are often what Burt (1992) calls "structural holes". The connection between

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<sup>7</sup> "37 ans CFE. Extrait du rapport annuel, 2007", p. 51, [http://www.ekm.admin.ch/fr/lacfm/doku/jb\\_f\\_07\\_web\\_hist.pdf](http://www.ekm.admin.ch/fr/lacfm/doku/jb_f_07_web_hist.pdf).

<sup>8</sup> The 2005 Federal Act against Illegal Work and its 2006 Ordinance were revised and updated in 2008. Improvements to the legal framework encourage cantons to deal with illegal workers more efficiently (<http://www.seco.admin.ch/themen/00385/01905/index.html?lang=fr>).

actors with a specific need and actors who potentially possess the resources to fulfil this need is mediated by the priest. He is in a position of centrality by virtue of his ministry: he welcomes new members to the community, develops a personal relationship with each parishioner through confession, is a spiritual authority and as such has the role of counsellor, and visits the homes of the faithful for blessings, etc. Therefore he is the figure who mediates access to resources and stimulates their flow.

#### **5.4.2 Cultural integration**

Many interviewees speak about the church as the place where they are reconnected to their identity and their roots, i.e. not to the receiving society. We have showed previously that bonding social capital and religious practice are providers of a sense of identity and factors of reinforcement of the spirit of *Gemeinschaft*. But it would be too hasty to conclude that this hinders cultural integration. On the contrary, along with Cattacin and Chimienti (2006), Bauman (2000) and Proeschel (2010), we interpret these as assets for participation in *Gesellschaft*. Cattacin and Chimienti (2006) highlight the importance of one's access to the identity forged in the primary process of socialisation, especially in a migration context. Swiss society favours change, pluralism and hybridisation and therefore tends not to produce communities with fixed identities. In such societies, the identity built during the primary socialisation process allows individuals to build references that help them situate themselves in a new cultural environment. This is even more important for migrants of rural origin and the low skilled, irrespective of their ethnic origin.

Yet this is a controversial point, as many converts or non-Eastern Orthodox contest this approach that cradle Eastern Orthodox migrants have to church and parish life. The former generally convey representations of the church as a religious institution that should not be culturally bound or, at most, should be permeated with the local culture. The latter inherit from a historically lengthy process of religious and cultural interconnectedness. The two logics sometimes collide in some parishes, stimulating collective thinking about the role of religion, culture and primary socialisation. Thus we conclude that the bonding social capital resulting from parish socialisation and the atmosphere of *Gemeinschaft* are not obstacles to individuals' cultural integration, i.e. they do not create a negative bias in individuals' relation to the host culture. This invalidates one of the hypotheses on which we based our research. Nevertheless, this conclusion is less clear in the case of Eastern Orthodox churches as religious institutions (see section 5.5.2).

Moreover, participation in *Gesellschaft* is not endangered because Eastern Orthodox parishes engage in "reflective positioning", as stated in section 5.2.1: priests encourage parishioners to be "good citizens", to support their children's schooling and education, and to learn the local language, e.g. two Serbian Orthodox parishes that plan to offer local language training to parishioners in order to help them improve their communication and contact with Swiss society.

In section 5.3.2 we mentioned that spiritual values such as repentance, humility and love are resources for integration. We interpret them as such because they invite the individual to a continuous self-questioning, self-renewal and self-discipline. The believer is urged to stop blaming external factors such as hostility or injustice – which are often invoked by migrants when they describe their status as foreigners in a host country – for his/her personal suffering and to overcome it through personal change, adaptation and responsibility. Such values encourage peaceful, respectful, optimistic conduct in society and they are a point of convergence with values cherished by Swiss society.

Finally, *oikonomia*, by permitting formal adaptation while preserving the spirit encapsulated in church law, allows Eastern Orthodox migrants to adjust to very diverse social and cultural environments without having to relativise their religious identity. A few examples can be cited here: during the four annual lent periods, when Eastern Orthodox refrain from consuming animal products, those who eat in restaurants and canteens or are invited for meals in non-Eastern Orthodox contexts suspend these fasting rules. Or, take the case of monks who have to wear a black monastic habit, which are traditionally prohibited in public places in the canton of Geneva. In order to avoid breaking the law or being mistaken for Muslim traditionalists, some Eastern Orthodox monks who reside in the canton adopt a sober civil way of dressing and thus live an interiorised monasticism.

One important indicator of the cultural integration of individuals is their feeling of identification with and belonging to their country of adoption, its culture and values, and the way they balance this with their attachment or commitment to their homeland. This is known as *subjective integration*. Our interviewees tend to situate their identification in terms of the regional and local, not of the Swiss in general (“*Je me sens Veveysan*”; “*je me sens Vaudois*”; “*je me sens Genevois*”). For Serbian Orthodox people, the homeland remains the main point of reference in terms of “origin” and “roots”. It is not idealised, but is a strong identity reference, even for members of the second generation. For Greeks, it is not so much the homeland that is an important reference, although some migrants talk about it as something “sacred” and “unique”, but rather Hellenic culture. For Russians and Romanians, representations of the homeland differ between political migrants before 1989 and the newer migration: the former tend to view it through its cultural achievements and the marks of communism, while the latter are fond of its people, food and traditions, but deplore the economic precariousness and corruption that exist in the homeland.

In this respect, participation in Eastern Orthodox parishes exposes migrants to a double discourse: on the one hand, the original culture is highly encouraged and supported, while, on the other hand, the vision of a Western Orthodoxy incarnated in the local culture is gaining more and more ground. Research in the field did not reveal any major contradiction or conflict at the individual level between these two logics.

#### **5.4.3 Institutional integration**

When we discussed “bridging social capital” (section 5.3.1), we showed that Eastern Orthodox migrants involved in organising, running and managing their parishes are exposed to a number of the host society’s institutions. This interaction improves their knowledge of public institutions and their skills in approaching and collaborating with these institutions. This helps migrants move forward in the process of structural integration. This contradicts the stereotype about migrants disengaging from the host society because of their involvement in ethnic organisations, provided that this involvement translates into a willingness to implant the ethnic organisation in the wider society.

Personal participation in the organisations or institutions of the host country, including its politics, is weak among the Eastern Orthodox. We found its peak in Greek Orthodox parishes and its lowest counterpart in Russian Orthodox parishes. Generally speaking, regardless of the ethnic composition of the parishes studied, highly skilled professionals tend to be more involved in organisations, most often profession-related, or in the field of social assistance, charity or their native culture. The high number of such professionals belonging to Greek Orthodox parishes explains why we ranked them as the Eastern Orthodox parishes with the most institutionally involved members. By contrast, low



Russian Orthodox participation is not the result of a predominance of low-skilled migrant parish members, as one might conclude from the previous statement. It is rather explained by the fact that Russians have little confidence either in the ability of institutions to assist their integration or in state-driven socialisation. We argue that this is reminiscent of their experience in former communist countries.

One important contribution parish networks make to migrant integration is situated at the border between socio-cultural and institutional integration and refers to newcomers in their initial stage of migration. The church is a place where they can meet co-ethnics who have already gone through the process of settlement. Early migrants' experience can constitute a valuable resource that newcomers draw on in order to make their way in the Swiss administrative, school, health-care, insurance and tax system. This was particularly manifest in Greek Orthodox parishes.

Before concluding this overview of integration at the individual level, it is worth mentioning two important observations.

Firstly, despite the fact that we have shown here that Eastern Orthodox parishes can be sites of integration for their migrant members, we do not imply that church attendance constitutes a *strategy* for integration. The term "strategy" implies something deliberate and purposeful. Even though we were informed by regular churchgoers that some newcomers do use church-based network resources and thus embrace a more utilitarian approach to church attendance, they generally do not put down deep roots in the parish.

Woodberry (2003) draws attention to the pitfalls of too much emphasis on religious practice ("spiritual capital") as a means to an end: it may "suggest that the main goal of religion is personal profit" and "may over-emphasize religion as a means to reach particular ends". Besides, church attendance and religious values are not the only resources people draw on in order to adapt to a new socio-cultural environment. Thus, we interpret our case study rather as a side-effect of religious participation and of churches' adaptation to people's needs. Although our initial hypothesis was centred on a utilitarian approach, field research revealed a plurality of logics that animate actors in parish-based networks that could be described in terms of a plurality of sociological theories, ranging from rational choice to gift theory

Secondly, if parishes can be promoters of integration, they also suffer its consequences (mostly with regard to cultural aspects): for example, parish members who are in contact with other Christian confessions (most often through spouses in mixed marriages) claim that Eastern Orthodox parish life tends to follow the patterns of local non-Orthodox congregations (e.g. targeted liturgies, shorter services, several services on Sundays, more charitable activities, chaplaincy services in hospitals and prisons, etc.). There is greater expectation among parishioners of transparency in financial matters on the part of priests and governing bodies and of greater participation by the laity in decision-making.

With respect to religious practice, we would like to highlight two divergent phenomena: on the one hand, there is a decrease of religious practice and a privatisation of religious references resulting from a generally secular lifestyle; on the other hand, we noticed an enhancement of theological literacy: living in a religiously pluralistic society challenges migrants to define their religious identity and thus question its theological content. This further encourages them to enhance their theological knowledge. Converts often provoke such responses and provide related insights and information.

## 5.5 The integration of parishes as migrant religious institutions

### 5.5.1 Economic integration

We approached the economic integration of Eastern Orthodox churches in Switzerland in terms of their fund-raising strategies and the effects of their financial situation on parishes' integration potential.

Unlike some of their privileged state-supported mother churches, Eastern Orthodox parishes in Switzerland are private-law organisations and as such are self-financed institutions. Such parishes rely on their own members' financial and human resources: they raise funds from Sunday collections and individual voluntary donations. Serbian Orthodox parishes have instituted the "*parohijal*" – a fixed tax that gives parishioners access to all ecclesiastical services (marriages, baptisms, funerals, blessings of the house, home services for the family *slava*, etc.). For more costly projects, like building, refurbishing or equipping a place of worship, parishes organise galas, balls or special dinners and they rely on volunteer work provided by their members. Some Romanian and Serbian Orthodox parishes received a modest five-year start-up support package from established Protestant and Catholic churches.

The economic situation of parishes varies with size (large parishes are, of course, better off than those that contain only a few families) and the length of time that they have been established (Greek and Russian Orthodox parishes that have a historical presence in Switzerland received donations of properties (e.g. flats) that ensure a regular income and they also have their own places of worship).

All Eastern Orthodox parishes are run by a board of members who manage the parish finances and budget, and whose activities are checked by an external financial authority. Clergy are part of these boards, but they avoid direct interference in financial matters. In most cases, priests are the employees of their parishes; this gives rise to greater interdependence between clergy and lay people and to negotiations that are unconceivable in traditionally Eastern Orthodox countries, where priests are state employees. For instance, Romanian and Serbian Orthodox parishes lay great stress on transparency in communications between the decision-making body and the rest of the parish population.

When parishes cannot afford to support their priests (which in Switzerland is mostly the case with Romanian Orthodox parishes), the latter take on low-skilled jobs, beneath the level of their education. This compromise allows them to survive financially and practise their priestly vocation at week-ends. The economic precariousness of a parish that cannot pay a full-time priest has important effects on parish life, which is reduced to liturgical celebrations, thus diminishing its potential role in migrant integration.

### 5.5.2 Cultural integration

We initially identified the celebration language in parishes and the presence of converts as indicators of the quality of the dialogue Eastern Orthodox parishes have with local culture. We assumed that parishes that adopt the local language have more outreach capacity to the local population and culture. When a migrant church succeeds in making converts among the locals, it is presumed to have understood local cultural codes and is able to mobilise them in order to explain its religious content, make it accessible to those from different cultural backgrounds and thus recruit new followers.

Our hypothesis was confirmed by our field research. The use of the local language has a positive impact on the integration of the parish into the local religious landscape,

because it makes it more accessible to other Christians and increases its outreach to the host society. This is further enhanced by the fact that most of the priests in French-speaking parishes are Swiss converts who have a good understanding of the cultural background necessary to the dialogue with their own society and its religious heritage.

However, we argue that the use of French in Eastern Orthodox parishes is not a strategy for integration: people do not choose to practice their religion in French in order to become integrated or to recruit converts. At most, it appears to be the result of integration or simply because of the fact that French is the official language in a parish from its foundation. The reasons vary from practical necessity (the ethnic and linguistic variety of the Eastern Orthodox population willing to establish a parish allows only French to be the shared language) to ideological orientation (at the origin of a parish, local converts wish to promote Eastern Orthodoxy's universal dimension and dissociate it from a specific ethnic and linguistic identity).

We encountered only one example of an ethnic parish that had introduced French in parallel to the original language of religious services. This was a Russian Orthodox parish that had reached a considerable amount of converts and second/third-generation Orthodox migrants, i.e. those who have a better command of the local language than that of their ancestors. It thus became self-evident to adopt the more familiar language. Yet recent waves of migrants challenged this balance by demanding exclusive use of Slavonic, justified by the ethnic qualifier of the parish: a Russian Orthodox parish should celebrate in traditional church Slavonic.

The conflict around the language issue in this parish crystallised the stakes of two opposing visions of Eastern Orthodoxy. On the one hand, recent migrants generally view their religion and religious institutions as providers of a framework that allows them and their children to stay in contact with their original identity. Although usually the literature reduces this identity to its ethnic aspects, our field research also discovered a spiritual dimension. Interviewees report their difficulty with praying in French or German and explain that not all Eastern Orthodox concepts have an exact correspondent in these languages, which are historically marked by Catholicism and Protestantism. This is further supported by the example of a Romanian Orthodox parish in which the Romanian course for children is designed so as to help them understand their Orthodox faith and not so much their Romanian identity.

On the other hand, for converts and third-generation migrants, Eastern Orthodoxy has a universal dimension and vocation, and should thus reach the wider society. In their discourse, Eastern Orthodoxy is a universal faith, whose content should be separated from the "folklore" that characterises it in traditionally Orthodox countries. In some cases, converts' claim for the enculturation of Eastern Orthodoxy is so strong that they appear to create a reversed ethnocentrism, built around the Swiss/French cultural reference.

Fieldwork revealed additional elements relevant for the cultural integration of Eastern Orthodox parishes as religious institutions.

Firstly, as shown above, migration has occasioned reflection about Eastern Orthodoxy's universal vocation and the possibilities of its enculturation in traditionally non-Orthodox countries and cultures. After 1917, Russian emigrants in France struggled to find Orthodox elements in the local culture and implement them in the church's ethos. The first ten centuries of Christianity – the period of the "undivided Church" – are interpreted by the Eastern Orthodox as the time of "the one, catholic and apostolic Church" and thus, naturally, as Orthodox. Theologians draw on this historical period in order to construct a common

heritage of Eastern Orthodox and other Christian denominations in the host country. Eastern Orthodoxy thereby appears as being in continuity with the Christian past of the respective country. This common heritage refers mainly to saints who worked or experienced persecution in these lands.

This is the case in Switzerland too. Local saints like Saint Maurice or Saint Maire are the patrons to whom parishes are dedicated. In the Russian Orthodox parish in Vevey, an icon of “all the saints that flourished in Helvetic lands” was painted. The late Bishop Ambroise, the spiritual guide of this parish, composed a religious service dedicated to the Swiss saints, which is celebrated on a highly symbolic date: the day of the federal lent in the second half of September.

Another relevant example is the Zurich-based Eastern Orthodox initiative of reviving the memory of the city’s patron saints: Saint Felix, Saint Regula and Saint Exuperantius. Local Christian communities are invited to a procession from the site of their martyrdom to the church where inter-Orthodox vespers are celebrated on this occasion, which takes place on 11 September.

Secondly, besides this symbolic and theological dimension, the cultural integration of Eastern Orthodox takes also concrete forms:

- *Cultural activities*: Serbian Orthodox parishes aim at changing the general negative image of their population in Switzerland; their strategy is to be open to the Swiss population, to participate in local events, to invite representatives of different Swiss organisations to their cultural activities, etc. Greek Orthodox parishes in the French-speaking part are involved in a bicultural association: “Amitiés gréco-suisses”.
- *Relations with the neighbourhood*: Eastern Orthodox parishes strive to maintain positive relations with the community that hosts them. Members strive to be discrete and avoid causing a nuisance; Serbian Orthodox parishes restrict bell ringing and organise car parking so as not to create traffic jams in the neighbourhood. For the Easter night procession, Greek parishes write letters to the inhabitants who live near the church to warn them of the potential noise created by bells, cars and the crowd.
- *Visibility of traditional Eastern Orthodox architecture in public spaces*: The Eastern Orthodox churches in Vevey, Geneva (Russian) and Lausanne (Greek) are part of the built heritage of their respective cities and as such are visited by tourists and school children. The recently built Serbian Orthodox church in Belp/BE is also visited by school children in the area, to whom the priest or parish representatives explain Eastern Orthodox architecture, music and faith. This Serbian Orthodox parish also seeks to establish good relations with members of the local community, who are regularly invited to parish activities.

### **5.5.3 Institutional integration**

One of the best examples of interaction between Eastern Orthodox parishes and local institutions is the building of places of worship. We identified eight Eastern Orthodox churches that had been built relatively recently in Switzerland: two Russian ones (Geneva and Vevey), four Greek ones (Chambésy, Lausanne, Zurich and Basel), a Romanian one

(Thônex/GE) and a Serbian one (Belp/BE).<sup>9</sup> Apart from the older buildings in Vevey, Geneva and Lausanne, the rest of the churches were built during the last 40 years. Negotiations were held with local authorities and communities. The latter often opposed the building projects, either for land planning reasons (the initial architectural plans of Byzantine churches in Zurich and Chambésy allegedly did not suit the style of the neighbourhood) or because of other practical reasons (noise and traffic problems). The relevant Eastern Orthodox parishes reacted with adaptations that satisfied the local communities and opened the way for construction to take place.<sup>10</sup>

The case of the Serbian Orthodox church in Belp is relevant in this regard. The construction project initially stirred some opposition from some inhabitants and from the right-wing party UDC/SVB. The Serbian community organised information sessions, Eastern Orthodox vespers and ecumenical celebrations for the people of Belp to which representatives of all local denominations, administrative bodies and political parties were invited. This strategy of dialogue resulted in a general atmosphere of mutual understanding and trust. Another key element that explains the success of this project is the fact that the committee in charge of construction (engineers, architects) and the priest as the parish representative scrupulously followed all legal procedures and respected building norms that regulate the construction of places of worship. The Eastern Orthodox representatives reassured non-Orthodox local churches that no proselytising action was planned and thereby gained their strong support, thus increasing the former's chances of success.

One can conclude from these experiences that, when Eastern Orthodox parishes meet opposition from state/local institutions, they prefer to act cautiously and search for consensus; they do not claim religious minority rights, nor do they resort to a non-discrimination discourse. The Eastern Orthodox approach of non-protest may, however, be perceived as submissive and passive.

The literature (Penninx, 2003; Penninx and Martiniello, 2004) points to the importance of migrants' participation in a host country's institutions as an indicator of their recognition in the host society.

To this effect, we considered the relations Eastern Orthodox parishes have with other local religious institutions. Both Eastern Orthodox and the regional representatives of ecumenical organisations view their collaboration in very positive terms. Eastern Orthodox priests and laymen who take part in such activities describe their relations as "fraternal", "cordial" and "good". Representatives of ecumenical bodies speak about the presence of Eastern Orthodox believers as indispensable for a true Christian atmosphere. "We can learn from their experience with Islam and from their confrontation with atheist regimes", according to an ecumenical body representative in Vaud.

The ethnic diversity of Eastern Orthodox churches does not raise practical problems with respect to their representation in ecumenical associations. However, it causes confusion as to their ecclesiology, which allows for their organisation into local churches differentiated by a national qualifier (Romanian Orthodox Church, Russian Orthodox Church, etc.). This sometimes gives the impression of several Eastern Orthodox denominations that compete with each other.

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<sup>9</sup> Other parishes rent Protestant or Catholic premises or purchase them and transform them according to the Eastern Orthodox way of organising the sacred space.

<sup>10</sup> In this respect, there are similarities with the Muslim community and the minaret ban, which became the event that provides a new perspective and calls for new interpretations of the difficulties of building places of worship in Switzerland. We are aware that the issues are different for Eastern Orthodox parishes.

Parallel to these ecumenical activities, Eastern Orthodox are also involved in theological dialogue with Catholic and the Protestant churches. This type of dialogue leads to agreements related to proselytising, intermarriages and conversions.

Another example of institutional recognition is situated in the academic field: the Institute for Orthodox Theology (postgraduate studies), part of the Orthodox Centre in Chambésy, collaborates with the Faculties of Theology in Fribourg (Catholic) and Geneva (Protestant). Students of Eastern Orthodox theology attend courses in both Fribourg and Geneva so as to become acquainted with other Christian traditions and be able to transfer their knowledge and skills to their respective churches and parishes. The Faculties of Theology in Fribourg and Bern have established a tradition of granting scholarships to postgraduate Eastern Orthodox theologians from Eastern Europe to complete their academic studies. This has had an unexpected impact on the organisation of ethnic parishes in Switzerland: some of the former Romanian and Serbian students were recruited by their bishops to serve as diaspora priests in emerging ethnic parishes in Switzerland. This proved a fruitful integration strategy, as these clergymen had the necessary cultural skills and requisite knowledge of the local religious landscape, the local language, and the pastoral needs of their future flocks.

In the field of health care, we identified an Eastern Orthodox initiative that received the approval of the local authorities: the Eastern Orthodox monastery of the Holy Trinity in Dompierre/VD set up a hospice for severely sick or dying people. This home is connected to the cantonal health-care network of institutional palliative care providers.

## **5.6 Obstacles preventing Eastern Orthodox churches from playing a greater role in migrant integration**

Firstly, the geographical decentralisation of the places of worship in relation to the parishioners' habitat prevents parishes from being the centre of the community. As we have shown in sections 5.2, 5.3.1 and 5.4.2, parishes can assist with integration when they are community centred.

Secondly, Eastern Orthodox churches tend to be too subservient to the institutions of host states and are unwilling to disturb the established order in any way. Although this may be a consequence of their underlying theology, a more assertive attitude could make them more vocal in host state society and thus open the path for collaboration and dialogue with state institutions.

But the most obvious obstacle that prevents Eastern Orthodox parishes from becoming more dynamic actors in terms of integration is the lack of any kind of common representation in their dealings with local society and the state. Although we used the word "community" all through our research period to describe the Eastern Orthodox presence in Switzerland, the picture is not as unified as the idea of "community" may imply; it would be more accurate to talk of a co-habitation of parishes sharing the same faith and the same dogmatic content, but organised mainly according to linguistic and ethnic criteria. Also, these parishes are under the jurisdiction of their respective mother churches, who have achieved increasing control over their "diasporas" since the fall of communism and the restoration of religious freedom in their home countries. As Eastern Orthodox churches were the only institutions that took care of national diasporas, soon the respective states realised that they could reach these diasporas via the church.

Yet the influence of mother churches is vital to the early stages of parish establishment, as they are the depositories of the various churches' traditions and rituals.

But if this strong umbilical cord does not loosen in the long term, parishes risk orientating themselves around the ethnic reference and thus failing to unite their energies in a common effort.

The following example will illustrate this point: there was a local attempt at building inter-Orthodox small-scale unity in the canton of Vaud. Eastern Orthodox clergy tested the possibility of creating a supra-ecclesiastical body that would gather together under one umbrella organisation all Eastern Orthodox parishes in the canton with the aim of making common representation to local state bodies. Their primary aim was to obtain the legal status of public interest institutions for Eastern Orthodox churches. Parishes failed to provide the necessary ecclesiastical solution to the intricate process of achieving coordination among their bishops and a legal solution that would make the statute of the representative body conform with each parish's already existing legal and ecclesiastical statutes. Consequently, the project was suspended.

Eastern Orthodox internal pluralism in terms of ethnicity, language, and ecclesiastical dependence on bishops located in different countries and following different agendas represents the main challenge to a unified Orthodox representation in dealings with state institutions. In addition, this internal complexity has to accommodate itself to the specificities of the host country context, i.e. Switzerland's own religious and linguistic diversity, and the plurality of cantonal legal policy regarding religious issues.

## **5.7 Overcoming these limitations**

### **5.7.1 Ecclesiastical solutions**

In March 2010 the Assemblée des évêques orthodoxes en Suisse was founded, reuniting bishops of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, the Moscow Patriarchate, the Serbian Orthodox Church, the Romanian Orthodox Church and the Antiochian Patriarchate. The aim of this newly created organisation is to coordinate pastoral care, with a long-term vision of achieving inter-Orthodox unity. Given the short period since its creation, this Conference of the Orthodox Bishops in Switzerland has not produced any visible concrete advances.

### **5.7.2 Lay solutions**

The most concrete Eastern Orthodox unification project emanates from lay people in Zurich, who created the Arbeitsgemeinschaft Orthodoxer Kirchen in der Schweiz (AGOK).<sup>11</sup> This association strives to “express in one voice the interests of all Orthodox religious communities”, “organize their common representation in front of local authorities, political and religious institutions” and “act in order to reach a common Orthodox position on topical religious issues”.<sup>12</sup> AGOK also aims at achieving legal and social recognition of Eastern Orthodox Christians in Switzerland and gaining financial support.

AGOK's main accomplishments are the following: the creation of small bilingual publication in French and German entitled *SuisseOrthodoxeSchweiz*. This provides information about parish life in Switzerland and ecclesiastical news about Eastern Orthodox activities worldwide; it has established a website that offers a venue for communication, exchange and sharing; and it has identified key actors who can be mobilised to carry out the

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<sup>11</sup> Orthodox Churches in Switzerland Working Group.

<sup>12</sup> Quotes are from AGOK's statutes, available online at <http://www.agok.ch/about/pdf/Statuten%20AGOK.pdf>.

main objectives of the organisation. Yet this association lacks the necessary economic base and human resources to make a greater impact.

## **6. Recommendations for further academic research**

For a better understanding of the establishment and evolution of the Eastern Orthodox communities in Switzerland, further investigation of second-generation Eastern Orthodox believers, mainly youth, is needed in terms of such issues as their relation to their homeland, the Orthodox values they receive in their education, how they integrate these values into everyday life, what elements of their religious identities they preserve and make use of in a religiously pluralistic society, etc.

Also, further research is needed in order to understand how Eastern Orthodox communities evolve in a climate of secularisation. How do these religious institutions, who have inherited a long historical collaboration between the state and the church, accommodate this heritage to the requirements of a secular state?

By the same token, we believe it is necessary to understand how Eastern Orthodox churches balance their dual dependence on ecclesiastical and civil law, as these legal systems are regulated by different statutes, ruling orders and sources of authority.



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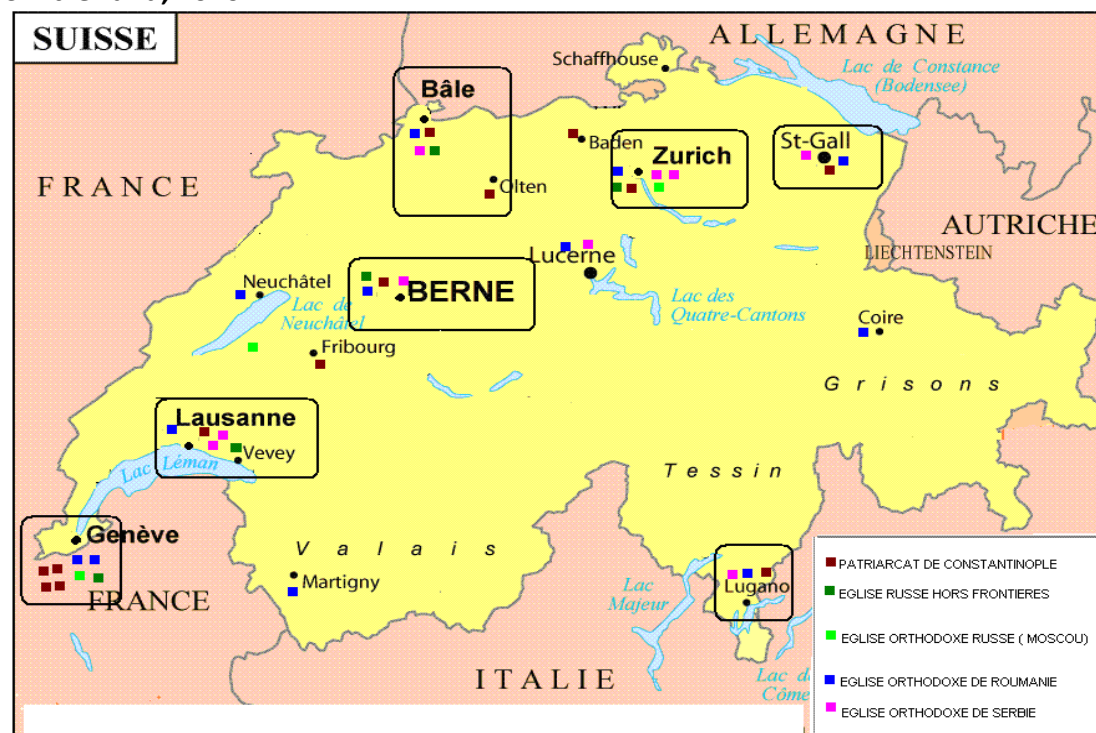
## Appendix: Figures and tables

Table 1. Eastern Orthodox population in Switzerland by country of origin, 2000

Country	2000
Switzerland	28,935
Greece	5,279
Former Yugoslavia:	
• Serbia	58,984
• Croatia	1,207
• Slovenia	102
• Bosnia-Herzegovina	15,657
• Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia	6,865
Romania	1,615
Former Soviet Union:	
• Moldavia	96
• Russian Federation	3,207
• Ukraine	1,061
• Belarus	133

Source: OFS, Recensement fédéral de la population, 2000

Figure 1. Geographical distribution of Eastern Orthodox population and parishes in Switzerland, 2010



**Table 2. Eastern Orthodox parishes in Switzerland by church membership and ethnic composition, 2010**

Mother church	Parishes	Number
Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople	Greek	9
	Romanian	2
	Francophone	2
Moscow Patriarchate	Russian	2
	Francophone	1
ROCOR	Russian	4
	Francophone	1
Romanian Orthodox Church	Romanian	10
	Francophone	2
Serbian Orthodox Church	Serbian	8
	Francophone	1

**Table 3. Eastern Orthodox population of Swiss cantons by academic qualification, 2000**

	Vaud	Valais	Genève	St. Gallen	Basel-Stadt	Basel-Landschaft	Luzern	Aargau	Zürich	Bern
<b>Total</b>	<b>10,560</b>	<b>3,092</b>	<b>7,166</b>	<b>12,709</b>	<b>4,783</b>	<b>3,336</b>	<b>7,801</b>	<b>11,523</b>	<b>29,592</b>	<b>9,153</b>
Aucune formation achevée	570	212	167	1,285	300	226	631	1,013	2,282	570
Scolarité obligatoire	2,447	962	941	3,436	1,314	832	2,159	2,894	7,526	2,291
Ecole de culture générale ou préparant à une formation	200	86	122	416	193	116	306	347	953	296
Apprentissage, école professionnelle à plein temps	1,176	391	448	1,993	645	548	1,126	1,922	4,891	1,266
Maturité	782	164	709	752	429	306	544	825	2,310	790
Ecole normale	216	57	150	65	42	15	37	69	202	82
Formation professionnelle supérieure	307	66	202	199	153	116	150	295	823	263
Ecole professionnelle supérieure	181	33	189	69	47	38	58	116	260	102
Haute école spécialisée	164	25	209	50	34	18	37	51	200	78
Université, haute école	1,437	171	2,293	288	292	218	200	471	1,667	662

Source: OFS, Recensement fédéral de la population, 2000