

# Life on the edge

Unlike ghettos, enclaves are concentrations of ethnic minorities living together out of choice rather than necessity. Over the next few pages we investigate three such cases and discover how successful they have been in retaining their cultural and religious identities in foreign lands. Here, Tatyana Saiko and Gunilla Linder follow the mixed fortunes of Swedes who migrated to the Ukraine over two centuries ago



The length of time an enclave has existed offers no guarantees to its future, as is evident in Gammalsvenskby, a small village in southern Ukraine populated by Swedes since the late 18th century. Over the last year, 35 young inhabitants left the village for good, bound for Sweden. This outmigration seems likely to continue, and probably increase, given that young people in the village now know much more about life in their country of origin.

The Swedish language has always been the central element of this enclave's cultural identity. By 1782, the church had established a Swedish school initially by a young teacher from Dagoë, and later by his son. Swedish scientist, Wilhelm Lagus who visited the village in 1852, wrote that the people of Gammalsvenskby spoke an old Swedish dialect together with German and Russian and would not marry people from other national groups. He noted that they were diligent, and that they had a very old-fashioned society with strict morals. The commune led a closed life and for almost 60 years they were completely isolated from their remote motherland Sweden.

This isolation probably helped preserve their

ancient Swedish traditions. They continued to celebrate feasts, rituals of baptism, marriage and burial. Old legends, fairy tales and songs were learnt and carefully handed down to new generations. Some still exist today.

Surprisingly, the biggest threat to maintaining the enclave's distinctiveness came not from Ukrainians, or even Russians, but from another enclave. German settlers came to the area from Danzig and settled in 1804. They were given some Swedish lands by Russian authorities, which resulted in land disputes as the Swedish population increased. By 1806 there were four villages, Gammalsvenskby was the largest with over a quarter of the region's 700 population. The other three were inhabited by German Lutherans and Catholics.

In 1860 a new German pastor came to the district and employed a German teacher. That began a language battle between the two communities; because the Swedish teacher had been dismissed the Swedes refused to send their children to school. A year later the Swedish teacher was re-employed.

However, despite ethnic tensions, the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th century were



**Left: schoolchildren from Zmeyovka. Above: many Swedes with German relatives attend German and Swedish religious services**