(Non)Synagogues in Slovakia

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(NON-)SYNAGOGUES IN SLOVAKIA[1]

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Abstract

This paper uses archival and ethnological research to analyze the fates of former synagogues during two totalitarian regimes in present-day Slovakia. The processes described here were catalyzed by the Holocaust. Between 1938 and 1945, over 100,000 Jews from Slovakia were murdered. Out of the 228 Jewish religious communities (JRCs) active before the war, only 79 were reconstituted after liberation. Most were later disbanded because of *aliyah* to Palestine/Israel. Their abandoned synagogues passed into the administration of the newly founded Central Union of Jewish Religious Communities (CUJRC). During the Communist era (1948-1989), the majority of these synagogues were sold because the CUJRC did not have sufficient resources for their maintenance.

The second section of this paper discusses synagogues in different parts of Slovakia to show how representatives of the CUJRC tried to ensure the temples' new owners did not violate their religious dignity. Purchase and sale agreements generally prohibited using the synagogues for entertainment purposes, instead preferring their conversion into warehouses, silos, workshops, etc. Although, as soon as the 1940s, part of the community requested that the synagogues be used as cultural centers, this did not happen on a large scale until after the revolution of 1989. A synagogue is not defined by its four walls but rather by the activities that take place inside it. The repurposed buildings are frequently located in regions with no active Jewish organizations. They are mere relics of the past and, bar a few exceptions, do not contribute to the renewal of traditional Jewish life. Believers nevertheless tend to have a negative view of the events that are held in the former synagogues, with some going as far as to consider them disrespectful. Even many secular Jews feel that the former synagogues do not fulfil their original purpose and have definitively transformed into non-synagogues.

Keywords: Holocaust; Communist regime; transformation of former synagogues; religious and cultural purposes; (non-)synagogues

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A synagogue (Heb. *bet ha-knesset*, "house of assembly") is a place primarily intended for believers who gather there to perform religious worship. After World War II, synagogues in the totalitarian regimes of Central Europe frequently lost their original function and were instead used for nonreligious purposes. In this paper, I discuss the secularization of synagogues in Slovakia after 1945.[2] I mostly base my analysis on archival materials from the Central Union of Jewish Religious Communities (CUJRC) dealing with Jewish religious communities disbanded between 1945 and 1965.

The Recent History of the Community

To provide some background, I will start with an overview of key historical and demographic facts. In interwar, democratic Czechoslovakia, 136,767 Slovak citizens identified as members of the Jewish faith.[3] Religious Jews were organized in 228 Jewish religious communities. The wartime Slovak State's (1939-1945) persecution of Jews culminated with two waves of deportations (1942; 1944-1945). Further victims lived in territories ceded to Hungary as part of the Vienna Award (November 2, 1938).[4] Between 1942 and 1945, over 100,000 Jews from Slovakia were murdered. After returning to liberated Bratislava, Romi Cohn noted that "all the places where Jews used to live were now deserted."[5] This would have been equally true in other towns and cities across the country.

The Holocaust changed the demographic structure of the community, as well as the values of some of the survivors. After liberation, only 79 out of the 228[6] JRCs active before the war were reconstituted, and most of them were disbanded soon thereafter. The Holocaust had driven a lot of people to emigrate. Between 1946 and 1953, nearly 11,000 Jews from Slovakia,[7] representing around one-third of the survivors, made *aliyah* (immigration to

[2] I have discussed some aspects of this issue in Peter Salner, *Židia na Slovensku po roku 1945. Komunita medzi vierou a realitou* (Bratislava: Veda 2016) and Peter Salner, Vývoj riešení opustených synagóg a cintorínov. In *Židovské stavebné dedičstvo na území Bratislavskej župy. Zborník príspevkov z konferencie Bratislavského samosprávneho kraja organizovanej pri príležitosti Dní európskeho kultúrneho dedičstva 2021* (Bratislava: BSK 2022), pp. 10–23.

[3] Sčítání lidu v republice československé ze dne 1. prosince 1930. Díl I (Praha: Státní úřad statistický, 1934), p. 23.

[4] Throughout the two waves, around 70,000 Jews were murdered. A further 40,000 victims died in the so-called Vienna Award territories. Between 20,000 and 30,000 Jews from Slovakia survived the war, with most historians leaning towards the more conservative estimate. For more, see Peter Salner, *Židia na Slovensku po roku 1945, Komunita medzi vierou a realitou* (Bratislava: Veda, 2016), pp. 37–74.

[5] Romi Cohn, Leonard Ciaccio, *Prežil, aby odriekal kadiš* (Bratislava: Marenčin PT, 2017), pp. 191–192.

[6] Yeshayahu Andrej Jelínek, Zachráň sa, kto môžeš. Židia na Slovensku v rokoch 1944–1950. In *Acta Judaica Slovaca,* 4, 1998, p. 101.

[7] Ivica Bumová, Povojnové pomery komunity a emigrácia Židov do Palestíny/Izraela v rokoch 1945–1953. In Monika Vrgulová, Peter Salner (Eds.), *Reflexie holokaustu* (Bratislava, Zing Print, 2010), pp.16–35); Chana Jablonková, Izrael a Židia zo Slovenska In *Acta Judaica Slovaca*, 4, 1998, pp. 163–185.

Palestine/Israel). In February 1948, the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia seized power in the country, remaining dominant until November 1989. In 1950, after the Holocaust, the Communists' ascent to power, and the first wave of *aliyah* only 7,476 Jews remained in Slovakia. Attempts at political liberalization in the 1960s (known as the Prague Spring) were violently quashed by the Warsaw Pact armies' invasion of Czechoslovakia on August 21, 1968. In response, 4,500 Jews–around 50% of the community–fled the country.[8]

Today, in many localities across Slovakia, the only remaining mementos of Jewish life are abandoned synagogues and dilapidated cemeteries. According to the most recent nationwide census, held in 2021, 2,007 people living in Slovakia belong to the Jewish faith.[9] This represents 1.47% of the overall number of Jews in 1930, and 26.85% of the overall number in 1950. At present, 12 Jewish religious communities operate in 12 towns or cities. From this, we can conclude that the secularization of synagogues, and of the community more broadly, was caused by the Holocaust and the atheistic Communist regime.

Synagogues

The fates of synagogues illustrate the wider situation of Jews in Slovakia between 1938 and 1989. In localities with no active Jewish religious communities, former synagogues, assuming they still stand,[10] are merely a symbolic reminder of the past. Some currently house restaurants, cafés, cinemas, galleries, concert halls, or recreational centers. Others have been converted into warehouses, workshops, apartments, gyms, bouldering centers, nightclubs, bars, shops, or temples of various Christian denominations.[11] The state of affairs is summarized by the following request whereby the Evangelical Parish Office in Zemianske Podhradie asked to buy a former synagogue:

> The building is located in the center of the village. The interiors are destroyed; all of the furnishings have been taken out, all the windows smashed; the roof is damaged. Because the Evangelical Church in Bošáca does not have its own temple, and because no members of the Bošáca Jewish religious community have returned nor, as we were dismayed to find out, are likely to return, the chances of renewing an independent Jewish religious community in Bošáca are null."[12]

[8] Yeshayahu Andrej Jelínek, *Dávidova hviezda pod Tatrami, Židia na Slovensku v 20. storočí* (Vydavateľstvo Jána Mlynárika: Praha, 2009), p. 421.
[9] See https://www.culture.gov.sk/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/veriaci2021.pdf.
[10] During the two totalitarian regimes (1938-1989), many synagogues were demolished, while others succumbed to the passage of time.
[11] Photographer Ľubo Stacho, who has long documented the phenomenon of (non-)synagogues in Slovakia, has presented several specific case studies in the projects Two Houses of One Lord (2008–2010) and Sacral Stories (2022, in collaboration with his wife, Monika)
[12] CUJRC archive, box 20, 9. 11. 1945. An unknown author hand-wrote the CUJRC's approval on the letter.

Even though, after 1989, some synagogues were renovated thanks to the sacrifice of volunteers and the amenability of the authorities, nothing could reverse their regrettable demise. The Slovak majority appreciates the repurposed temples' esthetic qualities and the fact that they are currently used to host social and cultural events. Because Jews no longer live in the localities, the visitors of these events frequently do not realize that they are being held in a place that was originally intended for divine worship and communal prayer. Many religious Jews take a negative stance on these (non-)synagogues and their present use.

The Relatively Recent Past

The origins of the current, regrettable state of (non-)synagogues in Slovakia lie in World War II. The virulently antisemitic posture of the governing (nominally Christian) regime enabled the desecration of Jewish religious sites. In 1942, the Orthodox synagogue in the town of Zlaté Moravce was plundered. "Members of the Hlinka Guard threw books, furniture, and ritual objects out on the street. They held on to the more valuable things; local residents pilfered the rest. In the end, they made a pyre of the discarded items and set them on fire."[13] A year later, the synagogue in the village of Chtelnica was declared property of the state, based on one of the sections of Decree 198/1941 on the Legal Status of the Jews (also known as the Jewish Code).[14] In 1949, the Jewish religious community in Zlaté Moravce confirmed that "the synagogue in Kňažice nad Žitavou has been largely destroyed; it is unsuitable for renovation; it is not being used as a prayer hall; between 1938 and 1940, it served as a barn and a timber storage."[15]

The regrettable fate of these buildings was exacerbated by the events of the war. In the town of Strážske, "the synagogue was completely destroyed by the German army, which had its kitchens and kept its horses and cattle inside, and later by evacuees, Soviet soldiers, etc."[16] German soldiers also burned down the synagogue in the municipality of Lúky pod Makytou. After liberation, the remains of the temple walls presented a hazard to local inhabitants, and the CUJRC was approached to address the problem: "The police at Lúky have pressed us to arrange the demolition of the synagogue, arguing that we ourselves were at risk if the walls collapsed. I don't know what to do."[17] A different challenge emerged in the village of

[13] *Encyklopédia Židovských náboženských obcí*, 4. Vol. U–Ž (Bratislava : SNM – Múzeum židovskej kultúry. Edícia Judaica Slovaca, 2014), p. 136.
[14] CUJRC archive, box 6, Chtelnica 14. 10. 1943
[15] CUJRC archive, box 1, Zlaté Moravce, 29. 4. 1949
[16] CUJRC archive, box 7, Strážske, 2. 9. 1970
[17] CUJRC archive, box 9, Lúky pod Makytou, 29. 5. 1946

Falkušovce in eastern Slovakia: "The temple must be sold off. The villagers are presently taking it apart because it is located in an isolated place, and we fear that they will take it apart completely."[18]

The destruction of the community and its property continued during the Communist era. Further Jewish religious communities were disbanded, and their cemeteries and synagogues were abandoned. In theory, these sites passed into the ownership of the newly founded CUJRC in 1945. According to Regulation 231/1945 on the Conditions of Jewish Faith Members,[19] the CUJRC was supposed to be the legal successor to the two prewar central Jewish organizations.[20] Among other things, the CUJRC was charged with monitoring the demographic situation of the community and sorting religious communities into active and disbanded ones. If a JRC was disbanded, the CUJRC took over its property. The continued existence of JRCs was conditioned on their holding regular worship. This entailed the need for a sufficient number of community members to convene a *minyan* (at least ten adult Jewish men). These criteria spelled doom for many JRCs across the country, which did not have enough remaining members interested in religious life, whether because of the Holocaust, emigration, or a change of values.[21] The CUJRC was also tasked with administering the property of disbanded communities, which included caring for synagogues and cemeteries. For the most part, it did not have the financial and personnel resources required to fulfil this task.

CUJRC Archive

The CUJRC archive contains the documents of JRCs that were officially disbanded between 1945 and 1965. Among other things, these documents reflect conflicts between the CUJRC and the individual JRCs that had to be disbanded according to the aforementioned religious criteria, even though their members wanted them to remain active. One such conflict involved the disbanded JRC in the town of Modrý Kameň, which wanted to sell its synagogue in the nearby municipality of Sklabiňa. The CUJRC denied the request: "We cannot approve the sale of this building as you are not authorized to dispose of community property, either in

[18] CUJRC archive, box 3, Michalovce, 18. 6. 1947. Similar activities were undertaken by the residents of other localities.
[19] 231 Vyhláška Predsedníctva Slovenskej národnej rady zo dňa 10. septembra 1945, ktorou sa uverejňuje uznesenie Zboru povereníkov Slovenskej národnej rady o úprave pomerov židovskej konfesie na Slovensku. In: *Úradný vestník*, 1945(23), September 29, 1945, pp. 515–516.
[20] Yeshayahu Andrej Jelínek: Dávidova hviezda pod Tatrami. Židia na Slovensku v 20. storočí. (Praha: Vydavateľstvo Jána Mlynárika, 2009), p. 154.
[21] Due to their recent tragic experience, part of the survivors were unwilling actively to participate in religious life. For more, see Peter Salner, *Judaizmus v tradícii a súčasnosti.* Premeny židovskej komunity v 19.–21. storočí. Etnologický pohľad. (Bratislava: Vydavateľstvo Veda, 2019).

Sklabiňa or in Modrý Kameň."[22] The officially disbanded JRC, however, did not give up. "Per Regulation 231/1945, you [the CUJRC] are the legal successor of disbanded Jewish religious communities. As our Jewish religious community has not been disbanded–and we hope that it will remain active in the future–the aforementioned directive does not apply. Please kindly take this communication into consideration."[23] The community based its case on the prewar statutory independence of individual JRCs, which Regulation 231/1945 had rendered null. To this day, the CUJRC is the only community organization to enjoy full legal subjectivity. The current charter states that, per Regulation 231/1945, the CUJRC is "the legal successor to disbanded JRCs and Jewish associations in the Slovak Republic." According to Article 2(2) of the charter, "the legal subjectivity of individual JRCs is derived from the legal subjectivity of the CUJRC." Individual JRCs can therefore dispose of their property only with the CUJRC's explicit assent.[24] The contemporary tensions are also evident from the story of the Šaštín JRC in western Slovakia. In the fall of 1946, the CUJRC put the local synagogue up for sale. The local community protested: "As we [the Jewish religious community in Šaštín and surroundings] have over 20 members, we are entitled to manage our own affairs. We were therefore surprised to learn that you had decided to sell our buildings without consulting us – particularly the church, which should not and must not be sold. We do not consent, and we protest your further interference in the matter."[25] The Šaštín JRC was disbanded shortly thereafter due to aliyah, and the CUJRC, faced with a dearth of financial resources, was unable to maintain the abandoned temple. One of the reasons for the sale of the synagogue could have been the CUJRC's fear of negative majority reactions to its decrepit condition. The CUJRC, as "the legal successor to all disbanded Jewish religious communities, is charged with liquidating all properties that no longer serve the purpose for which they were built. We are religiously bound to make sure that the former church, which has been damaged beyond repair, is not subjected to further derision by the public."[26] [27]

In hindsight, it is clear that, although selling the abandoned synagogues was difficult, it was objectively the best solution. "We wish to emphasize that it pains us greatly to have to sell our synagogues, which used to host services venerating the Almighty, but as there is no one to revive this tradition, we have no option other than to ensure that our synagogues are converted

[22] CUJRC archive, box 4, Modrý Kameň, 6. 2. 1947.
[23] CUJRC archive, box 4, Modrý Kameň, 25. 3. 1947.
[24] CUJRC charter, approved on May 17, 2017, by a general assembly of community delegates.
[25] CUJRC archive, box 52, Šaštín, 24. 10. 1946.
[26] CUJRC archive, box 6, Halič, 14. 9. 1949.
[27] Today, the building is being renovated by volunteers.

into buildings that do not contravene the dignity of a divine temple."[28] Needless to say, the term "dignity" lends itself to different interpretations.

Preserved sale and purchase agreements include clauses that should have prevented the former sacral buildings from hosting religiously unacceptable activities. In this context, we must realize that contemporary views differ from our own. In the 1940s and 1950s, the precepts of Judaism were paramount, whereas today, the public (including a significant number of Jews) prefers the former synagogues' conversion into cultural institutions. Archival documents confirm that this conflict of opinion was already ongoing in the 1940s. While the leadership of the CUJRC, along with part of the communities, emphasized the religious dimension of the issue, other communities already argued in favor of other solutions.[29] Take, for example, the conflict in the town of Senica in western Slovakia. The CUJRC decided to sell the local synagogue to an agricultural co-operative, which intended to use it for grain storage. The representatives of the local (officially disbanded) JRC, however, had already offered to sell the synagogue to Senica Town Hall, "on the condition that [the town hall] would turn the synagogue into a house of culture (a cinema). A nicely refurbished building would at least serve as a reminder that it once used to be our temple. But none of us wants to see–and none of us will tolerate–the synagogue becoming a granary or a storehouse for some other wares."[30] Until its demolition in the 1960s, the former synagogue served as a granary.

The municipal council in the town of Zlaté Moravce wanted to "buy the former Orthodox synagogue and convert it into a recreational center, which was supposed to serve exclusively cultural, educational, and athletic purposes. The municipal representatives have declared that the building will not house an entertainment hall, a bar, etc. Furthermore, the stage will be built outside the perimeter walls of the former synagogue."[31] The leadership of the CUJRC hesitated with an answer, although the local JRC demanded its hasty approval: "We kindly ask for urgent approval, as the buyer has refused to pay us any money in advance, and we therefore cannot begin construction of the new prayer room, which must be ready before the holidays."[32] The Bardejov JRC in eastern Slovakia declined an offer by the local town hall to convert their synagogue into a cinema. "(1) The synagogue in question is presently used by the Agricultural Warehousing Co-operative in Bardejov for grain storage, whereby it serves the

[28] CUJRC archive, box 54, Kuklov, 30. 10. 1946.
[29] For more on this conflict, see Peter Salner, *Židia na Slovensku po roku 1945. Komunita medzi vierou a realitou* (Bratislava: Veda 2016, pp. 155–161).
[30] CUJRC archive, box 24, Senica nad Myjavou, 22. 7. 1948.
[31] CUJRC archive, box 1, Zlaté Moravce, 28. 6. 1949.
[32] CUJRC archive, box 1, Zlaté Moravce, 4.8. 1949. There was precious little time for the construction of the prayer room, as that year's Rosh Hashanah (the Jewish New Year) fell to 14 September 1949.

public interest. This purpose conforms to the religious, ritual prescriptions of the Jewish faith. (2) The seizure of the synagogue and its use for entertainment purposes conflicts with the religious precepts of the Jewish religious community."[33] The JRC in Poruba pod Vihorlatom chose to rent out its synagogue, rather than sell it: "You may use the temple as a garage, as well as for other purposes, though not purposes of entertainment. It is because of this objection that we will retain ownership of the building."[34] The leadership of the CUJRC agreed to the conversion of former synagogues into living spaces. This is illustrated by its approval of a man's request to buy "the former temple of the Jewish community […] for cash money and convert it into my private residence."[35]

In the liberalized conditions of the Prague Spring, churches in Czechoslovakia expected restitution of their property. The CUJRC drew up a list of 173 synagogues and prayer rooms in 117 towns and cities. Thirty-four of the buildings were described as "still standing", while 20 were already "non-existent." Of the other synagogues on the list, 54 had been converted into storage spaces (mostly granaries and silos). Many housed various workshops; seven had been converted into living spaces; one was used as a gym, and one as a garage. Four former synagogues had become schools, and six housed various cultural institutions (cinemas, theaters, recreational centers, concert halls, etc.).[36]

According to present-day standards, the abovementioned use of most of the synagogues may seem undignified. However, from a religious standpoint, using a synagogue as a warehouse, workshop, living space, or business represented a workable solution. Sale and purchase agreements typically conditioned the sale with a ban on entertainment purposes. In the case of the former synagogue in Spišská Nová Ves, "the buyer undertakes not to construct such a building on the site of the former Jewish temple as would house a bar or other similar establishment that might denigrate the memory of the church."[37] In the sale and purchase agreement for its temple, the Lučenec JRC claimed that the building had been damaged by the ravages of war and that the community did not have the funds necessary for its repair. Furthermore, the community claimed not to need the temple anymore. It had been reduced to only one-tenth of its prewar membership and could therefore "make do with the second, smaller synagogue in town." Also important was the fact that, "because we are talking about a synagogue, the sale is conditioned on the guarantee that the building, which was constructed

[33] CUJRC archive, box 27, Bardejov, 12. 10. 1950.
[34] CUJRC archive, box 12, Poruba pod Vihorlatom, 23. 1. 1959.
[35] CUJRC archive, box 1, Čierna nad Tisou, 31. 3. 1952.
[36] CUJRC archive, unfiled.
[37] CUJRC archive, box 25, Spišská Nová Ves, 31. 3. 1952

for religious purposes and used for religious rituals, will never be used to host dance parties, that alcohol will never be served on its premises, and that it will always serve exclusively cultural and humanist purposes. Our final stipulation is that the remodeling of the building cannot be carried out in such a way that the lavatories will be placed haphazardly around the current building but will instead be placed outside it."[38] However, as the sale and purchase agreements frequently did not specify sanctions for a potential breach of the terms, the new owners could use the buildings as they saw fit.

Current Situation

The tension between the religious and cultural approaches has persisted into the democratic present. Importantly, the solutions adopted today would have seemed unacceptable in the past. The public (as well as the leadership of the CUJRC) broadly approves of using the renovated buildings for entertainment purposes. I should note, however, that this attitude is not universal. The synagogue in Banská Štiavnica was sold to the local town hall in 1949, with the CUJRC stipulating that the building would not be used 'for undignified purposes–as an entertainment room or tavern, for example."[39] The building went on to serve as a warehouse, a workshop, and a political training facility. After November 1989, the general belief was that it would be converted into a cultural center with a small café and a gallery. In 2014, the building was rented out to the local Erb brewery for a period of five years. The brewery converted the synagogue into a bottling plant.[40] The new owners declared that Bratislava Rabbi Baruch Myers was supportive of this decision because "a theater would not have been the best solution, as it could have put on shows that did not respect the dignity of the place. We consulted the issue with the rabbi, and he said that placing a well-supervised and perfectly hygienic section of the brewery there was more acceptable. This part of our establishment is clean, orderly, and most importantly, quiet."[41] After the five-year rental period elapsed, the building remained part of the brewery. Local activists have approached the CUJRC for support, but the Union's response was neutral: "Synagogues and cemeteries are our holy places, and we care about their fate. But as soon as they pass into private hands, we, like you, become mere observers. Their future fate or 'story' is taken over by someone else, and we have no resources or tools to

[38] Sale and purchase agreement, date illegible. Author's own archive.
[39] I wish to thank Ms. Beata Rückschloss Nemcová for a PDF of this agreement.
[40] *https://spravy.pravda.sk/domace/clanok/328832-obnovena-synagoga-nacas-posluzi-pivovaru/.* Accessed September 23, 2021.
[41] *https://www.bystricoviny.sk/spravy/synagoga-v-banskej-stiavnici-ozila/*. Accessed September 23, 2021.

intervene in it."[42] Rabbi Myers' and the CUJRC's attitude is understandable. The clean and quiet environment of a bottling plant is religiously preferable to a café or theater.

An example of a truly insensitive majority attitude to Slovakia's recent past is the former synagogue in Ružomberok. After its successful renovation, it began to host various cultural and social events. The renovated building, however, is currently entitled Andrej Hlinka Cultural Center, and this fact has provoked considerable uproar and bitterness among the Jewish community. Andrej Hlinka was an influential clerical and political leader who lived and worked in Ružomberok. He died on August 16, 1938, shortly before the founding of the Ľudák Slovak State, but he nevertheless went on to become a symbol of the state and the Holocaust. The governing Hlinka's Slovak People's Party, the Hlinka Guard, and the Hlinka Youth were all indelibly connected with the suffering of Jews during wartime.

Conclusion

Data concerning the demographic evolution of the community points to the gradual dwindling of Jewish religious communities and their memberships. This trend started in the wartime Slovak State (1939-1945) and continued throughout the Communist era (1948-1989). Both totalitarian regimes, albeit for different reasons, were hostile to the Jewish community and its members, faith, and way of life. Their "victims" included not only individuals but also synagogues, which were physically destroyed or rendered dysfunctional. The weakened community did not have the time, funds, and, frequently, the motivation necessary for their rescue.

After the democratic revolution of 1989, the situation partially improved. State support, along with the activities of nongovernmental organizations and volunteers, enabled the renovation of several former synagogues in various towns across Slovakia. The public has welcomed the renovation of buildings representing Jewish architectural heritage, as well as the cultural, educational, and entertainment activities held in them, as they improve the quality of local social life. Dara Horn has offered a different view, labelling the term "Jewish cultural heritage" as an "ingenious piece of marketing."[43]

[42] I have access only to the undated draft of the CUJRC's reply.

[43] "[Jewish cultural heritage] is a much better name than 'Property Seized from Dead or Expelled Jews.' By calling these places 'Jewish Heritage Sites,' all those pesky moral concerns—about, say, why these 'sites' exist to begin with—evaporate in a mist of goodwill. And not just goodwill, but goodwill aimed directly at you, the Jewish tourist. These non-Jewish citizens and their benevolent government have chosen to maintain this cemetery or renovate this synagogue or create this museum purely out of their profound respect for the Jews who once lived here (and who, for unstated reasons, no longer do)." Dara Horn, People Love Dead Jews. Reports from a Haunted Present (W. W. Norton & Company 2021), p. 28.

A synagogue is not defined by its four walls but rather by the activities that take place inside it. Today, there are 12 JRCs in towns and cities across Slovakia. Renovations of former Jewish buildings, however, frequently occur in places where there are no active Jewish organizations. The repaired buildings become relics of the past and no longer serve the renewal of the Jewish traditions (especially divine worship) for which they were originally intended. Religious (and part of secular) Jews therefore feel that the events held in these buildings are inappropriate, if not downright offensive. Former divine temples have (irreversibly, it seems) turned into (non-)synagogues.