

Theory of Change for the Difficult Heritage sites in ECE

This Theory of Change has been developed for the Difficult Heritage sites in ECE, on the example of Jewish neglected heritage sites in Poland.

1. Initial considerations

The destruction of Polish and Central-Eastern European Jewish communities left behind a very troubling legacy that can be defined as „difficult heritage”. 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. 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. 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, and supported by decision-makers on regional, national and European levels.

2. Process leading to elaborating the current Theory of Change

The current Theory of Change has been put together following 4 working sessions for project partners and consultations with experts and local memory activists in Poland. Our analysis of the *status quo* was based on literature overview, experience from fieldwork, interviews with stakeholders involved in the work with Jewish heritage sites in Poland, public authorities dealing with the heritage and descendants of Jewish families with roots in today’s Poland. Moreover, we included observations from the current activities in the NeDiPa project and memory work for 12 neglected Jewish heritage sites.

The underlying objectives that drove our reflections on the current Theory of Change are as follows:

- We wanted to identify WHAT kind of change we’re trying to make
- We wanted to identify whether our work is contributing towards its intended impact and how we can measure our own performance
- We wanted to spot potential risks by identifying underlying assumptions
- We wanted to articulate our intermediate outcomes
- We wanted to establish consistency for the sake of potential partnerships

We want our Theory of Change to be credible (based on previous experience), achievable (taking stock of our resources) and supported (with stakeholders involved in defining and validating it).

3. Which problem we are trying to solve and what is our main assumption?

The destruction of Polish and Central-Eastern European Jewish communities left behind a very troubling legacy that can be defined as „difficult heritage”. It consists of various types of sites:

- 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
- material remains of the infrastructure of genocide

Initiatives of commemoration and revitalization of these sites often result in conflict or cannot take off the ground. Why is that?

WHERE LIES THE CHALLENGE AND WHAT ARE WE MISSING?

- The **sheer scale** of Jewish difficult heritage is overwhelming, while the contemporary Jewish communities in Poland and Central & Eastern Europe are too small in numbers to effectively lead the process of caring for these sites.
- **Strong taboos** surround the history and heritage of such places, among residents, policy-makers and wider communities.
- We are dealing not only with the legacy of the genocide, but also years of neglect and distortions of history that came after WWII under the Communist rule – and that still persist in populist and nationalist discourses nowadays
- There are no clear guidelines on how to care for various types of Jewish difficult heritage.
- Expert knowledge is not widely available on how to effectively honour the memory of the Holocaust victims or how to transform taboos and divisions around Jewish difficult heritage into positive action.
- National, regional and local public funding is scarce for Jewish difficult heritage, while local institutions and organisations often have very limited project-based resources.

WHAT ARE OUR RESOURCES AND WHAT DO WE HAVE?

- The civil society in Poland is stronger and more mature than ever before, while there are many local, regional and national actors willing to take action,
- Memory activists and volunteers eagerly conduct important grassroots work,
- The academia representatives are increasingly interested in the topic,
- Small local institutions and organisations are eager to carry out very ambitious tasks,
- International funding – including from the EU – is available to scale up, network and develop new initiatives.

Our actions are based on a hypothesis that **if we foster practice-based culture of remembrance & participatory commemoration practices as a joint local effort** of communities, Jewish and non-Jewish, with support from decision-makers, **then Polish society will genuinely integrate difficult Jewish heritage into local – and subsequently European - memory cultures which contributes to more inclusive societies and strengthening democracy.**

This task is ambitious, but by dealing with difficult heritage, **we can effectively open up social divisions and build up more open-minded, tolerant, inclusive, sustainable and fair societies.** This requires long-term actions and cannot happen overnight, while requiring resources, planning, strategizing and working step-by-step.

4. Who are our key audiences and what are our entry points for reaching them?		
WHO	WHY	ENTRY POINTS
Local Jewish communities	They remain the custodians – and sometimes the gatekeepers – of Jewish difficult heritage	official Jewish Communities, incl. their own specialised bodies; local Jewish organisations, incl. youth organisations, associations, clubs
Jewish diaspora abroad	As descendants of local Jewish communities, they are personally interested in the fate of specific Jewish difficult heritage sites	Own research of activists and the academia; keeping the communication channels open for the diaspora representatives to reach out
Memory activists and volunteers	They drive forward local practice-based culture of remembrance, driven by own commitment and motivations	Networking, word of mouth, social media, press
Broader civil society	Given their increased sense of mission, drive for community building as well as working on the local level, they constitute important allies for qualitative local remembrance practices	Networking, word of mouth, social media, press
Academia	With in-depth focus on specific topics and diligence, the representatives of the academia can bring in knowledge and balanced perspective on issues tackled	Departments specialised in Jewish studies, cultural heritage, history, remembrance

<p>Policy-makers – local, municipal, regional, national, European</p>	<p>Acting on behalf of wider communities, either as their democratic representatives or as specialised civil servants, they should act upon people’s expectations; They are crucial in creating favourable conditions for remembrance practices – locally, nationally, and in Europe</p>	<p>Official channels, public consultations, advocacy campaigns</p>
<p>Wider communities – incl. neighbours, residents</p>	<p>Ideally, they are the participants of remembrance practices – and ideally more active than passive; Their perspectives - expectations and wishes, but also fears and doubts – should be acknowledged and taken on board</p>	<p>Public events, social media, press</p>
<p>People from all the above mentioned groups from outside of Poland</p>	<p>They can help to create synergies, broaden perspectives, build momentum, share good practices, share knowledge, etc.</p>	<p>Similar to above – depending on specific sub-groups</p>

5. What steps are needed to bring about change? Intermediate goals + their measurable effects

Intermediate goals	How?	Measurable effects
<p>Fostering meaningful relations and two-way communication with all the abovementioned stakeholders</p>	<p>Identifying and approaching stakeholders (in particular multipliers within these groups) and creating space for exchanges, building trust, understanding and sharing in an open, safe and inclusive manner</p> <p>Being open to stakeholders reaching out to advice – incl. establishing suitable communication channels</p>	<p>Number of public and non-public events carried out, together with breakdown of participants; number of people reaching out</p>

<p>Carrying out specific, place-based, participatory commemorations</p>	<p>Identifying Jewish difficult heritage sites across Poland, co-designing commemoration strategies with stakeholders & effectively carrying them out</p>	<p>Number of commemorations carried out, number of stakeholders from the abovementioned groups involved, individual testimonials of commemorations' participants (qualitative measurement)</p>
<p>Making available resources related to Jewish difficult heritage in Poland</p>	<p>Creating and co-curating Difficult Heritage Remembrance Framework: a toolkit for memory activists with in-depth case studies, transferability tips, guidelines, links that can support/ be applied to other sites of difficult history in Europe</p>	<p>Materials published and available online; statistics related to online visits</p>
<p>Influencing policy-makers – locally, regionally, nationally, on the European level</p>	<p>Advocating for the need of creating favourable conditions for participatory local commemorations: including guidelines, long-term funding, public awareness-raising</p> <p>Effectively communicating the specificities of quality approach in remembrance and commemorative practices: favouring long-term approach coupled with considerable and lean budgets (rather than one-off allocations of budgets, even if significant)</p> <p>Deconstructing and getting rid of the fear of policy-makers to tackle the topic of Jewish difficult heritage</p>	<p>Direct involvement of policy-makers in commemorative practices and events on the topic; allocation of public budgets for commemorative practices; public policies and frameworks put in place to foster practice-based culture of remembrance</p>

<p>Integrating Jewish difficult heritage in Poland into European practices and European remembrance</p>	<p>Carrying out local remembrance practices in a way that allows to combine both local and European memory culture, in order to counterbalance more exclusive narratives and perspectives on the legacy of WWII that contribute to the rise of populism, nationalism and antisemitism</p> <p>Promoting cultural diversity by co-creating European “difficult heritage community” based on dialogue around the legacy of the Holocaust as a common European issue that involves wide range of stakeholders</p>	<p>Participating in pan-European events, projects, initiatives and practices; Number of European participants in events and commemorations around Jewish difficult heritage</p>
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6. Wider benefits of our actions

Social cohesion and inclusion

Drawing from Council of Europe Framework Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society (so-called Faro Convention from 2005) as well as the build-up and follow-up of the European Year of Cultural Heritage 2018 of the European Union: benefitting from cultural heritage and thus remembrance practices as a resource to facilitate peaceful co-existence, foster social inclusion and integration as well as democratic participation

Sustainability

Bringing closer ecology and community by looking at environmental history and nature as witness of the Holocaust

Embracing the values of the New European Bauhaus by means of green commemorations – sustainability (circularity, zero pollution, biodiversity), aesthetics (style beyond functionality) and inclusion (valorising diversity, participatory governance, accessibility)

Epistemic justice

Bringing back justice in access to knowledge about history – helping communities in Poland to confront the truth that has been distorted by the Community propaganda and is now being distorted by nationalist and populist narratives

Building up more open and tolerant communities (incl. combating antisemitism)

By jointly co-creating safe spaces to make peace with difficult pasts, the communities can become more conscious, understanding and mature in terms of their values, perceptions, (lack of) prejudices and empathy.

Fostering European sense of belonging

By offering the participants of local commemorations experiences that are local yet part of the European remembrance, history and heritage, we can reinforce their own sense of belonging to Europe, its values, traditions and cultural diversity.