

NeDiPa

Typology of difficult heritage sites in ECE

Typology of difficult heritage sites in ECE was created at the stage of writing the proposal on the basis of existing research. In the course of the project it has been consulted with various experts attending project events (especially conferences and stakeholders meetings). As a result of the comments and suggestions coming from experts from various fields it was reviewed. In its final form it will be also included in the Difficult Heritage Remembrance Framework.

Background & context

The Holocaust caused almost complete destruction of European Jewry, killing 6 millions people, including 3 millions Polish Jews (almost 90% of the pre-war Jewish population in Poland). Although the Holocaust is usually associated with death and concentration camps, in Central-Eastern Europe killings also took place in plain view, in villages, as well as in forests and by the roads, in the process called „the Holocaust by bullets”¹.

The destruction of Polish and Central-Eastern European Jewish communities left behind a very troubling legacy that can be defined as „difficult heritage”². This difficult heritage consists of very different types of sites, such as abandoned, destroyed or inappropriately repurposed architectural heritage (synagogues, bathhouses, schools, etc.), neglected or desecrated Jewish cemeteries, unmarked burial sites of Jewish victims of the Holocaust, as well as material remains of the infrastructure of genocide. These objects of material heritage were further neglected under the Communist rule. Initiatives of commemoration and revitalization of these sites often result in conflict or cannot take off the ground because of a strong taboo surrounding the history and heritage of these places. There is a lack of tools and standards in dealing with the topic and challenges it represents. The scale of it is overwhelming, while the contemporary

¹ P. Desbois, *The Holocaust by Bullets: A Priest's Journey to Uncover the Truth Behind the Murder of 1.5 Million Jews*, Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke 2008.

² S. MacDonald, *Difficult Heritage: Negotiating the Nazi Past in Nuremberg and Beyond*, Routledge, London 2008.

Jewish communities in Poland and East Central Europe (ECE) are small in numbers. Our assumption is that, if this difficult heritage is to be genuinely integrated into the local preservation and commemoration practices, and incorporated into ethics of care by residents and lawmakers, it has to be fostered as a joint effort of local communities, Jewish and non-Jewish. It is also vital that it should be supported by decision-makers on local, regional, national and European levels.

Reviewed typology

- 1) material remains of the infrastructure of genocide - former death and concentration camps, former labor camps,
- 2) burial sites of the victims of the Holocaust - including those uncommemorated and unmarked,
- 3) killing sites & sites of violence - sites where tragic events of the Holocaust occurred, but that do not contain human remains,
- 4) Jewish cemeteries - including neglected and/or hidden ones, often invisible in the landscape,
- 5) Jewish material architectural heritage - former synagogues and prayer halls, ritual baths, theaters, religious schools etc,
- 6) sites of difficult-micro-histories,
- 7) compound sites representing more than one of the types and / or where various difficult histories overlap and intersect.

Examples

1: Material remains of the infrastructure of genocide (former death and concentration camps, former labor camps)

Except for the major centres of genocide such as Auschwitz, Treblinka, Majdanek and others, on the territory of East Central Europe there are also material remains of other infrastructure of genocide, including numerous smaller camps, eg. labor camps. The Adampol labor camp can serve as an example. The camp - located in close proximity to Sobibor - existed between 1941 and 1943. Its prisoners were slave workers on farmland. The number of people imprisoned in Adampol was estimated at 600 men, women and children. Many people died there and their bodies were buried in individual and mass

graves in the vicinity of the camp. In the spring of 1944 a special unit supervised by Sicherheitsdienst officers arrived at Adampol to conceal German crimes. Human remains were dragged out of their graves and burned on a custom fire grate.

In 2014-16 Caroline Sturdy Colls, PhD, an expert in the non-invasive archaeology of the Holocaust, conducted a series of non-invasive research activities in Adampol. She wrote her conclusions in a report which became the first monograph of the Adampol camp.

Currently, part of the camp infrastructure was repurposed or is being used by various parties. After the war, the place where the fire grate had been located was commemorated with a monument for the victims of Nazi crimes, however the commemoration does not give visitors any idea about the perimeter of the camp, its infrastructure and the burials located in the vicinity.



Photo: Zapomniane Foundation

2: Burial sites of the victims of the Holocaust (including those uncommemorated and unmarked)

On a private plot in Sulbiny, in June 1944, 39 Jews were shot by military policemen and the Gestapo at the military training square. They were local Jews from Garwolin, mostly tailors and shoemakers, recruited to work in the barracks. The location of the grave was possible thanks to the testimony of an inhabitant of Sulbiny, whose uncle saw the bodies right after the execution, in the place where they were buried. It was not the only crime against people of Jewish nationality in Sulbiny. In May 1944, the Nazis shot 42 Jews. Their burial place is unknown. In the same year, Wehrmacht soldiers shot about 60 Poles and 70 Jews near the Wilga river. The bodies were buried at the place of execution.

The site has not been commemorated, nor marked so far. The Zapomniane Foundation conducted research on the site and would like to undertake activities leading to a commemoration.

The overall number of similar sites (individual, collective and mass burials) is estimated at around 1500.



Photo: Zapomniane Foundation

3: Killing sites & sites of violence

There were many killing sites across East Central Europe and many of them we will never locate precisely. However, this category of sites, includes both the execution sites deep in the forests as well as sites of brutal violence, such as for example Umschlagplatz. The largest collection point was in Warsaw next to the Warsaw Ghetto. In 1942 between 254,000 – 265,000 Jews passed through the Warsaw *Umschlagplatz* on their way to the Treblinka extermination camp during Operation Reinhard. Often those awaiting the arrival of Holocaust trains, were held at the *Umschlagplatz* overnight. Other examples of *Umschlagplatz* include the one at Radogoszcz station - adjacent to the Łódź Ghetto - where people were sent to Chełmno extermination camp and Auschwitz.



Fot. Adrian Grycuk

4. Jewish cemeteries, including neglected and/or hidden ones, often invisible in the landscape

The 18th and 19th-century Jewish cemetery at ul. Gwarna in Wrocław, formerly known as *Jüdischer Friedhof an der Claassenstrasse* in the German city of Breslau, operated for almost a hundred years, from 1761 until its closure in 1856. Over 4,000 people from the Jewish community of the city were buried here. It was said to have been one of the most impressive cemeteries in Germany in terms of funerary art.

At the time of its establishment, in the mid-18th century, the area was outside the city walls. Along with the urban development of Breslau/Wrocław towards the south, the Main Railway Station was built in its close proximity in the 1850s, and it became a part of the busy, central district of the city. From the beginning of the 20th century, the cemetery was subject to urban encroachment, which gradually reduced the historic burial area, and was subject to further devastation in the 1940s during the Nazi period. The cemetery was formally liquidated in post-war Poland, in the 1950s and 1960s, when the remaining tombstones were removed from its site as part of a wider campaign to transform almost all of the seventy German cemeteries in the city (Protestant, Catholic, Jewish, communal and military cemeteries) into parks, recreational areas, and – in some cases – into land for development.

The hidden Jewish cemetery at ul. Gwarna is an example of a place that disappeared from the map of the city after the war. Located opposite the Main Railway Station, it is now part of a yard surrounded by blocks of flats. It remains a forgotten and neglected space, which was recalled by archaeological research and exhumations in 2017 carried out as a result of the construction of a hotel in this area. The 2000 spatial development plan of the Wrocław City Council calls for the revitalization of the area and the creation of a memorial park, including the introduction of greenery but it has not been implemented until today.

For several years, the UMF has been making efforts to commemorate the cemetery, and in 2020-2022, together with FestivALT, the Foundation ran the "Place of Remembering and Forgetting" project involving the local community and other stakeholders around the possible commemoration. The result of these works is, among others, Anna Schapiro's artistic and educational project and a report on research among stakeholders entitled "Commemoration of the Jewish cemetery at ul. Gwarna in Wrocław in a social perspective" presenting the analysis of data collected in the field and the conclusions

drawn from these studies and from the reconnaissance activities undertaken by the UMF in the last two years. The report states, among other things, that “representatives of the local community mostly agree that a pre-war Jewish cemetery should be erected at Gwarna Street. The topic of creating a small park or square was approved by the vast majority of research participants. (...) The green area could become an intercultural stimulator of attachment to the place, which - due to its practical function - will also be valuable for people who do not understand and do not fully identify with the history of the cemetery as a place of remembrance of the Jewish community.”



Map: Urban Memory Foundation

5. Jewish material architectural heritage (i.e. former synagogues, ritual baths, theaters, religious schools)

In 1896 a magnificent prayer house and yeshivah for the Chevra Tehilim Congregation (The Society of Psalms) was opened in the Jewish Quarter of Krakow. The building was

designed by the prolific Polish-Jewish architect Nachman Kopald. During the Holocaust, the Nazis devastated the building's interior. After the war and until 2006, the building housed the "Krakowiacy" singing and dancing group.

In 2001, under the 1997 "restitution of Jewish property law" , the synagogue was returned to the official Jewish Community of Kraków. In 2008 magnificent polichromes were uncovered on the interior walls, becoming the most important collection of surviving Jewish religious wall paintings in Kazimierz.

In 2012 despite attempts to turn the building into a cultural venue the Jewish Community of Kraków leased the building to the Mezcal disco, who installed shelving against the wall paintings, and speakers in the site of the Aron Hakodesh (the Ark of the Torah). The condition of the frescoes deteriorated significantly. Meanwhile, in 2013, the building was officially registered with the city's heritage department.



Photo: Jason Francisco

The Mezcal bar did not survive and was subsequently rented out to a bar called Hevre, where people are invited to enjoy drinks and food in atmospheric Jewish ruins. The creation of Hevre involved the deliberate destruction of the former site of the Aron Hakodesh to create a new door, including the loss of important historical ornamentation.

It is unclear how and why the city's heritage department gave permission for this to happen.

In response, between 2017-2019 FestivALT has staged three arts interventions at the site, drawing attention to the owner's desecration of one of the most significant pre-war Jewish buildings, and one of the worst examples of the ongoing exploitation of the neighborhood's Jewish heritage.

The site remains uncommemorated, and unmarked. FestivALT is currently conducting archival research into the history of the building and will undertake activities leading to raising awareness about the site's history

6: Sites of difficult-micro-histories

The more than 650-year-old Józef oak grows in the park on the grounds of the palace and manor complex in Wiśniowa in the Podkarpacie region. The local community retains the memory that it was a wartime hiding place for Jewish brothers, which is also confirmed by a post-war account by a journalist named Julian Pelc. The Józef oak is a chimney tree, hollow in the middle almost the whole height. During the war, there was an entrance to its interior on a level accessible to people. Today, the entrance is overgrown and only a small crack remains, through which you can look inside. Inside the tree are a dozen wooden steps and metal brackets.

For Dawid and Paul Denholz, who came from nearby Frysztak, it was probably one of many hiding places. After escaping in 1942 from the KL Plaszow camp in Kraków, they hid in the surrounding forests, fields and farms. Some former neighbors came to their aid, others posed a mortal threat to them. They were the only members of their family to survive the war, and after it ended, they both settled in the United States. Natalia Romik and Aleksandra Janus carried out the first comprehensive survey of the site as part of their exhibition "Hideouts. The Architecture of Survival".



Photo: Natalia Romik