Parliamentary Assembly
Assemblée parlementaire
http://assembly.coe.int

1949.2019

COUNCIL OF EUROPE
CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

**Doc. 14960**
05 September 2019

# Jewish cultural heritage preservation

**Report**[1]
Committee on Culture, Science, Education and Media
Rapporteur: Mr Raphaël COMTE, Switzerland, Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe

*Summary*

Jewish cultural heritage forms an integral part of the shared cultural heritage in Europe and therefore requires a common responsibility to preserve it. By ensuring the survival of Jewish historic sites, collective memory would also be preserved. Valuing and having a deeper understanding of Jewish culture and heritage, which reveal significant cross-cultural exchanges and mutual enrichment with other cultures, will also contribute to inter-cultural dialogue, promoting inclusiveness and social cohesion, and combating ignorance and prejudice.

The report recommends to develop guidance for the protection and preservation of Jewish heritage sites in line with the Council of Europe's *acquis* on cultural heritage protection; to assist member States to further develop educational programmes on the value of Jewish cultural heritage, widely embracing schools, universities, museums and the cultural sector; and to consider, in co-operation with the European Union, the possibility to create an award for outstanding volunteer work on Jewish heritage preservation.

1. Reference to committee: Doc. 14477, Reference 4364 of 16 March 2018.

**Contents** **Page**

A. Draft resolution ..... 3
B. Draft recommendation ..... 5
C. Explanatory memorandum by Mr Raphaêl Comte, rapporteur ..... 6
1. Introduction ..... 6
2. The situation of Synagogues in Europe ..... 6
2.1. Overview ..... 6
2.2. The key findings ..... 7
2.3. Regional specificities ..... 8
2.4. Challenges ..... 8
3. Possible responses ..... 9
3.1. Second Temple Synagogue, Hamburg, Germany ..... 10
3.2. The Etz Hayim Synagogue, Izmir, Turkey ..... 10
3.3. The White Stork Synagogue, Wrocław, Poland ..... 11
3.4. The Wooden Synagogue, Pakruojis, Lithuania ..... 11
3.5. The Synagogue, Merthyr Tydfil, Wales ..... 12
3.6. The Great Synagogue, Dąbrowa Tarnowska, Poland ..... 12
4. Key observations ..... 13
4.1. Legal ownership ..... 13
4.2. Research ..... 13
4.3. Collaboration ..... 13
4.4. Education ..... 13
4.5. Integration ..... 13
4.6. Meeting local need ..... 13
4.7. Telling the full story ..... 13
4.8. Economic benefit ..... 13
5. Conclusions ..... 14

## A. Draft resolution[2]

1. Jewish cultural heritage reflects the historic plurality of communities that have lived together over millennia and, while there have been instances of persecution, there have also been significant cross-cultural exchanges and mutual enrichment. The Parliamentary Assembly emphasises that Jewish cultural heritage, both tangible and intangible, forms an integral part of the shared cultural heritage in Europe and therefore requires a common responsibility to preserve it.

2. In this context, the Assembly recalls its Resolution 885 (1987) on the Jewish Contribution to European Culture, Recommendation 1291 (1996) in relation to Yiddish Culture, Resolution 1883 (2012) on Jewish Cemeteries and Resolution 1981 (2014) on Europe's Endangered Heritage.

3. Today, less than one quarter of historic synagogue buildings in Europe still function as synagogues. Without a community of users, the majority are often neglected and are therefore especially vulnerable. By ensuring the survival of such sites, collective memory would also be preserved, and they could continue to serve as "living heritage" able to engage and educate people, especially the young, about their history and culture, strengthening identity and sense of place.

4. Accordingly, the Assembly recommends that the member States of the Council of Europe:

4.1. concerning strategy and policy design:

4.1.1. sign and ratify the Council of Europe Framework Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society (CETS No. 199, "Faro Convention") and the European Landscape Convention (ETS No. 176) if they have not yet done so, and include Jewish cultural heritage equitably in national strategies which take into account cultural heritage according to the principles laid down in these conventions;

4.1.2. recognise the special vulnerability of Jewish heritage as "orphaned" heritage, without a community of users, to be considered in shaping heritage policies and programmes;

4.1.3. include Jewish heritage as a distinct category in national surveys on the state of heritage, develop action plans to ensure that Jewish heritage receives an appropriate level of protection, conservation and maintenance, and direct resources to the most urgent cases of Jewish heritage sites at risk;

4.1.4. value the potential of Jewish cultural heritage sites for fostering inter-cultural dialogue as a means of promoting inclusiveness, social cohesion and combating ignorance and prejudice; and undertake an assessment of the degree to which Jewish history and interaction of Jewish culture with other cultures are understood within society with a view to establish Jewish historical record fully and for Jewish history to be included within school and university curricula, and recognised within the museums' world;

4.1.5. recognise, interpret and communicate a rich intangible cultural heritage namely Jewish traditions, customs, religious practices, language, food, music, arts and crafts;

4.2. concerning implementation at local level:

4.2.1. raise awareness of the pressing need to preserve Jewish heritage, also as an asset of local sustainable development, and foster local "ownership" and engagement by encouraging partnerships among various stakeholders including local authorities, civil society groups and interested Jewish communal and heritage organisations;

4.2.2. develop mechanisms that can facilitate discussion, exchanges and the sharing of knowledge, skills, experiences and best practice, involving volunteer activists and professionals working in the field of Jewish heritage preservation, with a view to advance the sense of a shared ethos and the standardisation of practices;

4.2.3. where required, develop policies to address legal ownership questions in relation to Jewish communal buildings to help solve disputes and to avoid that they adversely affect preservation work;

4.2.4. in the event of development schemes that may endanger Jewish sites, ensure that preservation measures are considered in consultation with heritage agencies and Jewish heritage bodies such as the Foundation for Jewish Heritage;

2. Draft resolution adopted unanimously by the committee on 24 June 2019.

4.2.5. in addition to established conservation practices and methodologies to be applied to Jewish heritage sites, provide training to ensure that the specific heritage value of Jewish heritage sites can be recognised, appropriately assessed and correctly managed;

4.3. concerning the educational value:

4.3.1. address the challenges surrounding the context of Jewish heritage and the impact of the Holocaust in an honest and forthright way through education, as a means to bring a form of societal healing while promoting well-being and reconciliation;

4.3.2. develop educational programming, especially for young people, to acquire greater understanding and appreciation of the Jewish experience, helping them understand the historic diversity of the peoples of Europe, promoting respect for others and democratic citizenship;

4.4. concerning co-operation at European level:

4.4.1. foster inclusion of Jewish heritage sites in the Jewish cultural route, which is part of the Council of Europe Cultural Routes Programme, with a view to co-operate and take part in historical research and education, youth exchanges, and the promotion of contemporary cultural and artistic expression, as well as to interact with other cultural routes promoting the sense of shared history and heritage;

4.4.2. promote and support co-operation and partnerships across Europe, seeking to disseminate best practice in the domain of protection and preservation of Jewish heritage.

5. The Assembly invites the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe to take account of the present resolution and promote co-operation between local and regional authorities in this respect.

6. The Assembly invites the European Union to co-operate with the Council of Europe with a view to supporting the implementation of the Faro Convention, to develop guidance and financial incentives for the protection and preservation of Jewish heritage sites, to consider the setting-up of a mechanism for monitoring the state of Jewish heritage preservation and the introduction of an award for outstanding volunteer work on Jewish heritage preservation.

## B. Draft recommendation[3]

1. The Parliamentary Assembly, referring to its Resolution … (2019) on the Jewish cultural heritage preservation, considers that Jewish cultural heritage forms an integral part of the shared cultural heritage in Europe and that it is therefore a common responsibility to increase efforts to preserve it.

2. Jewish cultural heritage, both tangible and intangible, ought to be used as a key element in history teaching for it is a concrete expression of the Jewish life and historic presence in Europe. Valuing and having a deeper understanding of Jewish culture and heritage, which reveal significant cross-cultural exchanges and mutual enrichment with other cultures, will also contribute to inter-cultural dialogue, promoting inclusiveness and social cohesion, and combating ignorance and prejudice.

3. The Council of Europe Framework Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society (CETS No. 199, "Faro Convention"), the European Heritage Strategy for the 21st Century (Strategy 21), the Council of Europe Cultural Routes Programme and the European Heritage Days all provide an excellent framework to promote Jewish cultural heritage.

4. Therefore, the Assembly recommends that the Committee of Ministers build on these instruments and on the existing activities of the Council of Europe to:

4.1. develop guidance for the protection and preservation of Jewish heritage sites in line with the Council of Europe's *acquis* on cultural heritage protection;

4.2. assist member States to further develop educational programmes on the value of Jewish cultural heritage, widely embracing schools, universities, museums and the cultural sector;

4.3. consider, in co-operation with the European Union, the possibility to create an award for outstanding volunteer work on Jewish heritage preservation.

3. Draft recommendation adopted unanimously by the committee on 24 June 2019.

## C. Explanatory memorandum by Mr Raphaêl Comte, rapporteur

### 1. Introduction

1. This report was initiated by a motion for a resolution tabled by Ms Angela Smith and others on 23 January 2018 which highlighted the special challenges being faced by Jewish cultural heritage as revealed in a recent survey by the Foundation for Jewish Heritage[4] following research it conducted to map, grade and assess the condition of the historic synagogues of Europe. Given the Council of Europe's ongoing work in developing cultural heritage awareness, protection and presentation, that Jewish heritage is an ancient and integral aspect of European culture and, finally, that 2018 has been designated the European Year of Cultural Heritage, it felt an appropriate moment for the Council to undertake research into the current state of Jewish built heritage in Europe today.

2. In the past, the Assembly has considered related questions, namely Resolution 885 (1987) on the Jewish Contribution to European Culture, Recommendation 1291 (1996) in relation to Yiddish Culture, Resolution 1883 (2012) on Jewish Cemeteries and Resolution 1981 (2014) on Europe's Endangered Heritage.

3. Indeed, the Framework Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society (CETS No.199, "Faro Convention") called upon the member States to adhere to a set of principles for heritage protection and upon the Council of Europe to maintain a monitoring function in regard to cultural heritage in general. The articles of the Faro Convention are of direct relevance to this report emphasising the following principles:

– the value and benefits of cultural heritage to society, while putting ordinary citizens at the centre through linkage to human rights;

– cultural heritage is the common heritage of Europe, and its different expressions should be treated equitably;

– heritage preservation has a relevance to everyone, and is the responsibility of everyone;

– cultural heritage promotes an appreciation of diversity, respect for other cultures than one's own and, through inter-cultural dialogue, co-existence and social cohesion;

– to make cultural heritage fully accessible, it needs to be identified, studied, protected, conserved, interpreted and presented;

– education is a key component, cultivating a cultural collective memory within society;

– cultural heritage is a positive resource that can bring social and economic benefit.

4. I wish to thank Mr Michael Mail, Chief Executive of the Foundation for Jewish Heritage and Dame Helen Hyde DBE, Chairperson of the Foundation, for their assistance and expertise in drafting this report. I have also taken account of some key issues that were raised during my fact finding visit to Lithuania in October 2018, both with people who are directly involved in restoration projects locally and those who are involved in policy design at state level. In this respect, I wish to thank the Lithuanian parliamentary delegation, Mr Martynas Uzpelkis and the Lithuanian Jewish (Litvak) Community for helping us to organise a dense programme including field visits to 13 restoration projects in different parts of the country.

### 2. The situation of Synagogues in Europe

#### *2.1. Overview*

5. The Jewish presence in Europe goes back over 2,500 years and, over that time, the Jewish people evolved a distinct and rich culture which made a unique contribution to wider European civilisation and remains a remarkable legacy to this day stretching right across the continent.

6. Jewish heritage sites – synagogues, Jewish quarters, communal buildings, cemeteries, monuments – are repositories of Jewish life, art and customs, with many unique and beautifully constructed buildings reflecting real architectural and artistic achievement.

4. http://foundationforjewishheritage.com.

7. The most emblematic feature of the Jewish communities has been the synagogues they built, large and small, impressive and modest. The synagogue was much more than a place of worship, it was the main public space of the Jewish community and its symbolic representation. Therefore, Jews and non-Jews assigned the synagogues special importance as the embodiment of Jewish presence and of Jewish communal and religious life.

8. The urban situation and the exterior aspect of the synagogue often reflected the position of the Jewish community in the structure of local society, ranging from "ghettoisation" to complete acculturation, which became more prevalent with the Enlightenment which brought Jewish emancipation to Europe. The look of synagogues went through a major transformation as Jewish communities sought to demonstrate that they were now fully European citizens; that the synagogue should match the church in look and splendour.

9. However, the story of the 20th century became one of transitions, with massive, and often tragic, population loss and displacement culminating in the catastrophe of the Holocaust. In the 19th century, 9 out of 10 Jews lived in Europe, today it is 1 out of 10 – the Jewish people no longer “live where they had lived”. What were once the heartlands of the Jewish people for many centuries in countries such as Poland and Lithuania, these communities were largely extinguished. Without a community of users, this ancient heritage has been under attack through neglect, natural forces, and human actions – and today remains in many places in crisis.

10. Especially tragic was the fate of former synagogues in Eastern Europe under communist rule: they were demolished, reconstructed for various purposes, or simply abandoned. In Western Europe, where the state of preservation was significantly better, reduced Jewish communities have struggled to maintain numerous synagogues. However, in the United Kingdom for example, unaffected by the Holocaust, natural migration of the Jewish population from smaller to larger cities and from city centre neighbourhoods to the suburbs left many historic synagogues abandoned, sold and demolished.

11. After half a century of neglect, there has recently been growing public interest in synagogue architecture. Jewish built heritage is now more widely perceived as an integral part of local cityscapes and of European culture in general. For example, the Council of Europe’s Cultural Routes Programme includes a specific Jewish route. Nevertheless, the situation with synagogues has remained unclear. While specific outstanding buildings have been recognised, preserved and documented, a comprehensive picture concerning the current situation of the existent historic synagogues has been missing. Moreover, the demolition of many former synagogues has continued into the present.

12. This is what led the Foundation for Jewish Heritage to commission research, undertaken by the Center for Jewish Art at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem,[5] to create an inventory of all the historic synagogues of Europe in order to provide a comprehensive picture of the current state of these buildings, with each one rated according to their significance and condition.[6]

13. The countries covered by the research were the members of the Council of Europe with the addition of Belarus which has important Jewish heritage sites.

### *2.2. The key findings*

14. The key findings of this mapping research were as follows:

| Significance | Total | At risk | % |
|---|---|---|---|
| International | 90 | 16 | 18% |
| National | 624 | 148 | 24% |
| Regional | 1,565 | 360 | 23% |
| Local | 958 | 233 | 24% |
| Total | 3,237 | 757 | 23% |
| Total International and National | 714 | 164 | 23% |

– **there are 3,237 historic synagogue buildings in Europe:** it is calculated that there were 17,000 synagogues in Europe in 1939 on the eve of the Second World War, therefore those that survived represent **19% of the 1939 total**;

5. http://cja.huji.ac.il/.
6. http://historicsynagogueseurope.org/synagogue-map.

– **of the 3,237 sites, 718 are today functioning synagogues (22%):** more than three quarters of the historic synagogues that functioned in 1939 and that are still extant are either used for other purposes or are abandoned;

– **757 synagogues are designated as being at risk (23%):** a quarter of the historic synagogues still standing today are in poor or very bad condition, sufficient to be deemed in danger.

### *2.3. Regional specificities*

15. The main architectural characteristic of the synagogue is that it possesses a large prayer hall. The synagogue buildings no longer used as such serve various purposes, for example 133 are places of worship for other faiths, 180 are museums, 289 are cultural and art centres, 900 became dwellings or offices, and other uses include as gyms, theatres and cinemas, storage spaces and restaurants, as well as garages and fire depots. 300 former synagogues stand today abandoned.

16. The percentage of synagogues that survived the war significantly differs from country to country. In general, it is much lower in the countries of Eastern Europe and much higher in Western Europe. The lowest level of preservation is in Belarus – only 7% of synagogues that once existed there are still extant. About 10% of synagogues are preserved in Ukraine, Russian Federation, Latvia, Lithuania, Republic of Moldova and Serbia. 14% of synagogues are preserved in Poland and Croatia, 18% in Romania. In Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Slovak Republic and Bosnia and Herzegovina the situation is much better, with 30% of synagogues still extant.

17. Further west the level of preservation becomes more significant – about 50% of synagogues are in existence in Italy, about 60% in France, Netherlands and the United Kingdom. In some cases, of course, the statistics are meaningless. In Norway there were only two synagogues and both of them are preserved, which means the level of preservation is 100%.

18. It appears that the synagogues in the former Soviet Union tended to disappear much more than in other countries. However, the synagogues in the territories that were Soviet prior to the Second World War have been preserved to a far lesser degree in comparison to the territories that were annexed by the USSR as the result of the war.

19. For example, in Belarus, two thirds of the synagogues that exist today are situated in the western part of the country, annexed in 1939, and only one third are in the pre-war Soviet Belorussia. The same is true for the Ukraine. Many more synagogue buildings are preserved in those parts of the country that prior to the war were Poland, Romania and Czechoslovakia, than in pre-war Soviet Ukraine. From the comparison between pre-war and post-war Soviet territories, we can conclude that the disappearance of synagogues in the Soviet Union began before the Second World War and the Holocaust.

20. In the countries of the former communist bloc in Eastern Europe, the situation with preservation of synagogues is better: about 14% of synagogues are preserved in Poland, about 18% in Romania and former Yugoslavia, and about 30% in Bulgaria, Hungary and Czechoslovakia.

21. The difference between the Soviet Union and other communist countries has several reasons. Firstly, we have already seen that the destruction of the synagogues in the USSR started much earlier, before the Holocaust. Secondly, the majority of synagogues in Belarus and Ukraine (and Lithuania and Latvia) were timber buildings and much more vulnerable to destruction during the war and after its end. Thirdly, there was no private property in the Soviet Union, so that all buildings belonged to a State which was inherently hostile to religious communities and which did with them whatever it wanted. In the East European communist countries outside the USSR in contrast, Jewish communities continued to exist as legal entities and the State-sponsored destruction of synagogues was not so intense.

22. The situation in Western Europe was much better than in the East. Here the synagogues were mostly masonry, the Jewish communities legally owned the buildings and the State was more or less neutral and did not hold an antagonistic position towards religion.

### *2.4. Challenges*

23. The Jewish heritage today faces the following main challenges.

*2.4.1. "Orphaned" heritage*

24. Most Jewish heritage buildings exist today without active communities of users making them immediately vulnerable. There also remains a certain ambivalence within surrounding society who consider such sites as not their own – "minority heritage" – therefore not as valued. This is also reflected in the lack of knowledge regarding how these buildings functioned, what the heritage value is, and what they now require in terms of preservation and sustainability. There is still a legacy from the policy of ignoring Jewish history prevalent in former communist countries and, most worryingly, significant levels of antisemitism, which has plagued Europe for centuries, are still being documented across Europe which may also be a factor. Furthermore, while many Jewish communal properties in the former communist countries have been returned to the Jewish community, there are instances where the ownership issue has not been resolved and this can hinder preservation efforts.

*2.4.2. Trauma*

25. Many of these buildings reflect a deep societal trauma whose barbarity is hard to face. It can be more comfortable psychologically to simply ignore such sites and what they represent. There can also be an issue of competing narratives surrounding the events of the Holocaust, for example in relation to the level of collaboration with the Nazis, which can add to the sensitivities and difficulties in addressing such sites. It is an interesting exercise to visit the websites of towns that had substantial or majority Jewish populations before the war – *whose history was largely a Jewish history* – and see what is now presented of that history. This neglect however is also true for sections of the Jewish world for which the Holocaust is a deeply painful memory that is easier to avoid.

*2.4.3. Scale*

26. There have been numerous successful Jewish heritage preservation projects undertaken in recent years, however the sheer number of sites that continue to be at risk remains a barrier to action – it can seem an overwhelming task.

*2.4.4. Cost*

27. Heritage restoration and reconfiguring old buildings for new uses is a sophisticated and costly process. Especially in financially hard times where the focus for governments is far more on maintaining core social services, heritage preservation in general, and "orphaned" Jewish heritage in particular, is simply not seen as a priority. The preservation policies are often formally in place, but are not being implemented in practice because of financial constraints.

## 3. Possible responses

28. There have been increased efforts to preserve, protect and present Jewish heritage as its historical, architectural and social significance has become more recognised, as well as its educational potential for contemporary society.

29. Growing numbers of local champions, often not Jewish themselves, are determined to make sure that the Jewish story and contribution does not disappear. Indeed, citizen participation and social activism have often proved decisive to driving forward plans to rescue endangered Jewish heritage. At the other end of the engagement spectrum, the importance of this work has been recognised by the European Union and Iceland, Norway and Liechtenstein under the European Economic Area (EEA) and Norway financial grants mechanism, which have provided funding for specific Jewish heritage preservation initiatives.

30. There are today projects right across Europe that suggest how such sites can be sympathetically brought back into use and given a sustainable future. They are good examples of "adaptive re-use" – re-inventing old sites for new purposes. Below are case studies of such initiatives at various stages of development that point to the possibility and potential.

### *3.1. Second Temple Synagogue, Hamburg, Germany*

#### *3.1.1. Introduction*

31. In the early 19th century, Hamburg had the biggest Jewish community in Germany. The Neue Israelitische Tempelverein of Hamburg, founded in 1817, was one of the earliest Reform congregations and played an important role in the development of the Reform movement in its theology, liturgy, music, and architecture. In the early 1840s, its members decided to build a new Temple which was the very first Reform synagogue to be constructed in a major German city. It was an imposing building combining forms of neo-classicism with elements of Neo-Gothic and Moorish style. Today, the Temple is considered one of the most important architectural traces of the Reform movement of the 19th century in Germany.

#### *3.1.2. The challenge*

32. In 1931, the Jewish community moved to a new location and the Temple was sold. During the Second World War, the building was partially destroyed during air raids on Hamburg. Two parts of the structure are still preserved – the entrance in the west, and the eastern part with the apse. Today the property is in private ownership and parts serve as a garage. The rear of the building is out of use and in very bad condition. The whole site is in danger due to complete neglect.

#### *3.1.3. The project*

33. The first stage of the preservation plan is to conduct research. This will be undertaken by the “Institute for the History of Jews in Germany” based in Hamburg, and “Bet Tfila – Research Unit for Jewish Architecture”, Technische Universität Braunschweig who will document the structure and history of the Temple. In recognising and drawing attention to this important heritage, the longer-term plan is to protect the remnants of the site, turn it into a memorial and educational centre that will present the history of the synagogue and the significance of the site to a wider public, while also exploring the building being used once again as a synagogue in consultation with the current Reform community in Hamburg.

### *3.2. The Etz Hayim Synagogue, Izmir, Turkey*

#### *3.2.1. Introduction*

34. The Etz Hayim Synagogue is an ancient building – the oldest synagogue in Izmir (formerly Smyrna) – that dates back to the time of the Romaniot Jews who settled in Asia Minor during the Byzantine period. It was later rebuilt by Sephardic Jews who had been expelled from Spain and were welcomed by the Ottoman Empire. The Etz Hayim therefore is a mix of architectural styles including both Spanish and Ottoman elements which is also reflected in the impressive frescoes that are another special feature of the building. This confluence of influences that the building represents is unique to Izmir. The synagogue forms part of a group of nine historic synagogues in the old city of Izmir which is itself a designated conservation zone.

#### *3.2.2. The challenge*

35. The problems faced by the Etz Hayim Synagogue are ones of decay over time, past city-wide disasters including fires and earthquakes, and a declining Jewish community that lacks the means to maintain the building. There had also been uncertainty regarding the ownership of the site. At one point, the building’s very future was in doubt, but urgent works have been carried out to repair the roof and stabilise the floor which was sinking. However, the building remains in a precarious situation.

#### *3.2.3. The project*

36. The project to restore the Etz Haim Synagogue is part of a larger effort to save all the historic synagogues of the old quarter of Izmir being led by the Israeli-based Kiriaty Foundation, working in co-operation with the Izmir Municipality, the Jewish community of Izmir, and the Ministry of Culture and Tourism of Turkey. The ownership issue relating to these sites was recently resolved in the community’s favour, and the vision is now to save the Etz Haim and integrate it into a wider presentation of all the synagogues, turning the whole complex into a unique Jewish museum and cultural venue which will make the buildings available to a wider public, and present the story of the Jews of the region, its history, values and traditions and the distinct

Sephardi heritage that was introduced in the 15th century. A further key aspect will be to present – and celebrate – the story of co-existence that has been a feature of Jewish-Muslim relations in the region, the cross-cultural influences and shared values, and the contribution that the Jewish community has made.

### *3.3. The White Stork Synagogue, Wrocław, Poland*

#### *3.3.1. Introduction*

37. Cultural diversity is one of the most important historical and cultural attributes that makes Wrocław (formerly Breslau) so distinctive. Rulers and borders have changed over the centuries and it was home to many nations and denominations owing to its location along various trade and migration routes. The Jewish presence was first documented over 800 years ago. With the Enlightenment came the proposal to build one main synagogue that would serve the entire community, and this became the neo-classical White Stork Synagogue inaugurated in 1829.

#### *3.3.2. The challenge*

38. The building was confiscated by the Nazis during the Second World War as part of the destruction of Jewish life, and it was used as an auto garage and warehouse for stolen Jewish property. After various incarnations under the post war communist authorities, the building was permanently returned to the Jewish community in 1996 but in a parlous state of disrepair.

#### *3.3.3. The project*

39. A project of restoration immediately began led by the Bente Kahan Foundation with the support of the city of Wrocław and the EEA financial mechanism. Today, the Wrocław Center for Jewish Culture and Education at the White Stork Synagogue is a hub for exhibitions, film screenings, workshops, lectures and concerts, making it a well-known feature of the contemporary cultural scene in Wrocław. The building also contains a permanent exhibition entitled “History Reclaimed: Jewish Life in Wrocław and Lower Silesia” and a small functioning synagogue. The Center has specifically targeted young people and its educational theatre performances on Jewish historical themes have been seen by 25,000 youngsters. The synagogue, together with the Eastern Orthodox, Roman Catholic and Lutheran Churches, is part of the Culture Path of the Four Denominations district whose members organise cultural, educational and ecumenical events with the support of the Wrocław Municipality.

### *3.4. The Wooden Synagogue, Pakruojis, Lithuania*

#### *3.4.1. Introduction*

40. Jews settled in Pakruojis in the early 1700s. The majority were merchants and they contributed heavily to the development of the local economy. The growing Jewish population stimulated the growth of the town and its social life. The wooden Synagogue itself dates from 1801 and is the oldest surviving synagogue in Lithuania today. The Synagogue operated until the Second World War when the Pakruojis Jewish community was murdered en masse.

#### *3.4.2. The challenge*

41. After the war the synagogue became a recreation club and later a cinema. The building caught fire several times which caused much damage putting its future in doubt and there were calls for it to be demolished.

#### *3.4.3. The project*

42. The Pakruojis Regional Administration and the Lithuanian Cultural Heritage Department worked firstly on saving and protecting the building. The Regional Administration and the Lithuanian Jewish Community – the synagogue’s formal owner – then entered into an agreement on its adaptation for public use. The works were completed in 2016 with financing from the EEA financial mechanism, which resulted in the renovation of the building and the restoration of striking murals in the interior. The site is now being used by the Pakruojis Public Library to house a children’s literature section as well as hosting concerts and other cultural events for the town. There is also a permanent exhibit educating visitors on the history of the Jews of the Pakruojis region.

### *3.5. The Synagogue, Merthyr Tydfil, Wales*

#### *3.5.1. Introduction*

43. Merthyr Tydfil was the industrial powerhouse of Wales in the 19th century and its largest town. There has been a Jewish presence in Merthyr since the 1830s and the construction of the Synagogue in 1863 reflected a community that was growing and prospering. Merthyr's Synagogue is a stone structure designed in Gothic Revival style, and the oldest purpose-built Synagogue still standing in Wales. Today it is considered architecturally one of the most important synagogues in the UK and has been awarded Grade II listed status.

#### *3.5.2. The challenge*

44. The Jewish community of Merthyr slowly reduced over the 20th century as the town's industries declined, and it formally came to an end in 1983 when the Synagogue was sold. Since that time, the building was used for various purposes. However, for the last several years it has been lying empty, its condition deteriorating and the fabric of the building has been compromised with a gaping hole in the roof and broken windows.

#### *3.5.3. The project*

45. The building was put up for sale by its current owner creating an opportunity to once again consider its future. The Foundation for Jewish Heritage began seeking views on the proposal to create a "Welsh Jewish Heritage Centre" that would recognise, celebrate and educate about the remarkable 250-year history of the Jewish community in Wales, while also providing a new cultural venue for the town. This was well received by the Merthyr municipality, and the local Jewish and heritage communities in Wales. As a result, a feasibility study was undertaken, consulting with key local stakeholders including schools in the area and the local museum, and this demonstrated that the concept was viable. Next steps are now being considered in discussion with the municipality and the Heritage Lottery Fund.

### *3.6. The Great Synagogue, Dąbrowa Tarnowska, Poland*

#### *3.6.1. Introduction*

46. Before 1939, Dąbrowa Tarnowska was a typical Galician small town, where Polish Jews and non-Jews co-existed without major conflicts. The first synagogue recorded was a wooden one built in 1697. In the 1860s a monumental stone synagogue was built to serve the growing population – the Great Synagogue – which is considered a pearl of Hasidic architecture in Poland. In 1900, the 2,500 Jews constituted 80% of the population.

#### *3.6.2. The challenge*

47. During the Second World War, the building was confiscated and used as a warehouse by the Nazis. Very few of the Jewish community survived, with the majority killed in Belzec death camp. After the war, the building became the property of the Polish State Treasury and, while its future use was debated, it remained unused and its condition deteriorated.

#### *3.6.3. The project*

48. The turning point for the future of the building was when the Polish State Treasury handed the synagogue over to the Dąbrowa Tarnowska Municipality in 2006. This led to the substantial undertaking to restore the building involving a coalition of partners – the municipality, Malapolska Regional Authorities, the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage and the Jewish Religious Community of Krakow, along with the financial assistance of EU Regional Funds. The result is the "Center for the Meeting of Cultures" which serves as a platform for intercultural and interfaith dialogue, where the Judaic and Christian traditions meet and interact. The Center has a permanent exhibition on Jewish life in the region while also offering temporary exhibition space, and it hosts concerts, lectures, and training workshops for residents and the wider Malapolska region. A key aspect is to make the Center intergenerational engaging the youth, and a specific aim is to promote Polish-Jewish dialogue and reconciliation while combating prejudice and harmful stereotyping.

## 4. Key observations

### *4.1. Legal ownership*

49. It is important that any outstanding issues regarding formal ownership of Jewish communal property are fully resolved so that this does not inhibit conservation work.

### *4.2. Research*

50. Research is vital to ensuring a good base of knowledge in terms of the building, its history and the heritage value to be preserved. It is also vital that those professionally engaged have the necessary knowledge and skills to understand the nature and special features of the building on which they are working.

### *4.3. Collaboration*

51. These projects are of a scale that require a range of stakeholders and that includes:

– local engagement – it is vital that the local community is closely involved both at the official local government level and through civil society, strengthening local interest and sense of "ownership", having residents input into, shape and champion the project given that this is indeed their heritage;

– regional and national government support – the support and involvement of the authorities at the regional and national level providing formal endorsement and practical advice has been important;

– Jewish engagement – there should be involvement from the Jewish community, either locally if present or externally, including reaching out to descendants of residents and Jewish heritage organisations;

– outside funders – such projects require substantial funding usually beyond the means of a local municipality and on-the-ground activists. Funding has been made available by regional and national governments, from private philanthropic sources and from EU and EEA funds.

### *4.4. Education*

52. While synagogue buildings may be used for a range of purposes, there is invariably a strong educational component presenting the history of the building and the Jewish community, promoting co-existence and inter-cultural dialogue while combating prejudice and intolerance. The educational aspect often has a particular focus on the young, covering both: (a) the Jewish life, contribution and societal enrichment through inter-cultural exchange and (b) the dangers of intolerance, prejudice and antisemitism that culminated in the Holocaust.

### *4.5. Integration*

53. The synagogue is integrated into the general cultural life of the town, restoring and "normalising" it as simply another location on a diverse landscape, promoting sense of place, connecting current generations to the Jewish aspect of their history and culture.

### *4.6. Meeting local need*

54. The projects are keen to ensure that the use of the building is appreciated by, and meets the needs of, the local community thereby providing a sustainable future.

### *4.7. Telling the full story*

55. In those sites that reflect communities killed in the Holocaust, the educational focus is not just on how the community came to an end, but also on the centuries beforehand demonstrating the life and contribution of the community.

### *4.8. Economic benefit*

56. There is the recognition that, by saving such sites and giving them a new lease of life, they can also provide an economic dividend to the town for example by promoting tourism, and can be a source of socio-economic regeneration. Jewish heritage buildings serve as pilgrimage sites for Jews seeking to understand how their forebears lived, and increasing numbers of non-Jewish people are also drawn to such sites in wanting to understand the Jewish history of the region, or simply appreciate an aesthetically beautiful building.

## 5. Conclusions

57. Jewish cultural heritage should be fully recognised as an integral part of the overall heritage of society and therefore treated equitably. As a reminder, a quarter of the historic synagogues still standing today in Europe are in poor or very bad condition and are deemed in danger. Based on the experience from heritage preservation projects that I have visited during the preparation of this report, I wish to emphasise that awareness at the local level of the need to preserve Jewish heritage should be further promoted, building local "ownership" and encouraging partnerships among various stakeholders including local authorities, civil society groups, the Jewish community and heritage organisations.

58. The special vulnerability of Jewish heritage, described often as "orphaned" heritage without its local communities, must be taken into account in shaping heritage policies. National heritage surveys should include Jewish heritage as a distinct category, identifying sites at risk, providing statutory protection, developing action plans and directing resources to the most urgent cases, ensuring that Jewish heritage is receiving the same level of protection, conservation and maintenance.

59. I believe that Jewish cultural heritage – both tangible and intangible – should be used as a key element in history teaching, for it is a physical expression of the Jewish life and historic presence in Europe. This educational value should be recognised, and educational programmes widely developed embracing schools, universities, museums and the cultural sector. Moreover, valuing and having a deeper understanding of Jewish cultural heritage would also contribute to inter-cultural dialogue, promoting inclusiveness and social cohesion, while also helping societal healing and coming to terms with a difficult past.

60. The Holocaust should be studied because it fundamentally challenged the very foundations of society. It enables people to consider the use and abuse of power, and the responsibilities of individuals, organisations and nations when confronted with human rights violations. It gives a perspective on how a convergence of factors can contribute to the disintegration of democratic values, showing the stages that can lead to genocides and thus heighten awareness to the potential for genocide in our world.

61. In practical terms, I would advocate creating a mechanism for the training of professional and volunteer practitioners in the field of Jewish heritage, including accessing knowledge, skills and models of best practice across Europe. Such co-operation could be further promoted by developing a shared ethos and working practices.

62. Let me also emphasise the economic benefits to preserving Jewish heritage sites, which can contribute to the visual landscape and boost local economies by being integrated into the general heritage on offer to visitors, tourists and pilgrims.

63. In conclusion, I wish to underline that Jewish culture forms an integral part of the shared cultural heritage in Europe – and it is therefore our common responsibility to increase efforts to preserve it.