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“Definitely Jewish, explicitly Polish...” Narrative strategies of the founders of the Polin Museum of the History of Polish Jews

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ABSTRACT

This paper aims to establish a framework of discursive narratives about the idea of the Polin Museum of the History of Polish Jews. Most of these narrative strategies concern the implementation of this huge project, arrangement of exhibitions, topics presented and the importance of the museum for the community of Polish Jews and Poles.

The qualitative analysis of the narratives is conducted based on the content of periodicals published by the Jewish community in Poland: „Midrasz. Pismo Żydowskie” and „Chidusz. Magazyn Żydowski”. The analysis involves 11 speeches given immediately after the ceremonial opening of the Museum in 2013 and later, primarily at anniversary celebrations.

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Due to the mass media coverage, the grand opening ceremony of the Museum of the History of Polish Jews in 2014 was widely commented all over Poland and everybody's eyes were set on the first Polish museum devoted entirely and exclusively to Jews. This paper is an attempt at defining the framework of discursive narratives which emerged around the idea of the Museum. In particular, the narratives concern the implementation of this huge project, the topics of the core exhibition and the educational role of the museum for the community of Polish Jews, Poles and foreign Jews. In my opinion, these strategies can be seen in the broader context of the Jewish identity dilemmas and constitute the core of the contemporary socio-cultural and academic reflections in the field of Jewish studies.

1. "Muzeum Życia" (Museum of Life)

The opening of the Polin Museum was preceded by long efforts and preparations. The idea of founding a museum dedicated to Polish Jews dates back to 1995 and it originated in the Jewish Historical Institute. However, it was only on 19 April 2013 that the Museum building was formally opened. The grand and impressive building is located at Mordechaj Anielewicz Street, in the proximity of the Ghetto Heroes Monument in the centre of the formerly Jewish district (turned into a ghetto by the Germans during the war). The official opening of the core exhibition at the POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews took place on 28 October 2014. The ceremony was attended by Bronisław Komorowski, President of Poland, and Ewa Kopacz, Prime Minister, Reuven Rivlin, President of Israel, the Marshals of the Polish Parliament (the Sejm and the Senate), the Mayor of Warsaw and delegations from other countries. It is estimated that the ceremony was attended by more than 1,500 guests and 600 journalists.¹

The Museum website defines its mission as follows: "To recall and preserve the memory of the history of Polish Jews, contributing to the mutual understanding and respect amongst Poles and Jews as well as other societies of Europe and the world", and its vision as follows: "To create a modern museum – an educational and cultural centre, a platform for social dialogue; an institution offering a profound, transformative experience and promoting new standards of relating to history".² The website also describes the specific nature of the facility: The Museum of the History of Polish Jews is the first public-private partnership institution of its kind created by the Ministry of Culture, City of Warsaw, and the Association of the Jewish Historical Institute of Poland. Under the founding act, the public party provided PLN 180 million for the construction of the Museum building. They also cover a major part of the Museum's annual budget. The Association initiated the Museum project and was responsible for the development and production of the core exhibition. Thanks to the support of donors from all over the world, the Association raised PLN 145 million for this purpose. It also provided more than PLN 20 million to support the Museum's various educational and public programs.³

The core exhibition covers one thousand years of the Jewish history in Poland. It includes the following galleries:

¹ <http://www.polin.pl/pl/historia-od-idei-przez-ohel-do-muzeum-polin>, access: 20 March 2017

² (<http://www.polin.pl/pl/o-muzeum/misja-i-wizja> 2017, access: 20 March 2017

³ (<http://www.polin.pl/pl/partnerstwo-publiczno-prywatne>, access: 20 March 2017

1. Forest
2. First Encounters (960–1500)
3. Paradisus Iudaeorum (1569–1648)
4. The Jewish Town (1648–1772)
5. Encounters with modernity (1772–1914)
6. On the Jewish Street (1918–1939)
7. Holocaust (1939–1945)
8. Postwar Years (1944 to the present)

Despite the short period of operation, the Museum has already received numerous awards. e.g.: the Officer’s Cross of the Order of Merit of the Republic of Poland, the Medal for Merit to Culture – Gloria Artis, the Polityka’s Passport, the Oscar Award of the Polish Business Roundtable, the Finlandia Prize for Architecture (Kirshenblatt-Gimblet 2015b: 2) as well as the prestigious European Museum of The Year 2016 award.

2. A qualitative analysis of discourse

In *Nasza Gmina*, the newsletter of the Jewish Religious Community in Kraków, the following information was published: “The core exhibition – the grand multimedia presentation of one thousand years of the Jewish history in Poland – was seen by 15 thousand visitors during the first 3 days after the opening. It was covered in more than 2 thousand press releases in Poland and 300 mentions in the foreign media, especially in the U.S., Germany and Israel.” (Podgórska, 2014: 4). Such data seem to justify the decision to limit the research material. The material for research was selected top-down, i.e. from the general down to the particular (Wodak and Krzyżanowski, 2011: 60). In result, the body of research comprises two Poland-wide Jewish periodicals: “Midrasz. Pismo Żydowskie” and “Chidusz. Magazyn Żydowski”. They are two renowned and opinion-forming Jewish periodicals published in Poland in the Polish language. “Midrasz” is a Jewish socio-cultural periodical published since 1997 and addresses to the Jewish reader and everyone interested in the life of Jews in Poland. Until 2009 it was a monthly, at present six issues are published annually. The contents include “the Jewish history, tradition and identity, Judaism, the Jewish-Christian dialogue, books, films, music, politics, Israel and other matters relevant to the Jewish diaspora.”⁴ “Chidusz” is a monthly of the Jewish community in Wrocław, published since 2013, and a majority of ar-

⁴ <http://www.midrasz.pl/miesiecznik/onas> (access: 20 March 2017)

ticles are available on-line.⁵ It is a richly illustrated socio-cultural magazine where readers will find a great deal of interesting information on Jewish culture, art and history as well as news regarding current events and social problems of Jews. It must be noted that many Jewish portals, newsletters of Jewish communities and periodicals such as “Cwiszyn. Żydowski Kwartalnik o Kulturze i Sztuce”⁶ and “Miasteczko Poznań. Pismo społeczno-kulturalne”⁷ also published the news about the opening of the Museum, usually in the form of short informative press releases. The two selected periodicals described this event more extensively and the issues published in 2013–2016 presented full-fledged articles and interviews with the founders of the Museum and reviewers. Therefore, I assumed that this voice and this vision were to be the core message in the view of the editors. In result, the analysis of discourse focused on the perspective of the people responsible for the Polin Museum’s core exhibition that was covered by the selected minority print media. It can also be assumed that the authors of these narratives find it easier to express their views in periodicals addressed mainly to the Jewish audience. The object of the analysis includes statements that immediately followed the opening of the Museum and later views published on the anniversaries of the institution. To determine the widest spectrum of discourses, a separate analysis of the Polish press releases is necessary. The key Polish opinion-forming periodical usually mentioned the opening of the Museum, but the *Polityka* weekly devoted its entire issue to this event.⁸

It was already the first reading of the press releases that revealed the heterogeneity of views, but the statements share several central categories oriented towards the identity of the Museum, identification of Polish Jews and dilemmas around the Polish-Jewish history. The aim of the analysis was to determine the intention of the authors, methods of constructing the narrative strategy regarding the Museum’s mission and vision as well as the presence/absence of specific types of content. It must be emphasised that the questions about the profile of the Museum were often included in the suggestive titles of the interviews (see: Annex). The questions that my research posed concerned the construction of the Museum’s image for the Polish and the Jewish audiences. Do the creators share one vision of presenting the Jewish history at the Polin Museum? Is the institution more Polish or Jewish? Do the authors of the core exhibition adopt one specific perspective, i.e. Jewish or Polish? How does the Museum present historical dilemmas and controversies? Is the

⁵ <http://www.chidusz.com/> (access: 20 March 2017)

⁶ <http://www.cwiszn.pl/pl/pages/show/otwarcie%20muzeum> (access: 20 March 2017)

⁷ <http://www.miasteczkopoznan.pl/node/377> (access: 20 March 2017)

⁸ “Tygodnik Polityka”, Issue 43 (2014), Powrót Żydów (cover)

Polin Museum inscribed into the positive narrative about the many centuries of Jewish-Polish co-existence in Poland? How does the Museum reconcile expectation of different social groups?

A. Grzymała-Kazłowska (2004: 21) argues that "the interest in discourse is related to the deep social transformations and the vision of the contemporary world as a society dominated by communicational practices and construed through the processes of communication." The author believes that discourse can be understood as a structure (where the analysis covers its architecture, order, elements, relations and hierarchies), as a process (communication, continual construction of meanings, a dynamic act of creation) and as a set of functions: communicational, mental and interactive (*ibidem*: 21). I strived to take these three perspectives into account within a holistic view. My analysis uses the sociological concept of discourse which is seen as a type of communicational practice and a form of symbolic interaction where language is used to define and interpret situations. The sociological analysis of discourse (SAD) also focuses on identity formation, the drive for positive self-presentation and the effort to gain power over the partner and induce the partner to perform specific actions (*ibidem*: 17). In this particular case, the goal is to create an image of the group (the Polish and the Jewish communities sharing one history) as well as an image of the museum as an institution. The varieties of SAD include Michel Foucault's post-structuralist theory, ethnomethodology, the conversation analysis, Erving Goffman's theory and symbolic interactionism. For the purposes of the present analysis, the most suitable framework is provided by symbolic interactionism which accentuates the dynamic process of interactions between individuals who negotiate meanings, adjust to each other and take an active part in the emergence of new social phenomena, while "a network or an institution do not function simply for the reason of its internal dynamics or systemic requirements, but because people do something in various points of this network or institution, and what they do is the consequence of the way they define the situation in which they come to act" (Blumer 2007: 18). They are participants who bring in a world of objects, sets of meanings and models of interpretation.

After multiple readings of all texts (see: Annex) which concern the issues in question in both periodicals, I continued to create a categorization key which, according to K. Szczepaniak, "is itself a peculiar study result" in the qualitative research. "The subsequent categories of the key constitute the major themes or minor aspects of such themes in the analysed texts. Therefore, the key is in fact a list of topics in the research material that strives to describe their diversity to the greatest possible extent" (Szczepaniak, 2012: 98). Thereafter, I defined several categories to be included in the key. The next step suggested by K. Szczepaniak is

to complement the study results with a table of quotes from the analysed articles and demonstrate how (theoretically defined) elements are connected or overlap (ibidem: 100).

3. The basic interpretation key

1. DEFINING THE MISSION	
<p>Testimony to the rebirth of Jewish life in Poland</p>	<p>“Holocaust is not the entire Jewish experience in Poland. The Postwar gallery and the museum show the rebirth of Jewish life [...] The Museum makes an announcement to the world that there exists a new Poland that wants to face the problems and settle old accounts”, M2, pp. 61 and 63</p> <p>“Twenty-five years ago many people had doubts about the sense of the Jewish life in Poland. I was one of those who believed it would survive [...] After 25 years, I can boldly say that a new Polish diaspora is emerging”, p. 1 “The Museum, at least in its intention, wanted to inform each visitor that Jews were also Poles. When you know this, you will start wondering if that is still the case and you will look for Jews in Poland. The sense of void is the first step. The next step will be to go back to the Museum and take interest in the contribution of Jews to the building of a shared motherland as well as to learn more about the Jewish culture”, Ch7, p. 2</p> <p>“For me, the opening of the core exhibition at the Polin Museum is a fundamental change in the space of the Jewish diaspora in Poland” Ch10, p. 1</p> <p>Also: Ch5, p. 1</p>
<p>A reminder of the Polish-Jewish history</p>	<p>“One of the goals of the Museum is (at least indirectly) to reinstate the collective awareness of the long history of Poland as a diverse country in terms of culture and religion. The fact that the Museum focuses on Jews is a concrete expression of the key postulate of this new metahistory. Regarding the practical aspects, it is also a gesture on the part of Poland aiming to settle accounts with Jews through the attempt at facing the complicated past”, M2, p. 59</p> <p>“Polin is supposed to remind Poles and Jews that the history of Polish Jews is their history. Non-Jewish Poles can see that it is an integral and vital part of the history of Poland, while non-Polish Jews can see that it is an important chapter in the diaspora of the Jewish people”, Ch11, p. 14</p> <p>“The only large museum in Poland that tells the thousand years of the history of Poland, not only of Jews in Poland”, Ch4, pp. 2-3.</p>

<p>The Grand Narrative of Polish Jews</p>	<p>"He would like {Jeshayahu Weinberg, the originator of the Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington and the Diaspora Museum in Tel Aviv}, to see here a museum that will make Poland associate not only with Holocaust and that will tell a story of how Jews lived here before and after" [...] "We would like our museum to be a place that adds more dimensions to the story of Polish Jews", M1, pp. 14-15.</p> <p>"It is not a message against anyone, but a story about the diversity of Jews and different aspects of the Jewish life in postwar Poland. We present emigration and assimilation, Communists and Zionists, religious and anti-religious Jews, the culture in Yiddish, Hebrew and Polish. The entire exhibition is like that, Also, we can see that part of Polish history that is presented nowhere else", Ch6, p. 6</p>
<p>The new historical narrative in Poland</p>	<p>"My contacts with the Museum and the team have reinforced my conviction that the core exhibition will be situated with the framework of the new metahistory emerging from the studies of the Polish-Jewish history that were resumed in the 1970s and have developed impressively, as Poland effectively rejected Communism and set on the journey to democratization", M2, p. 58, [...] "It is a challenge to both Poles and Jews to treat seriously the new metahistory resulting from the last 30 or 40 years of research and undermining some of the deeply-rooted stereotypes and beliefs", M2, p. 63</p> <p>"It refers to the tendency of seeking different identity narratives that is now so strongly present in Poland. The museum presents such a new narrative. It is the story of Jews who are completely Jewish, while also remaining completely Polish. They are Polish Jews, they are Poles." Ch4, p. 2</p>

<p>2. THE IDENTITY OF THE MUSEUM</p>	
<p>Polish-Jewish by its nature</p>	<p>The Museum shows that there is no Jewish experience without immersion into Poland and its Gestalt, especially to Israeli students and other visiting groups; previously, they were separated from the Polish environment, "this seems erroneous and even offensive to many intelligent Poles" [...] The museum strongly embeds Jews in Poland and demonstrates they constituted an integral part of this country, M2, p. 59</p> <p>"It is impossible to tell the history of Poland without the history of Jews. They both complement one another. One cannot understand the history of Polish Jews without the broad contextualisation of this history in events that always affected Jews. For this reason, the exhibition refers to foundations of cities, elections of kings, partitions and wars" [...] "if anyone who has seen the exhibition still thinks that "The Royal Cake" tells the history of Poland, not of Jews, it may be due to a very superficial response to the three portraits. One can reflect on the three invaders and the empty royal throne and then go on with the impression that the Polish narrative dominates of the Jewish story. Visitors have the right to make their own interpretation, even if it stands in contradiction to the message of the exhibition. But one can hardly blame the exhibition for this. Also, it cannot be concluded that the "Polish" perspectives prevails over the "Jewish" perspective", Ch8, p. 2</p>

	<p>“We did all we could to give an expression to the Jewish spirit. Some say it is the history of Poland from the Jewish perspective, which I cannot accept, since experts from all corners of the world prepared this exhibition and strived to show the history of the Polish diaspora in the most objective way possible. It does not mean that the Jewish perspective is absent” [...] “we were unable to collect the funds by ourselves” [...] “But this situation is also beneficial to Polish Jews, since the more non-Jewish people become involved in our matters, the better for the society at large, and, in result, we do not shut off the Jewish thematics in our own ghetto. My dream is that the Polish society should start feeling that Polin is a shared project”, Ch7, pp. 2-3</p> <p>“The only large museum in Poland that tells the thousand years of the history of Poland, not only of Jews in Poland” [...] “At the same time, it does that in a completely unorthodox way — through the eyes and experiences of a minority. It is a different Poland that we will not find in history handbooks”, Ch4, pp. 2-3</p>
Beyond dichotomy	<p>“First of all, it is an international and historical institution. Of course, it is a Polish museum, located in Poland and telling the story of Polish Jews. However, it is not a Jewish museum in a traditional sense that has no grounds for existence in Europe, where many of the so-called Jewish museum are in fact state museums”, Ch5, p. 1</p> <p>“The dichotomy itself is false and results from ideological assumptions that the Polin exhibition rejects. There are no two perspectives: a Polish one and a Jewish one. The conviction that there exist “two truths” and the historical narrative must serve and privilege one party is a typical appropriation of historiography by politics. The real question should be: is the narrative convincing and reliable, and not: whom does it serve and privilege?” Ch8, p. 1</p> <p>“It is not a message against anyone, but a story about the diversity of Jews and different aspects of the Jewish life in postwar Poland”, Ch6, pp. 5-6</p>
Towards the Jewish perspective	<p>“If it is a museum about Jews, then it should concern the Jewish view of various historical events and show how Jews perceived them. [...] We use historical documents, we show contexts and polemics, but the subjects of the narrative are Jews and their point of view” [...] “Jews constitute the subjects of our exhibition, the presented world and the time of the Polish People’s Republic are shown from the Jewish perspective. However, I am aware that this museum is the work of various people, so it is impossible to speak of simply one perspective”, M3, p. 8</p>
Very Polish by its nature	<p>“I am extremely amused by how frantically Polish this museum is. The exhibition shows hardly any external world. There are two exceptions. The medieval gallery indicates where Jews came from and the contemporary gallery locates their point of destination [...]. I don’t think it is intentional, that is just the way it is. But it turns out to be very authentic in terms of the Polish and Jewish self-perception”, CH10, p. 3</p>

But more Polish in the end	"All of this is a Polish narrative , reduced to one perspective, levelling, there is no place for otherness", M3, p. 10
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3. THE IDENTITY OF JEWS AT THE EXHIBITION	
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The search of identity criteria	<p>"We can see a very clear strategy of presenting the identity issues. We do not call Jews those people who never spoke about it in public or who did not consider themselves Jewish. Jews talk of their identity in their own language", M1 p. 17</p> <p>"We want the ordinary, average Jews to play an equally important role in the narrative as the eminent ones. We describe a tendency, e.g. Emigration, and we show ordinary people instead of some famous personages", Ch6, p. 5</p> <p>"The process of de-assimilation [...] is presented at the end, retrospectively, at the post-1989 exhibition. They will speak about the moments when they learned they had Jewish roots or decided they wanted to become Jews. That was extremely important to us. Unfortunately, this part is very limited in size", M3, p. 6</p>
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Social expectations regarding the identity of Jews at the exhibition	<p>"so we could somehow get those Jews «out into the light»." "I think it would not be good if people came to our gallery driven by the curiosity to find out who is Jewish" [...] "At the same time, we know the attitude of people who evaluate our exhibition: they want to shape the awareness of Poles who often have no idea that some important artists, film-makers, painters, writers, scientists and people who contributed to the Polish culture were Jews and boast great achievements. To simplify, they want people to realise the huge contribution made by Jews to the Polish culture", M1, p. 19</p> <p>"Julian Tuwim and Adam Michnik as the ideal of the Jewish participation in Polish culture and history" [...] What Poles (of course, Poles who "think right") are interested in according to the authorities is the similar Jew. A dissimilar Jew is difficult, incomprehensible and, possibly, dangerous", M3, p. 7</p> <p>"Some of our important and honoured sponsors imagined that they would support a Museum presenting eminent Jews and thus reinforcing the Jewish pride. Some institutional sponsors wanted the Museum to show how much Jews can contribute to the Polish national interest. However, neither perspective was our starting point", Ch6, p. 6</p>
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4. POLIN AND THE CONTEMPORARY JEWISH LIFE	
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Insufficient presentation of the post-1989 period	"There was not enough time and will to adequately present the contemporary time", M3, p. 6
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	<p>“We are not happy about the present condition, but we are working on improvements. Interviews with representatives of the contemporary generations of Polish Jews in this section of the exhibition aim to give an impression of the current developments [...] There are things that still need to be done. The 5-minute film still has no final version. We already rejected its three versions. They showed the Jewish life in absurdly folk-like colours, as we still lived in wigwams” p. 4 [...] “We are only starting our journey, we have just opened the museum. Let us wait for it to get settled a bit and we will see in six months [...] Let us wait for the feedback from the visitors so we can arrange the space in a dialogue with them”, Ch7, pp. 4-5</p> <p>“The last gallery is simply not there at all. We are too close to those times and we have no idea how to present them. [...] The sole fact that there are Jews is not not enough to create a gallery. I know about some desperate attempts at adding something in this last space that would not be a poor promotional video or just talking heads. Although it is easy to criticize the last section, I myself have no idea about how it could be arranged”, Ch10, p. 3</p> <p>Also: Ch6, p. 2</p>
A different space	<p>“It is not a fully adequate description. First of all, the events after 1989 occupy the most exceptional space. This high room which rises from the cellar to the roof is filled with beautiful life during the day. An open space that reflects the spirit of freedom after regaining independence [...]. As regards size, height and dramatic qualities, it surpasses all other rooms”, Ch5, p. 2</p>
POLIN as a platform for the Jewish community	<p>“I hope we will be able to collaborate in this respect, as we are trying to collaborate with the Centre for Yiddish Culture in Muranów (Warsaw)”, p. 21 [...] “we perform a bit different tasks {than the Jewish Historical Institute} and that is why I would like a closer collaboration”, M1, pp. 21-22</p> <p>“Under no circumstances, the Polin museum can be an institution representing Polish Jews”, p. 3 “I do hope the museum will become a place for meetings and mutual understanding. But it cannot replace any organisation”, [...] The Jewish Historical Institute has authentic documents and treasures entered in the UNESCO World Heritage List, Ch7, p. 4</p> <p>“I hope that the Museum will be like a large tent. A neutral meeting place in the sense that there will be no conflicts [...] A place where Polish Jews will want to talk”, Ch5, p. 8</p>
5. CONTROVERSIES	
Polish-Jewish relations without manipulation	<p>“The guiding idea of this new metahistory and the core exhibition in the Museum is that the relations between Poland and Polish Jews were expressed through a large variety of attitudes and behaviours. Together, they made up a complex sum of causes and effects, diverse motivations and unpredictable consequences”, p. 60 [...] “The best metaphor for the major part of the Polish-Jewish symbiosis is “the marriage of convenience” [...] The museum puts forward this message, neither romantic or demonic, but an attempt at revealing a very complex relation full of light and shade”, M2, p. 60</p>

<p>Negotiations</p>	<p>“While the positive or neutral aspects of the life of Jews in Poland are strongly visible, anti-Semitism, discrimination or pogroms are more difficult to find [...] to defend this stance, which also was politically enforces, there is a reliable argument – for the majority of Polish Jews, the positive and neutral elements prevailed during the time they lived in Poland, though probably because they were not admitted to the social areas where they could have encountered anti-Semitism. This experience became prevalent along with the removal of legal social barriers [...] Essentially, it is an adequate representation of reality”, Ch10, p. 1</p> <p>“The expert reports from the Ministry of Culture raise “some controversies” which do not concern facts, but interpretations and the mentioned nuances. They pertain to the postwar gallery in particular. [...] The current talks aim to find a balance between the internal Jewish perspective and the perspective resulting from the level of awareness in the Polish society”, M1, p. 17</p> <p>“Of course, historians made various remarks indicating that some fragments of the exhibition could be arranged differently, but these are natural differences in perspectives and not a fundamental discord. As a result, the museum generates positive reactions but also inspires trust, which is paramount”, Ch11, p. 16</p>
<p>Historical manipulation</p>	<p>“The misgivings before the opening were so huge that remedies and corrections were necessary so that the exhibition did not contain anything ostentatious and to ensure a positive atmosphere”, M3, p. 9</p>
<p>Pressures from sponsors</p>	<p>“For the postwar exhibitions to present a more uplifting history and focus on big and known names of those Jews who made a contribution to Polish culture” [...] These pressures were understood in Poland. “Firstly, it was said that if they give money, and it is a lot of money, they have the right to expect. Secondly, the history of assimilated Jews was more comprehensible and attractive to Poles”, M3, pp. 5-6, also: Ch6 2015, pp. 5-6 (see Table: The identity of Jews at the exhibition, category: Social expectations regarding the identity of Jews at the exhibition)</p>
<p>Political pressures</p>	<p>In May 2013, the Ministry of Culture “informed in a direct manner that our (postwar) gallery was incompatible with the Polish national interest, while the Museum was built with Polish funds” [...] Too many elements that were not interesting to Polish audiences. A perspective coinciding with the view of the Jewish sponsors: too much of the Socio-Cultural Association of Jews in Poland (TSKŻ) and “Jewish Jews”; a vague message regarding the Kielce pogrom; insufficient information on Jews who introduced Communism; “First of all, insufficient information on Jews who are «similar to our friends», as it was elegantly put, i.e. assimilated Jews of whom we can be proud”, M3, p. 7</p> <p>“They appeared close to the end, which was no surprise to me. However, the evaluation of the exhibition was entrusted to well-intentioned people, mostly historians, who have extremely extensive knowledge about the period. Some of the changes were for the better. What is crucial to me is that changing a few quotes and softening the narrative about anti-Jewish attitudes among Poles in two or three sections did not alter the effect and the intended message of the exhibition”, Ch6, p. 5</p>

	<p>“The Museum is not a Jewish institution, but a Polish public institution that is subject to political pressures, just like any other public organisation in this country”, Ch10, p. 3</p>
<p>Ensuring the freedom of interpretation and multiple perspectives</p>	<p>The important aspect is the freedom of interpretation; an international team of historians was at work, “we wanted to see the history in a broader perspective, from many different angles”, p. 15 [...] Difficult issues, e.g. the Kielce pogrom, “we apply different perspectives of interpretation. We present the positions of the three key political powers and an independent intellectual and we juxtapose these interpretations”, M1, p. 16</p> <p>“The choice of perspective was always the outcome of reflections by many eminent researchers, including those for whom the “Polish” was never the crucial one”[...] “There is no one answer to the history as told by the Polin Museum, to the question about Polish Jews and their history. If a museum gives you one answer, it means it is a poor and boring museum, just for one visit”, Ch8, p. 3</p> <p>“We never wanted to create a narrative that would go along one path and enforce one perspective. We are open to interpretation. There is more than just one voice, more than one perspective”, Ch5, p. 7 also: Ch6, p. 3</p>
<p>No freedom of interpretation, a closed narrative</p>	<p>“The present narrative presented by the museum gives no space for questions. Because there is this fear right away: how will they see us? what will they think of us? Such fears, also on the Jewish part, result in softening the narrative and prevent educational activities, so important to our civilisation” [...] The Museum is a huge effort; a great effort by many people, but “today, the Museum serves to perpetuate the narrative which fails to support changes and forms an alibi for the Polish state. The conclusion is that it is all good, with the Museum being the proof”, M3, p. 10</p>

	<p>6. QUALITY OF THE MUSEUM</p>
<p>Figures and interest</p>	<p>“I took part in several debates and I was shocked there were people sitting on the stairs”[...] “Only during the Night of the Museums we had 6 thousand visitors” M1, p. 22</p> <p>“I think it will be a ground-breaking museum in many respects. It does not mean there are no errors. I am critical about several solutions, especially those used in the gallery I designed, since it is closest to my heart. Anyhow, it is a revolutionary exhibition, since it spectacularly shows to tens of thousands of people what is already present in Polish culture, but only in the elite and narrow awareness”, Ch4, p. 2</p>

	<p>“The first sign that the museum was exceptional was the extraordinary interest and coverage by the media”, “it exceeded our wildest expectations. During several weeks, we observed five thousand positive and often enthusiastic comments in the press, on TV, on the radio and via on-line information portals – in Poland and around the globe, including the big international titles such as <i>The Economist</i> and <i>The New York Times</i>”, p. 14 [...] “Starting from the opening day there were long queues of people who wanted to see the exhibition and we had nearly 70 thousand visitors during the first two months.” To date, the total number of visitors has reached 1.5 million, Ch11, p. 14 Also: Ch9, p. 1</p>
<p>Inquiries and long years of prior research</p>	<p>“Long years of raising funds to open the museum gave the researchers a great deal of time for reflections and studies [...] as a result, the museum is built on reliable intellectual foundations”, Ch11, p. 16 “The overall plan of the exhibition emerged in 2000, but the work on the materials started in 1997, so in total it has been almost two decades of preparations”, Ch9, p. 1 “The process of creating the museum took so long also because many historians were involved in developing the narrative as well as conducting more in-depth research in those areas where we had to find out more about the history of Polish Jews in order to construct a reliable narrative”, Ch4, p. 3 Also: M5, p. 5</p>
<p>The academic authority and reviewers</p>	<p>“Our work was reviewed at different stages of creating particular galleries. [...] In addition, the work was also verified by the Museum Council. No content-related errors were identified during those controls”, M1, pp. 16-17 “Each time, the international team of historians made decisions about how to best combine the various plots and choose the dominant ones in the context of what we identified as the key narrative in the history of Polish Jews”, Ch8, p. 2 “The enormous work of my predecessors, a large team of historians and curators, turned out to be reliable and trustworthy, and it contains no major errors or historical misrepresentations” Ch11, p. 16</p>
<p>Awards</p>	<p>“The juries granting both awards consist of eminent museologists [...] The competition was really serious [...] Up to date, no Polish museum has received neither award, and now Polin gets both at once [...] This contributes to our position in the museums sector in Poland and Europe”, [...] This clears any doubts, since the Polin museum was created “nearly without any exhibits and the truth is that our collection is only now being formed, mainly thanks to the mementos donated by private individuals”, Ch11, p. 16, “Of course, I must also mention all the awards and titles we have received this year [...] Each distinction and praise was singular and important to us” Ch9, pp. 2-3</p>

<p>A narrative museum and the lack of objects</p>	<p>“At that time, the newest idea was the narrative museum that tells a story in a film-like manner, through developing various plots instead simply providing information” [...] “We face the negative feedback regarding the limited number of exhibits at the museum. In fact, there are as many as 200 objects, and each of our exhibits must fit into the narrative”, M1, p. 15</p> <p>“Our collection is now being formed thanks to the donated mementos”, Ch11, p. 16</p> <p>“We are collecting items for this story. The basic problem of every narrative museum is the lack of exhibits, and we realised this problem from the very beginning and perhaps we did not manage to solve it completely”, Ch4, p. 1</p>
<p>Multimedia</p>	<p>“Our key advantage is the quality [...] The exhibition is based on multimedia in a wide spectrum: the set design, the choice of photographs, exhibits perfectly suited to the narrative and the sound effects. The outcome of a full and immersive experience”, M1, p. 15</p> <p>“The guiding principle of the exhibition is as follows: any key message is repeated several times: in a text, as an illustration, in the form of a projection, as an exhibit [...] Our message is always a combination of various elements. Some prefer reading the text to watching a video, while others pay no attention to the exhibits but go straight to the texts”, Ch5, pp. 4-5</p>

	<p>7. A VISITOR AT THE MUSEUM</p>
<p>Inspired and provoked to think</p>	<p>“We want to provoke and inspire reflections in our visitors, we want to make them consider their own behaviour in a situation where there is a person at your door, asking for help, and you know what punishment you risk if you do help”, M1, p. 16</p> <p>“The museum is a space of informal education. In my view, it is important to explain and reveal rather than teach. It is not about teaching, it is all about learning. Visitors should be active, they should seek, explore and discover on their own”, Ch5, p. 4</p> <p>“I am glad that the majority of visitors do not simply pass through the exhibition, but they actually delve and go deeper [...] At the Polin museum, visitors spend around 5-6 hours, which is unprecedented”, Ch9, p. 2</p> <p>“We want to provoke and inspire reflections in our visitors, we want to make them consider their own behaviour in a situation where there is a person at your door, asking for help, and you know what punishment you risk if you do help”, M1, p. 16</p>

<p>Surprised</p>	<p>“They went out surprised at what they had seen. This is very good. When people leave the Warsaw Rising Museum, they have no doubt that the rising was a great and righteous event [...] When people leave the Polin Museum, they have more questions than answers. Poles are shocked by the scale of anti-Semitism in the past, of which they have been unaware. Foreign Jews are shocked by all the things apart from anti-Semitism. If an institution undermines established preconceptions, it is very good”, Ch10, p. 2</p> <p>“Poles come here to visit a museum of the Polish history and see value in it. For Jews, it is a place devoted to that part of their history of which they had no clue. For them the exhibition leads to an illumination. They realize that there is that part of the Jewish past that became overshadowed by Holocaust” Ch9, p. 2</p>
<p>“A flood of visitors”</p>	<p>See Table: Quality, category: figures and interest</p>
<p>“Foundation of the museum”</p>	<p>“In fact, visitors form the foundation of this museum, they are its branches and support, not the reviewers or historians”, M1, p. 22</p> <p>“The reception by ordinary people is most important to us, because you measure the exhibition quality on the basis of professional reviews as well as the visitors’ impressions” Ch9, p. 2</p>
<p>Overwhelmed</p>	<p>“There is a sense of being overwhelmed, because this is no ordinary museum. It is a combination of a museum and an archive” [...] “if you want to visit the museum in a thorough manner, you need at least 20 hours to see and read everything. The fact that you cannot do it during one visit can be overwhelming in a sense. Even two or three visits are not enough. It it a value and a weakness as well. There is a sense of unfulfillment [...] “If you go fast, there may be things you miss” [...] “The fatigue makes people pass really quick through the last gallery”, Ch6, pp. 3-4</p>

4. An interpretation of the key narrative strategies

The first component of the interpretation key is the vision and role of the Museum: its founders and creators declare it is the testimony to the rebirth of the Jewish life in Poland and a reminder of the shared Polish-Jewish history. It is also a grand narrative about Polish Jews. These reflections can be found in particular statements. Two press releases spoke explicitly about the new Polish historical narrative oriented towards accentuating the multi-cultural heritage that made it possible to create the Museum. The three subsequent components of the key are centred around the debate: is the museum more Polish or Jewish? The majority of opinions say that Polin is a Polish-Jewish museum by its nature, since it tells a story of Polish Jews. The museum intertwines Polish and Jewish threads. In order to present the history of Jews, a wider Polish context is necessary. Some express their concern

about the “Jewish spirit” of the Museum that would show the Jewish history from the “minority perspective”. There is one critical voice which states point-blank that the Museum presents a (Polish) dominant narrative and that it should be more Jewish-oriented. One can also observe some interesting attempts at stepping beyond the established dichotomy by emphasising the international nature of the museum or indicating open interpretations of the Polish-Jewish identity dilemmas. In this context, the question arises: Who is a Jew? (key 3). The museum must face the conflicting approaches (presenting people with Jewish roots who did not declare their origins openly vs. presenting only those who identified themselves as Jews). In line with one of the strategies of the narrative initiators, the museum refrains from presenting people who never considered themselves Jewish. However, the analysed narratives refer to these dilemmas and strive to face the pressures from critics and reviewers who want to underline bi-cultural identity of Jews presented in the exhibition and their contribution to Polish culture. One of the texts reads as follows: “The museum strives to combine two approaches by presenting some important persons of Jewish descent who had difficulties with their identity and their place in Polish culture” (Rosman, 2014: 63). In my opinion, it is a deeper problem of external imposition of the Jewish identity as well as the unconscious or philo-Semitic propensity to underline the Jewish roots of famous Poles. However, the problem of the identity of Jews presented in the exhibition is fully realised in the narratives. At the same time, the printed guidebook reads: “There are no univocal answers to the questions of what it means to be a Jew or what Judaism actually is, since the exhibition shows that one can be a Jew in many different ways” (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 2015a, p. 12).

The debate on the contemporary identity also comprises the problem of the last, post-1989 exhibition (key 4). The “Chidusz” periodical used the contemporary Jewish identity as the central theme for its interviews and it described the Polin gallery as “marginalization of the Jewish life after 1989” (Bojanowski 2015: 1). It is a peculiar form of self-examination for the authors of the concept, since this gallery is the smallest section of the museum. Its “core part includes interviews with Jews who speak about their identity in different ways. It is a comfortable situation, since they can decide if they want to speak openly or not” (Jutkiewicz-Kubiak 2013: 19). Recently, a short video presenting the contemporary Jewish life has been added to the last exhibition. In this respect, the “defending” statements prevail (especially in “Chidusz”), including declarations for the future and the willingness to make additions and improvements to the gallery. Similarly, in reference to relations with other institutions, the founders of the Museum declare they do not want any monopoly on “Jewishness” in Poland. They will provide Jewish insti-

tution with access to the Museum spaces with large discounts and are now seeking collaboration with the Jewish Historical Institute, aiming to become a platform for other Jewish organisations in Poland.

Such a spectacular and bold project must give rise to controversies (key 5). The prevalent narrative strategies underline that the Museum strives to show the history of Polish-Jewish relations without any whitewashing, as objectively as possible, including various perspectives and a variety of source documents (e.g. the pre-war anti-Semitism, the Kielce pogrom, March 1968). Historical controversies are not omitted, but often accentuated through questions included in texts. In one of the interviews, the author includes the key oppositions and refers to the major doubts, trying to overcome those dichotomies (Wodziński M., 2015).

Another statement, in turn, emphasises that the public expression of debates and disputes is a proof of the new Poland and the new status of Jews (Rosman, 2014: 61). When the concepts of particular galleries were developed, the pressures usually concerned negotiating some nuances or the greater emphasis on the Polish national interest. I refer to the political pressures and pressures from the sponsors. One of the interviews is more critical in this respect and reveals the backstage of "negotiating" the history (Paziński P., 2005: 9).

In their narratives, the founders and creators of the Museum underlined the high quality of the exhibition and the large scale of the initiative (key 6). This discourse is supported mainly by figures: 20 years research and preparations, 1.5 million visitors, 1000 years of history, numerous awards, as well as by authorities: eminent historians, inquiries, reviews of the gallery. Furthermore, in 2016 the Museum hosted a history conference attended by worldwide 100 specialists on the history of Polish Jews and during that event, as stated by one of the authors of the exhibition, "we encouraged constructive criticism and seeking errors in the core exhibition" (Stoła 2016: 16). This key includes two statements admitting that the museum has a limited number of exhibits, but the form of a narrative museum is the reason here. This issue is also explained in the printed guidebook: We strived to compensate the scarcity of material exhibits with the richness of the immaterial heritage: we included quotes expressing the views of the authors" (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 2015a: 11). Interestingly, only one statement accentuates the multimedia aspect of the museum, while the visitors expressing their opinions on-line see it as the key attractive feature of the exhibition.

Relatively little is said about the visitor's aesthetic experiences. The narrative strategies tend to focus on the historical mission, the cognitive impact and the national categorisation of the visitor: Polish, Jewish or Israeli. The visitors are mentioned more frequently when the huge interest in the exhibition becomes the

centre of the narrative strategy. The visitor is supposed to be positively surprised, inspired to reflect and ready to make another visit at Polin. Two statements position the visitor as the foundation of the exhibition (one interview has this expression in its title). On the other hand, one article admits that the visitor may feel overwhelmed by the size of the exhibition and its narrative form. Immediately after the opening of the museum, a “tree of wishes” was installed at the entrance, so everyone can place their opinions on the museum on it; today this function is performed by the visitor survey. The dominant strategy in the narratives about the museum focuses on its openness to change and criticism, including visitors’ suggestions. A comprehensive survey among visitors could provide more in-depth information in this category.

The analysis of selected press materials regarding the idea of the Museum of the History of Polish Jews and first years of its operation allows to conclude that the related discursive strategies are not homogeneous, but the core message comprises several interpretation keys which reflect the fundamental identity dilemmas (and this constitutes the immanent element of the Jewish theoretical and social reflection). These issues had to be faced when the Jewish museum was being established in Poland. Both analysed periodicals pay much attention to the very idea of the museum. One issue of “Chidusz” in 2015 focuses on this aspect in particular. The series of interviews posed the key question about the process of building the Jewish identity in Poland. However, the editors believe that the debate on “presenting the history of Jews from an excessively Polish historical perspective seems belated. This debate should have taken place in 2006, when the initial concept of the exhibition was rejected” (Bojanowski 2015: 1).

The analysis of discourse should be based both on *what is said in/with the discourse* (i.e. the mechanism of construing arguments, ideas and concepts included in the discourse) and on *what is not said in/with the discourse* (i.e. omissions, gaps, “silences”) (Rapley 2010: 194). It must be admitted that the discourse of the Museum’s founders and creators is open, ready to enter into polemics and consider critical voices. Another interesting aspect is the *rhetorical effect* of the text, i.e. how the text *strives to convince* the reader about the legitimacy of the presented interpretation (ibidem: 197). The prevalent opinions are balanced and discreet, encompassing various perspectives, posing internal questions that do not always follow from the form of a given article (e.g. interview). One opinion is explicitly critical about the final concept of the Museum. Identity dilemmas are fully realised and attempts are made at overcoming or stepping beyond established dichotomies. The narratives tend to take into account the necessity to negotiate meanings and underline the multiplicity of historical sources and the possibility of the visitor’s

individual opinion and seeking threads in the exhibition that are more Polish- or Jewish-oriented. Discourses indicate the necessary compromises in the process of developing the concept of the Museum. Several strategies show internal disputes between creators and sponsors at the concept phase as well as the consensus reaching process. Stronger rhetorical effects are used, when the large scale of the idea and the efforts of the creators are described (“a huge work”, “a bold venture”). Simultaneously, the diligence in terms of historical reliability is emphasised through references to external historical authorities and the long years of research by historians. This rhetorical effect is slightly softened, when it is admitted that the huge and bold project remains incomplete and open to modifications.

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