

The image shows the interior of a grand, ornate synagogue. The architecture features high ceilings with intricate carvings, a large chandelier hanging from the center, and two levels of galleries with decorative railings. The main floor is filled with rows of wooden pews, and a speaker stands at a podium on a raised platform at the front. The lighting is warm and focused on the central area.

# **JEWISH BUILT HERITAGE WHAT TO DO? HOW TO DO IT?**

**Managing Jewish Immovable Heritage**  
**A report on a working seminar in Krakow, Poland, April 23-25, 2013**

**The seminar was convened by**

The Rothschild Foundation (Hanadiv) Europe; The David Berg Foundation;  
The Cahnman Foundation, The American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee;  
The World Monuments Fund; and The Taube Foundation

**in cooperation with**

The Foundation for the Preservation of Jewish Heritage in Poland;  
The Galicia Jewish Museum in Krakow;  
The European Council of Jewish Communities; and The Jewish Community Centre in Krakow,  
which was the on-site partner in organizing the conference.

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**Conference participants came from:**

Belarus, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary,  
Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Macedonia, Moldova, The Netherlands, Poland, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia,  
Slovenia, Spain, Turkey, the United Kingdom, Ukraine, Israel and the United States.

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Further information, including full videos of conference sessions,  
can be found at the Jewish Heritage Europe web site: **[www.jewish-heritage-europe.eu](http://www.jewish-heritage-europe.eu)**  
– an expanding interactive web resource on Jewish built heritage in 48 European countries.

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Text: Ruth Ellen Gruber  
Cover: Opening session of the conference in the Tempel Synagogue. Photo © JCC  
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Design: Alicja Beryt

# CHALLENGES AND STRATEGIC THINKING

**What can – and should – be done with the thousands of historic Jewish properties across Europe – and who should do it?** What role can new technologies play in documenting these places and making them accessible? Where to turn for funding? For expert advice? Must each former synagogue be saved? Can a former prayer house be used as a nightclub? Can an abandoned Jewish cemetery be sold? What role can tourism play? What place do Jewish heritage sites occupy in today's Europe? Does the Holocaust impose particular obligations on non-Jews to consider, learn and even care for Jewish culture? Can sites of Jewish heritage help shape modern Jewish identity? How best can diverse interests network, exchange information and cooperate?

These were just some of the questions confronted at **Managing Jewish Immovable Heritage**, an international working seminar held in Krakow, Poland April 23-25, 2013, that brought together some 100 invited participants from more than two dozen countries: they were experts in the field as well as representatives of Jewish communities, NGOs, and civic bodies; grassroots activists, researchers, government officials, funders and interested citizens. The aim was to pool experience, analyze successful strategies and encourage strategic thinking about Jewish heritage and heritage sites on the local, national and international levels.

## **The need is great – and growing.**

There are hundreds of historic synagogue buildings and thousands of Jewish cemeteries in eastern and central Europe alone, in addition to scores of other communal buildings such as mikvaot and Jewish schools. Many synagogues in the region are huge, and many are ruined or in very poor repair. A number are listed as historic landmarks, but only a



*Visiting the restored synagogue in Dąbrowa Tarnowska.*

The only way to “save” cemeteries is with a photo camera. That is what we do: we systematically capture all the gravestones, trying to highlight each letter so that it can be read; we translate them and post on the Internet.

– Rūta Anulytė, Maceva project, Lithuania

few are still used for worship. Many Jewish cemeteries are abandoned, long-neglected, overgrown or have even been built over. Most Jewish heritage sites remain in towns where few if any Jews now live. Basic care and maintenance are hampered by limited financial and professional resources.

**The challenges are particularly acute in this part of the continent**, where the slow and often painful legal battles to gain restitution of Jewish property seized by the Nazis or nationalized by post-war communist regimes have overshadowed the pressing practical problems of just what to do with such sites when returned.

But they also remain **fundamental concerns** in other countries, particularly in towns, cities and neighborhoods with small or dwindling Jewish communities.

How to preserve, document, manage and promote these sites are **strategic challenges** faced by Jewish communities, civic bodies, NGOs, state and local governments, grassroots activists and other interested parties throughout Europe.

Material Jewish heritage is the kind that can't be put in one's pocket and taken from Europe to Israel or the New World.

– Hagay HaCohen; Hebrew Service, Polish Radio



*Ruined synagogue, Działoszyce*

# KRAKOW – A SYMBOLIC AND STRATEGIC VENUE

**Kazimierz, Krakow's old Jewish quarter, formed an especially significant venue for the conference.** The district comprises the most important surviving complex of Jewish historic sites in Europe – synagogues, prayer rooms, Jewish cemeteries, marketplaces, homes and other urban infrastructure. Since the fall of communism it has become a laboratory of recognition, restoration and sometimes controversial exploitation of Jewish heritage, evolving from a dilapidated slum and archetypical Jewish graveyard to one of the leading Jewish tourist attractions on the continent. At the same time, recent years have seen a revival of Jewish communal life and individual involvement among its small Jewish population, as well as the development of a number of Jewish educational and cultural institutions.

Conference sessions were held in two side-by-side buildings that epitomize the changes: the ornate, **19th century Tempel synagogue**, where plenary sessions were held, and the **modern Jewish Community Centre**, opened in 2008, which hosted the workshops, display area and meals, and whose staff and youthful volunteers worked long hours to provide technical assistance and facilitate the conference agenda and activities.

The Tempel, originally built in 1862, served as a **symbolic venue** for several reasons. Its restoration in the 1990s was one of the first major restorations of a synagogue in post-communist Europe; the lofty sanctuary, with its elaborate wall and ceiling paintings and imposing Aron ha Kodesh, provided a fitting setting for the formal **opening ceremony and other plenaries**. Moreover, the World Monuments Fund, one of the conference sponsors, played a key role in the restoration project, in collaboration with the Municipality of Krakow, the



*In the Remuh Synagogue, Krakow*



*Dr. Samuel D. Gruber*



*Meylakh Sheykhet, Lviv*



*Josef Zissels, Ukraine and Sergey R. Kravtsov, Center for Jewish Art*



*Dr. Karen Underhill leads tour of Jewish Krakow*

Jewish Community of Krakow, and the Citizens' Committee for the Renovation of Krakow's Monuments.

In his **keynote address**, Dr. Samuel D. Gruber, who as the founding director of the World Monuments Fund's Jewish Heritage Council was closely involved in the Tempel restoration, recalled standing in the synagogue in 1992, at a concert that kicked off the restoration program for the building. At that time, he said, the Tempel sanctuary was "dark and dirty, still blackened from the ammonia in horse urine from when the Nazis used it as a stable."

Are we merely tourists when we visit our ancestral towns and villages? Or do we as Jewish genealogists bear unique responsibilities not only to our ancestral towns and their current communities [...] but also to the perpetuation of Jewish memory? If we decide to get involved [...] what are the implications and responsibilities we assume by our involvement? Where and to whom can we turn for expert advice, resources, assistance, funds, and professional guidance?

– Marla Raucher Osborn, Gesher Galicia

Today, he said, **things are so different** that "it may be hard for a new generation to realize the extent of change. They can look at restored buildings, renewed urban centers and reinvented governments and economies and only imagine a time, just a few decades ago, when discussion of Jewish history, culture, and the fate of Jews in the Shoah was clandestine, and buildings like this one were locked and mostly forgotten."

# FOUR BROAD THEMES

The Krakow conference was a direct follow-up to a seminar on Jewish heritage management that took place in Bratislava, Slovakia, in March 2009 and issued an important document, **the Bratislava Statement**, which summarizes Jewish heritage preservation priorities and includes best practices recommendations. (See [www.jewish-heritage-europe.eu/bratislava-declaration](http://www.jewish-heritage-europe.eu/bratislava-declaration).)

## The conference focused on four main themes highlighted in the Statement:

■ **Sharing experience/strategic thinking:** Each situation is specific, but there are many shared problems and needs that can be addressed collectively; it is important to stress that there are also solutions that can be shared.

■ **Making information available/using new digital technologies:** Information on Jewish sites is most useful when it is most widely available. Thus, efforts should continue and expand to make documentation available in publicly accessible research centers and through publications and on-line presentation, all the while considering safety, security and privacy concerns. Technology is changing techniques, and new technology – ranging from smartphone apps to digital documentation to enhanced scanning – needs to be addressed as part of research, documentation and promotion of Jewish heritage.

■ **Networking and collaboration:** Jewish communities and institutions should work together as much as possible to share information, methodologies and technologies and to develop new and compatible goals and strategies to optimize the care and management of historic Jewish properties. They should also, however, seek partners among NGOs, local, civic and government bodies, and individuals outside the Jewish community. And vice versa.

■ **End-user development:** Jewish communities and local heritage, cultural and tourist bodies (as well as NGOs, civic bodies, individuals and others) should work together to develop regional, national and trans-border heritage routes as well as local projects to both attract visitors and promote Jewish heritage sites as educational and civic resources.



*Maciek Zabierowski, Auschwitz Jewish Center*

Synagogues and former synagogues should retain a Jewish identity and or use whenever possible, though each one does not necessarily need to be restored or fully renovated.

– The Bratislava Statement

# CONFERENCE HIGHLIGHTS



*Inside a former Beit Midrash, Krakow*



*Gita Umanovska, Latvia*



*Visiting the preserved ruin of Działoszyce synagogue*

**Participants got a first-hand taste of Jewish heritage preservation issues in Poland** with a plenary session round-table on Polish Jewish heritage, a guided walking tour of Jewish heritage in Krakow and visits to two very different Jewish heritage solutions near Krakow. These were the synagogue at Dąbrowa Tarnowska, which was recently restored as a town museum, and the synagogue in Działoszyce, which has been preserved as a ruin. In both towns they met with municipal officials and others involved in the projects.

Some conference participants also took advantage of an optional **pre-conference tour of Jewish Warsaw**, which included a visit to the new Museum of the History of Polish Jews, and a **study tour of the derelict 18th century synagogue in Przysucha**, between Warsaw and Krakow, whose restoration is a current major project of the Foundation for the Preservation of Jewish Heritage in Poland (FODŻ).

In addition to the keynote address by Samuel D. Gruber, a pioneer in Jewish heritage preservation, **the opening session** included remarks by Tadeusz Jakubowicz, president of the Jewish Religious Community of Krakow; Jonathan Ornstein, Executive Director of the Krakow Jewish Community Centre; Lesley Weiss, the Chair of the U.S. Commission for the Preservation of America's Heritage Abroad; and Sarah Sher, the Program Associate for Jewish Heritage of the World Monuments Fund.

Honesty and transparency are Jewish values and should be especially apparent in the handling of all matters concerning Jewish property, which is held as a communal trust.

– The Bratislava Statement



## Plenary sessions focused on

■ **Managing Jewish Heritage in Poland** (a panel chaired by Dr. Gruber, with FODŽ CEO Monika Krawczyk; Piotr Kadlčik, President of the Union of Jewish Communities; Eleonora Bergman, former director of the Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw; Albert Stankowski, founder of the Virtual Shtetl portal, a project of the Museum of the History of Polish Jews; and Karolina and Piotr Jakowenko, grassroots activists who established the Brama Cukerman Foundation in Będzin)

■ **Going Forward:** strategizing, information exchange; implementing best practices (a panel chaired by Ruth Ellen Gruber, coordinator of the [www.jewish-heritage-europe.eu](http://www.jewish-heritage-europe.eu) web site, with Sergey Kravtsov and Ivan Ceresnjes, of the Center for Jewish Art, Hebrew University, Jerusalem; Jaroslav Klenovsky, of the Jewish Community in Brno, Czech Republic; and Meilach Binder, program director of Lo-Tishkach cemetery documentation project.)



*Jasna Čirić, of Serbia, in Krakow's Old Jewish Cemetery*

Jewish heritage is the legacy of all aspects of Jewish history – religious and secular. Jewish history and art is part of every nation's history and art. Jewish heritage is part of national heritage, too. Documentation, planning and development of sites benefit and enrich society at large as well as Jews and Jewish communities. Jewish historic sites and properties should also be developed where possible within the context of diverse histories – Jewish, local, national, art, etc. Jewish tourism and tourism to Jewish sites should be part of every country's tourism strategy.

– The Bratislava Statement

## Thematic workshops focused on

■ **The documentation and restoration of buildings and Jewish cemeteries:** methods, models, challenges, possibilities, with a focus on both individual projects and national and regional strategies.

■ **New technologies and methods** in researching, documenting, preserving and protecting Jewish historical sites, including digitalization, smartphone apps, databases, satellite-mapping, computer-aided scanning and more

■ **The role of physical Jewish heritage** both in Jewish communal development and for general society: as educational tools, for tourists, for identity-building, for broadening cultural and historical awareness; as sources of income.

In addition to plenary sessions and theme-based workshops, there was a display room for pamphlets, posters, brochures, books and video presentations. Informal meetings took place in the JCC garden and at meals, including an opening reception and dinner at Krakow's Galicia Jewish Museum.

All workshops and public plenaries were recorded, with the full video of all sessions posted online on the Jewish Heritage Europe web site: [www.jewish-heritage-europe.eu](http://www.jewish-heritage-europe.eu). JHE is an expanding interactive web resource on Jewish built heritage in 48 European countries. Visit the web site for information, articles, links and more – and **subscribe to the JHE news feed** for frequent updates on Jewish heritage projects and issues. You can also follow JHE on Facebook and Twitter.



Ana Lebl, of Split, Croatia, photographs the exhibit in the Dąbrowa Tarnowska synagogue



Sometimes it seems the more that is accomplished, the more there is to do. The achievement of what once seemed impossible – the restoration of enormous synagogues, the repair of hundreds of cemeteries, the creation of new museums — just raises the bar for what can still be achieved. [...] The best success has come in two ways: through the creation of organizational structures and long range planning (and that includes training the next generation of leaders), and through the persistent step-by-step interventions – one cemetery and synagogue at a time. Both approaches are needed. Good planning and hard work.

– Dr. Samuel D. Gruber, Keynote Address



*Visiting the ruined synagogue at Przysucha*



*Ruined wall painting of Jerusalem in a former Krakow Beit Midrash*