

The Peoplehood Papers provide a platform for Jews to discuss their common agenda and key issues related to their collective identity. The journal appears three times a year, with each issue addressing a specific theme. The editors invite you to share your thoughts on the ideas and discussions in the Papers, as well as all matters pertinent to Jewish Peoplehood: publications@jpeoplehood.org

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The UJA-Federation of New York cares for those in need, rescues those in harm's way and renews and strengthens the Jewish people in New York in Israel and around the world. **The Commission on the Jewish People** is dedicated to building connections among the diverse elements of the Jewish People and develops and supports efforts to forge linkages among Jews wherever they may live and support Israel as a vibrant, democratic and pluralistic Jewish state.

The Center for Jewish Peoplehood Education (CJPE) is a "one stop" resource center for institutions and individuals seeking to build collective Jewish life, with a focus on Jewish Peoplehood and Israel education. It provides professional and leadership training, content and programmatic development or general Peoplehood conceptual and educational consulting. www.jpeoplehood.org



המרכז לחינוך לעמיות יהודית
The Center for Jewish Peoplehood Education

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The Collective Jewish Conversation:
Its Role, Purpose and Place
in the 21st Century

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local Federations and global Jewish organizations such as the Jewish Agency; and (3) a consolidated “cohesion” of the Jewish People, rather than false “unity”.

The Jewish People do not need any “new” central organizations to further the global Jewish conversation. Rather, existing organizations and institutions of the State, if they are to best serve the Jewish People, need to acknowledge that they are not the center of the conversation. They must make space for, promote, enable and listen to the pluralistic global Jewish conversation that is going on in their midst and act to support what emerges from it.

...and no, there is no need to agree with what we are saying. On the contrary.

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Jewish Peoplehood in Hungary: a challenge and an opportunity

Gábor Balázs and Mircea Cernov

Who are the leaders of the Jewish community in Hungary today? Who engages and inspires the most creative minds of the young generation? Who is investing in their ideas and mobilizing their networks to revitalize the Jewish community? Who is providing knowledge, sharing tools, enabling and empowering innovators? Who is providing the financial resources and facilitating the platform for dialog between givers and implementers? Who is providing resources for small and mid-size organizations, initiatives and projects not in line with the communal system’s agenda?

Among the local Jewish community establishment in Hungary, no one!

If anything is being done to address these issues, it is carried out by a small number of individuals, informal community leaders, and international organizations engaged with a process of change and focusing on exploring the potential of the communities’ social capital.

The lack of a visionary local community leadership, together with an establishment focusing at the moment only on keeping control over the malformed organizational structures, are the main obstacles to promoting Jewish peoplehood as a reference point value for building the community of tomorrow.

Hungarian Jewry has a rich heritage and great potential. According to a recent survey there may be as many as 200,000 people in Hungary who have at least one Jewish grandparent. At the same time, the number of affiliated Jews is no more than 10,000 people.

The third biggest Jewish community on the continent (after France and Germany) has, in the last six decades, somehow been disconnected from world Jewry. Notwithstanding this, over the past decade a revival of Jewish life has spread in Hungary, reflecting the diversity of contemporary Jewish thought and experience, expressing hope for a promising future. Young Jewish social entrepreneurs have been experimenting with new forms of community and organizations designed to engage a new generation of Jews. Initiatives and organizations such as the Szarvas Camp, Balint JCC, Limmud Hungary,

Lauder School, Judafest, Marom Association, and Haver Foundation are creating and developing the platform for a vibrant community life.

Most of these new initiatives and programs have Jewish peoplehood on their banner. There is not always a consciousness of the Jewish peoplehood component as a value within these initiatives, and in the future this might change. The tipping point for these organizations is still to come. Their influence and involvement in the decision-making process and participation in the distribution of resources as well as in setting priorities is still marginal.

Hungary as a country has been in an economic and political crisis since 2006 and its situation is deteriorating. The general crisis of Hungary is clearly reflected in a recent survey which showed that approximately 60% of students studying in high school are not planning a life in Hungary.

The Jewish community's situation often mirrors the general situation of the host country. This is certainly true in the case of present-day Hungary, where the general state of mind of the Jews is very pessimistic. Most of the messages communicated by the representatives of the Jewish communal establishment are still focusing on the Holocaust and the oppression of the Communist era, and bemoan the lack of interest among Jews in organized Jewish communal life.

The Jewish community of today is torn by a major conflict between the historical alliances of the Jewish communities: MAZSIHISZ (Federation of Hungarian Jewish Communities), which is very much associated with the political left, and the newly organized Chabad community, which is well-known for its sympathies for the current right-wing government. These two organizations are fighting each other on every possible level of community life. On the other hand, it is clear that neither of these organizations represent the Jewish people in Hungary. Nor are the Reform or Conservative congregations or civic organizations represented.

One of the major debates among Jewish organizations is on the question: Who has the right to represent the Jews? Both MAZSIHISZ and Chabad are religious organizations and by definition they do not represent those Jews who do not want to belong to a religious community or those who seek transparency and adherence to proper public management standards.

As a community without a consensus about its representation, and where the majority of Jews feel that the current leaders of MAZSIHISZ and Chabad are not credible and that Jewish organizations lack transparency and accountability, the Hungarian

Jewish community is characterized by a weak and ineffective structure and a crisis of leadership.

Even the few thousand Jews who participate in Jewish religious life in Hungary are divided into at least seven or eight different streams, and there are many more identity forms among the Jews of Hungary. Since the 19th century Jewish national identity has become probably the most sensitive issue concerning Jewish identity. A large number of Jews react hysterically when a Jew or Gentile suggests that Jews can be defined not only by religion but also by nationality, culture and heritage, common fate, or personal belief.

Identity and self-definition are mostly not rational issues. Since the Jewish population of Hungary has been prominently non-religious, it would be natural for its Jews to identify with the common fate of different Jewish communities, and with the historical, cultural heritage and natural values of the Jewish people. If self-identity were a rational issue, the idea and value of Jewish peoplehood would be very popular among Hungarian Jews.

In a process of social change the peoplehood value and approach can serve as a catalyst if it is embraced by a number of people involved in community dialog and collective action.

Peoplehood as a reference point in the formation of the individual, social and collective identity of the Jewish people and community in Hungary is both a challenge and an opportunity. A new leadership committed to nurturing the building blocks of our common Jewish future – new ideas, creative projects, emerging leaders – can make a difference by making sensible changes and building a shared Jewish society based on the value and approach of Jewish Peoplehood.

World Jewry, particularly international organizations and donors, can play a vital role in this process. Establishing strategic partnerships and cooperation channels with those involved in the process of change in Hungary is essential in achieving a strong impact and the desired outcome.

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