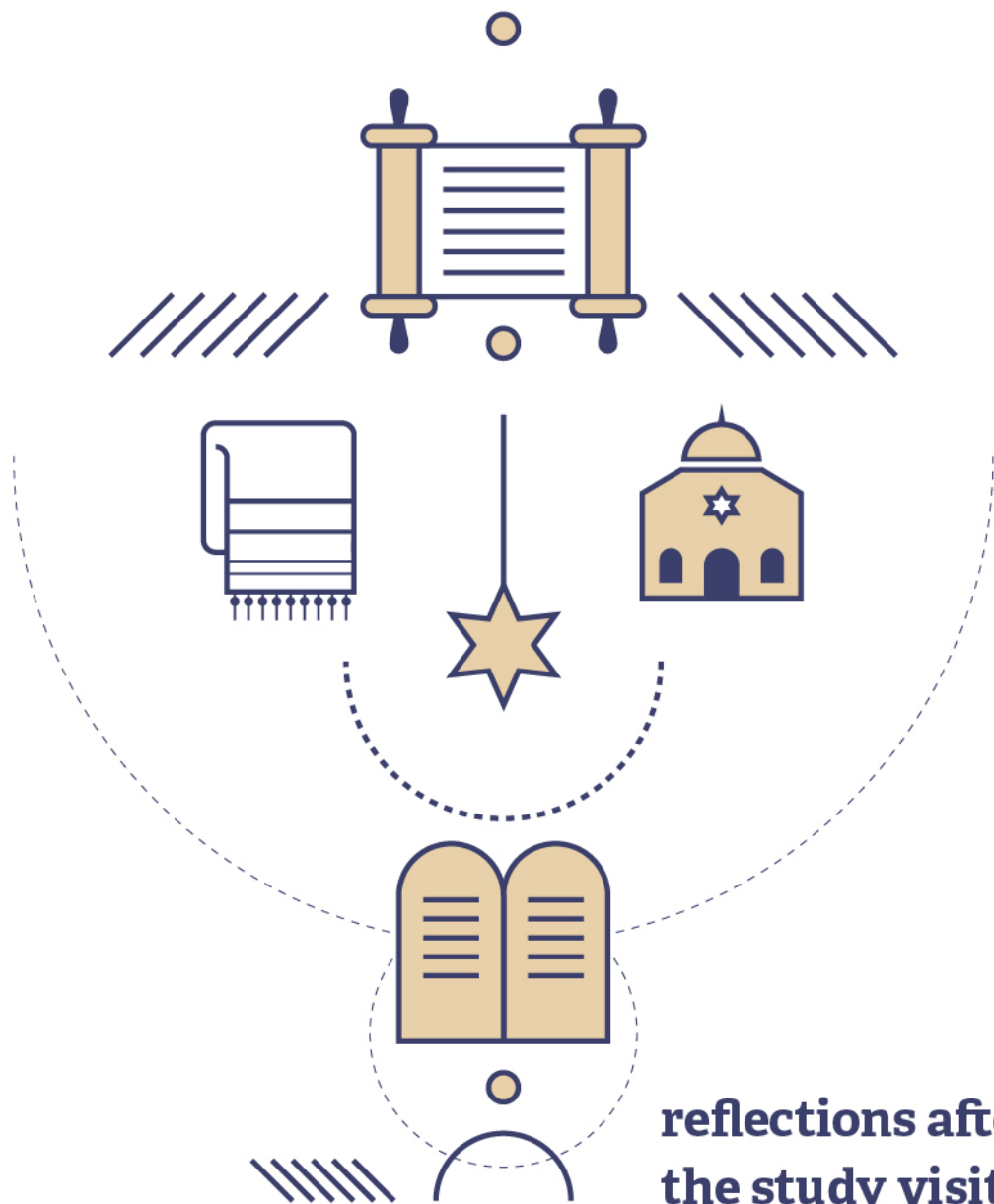


# Through Polin



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Kraków 2016



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## Introduction

**In 2016, the Galicia Jewish Museum organised the fourth edition of the “Through Polin” study visit. Thanks to the generous support of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Republic of Poland, we were able to expand this edition from an exclusively Polish-Israeli programme to a truly international one by inviting Jewish educators and scholars from the Diaspora. The project was made possible thanks to funding provided by the Ministry as well as thanks to our friends and partners.**

We would like to express our gratitude to:

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Ec Chaim Synagogue, Warsaw

This publication is a collection of essays written by participants of the 2016 “Through Polin” programme – their reflections after the week-long study visit, their ideas and results of discussions. Each text is different; each is based on unique personal experiences, showing different perspectives. This study visit brought together 40 people from all over the world – teachers, guides, educators, NGO workers and museum employees – people of different backgrounds, nationalities and religions.

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Anna Wencel

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# After Through Polin

**The Through Polin project is directed toward educators from Poland, Israel and the Diaspora who are interested in expanding their knowledge of Polish Jewish history and sharing thoughts. During the 7 days of this programme the participants visit important places relating to Jewish history and heritage of Southern and Central Poland and – above all - meet people from institutions that are not only commemorating the past and preserving the Jewish heritage of Poland but also are building a contemporary Jewish life in Poland.**

In the 2016 edition the legacy of Polish Righteous Among the Nations was one of the key elements of the study visit. The participants visited the newly opened museum in Markowa, dedicated to Polish Righteous, and named after Ulma Family – parents and children murdered by the Germans for sheltering Jews. They met Mrs Mirosława Gruszczyńska, who rescued a Jewish girl in Kraków, and was recognized as Righteous Among the Nations in 1990. But we also extend the notion of Polish “Righteous Gentiles” as Shana Penn expressed it in her article “The Roots



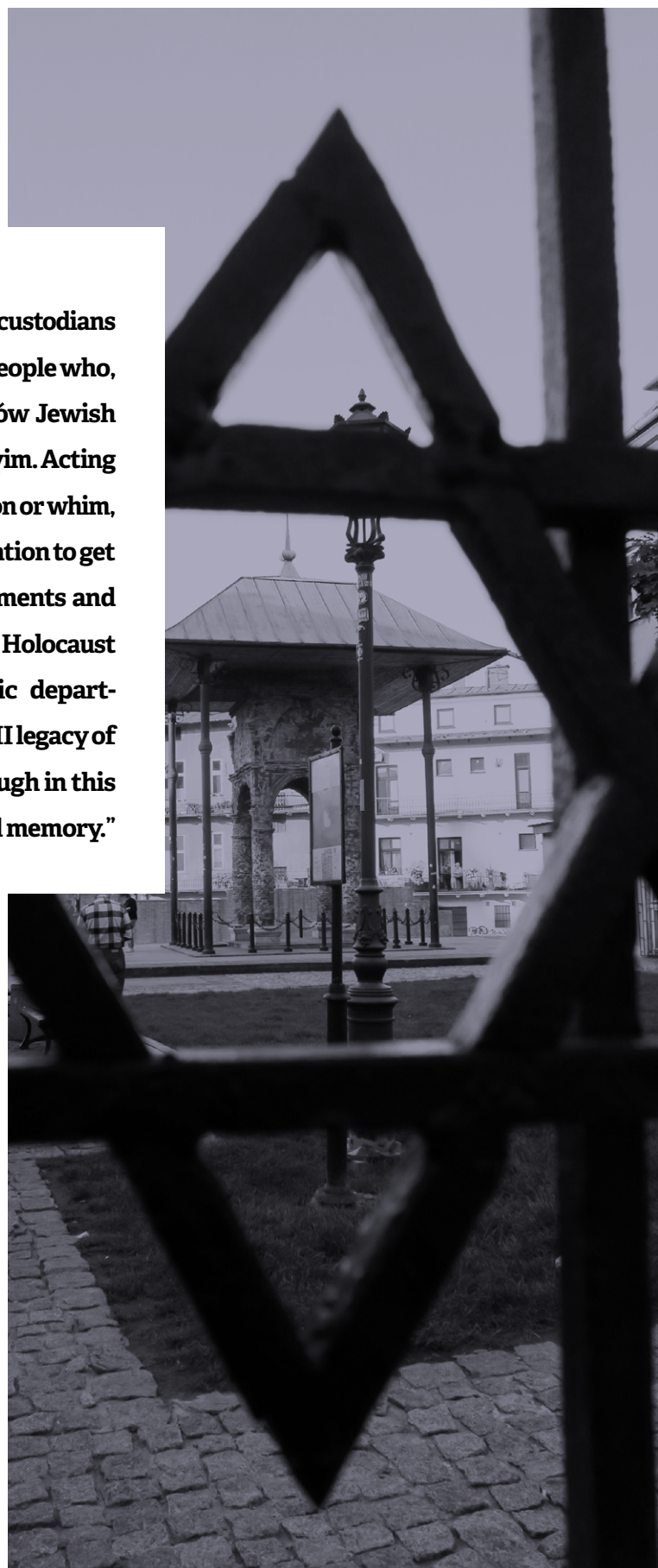
That Survive Through Us” in the book “Deep Roots New Branches” published by Taube Foundation:

This is the reason why meetings with people who act locally were so important in this project. In every

**“Some of Poland’s non-Jewish educators and custodians also helped birth the new Jewish culture; people who, like Janusz Makuch, director of the Kraków Jewish Culture Festival, selfdescribe as Shabbes goyim. Acting on a healthy impulse far stronger than fashion or whim, they have had the determination and dedication to get degrees in Hebrew Studies, restore monuments and cemeteries, conserve archives and establish Holocaust educational curricula and whole academic departments. To me, they carry on the World War II legacy of Righteous Gentiles who rescued Jews, though in this case, they are rescuing Jewish heritage and memory.”**

place they visited, the participants could talk to scholars, educators, researchers, caretakers of synagogues and cemeteries, local guides – people who preserve the memory of Jewish communities, and contribute to contemporary revival of Jewish culture.

The aims of this project, as expressed in the official description of “Through Polin” (learning about Polish-Jewish history, heritage and contemporary Jewish life in Poland, exchanging experiences, development of joint proposals of educational activities, establishing international contacts etc.) don’t show what this programme really was, what was its meaning and impact. To know and understand what “Through Polin” became, one has to hear the voices of participants – this wonderful chorus of different voices, various rhythms and intertwining melodies.



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Larysa Michalska

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# An unusual journey...

**Two years ago, I was pleased and happy to join the group of participants of the “Through Polin- Poprzez Polin” study visit. It was the second edition of this project, which is aimed at guides, educators and teachers from Poland and Israel. It was an amazing experience for me, but I never imagined I would be able to participate in this programme again. As we all know though, life can surprise. This year, I put the note “Through Polin” into my calendar again, but this time it was a completely different experience. Now that I work in the Education Department of the Galicia Jewish Museum, I joined the study visit not as a participant but as the co-ordinator of this great project.**

Since the very beginning I treated this project as a great challenge. I knew it was already on a really high level. Preparing the programme, I had to balance the expectations of the Museum’s board and, of course, of the participants. This time, the participants would come from all over the world because the programme this year was open to people from Poland, Israel and the countries of the Diaspora. The group would not be 20 people this time, but 40.

When I was thinking about where to go, what to show and who the participants should meet, I decided to use a keyword that describes the group as well. That keyword is “diversity”.





I wanted to take the group on a journey, and not only in the geographical sense. My idea was to take them on a journey through the common Polish-Jewish history, a journey through Polish-Jewish culture, and, finally, on a journey through the mythical Polin. For me, this is not a specific territory, but rather the idea of Polish-Jewish coexistence, which is still vibrant in many places.

This idea could never have come into being without people. That is why we met so many different people during this week-long journey. People who are protecting and preserving the memory, people who are combatting stereotypes, people who are devoting their lives to commemorate the Polish-Jewish past but simultaneously are working to build the Polish-Jewish future.

This journey would not be complete without taking a look at the difficult and complicated wartime reality. I knew that the members of the “Through Polin – Poprzez Polin” project are well-educated in that domain; they probably have read a lot of books, watched so many movies about the Holocaust and the Second World War. Conceivably, for some of them, the wartime experience is a family, personal experience. What could be new, interesting or inspiring here then? In my opinion, I can again use this amazing keyword “diversity” here – diversity in the places we visited, diversity of topics discussed

and diversity of stories we heard. Personal stories. I think this is the highest value of this kind of project – getting to know stories and sharing stories with others. Building a network, or rather a community.

The participants became acquainted with stories that ended in tragedy, like the story of Ulma family, which we heard in the Ulma Family Museum of Poles Saving Jewish People during World War II in Markowa. Yet they also heard beautiful stories with happy endings, like the one shared by Mrs Miroslawa Gruszczyńska, the Righteous Gentile.

As it was mentioned previously, people were one of the most important aspects of this study visit. Not only the people the participants met, but especially this wonderful, diverse group of 40 people who decided to be a part of the “Through Polin – Poprzez Polin” project.

Working with this group has been an amazing experience for me from the beginning. It was definitely a challenge to co-ordinate and to take care of so many people, but at the same time it was a great pleasure. Watching how they started to co-operate; how they got to know each other; their exchanges of ideas, opinions and experiences; how they discussed (or even argued) so many questions; and, in the end, how they made friends with each other was the best prize for my work.

Perhaps this project has not changed all of the prejudices, stereotypes and opinions the participants had, but I am sure that it changed a lot. During both informal and formal conversations, I kept hearing one word be repeated. That word was “eye-opening”. Isn’t that a great and meaningful combination of words – “diversity” and “eye-opening”? Due to “Through Polin – Poprzez Polin”, I was able to see, to experience how eye-opening diversity (in so many different aspects and contexts) can be. ■



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Yaakov Simkovitz

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# Galicia 2016: Reflections Erev Yom Kippur 2016

**“And, behold, the Lord passed by. Then a great and powerful wind tore the mountains apart and shattered the rocks before the Lord. But the Lord was not in the wind. After the wind was an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake. After the earthquake came a fire. But the Lord was not in the fire. And after the fire: a still, small voice” – Kol Dmamah Dakah. (I Kings 19:11-12)**

My first encounter with the Galicia Jewish Museum in Kraków occurred by chance in the spring of 2005 when I had the honour of guiding a March of the Living group of primarily non-Jewish students of Holocaust and Genocide Studies from Stockton University. We toured the “standard” sites of Kraków on Friday and the following day they were to continue for an excursion to Częstochowa. As I observe Shabbat, I sent the group off with our Polish guide and had the day off, allowing me to participate in Shabbat prayers in the Remuh Shul and then enjoy a good cholent lunch with another March of the Living group.





With the afternoon free, I began to wander around Kraków and happened to notice the sign of the Galicia Jewish Museum. As I was in need of a 'pit-stop' and curious to see what exactly this museum was all about, I wandered in and discovered that it was empty. A man, who I assumed was the guard responsible for selling tickets, greeted me and, despite the fact that I had no cash due to the Shabbat, urged me to tour the exhibit for free. Without any further ado, he literally took me by the hand and for next few hours blessed me with a personal tour of all the exhibited photograph. The "guard" was, of course, the photographer and founder of the Galicia Jewish Museum, Chris Schwarz.

Aside from describing and explaining each photograph in a manner which showed how close the subject matter was to his heart, Chris also shared his personal story with me. I was totally blown away by his very moving, inspirational presentation. I couldn't believe that this museum wasn't on the "standard" itinerary, since in my opinion it deserved to be at the top of the list. Towards the end of this personal tour, Chris suggested that I bring the group to the museum. I explained to Chris that the group had a very tight schedule and that I was not permitted to change the itinerary, but Chris wouldn't take no for an answer. He offered to open the museum early Sunday morning (way before the official opening hour) and grant the group free entrance.

That evening at dinner I reported my experience at the Museum and the special offer by Chris to the group's staff. To put it mildly, they were not impressed or enthusiastic, convinced that I was going to get a "kick-back". Upon boarding the bus early Sunday morning, despite continued objections by the staff, I instructed the driver to take the group to the Museum and announced to the group that we were going to see a very special exhibit and spend 20 minutes with an extraordinary person. After over an hour with Chris, I literally had to force the group to leave. The group leaders not only apologised to me, they thanked Chris for what they described as one of the highlights of the group's tour of Poland. To my sorrow and eternal regret, I never met with Chris again during my subsequent visits to the Museum after 2005, as he passed away in 2007...

Over the years, I occasionally came across articles praising the Galicia Jewish Museum and interviews citing Chris's dedication and goals: "Rather than coming here just to mourn, we should come with a great sense of dignity, a great sense of pride for what our ancestors accomplished," (New York Times).

The recent "Through Polin" seminar, which I was privileged to attend, was for me a continuation of the private tour with Chris, as well as an opportunity to witness the contributions the Galicia Jewish Museum is making towards "preserving traces of memory – remnants of a world that no longer exists – but also to restore memory and actively participate in the revival of Jewish communities."

One of the opening lectures of the "Through Polin" seminar was given by Prof Jonathan Webber, who I learnt co-collaborated with Chris in establishing the permanent exhibit Traces of Memory. In his stimulating and inspiring talk, focused on his Brzostek Jewish Heritage Project, he vividly demonstrated that a positive 'grass-roots' change of attitude among Poles towards Jews and Jewish heritage is not only possible – it is actually happening. His "diplomatic" approach of not imposing and demanding preservation of Jewish heritage sites as an outsider, but rather engaging local





Polish communities to actively want to implement restoration as part of their cultural history was an eye-opener. Having said this, I found it hard to accept his opening remark that “memory belongs to everyone”. Do Poles and Jews really share mutual memories?

As an Israeli, my immediate Pavlovian Response was that his thesis was simply an oxymoron. While I was aware that many Poles insist that Poland has served as *Paradisus Iudaeorum*, the fact that antisemitism is deeply entrenched in Polish society cannot be ignored. Having lived my entire adult life in Israel, I have been heavily influenced by “mainstream attitudes” held by Israeli Jews with regards to Poland and Poles. This attitude was once blatantly stated by the late, Polish-born Prime Minister of Israel Yitzhak Shamir (Ysernitzky). He often spoke about his father, who was murdered during the Holocaust

by Polish farmers, friends of his youth. His sister, her husband and their children were also murdered by a Polish forest guard that previously worked for them and in whose home they tried to hide. Shamir’s memories and attitude were summed up in one sentence: “Poles drink antisemitism with their mothers’ milk. This is something that is deeply imbued in their tradition, their mentality...”

However, Prof Webber’s talk reinforced Shamir’s infrequently quoted addendum, “Today, though, there are elements in Poland that are cleansed of this antisemitism.”

Prof Webber’s talk had been preceded by a meeting with Mirośława Gruszczyńska, who is recognised by Yad Vashem as a Righteous Gentile, having risked her life to save a young Jewish girl, Anna Allerhand. While Mirośława Gruszczyńska’s story is one of great heroism, she refuses to regard herself as a heroine. She insists that her actions were motivated out of pure humanitarian values. These values are now enshrined in the new the Ulma Family Museum located in Markowa, honouring Righteous Gentiles who gave their lives to save Jews and nationally lauded: “The Polish legislature, in the name of the Polish nation, praises those who risked their lives to save Jews from extermination, and especially those who were killed by the occupiers in retaliation for helping Jews.”

These “autonomous altruists”, as defined by Nechama Tec, acted despite both the immediate death sentence imposed by the Germans if discovered and in spite of ostracism from Polish society at large. As we discovered in the continuation of the seminar, these “autonomous altruists” appear to have spiritual descendants active in contemporary Poland. The visit to Będzin, known as the Jerusalem of Zagłębie, with Piotr Jakoweńko was for many of us a truly exemplary demonstration of dedication to preserving Jewish heritage without any ulterior motivate. Together with his wife, Karolina, they co-founded the Brama Cukermana [Cukerman’s Gate] Foundation, restoring the



walls of a former shtiebel (small prayer hall) found on the second floor of a now run-down tenement building once owned by the Cukerman family. Being able to say Kaddish in this now-preserved shtiebel, redeemed by a contemporary “Righteous Gentile”, was a truly remarkable moment.

Later in the evening, some of us went to another shul in Kraków – the rundown Chewra Thilim [Psalm Brotherhood] Beit Midrash, now utilised as a bar, where having a beer was certainly no mitzvah. The structure is apparently not on Kraków’s list of protected heritage: perhaps this is more representative of contemporary Polish attitudes toward “shared memory”? Should skeptics, like myself, recognise that indeed ‘memory belongs to everyone’ in light of the projects we saw and heard about in the seminar? Are the projects and people we met during the seminar representative of contemporary, mainstream Polish society or are they simply a peripheral fad being promoted as Polish cultural heritage in order to increase tourism?

As someone who also deals with Israeli commercial real-estate projects – my other hat when I’m not guiding in Israel – the usage and development of real-estate assets left behind by the Jews murdered in the Holocaust makes sense to me. It is certainly in the interest of local Poles not to allow significant structures, often centrally located, to remain abandoned and neglected. However, why the interest and desire to also use these properties for the perpetuation of Jewish cultural heritage? Do Poles really regard Jewish heritage as an integral and positive part of Polish national memory? Perhaps one of the best examples of this contemporary dilemma faced by Poles regarding usage was presented during our tour of Chmielnik.

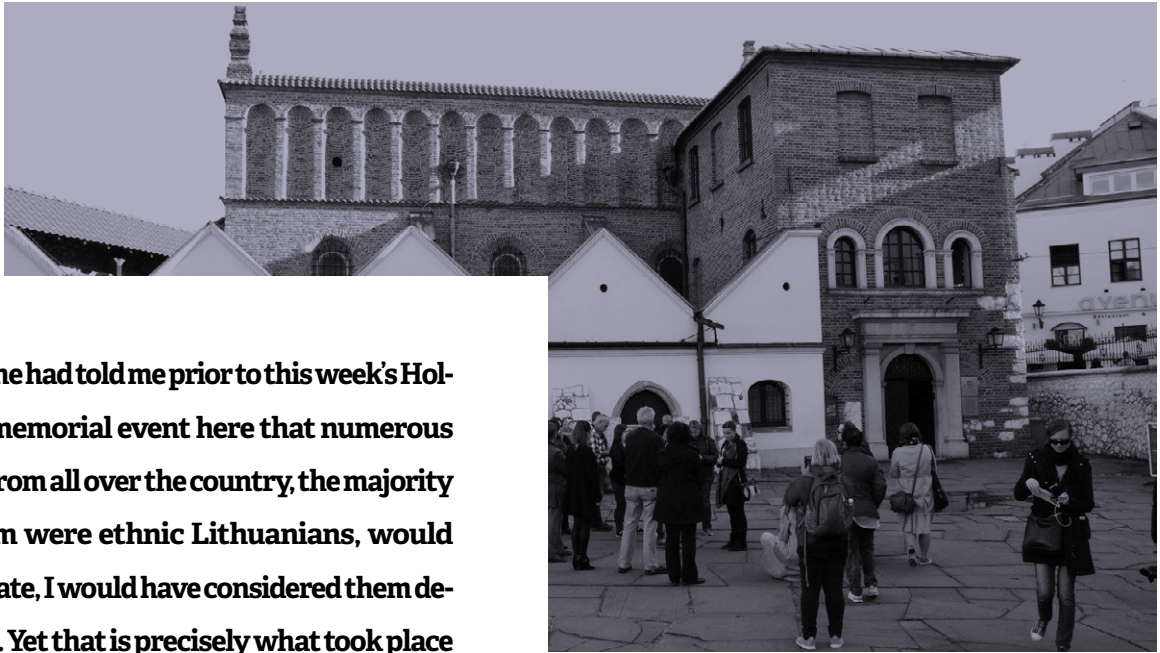
We first visited a very impressive preservation project of a synagogue, now serving as a state-of-the-art museum dedicated to the perpetuation of the Jewish heritage of Chmielnik. The 3 million dollar project was financed primarily by the European Union, supplemented by funding from the Polish Ministry of

Culture, the city of Chmielnik and regional governments. We then met with a developer, Marian Zwolski, the owner of a building that once housed the Chmielnik mikvah. He hopes to find an investor to restore the mikvah as part of a boutique hotel; from the point of view of a developer, this is also a legitimate real-estate project...

Another example of usage was shown to us in the remarkable Upper Silesian Jews House of Remembrance in Gliwice, promoted by the mayor and fully financed within the parameters of the local city budget, further demonstrating that Polish initiatives for preserving Jewish Heritage seem to be becoming mainstream. As Prof Webber emphasised, appropriate usage of Jewish properties initiated by local Polish communities is essential for the purpose of perpetuating a “shared memory” and the successful forging of positive links between Jews and Poles.

Obviously, presenting the joint history of Poles and Jews, interlocked for over 1,000 years, without being totally overshadowed by the Holocaust is imperative for creating a basis for changing existing stereotypes and preconceived notions. Programmes like March of Living that focus primarily on camps, ghettos and mass graves, almost inevitably leave participants with the conclusion that the Holocaust is the only relevant episode of Jewish history to be found in Poland. That is why the new Polin Museum is of such great importance for both Jews and Poles. What was especially impressive was that our non-Jewish guide, Paweł Sczerkowski, eloquently presented a scholarly overview of the history of the Jews of Poland as a “shared memory”, equally cherished by Poles.

Perhaps one of the leading Israeli “skeptics” of this change in attitudes is Efraim Zuroff, chief Nazi-hunter of the Simon Wiesenthal Center, who recently wrote the following article in the Jerusalem Post called “Hope for Change in Lithuania”:



**“If anyone had told me prior to this week’s Holocaust memorial event here that numerous people from all over the country, the majority of whom were ethnic Lithuanians, would participate, I would have considered them delusional. Yet that is precisely what took place earlier this week here in Moletai (Malyat in Yiddish), where at least 3,000 persons, the majority of whom are not Jewish, marched about two-and-a-half kilometers from the center of town to the main site of the mass murder of 2,000 Jewish residents of Moletai exactly 75 years ago.**

**In the wake of the march in Moletai, it appears that there are many Lithuanians, and especially young people, who realize that a profound change in the approach to the subject of the Holocaust is absolutely necessary to help heal their country. They also understand that the only way to emerge from the shadows cast by Lithuanian complicity is to shed light on them, not to hide them. So let us all hope that the new spirit on display in Moletai will mark the beginning of a new era in Lithuania.” (Jerusalem Post, 31/08/2016)**

It appears that examples like Brzostek, Będzin and Gliwice may indeed represent a growing mainstream desire of Poles to perpetuate a shared memory of Jewish heritage. The “Through Polin” seminar was in many ways an enlightening epiphany, showing that fundamental values of mutual respect, tolerance and, perhaps in time, true friendship can develop and exist between Poles and Jews.

Rabbi Akiva, one of the most important rabbinic figures of the 2nd century, was once asked: what is the essence of the Torah, the heart of Jewish heritage? His answer was, “Love your neighbor as yourself,” (Leviticus 19:18).

This indeed appears to me to be the fundamental Jewish value embraced by Chris Schwarz, echoed by the Galicia Jewish Museum and, as the Bible describes, can only barely be heard: a still, small voice - Kol Dmamah Dakah. ■

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Shai Abend

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# Through Polin: A Lifelong Experience

**A Jew, a European and an Israeli meet in a museum. What might seem like the beginning of a joke is a beautiful reality, possible thanks to the joint efforts of the Galicia Jewish Museum and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Poland.**

“Through Polin” is a unique programme that connects educators from Poland, Israel and the Diaspora for a seven-day study visit in one of the most important places for Jewish history. The mere encounter of people of different cultures and religions is already a major achievement. However, what makes this programme unique is the combination of at least five elements, as shown below.

**“Through Polin” is about challenging Preconceptions.**

Travelling is always an enriching experience. By visiting a destination, we can learn firsthand about its inhabitants, their traditions and their ways of life. Although visiting a site is not synonymous with knowing it. If we really want to know a place, we must keep an open minded attitude and willingness to learn. Some say, unfortunately, that Poland is a “great Jewish cemetery”. “Through Polin” challenges preconceptions. It allows participants to meet and interact with local Jewish and non-Jewish people, real people with interesting life stories. It allows us to visit sites and to understand the context and complexity of Jewish life in Poland before, during and after the Shoah. It is a chance to discover, as the Galicia Museum tells, both the absence and presence of Jews in Poland. The personal challenge is to welcome a transformational learning experience. “Through Polin” is about generating Opportunities.

The schedule offers formal and informal spaces, full of opportunities to learn, meet, discuss, exchange ideas and, why not, enjoy leisure time together. The hotel room, the food table, the bus, walks, become scenarios for interaction and dialogue. The personal challenge is to seize these opportunities.

### **“Through Polin” is about honouring Life.**

It is impossible to ignore the fact that the Holocaust took place in this territory. Each town in Poland is marked by what happened during the war. Yet we cannot limit our experience to a visit of sites of martyrdom. There is a rich history of a thousand years of Jewish presence in Poland. “Through Polin” is a journey of life: because we can learn about the rich diversity of Jewish life; because we visit sites to honour those who are no longer with us, but not only by learning how they died, but also learning who were they and how they lived; because it shows that there was Jewish life before the Holocaust, and because it also shows that there is an active Jewish life even today, after the Shoah; because it teaches us about the Jewish heroes who sacrificed their lives to defend the Jewish dignity, and because it allows us to learn about non-Jewish heroes – often anonymous – who sacrificed their lives to save Jews. The meeting with a Righteous Among the Nations (in our case, Ms. Mirosława Gruszczyńska) is one of the highlights of the programme. This meeting is a chance to thank, on behalf of the Jewish people and humanity, those who could not remain indifferent to others’ pain. The personal challenge is to follow this legacy of doing good and seeing the “other” as a pair.

### **“Through Polin” is about exploring our Identity.**

For many of the Jewish participants, Poland is the land of their ancestors. Therefore, visiting Poland is often a roots trip that strengthens Jewish identity. Undoubtedly, participating in a Kabbalat Shabbat or listening to the shofar in contemporary Poland are experiences that “fill the soul”. However, “Through

Polin” also challenges that identity. It teaches us that we cannot reduce reality to mere statistics. Jewish life in Poland today is not confined to those who were born as Jews. There are Poles who discover they have Jewish ancestors. Additionally, there are those who, despite not being Jews, work professionally and voluntarily in preserving Jewish heritage and legacy. This program has allowed us to learn, for example, about the wonderful and inspiring work of Piotr and Karolina in Będzin. But we also learned about the valuable work done by many of the programme’s participants. Why do non-Jews work in the preservation of Jewish heritage? Their motivations are diverse and all laudable. The personal challenge is to be aware of our multiplicity of identities, remembering we are all human beings.

### **“Through Polin” is about building Networks.**

Forty talented educators gathering for seven days in a collective learning experience is the basis of future collaboration. This program invites us to share our experiences with others. We are challenged to create and expand networks, keep in contact and develop joint projects. Our challenge is to inspire others.

To sum up, “Through Polin” is a unique program that challenges Preconceptions, generates Opportunities, honours Life, allows us to explore our Identity and to build Networks.

**Preconceptions, Opportunities, Life, Identity, Networks (POLIN). Undoubtedly, “Through Polin” is a lifelong experience.**

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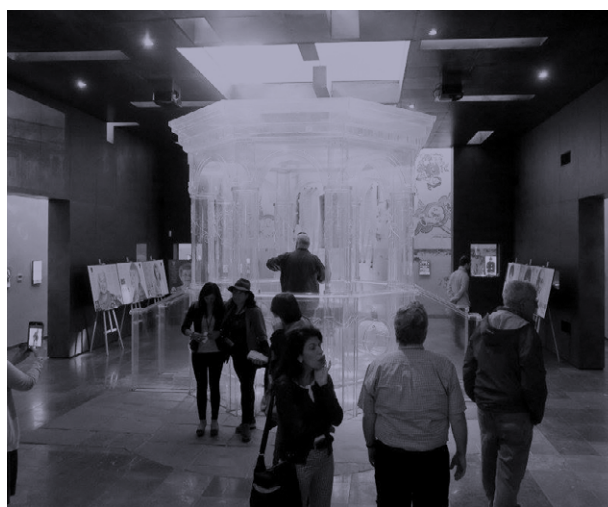
Peter Hudák

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# Through Polin: Study visit for Educators from Poland, Israel and the Diaspora 2016

**As a teacher and educator in Bardejov, Slovakia, I respect the principle of contextualising history, which states that events should be placed in historical context to give students a perspective on the precedents and circumstances that may have contributed to these events. In fact, it is for this reason I had expected that the “Through Polin” study visit would be a difficult journey, as it took place in the country which was once the home of the most vibrant Jewish community in Europe. However, after the Holocaust, Polin was in ruins and its heritage often abandoned and dilapidated over the next decades under communism and even later.**

When I started thinking on the subject, a number of questions occurred to me. To what extent is it possible to present traces of Poland’s rich Jewish past and its heritage in small villages and towns throughout the country and not have them overshadowed by





places that are strictly linked to the tragedy of the Holocaust? What legacy do we want to leave future generations in terms of the Jewish history in countries whose Jewish communities are struggling to survive? What is the role of the majority society? What things are individuals able and required to do in order to limit the threat so that the Jewish past does not end up in oblivion? What is contemporary Jewish life in Poland, a country with a deep-rooted Christian tradition?

This programme offered me a unique way of looking at the Jewish past in Poland. From different perspectives I understand what “rediscovering traces of memory” means in practise, as Jonathan Webber taught us. Thanks to the efforts of the organisers,

I was able to realise how much of the Jewish past can be still seen all over if one keeps a watchful eye on physical places from various perspectives and a sensitive interpretation of the facts.

To return to where I began. I am comforted to note that this study visit gave me an opportunity to see the overall picture, to discover and see the achievements of inspirational local activists scattered across Poland who have dedicated their lives to building a bridge between past and present. This is an instrument of dialogue and understanding between cultures, keeping in mind the social dimensions and the ideals of democracy and respect for human rights.



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# Beyond the Ashes

**“One objective of this programme is to show you that Poland is more than just a place of ashes,” Larysa Michalska of the Galicia Jewish Museum told us on our first night of the “Through Polin” 2016 programme.**

I understood this very well, but knew little of what my fellow travelers’ (at least those who were not Polish) expectations were of Poland. The mission of Bridge To Poland, the organisation that I founded and direct, is to open people up to a broader story in Poland than what they might be expecting; to highlight non-Jewish commemoration of Jewish life and to teach Jewish-Polish history along with non-Jewish Polish history — the two being, of course, inextricably intertwined.

Over the course of our week together, I witnessed some of my fellow course participants open up with amazement to the idea of a Poland beyond the ashes. One woman said she never knew other people were interested in her people’s history. Many were visibly moved by Piotr and Karolina Jakoweńko, the young couple who have taken it upon themselves to save the small Jewish prayer house, or shtiebel, in Będzin. It was moving for members of our group to be able to pray there.

In Chmielnik, where my great-grandmother and great-great-grandmother were born, we got to see the remains of the recently uncovered mikveh (Jewish ritual bath) in the basement of what was once an Egyptian-themed nightclub. The businessman who waited half his life to buy this property told us that he wants to do “the right thing” with it. When I told him

of my connection to the town, he immediately asked when my last ancestor had lived there to try to find out when it would have been that we had ancestors living there together. I was moved by this impulse to find our common past, the connection between us before the tragic events of World War II and the Holocaust erased Jews from the map of the town, leaving only remnants.

Of course, not all of the trip was comprised of moments of poignancy and revelation. A difficult moment for me was when a man who was leaving a day early, one of the Israeli participants, took the microphone on the bus and announced to us all that he wanted to say goodbye. He said he was taking a risk because he was taking a train and chances are that if a Jew takes a train in Poland, he will end up in Auschwitz. Then he said he was going to fly Air Berlin, and that that was like the Luftwaffe. He said his remarks were meant to be a joke and acknowledged that not everyone would find them amusing, but said that he did.

I, the daughter of a Holocaust survivor from Poland, was saddened by these remarks. I have many non-Jewish Polish friends selflessly devoting their lives to preserving Jewish memory for very little compensation — and we had seen examples of this on our “Through Polin” trip. I thought we had all come together to move beyond the narrative of Poland meaning only death for Jews. And here we were, on the bus with good-hearted Poles and Germans, each attempting in his or her own way to sensitively approach this painful history. One Polish woman cried and I hugged her, feeling the tears well up behind my eyes as well. What had this man missed? What pain in his own history caused him to say these things? Later, another trip participant, also from Israel, told me that those remarks are part of the “mainstream Israeli narrative about Poland”. If that is true, then I think we have a lot of work to do to change that narrative.

Professor Jonathan Webber in his talk on renovating the cemetery in Brzostek said that memory belongs to all of us. Not just to the Jews, not just to the Poles or the Europeans, but to the world. I agree and always say that all you need is the desire to remember.

Those of us on the “Through Polin” 2016 trip saw many examples to counter the idea that Poland is merely a repository of ashes:

The dedication of Piotr and Karolina in preserving the Cukerman shtiebel in Będzin, and the joy of those who were able to pray there.

The excitement of Professor Jerzy Mizgalski as he showed us the brand new exhibit about Jews in Częstochowa.

The spectacular glass bimah in the restored synagogue in Chmielnik; testament both to the impermanence of the community that existed there, and to the desire of their fellow citizens to remember.

Karolina’s passion for giving a place to the Jews of Gliwice who are not remembered in the POLIN Museum because they are considered German and not in the Berlin Jewish Museum because they are considered Polish.

Mrs Mirosława, the Righteous Gentile, when asked what she would do if she had a magic wand, said,

**“We could have built a hiding place. We could have saved all the Jewish girls in my class.”**





Those desperate times, thank God, are gone and we are not faced with the life-and-death decisions of Mrs Mirosława and her family. Those of us on the “Through Polin” trip have an easier task. If we choose to take on the role of the keepers of memory, we can tell the world the myriad ways we saw that Poland is so much more than ashes. We can do this through collaborative

partnerships and storytelling, but, most of all, perhaps, through nurturing and maintaining the connections that began during our week together, when we — Jews and non-Jews, old and young, from many different countries — opened our hearts and minds to each other and to Poland and its complex history.



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Ewelina Wałag

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# My impressions after participating in the project “Through Polin”

**I am so glad that I could be a part of the “Through Polin” project, which was dedicated to teachers, tour guides and employees of museums who are interested in the issue of Jewish heritage in Poland. For me, this project was one of the most interesting and educational experiences of my life. I met people who teach and bring their students up in a spirit of tolerance and respect for others, who inspire to them act in accordance with the rules, and play an active role in their schools and local communities. I think that it is very important to be a part of this project, which was created as a forum for educators to meet other people while learning about Jewish heritage in a friendly atmosphere.**

I met leaders from all over the world – for instance, from Israel, the USA and Poland – reflecting diverse cultures, opinions and religions. I know that for me it was a perfect situation to get to know one another and try to construct a real area of freedom, security and justice in the world. But, I don't want to say that it was only agreeable time because of the variety of perspectives, experiences, sensitivity and also different memories.

I know that to be successful now you have to think about future generations, not only about past. That is why I was still thinking about the concept of the nation-state during this experience – not only of Germany in the twentieth century, but also Poland and Israel. It is likely a utopian perspective because some people need the past, tradition and common values to create uncontested good for the inhabitants of a country, but sometimes this kind of thinking is too beguiling and may contribute to incorrect interpersonal effects.



Indeed, we also say that all are equal, and that includes equality before the law. Polish philosopher Leszek Kołakowski asked in 1999:

**“We have inured that pointing to cultural differences can dispose of various atrocities of our world. ‘We have our values, they have their values,’ we can hear this saying from time to time (...) Should we acknowledge that the difference between a demi-vegetarian and cannibal is only a question of taste?”\***

I also try to think about how easy it is to reverse the roles of a demi-vegetarian and a cannibal in our world.

The Polish writer Ryszard Kapuściński wrote, “Thinking must encounter resistance,”\* and this is the only way to leave our safe place full of customs or stereotypes and open up to something Other. Everyone keeps some kind of history inside themselves, and this history is more or less dependent on social, cultural, familial or ideological contexts. If we want to understand the Other, we will need to have the relevant keys. Some-

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\* L. Kołakowski, *Moje słuszne poglądy na wszystko*, Kraków 1999, p. 253: Przyzwyczailiśmy się do tego, że można zbywać rozmaite okropności naszego świata powoływaniem się na różnice kulturalne. „Mamy swoje wartości, a oni swoje” – słyszy się nieraz takie powiedzenie (...) czy mamy uznać, że różnica między jaszczem a ludożercą jest tylko sprawą smaku?

\* R. Kapuściński, *Lapidaria*, Warszawa 2005, p. 423: Myślenie musi natrafić na opór.



times, however, people think that as we have borne the image of the past, so too shall we bear the same image of the future. But the image that was once engineered does not help us understand the world, particularly different people. This is a similar situation as with the question of how to prepare for this trip. Perhaps we have to strive for tabula rasa and learn about the place of our journey; maybe it is better to read something earlier and have some information to build our image. The upshot can be that an ectypal image may be able to change into a prejudice which we should get rid of. We need non-cliché thinking that doesn't build a world which, frankly speaking, has already been created, but where one will find a new language to describe reality and will be open to different perspectives.

I work in a small city, but this place is full of diverse history – Polish, German, Ukrainian and Jewish. On the other hand, relationships with our closest neighbours don't exist in our society today and they did not exist in the past. Memory has been a permanent feature of human history and shall always exist. Thus, for me, not only are persistence and perseverance needed, but also

more information about the history of the Other. In my opinion, this project was a special moment for me and thanks to being a part of this forum I could access a tangible history of the Jewish people. This history helps me to learn and teach about the everyday lives of the Jewish people, especially in Poland.

To be precise, I think that participants and their thoughts must be allowed to develop; these seven days were just one part of that process. The other part is at our homes. This may sound corny, but it's sincere: I want to say a huge "thank you" to everyone I met during this project, especially to the people from the Galicia Jewish Museum and their friends, to every participant in this project, to everyone who assisted in outlining new steps for our mental landscapes, and lastly to those – living and dead – from very important places like Kraków, Bochnia, Markowa, Tarnów, Wadowice, Będzin, Gliwice, Częstochowa, Zbylitowska Góra, Chmielnik and Warsaw. I hope that I can make use of this experience not only in my work, but, but above all, in my life and contacts with Others.



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Nikita Hock

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# Through Polin

**One of the striking characteristics of Jewish religious thought for me has always been its focus on present life, especially in the face of loss. When the Temple was destroyed, a renewed focus on community, righteous deeds and learning took its place. And while other major religious traditions ended up developing elaborate concepts of life after death, here, olam ha-ba remains elusive. What is stressed instead is the visible and lived world, and ritual demands the gathering of community and an affirmation of the greatness and holiness of what is.**

The intense relationship with history and tradition usually associated with Jewish life, then, stands next to a keen awareness of what can be seen, said, heard and affirmed in the now. As it turns out, the 2016 study trip “Through Polin” ended up mirroring this unique combination in more ways than one.

The stage for this experience was set from the very beginning. The Galicia Jewish Museum in Kraków deals with the visible legacy of Jewish life in contemporary Galicia. The photographs by Chris Schwarz and Jason Francisco at first glance appear to merely document this fragmented heritage. Nevertheless, they inevitably turn out to be deeply symbolic. Take the picture of a restored synagogue now used as a library: it not only represents one way remembrance happens in contemporary Poland; inevitably, it provokes further questions. After all, a synagogue as a “place of learning” represents merely a fragment of Jewish life, albeit an important one and one that in some form can live on today. Which aspects of Jewish heritage, then, are being stressed in today’s Poland; which remain or once again are made visible, and how does this fit with received wisdom on “appropriate” preservation of memory?



Having worked with the presentation of oral history in museums in Berlin, I was also glad to see the trip begin with another approach to presenting memory that does not rely on the classical presentation of artifacts. An entirely image-based exhibition has an interesting effect: it naturally provokes stories, questions and discussions, without which it would remain incomplete if not incomprehensible. This is where the excellent guiding and our newly constituted study “community” comes in. As we learned of the local inhabitants’ pride in the restoration of this particular synagogue, contrasted with anonymous uses of others such as a furniture shop, our group took the theme further. The topic became about even less visible places such as Jewish residences – about what it means to live in a former Jewish home in today’s Poland, as well as to return to see one’s former home as someone with Jewish roots. This discussion, triggered by a “trace of memory”, was a first sign of things and themes to come on this trip.

Once our eye for the visual signs of Jewish life was sharpened, it became clear that the museum was merely a condensed and partial version of what we were about to see. On our week-long travel in an increasingly large radius around Kraków, elements from the exhibition reappeared and soon became a sort of chorus. The *mezuzah* scars on the doorways in many towns, the familiar traces of colourful illustrations in former synagogues and prayer houses behind ever-changing exteriors.

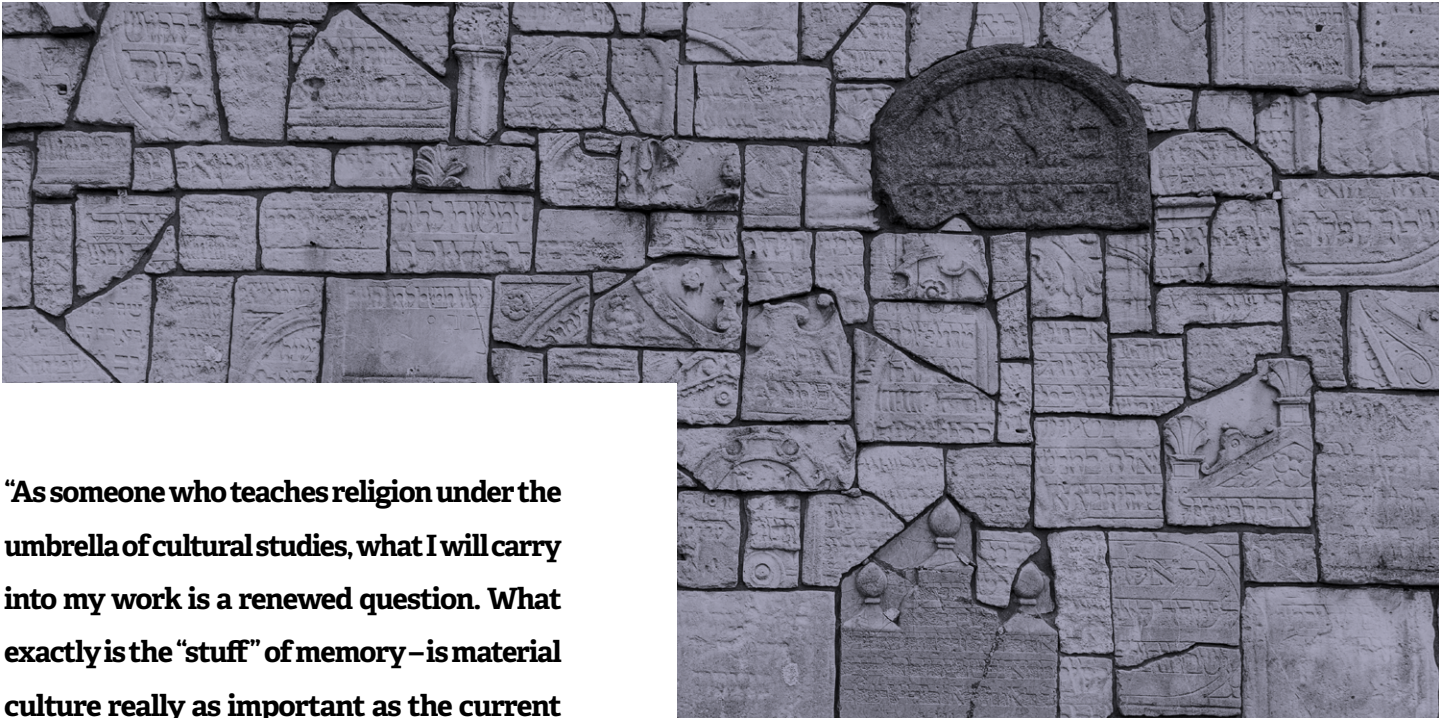
At the same time, what became strikingly obvious over the next days were the vast differences in how Jewish life in today’s Poland is preserved, remembered, taught – and lived. To this end, it was important that we were able to see not merely officially supported projects, such as the impressive Jewish museum in Gliwice and the *bimah* in Tarnów, but also the local, activist-driven restoration and reuse initiatives such as the prayer house in Będzin. Coming from Germany, where remembrance is mostly organised in a “top-down” approach, it was fascinating to see the local and



often spontaneous projects in Poland. With all the remaining difficulties these at times struggling projects point towards, it is a sign that inspires hope and demands respect for the initiators. With or without previous personal connections, they take it upon themselves to contribute to the preservation and revival of Jewish-Polish life.

While these efforts are impressive in and of themselves, for me they also became an important reminder that the approaches towards dealing with Jewish heritage are both figuratively and literally not set in stone. They range from the symbolic force of the glass *bimah* in Chmielnik (as a conscious reminder of the nature of reconstruction), to the haunting beauty of the abandoned Częstochowa cemetery (a state and atmosphere that speaks for itself) or the texts and sounds at the centre of the POLIN Museum’s exhibition (which came as close to representing ideas and concepts as I can imagine). In this way, virtually each stop on the study trip presented us with a new set of assumptions about heritage and ways of relating to it.

Here I would like to stress what perhaps was the most important aspect of this study visit. In making sense of this diversity, it was the composition of our motley crew that really began to shine through. This includes both the hosts and participants.



**“As someone who teaches religion under the umbrella of cultural studies, what I will carry into my work is a renewed question. What exactly is the “stuff” of memory – is material culture really as important as the current research trend suggests?”**

For one, the team of speakers and guides could not have been better selected. Here I want to stress the meeting with Mrs Mirosława Gruszczyńska, a Righteous Among the Nations, which brought home the very personal dimensions of the Polish-Jewish experience during the war; the talk by Edyta Gawron of Jagiellonian University, who provided at least for me a much-needed scholarly assessment of Jewish visibility and presence in today’s Poland; and the opportunity to witness and even join the ceremonial blowing of the *shofar* at the JCC. Adding to this were our tour guides. They ran the gamut from insightfully contextualising the remembrance of the Jewish population with communist political heritage (for instance, by pointing to language: murdered “citizens”) all the way to providing an impressive (if slightly intimidating) real life demonstration of the Kraków-Warsaw city rivalry.

Most impressive, however, was the mix of the participants themselves. It is a testament to the

planning of the trip that we ended up with such an engaged and opinionated, yet intensely curious, group from literally around the world. For the immense task to gather and keep this team together, I think the whole group rightfully gave and gives credit to the efforts of Larysa Michalska. Remarkably, the tour bus ended up as something between a social club and an interdisciplinary laboratory. During the stretches between the sites, religious scholars talked with guides, conservators exchanged experiences with teachers and curators argued with psychologists. What are the personal and systemic conditions for “Righteous Gentile” behavior? How does language – “the Germans”, “Polish Jews” – impact remembrance and dialogue? How do we feel about this or that way of commemoration, coming from our individual cultural backgrounds? My memory of the study visit includes as much these times between the sites as the sites themselves. While the atmosphere remained light-hearted, this was not idle talk. By the end of the week, it became clear that what we

were collectively engaged in was an unexpectedly profound exploration of identity and memory. To say I was not prepared for this aspect of the experience would be an understatement.

This idea of collective exploration leads me to the other end of the study visit. We began our trip in the Galicia Jewish Museum, which condensed symbols of Jewish heritage and inevitably provoked stories and debate to unpack them, effectively engaging us in something close to “co-remembrance”. This experience was complemented by the POLIN Museum in Warsaw, which to a large extent made sound and text its focal point. Both Galicia and POLIN are thus museums that succeed in communicating concepts, each in their own way. They shift the focus from an attempt to present a past reality that has to be learned, knowledge of “how it was”, towards the ongoing need to make sense of a multifaceted and at times paradoxical heritage in the present. To place these exhibitions as the beginning and endpoint of a trip is a testament to the planning and organisation of the “Through Polin” study visit.

As someone who teaches religion under the umbrella of cultural studies, what I will carry into my work is a renewed question. What exactly is the “stuff” of memory – is material culture really as important as the current research trend suggests? How about the rearrangement, presentation of material heritage? What role does narrative play? And, not least, how is it entangled with identity, when the question of “Polish Jewishness” is one that came up time and time again – from evasive answers to questions about one’s “Jewish roots” to Jonathan Webber’s concept of “cultural diplomacy”? These are questions and concepts that do not lend themselves to abstract discussion and the study trip provided more than enough very concrete examples – “stuff” – which will easily become part of my curriculum. As someone also involved in exhibition design, I again became confident in my search to explore alternative ways of presenting heritage and not to be content with a dusty Torah scroll behind glass (as interesting and beautiful as Jewish calligraphy is).

Finally, the trip also succeeded in bringing together potential co-conspirators, and in my case ended up sowing the seeds for an audio documentary project on aspects of the (re)discovery of Jewish life in Poland which I will be pitching to German public radio.

What room for improvement remains? A little more breathing space in the itinerary; perhaps also more preparation for the individual stops within the larger context of the study trip. For example, after a while, Jewish cemeteries tend to blend into each other. This unjustly ends up covering differences in how they are preserved and presented, something that could have been stressed or made more explicit.

Finally, given that the participants of the “Through Polin” tour are educators, I would like to propose to use this opportunity for a “workshop” mode in the future. A day set aside for a more structured exchange of educating approaches, sharing experiences and insights – e.g. with short presentations or a BarCamp format – I think would benefit everyone.

These are minor details. They fade against the background of a trip that showed us more than the wounds of the Holocaust; that brought our very different participants into contact with each other and thrust us in the midst of Polish-Jewish memories (a chance encounter with a Polish cemetery worker comes to mind); that confronted us with abandoned and reconstructed artifacts, hints of places and stories waiting to be brought up again and, through that, shaped anew.

Returning to the affirmative character of Jewish tradition that I feel represents our trip best – there is a psalm that poignantly states: “In death there is no remembrance of you: in the grave who shall give you thanks?” After the study trip, I am confident that our collective answer to this challenge will follow the lead of Jewish tradition and focus on exactly this irreducible stuff of life.



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Rina Eshet

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# Through Polin

**After the interesting tour of Kazimierz and Podgórze districts and the guided tour of Bochnia (which included the Jewish cemetery), the meeting and lecture by Dr Edyta Gawron of the Institute of Jewish Studies at Jagiellonian University on Jews in post-war Poland was intellectually challenging.**

Another highlight of the seminar was our meeting with the Righteous Gentile, Mrs Mirosława Gruszczyńska, whose story of saving a Jewish girl during the war whilst risking the lives of her whole Polish family was very touching. The same was true with our visit to the Ulma Family Museum of Poles Saving Jews in World War II in Markowa. There, we saw the walls inscribed with all the names of the Righteous Gentiles who saved Jews while endangering their lives, and sometimes dying for the sake of saving Jews.

Our visit to Zbylitowska Góra in the Buczyzna forest, where about 6,000 Tarnów Jews – including small children – were murdered, mainly during a massacre in June 1942, was very moving. We could not stop crying, thinking of these poor people and children murdered in cold blood. The men in our group prayed Kaddish for their souls and we all sing the Israeli national anthem „Hatikva” so they will never be forgotten.

It goes without saying that all of the stops on our visit were all very interesting, educational, and left us with a taste for learning more about the complexity of Jews living in Poland before the war.



Our concluding visit to the POLIN Museum in Warsaw was the highlight of the tour. It is a modern, interactive museum which give us a summary of the history of the Jews in Poland from the beginning. It is very well organised and educational. It was a good summary of our visit in Poland, leaving us with a desire to come again, to visit and learn more about the interaction between Jews and Poland in the future. I was also very impressed by the reconstruction of cities in Poland after the war, especially Warsaw.

I will share my experiences of my visit to Poland and my personal favourite impressions with those in my milieu, with the children I educate and adult entrepreneurs in the high-tech, construction and

commerce sectors. I will recommend they visit Poland and invest there.

In summary, this visit for me was very helpful and satisfying. I was very moved by the hospitality of our hosts, mainly the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Poland, which supported our visit.

Thank you to everyone who contributed to this very important project. Thank you to Larysa and to all the kind guides who accompanied and enriched us with information during the seminar. I hope to hear about new, interesting projects in the future.

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Bob Mark

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# Through Polin

**I have nothing but praise for the “Through Polin” programme: for the thought that was put into the schedule, the knowledge and seriousness of the guides who met us at each stop, the efficient organisation of the programme and the fascinating group that was put together for the seminar. I want to thank Larysa Michalska in particular for her hard work and for her patience with us, the staff of the Galicia Jewish Museum in general for making us feel at home, and of course the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs for making the programme possible. It was a privilege to be able to take part in the programme. Aside from how much I learned from our week in Poland, it was also, if I’m allowed to add, fun. And that’s a fairly important component in helping to digest the vast amount of information we received.**

Naturally the programme enriched my knowledge of Polish history in general and of Nazi-occupied Poland in particular. However, the most powerful experience I take from this trip was in the learning process itself – the examination of this period through dialogue with young Poles who have the integrity and intellectual curiosity to confront the ghosts of their country’s past. This kind of work could serve as an inspiration for an array of projects in each of the countries represented in the group: Israel, Ukraine, Lithuania, Latvia, the Czech Republic, Azerbaijan, Slovakia, the USA and elsewhere.

I find myself thinking of ways that this opportunity might have been used to examine related contemporary issues, taking advantage of the group members as resources for learning. In my mind, an outstanding session in the programme that could have been a starting point for such discussion was Professor Webber’s brilliant presentation of what he called “cultural diplomacy”. He demonstrated how, through dialogue and respect, a Polish village could become a full partner – or could even lead the way – in addressing the memory of the annihilated Jewish community that was a part of its history. One question that comes to mind is, why does this surprise us? What lies behind our expectation that the local Polish community might behave otherwise? Without explicitly saying so, Prof Webber seemed to address an assumption that the community would be apathetic or perhaps even hostile to such a project. Structured discussion might have been introduced

to discuss the potential and obstacles of building such partnerships in the participants' countries, using the Polish experience as a case study. We hear of legislation by the present Polish government regarding the way that history may be presented. It would have been interesting in this forum to address the sensitivities that grassroots initiatives face when challenging official historical narratives.

**“One of the questions asked was how I might incorporate the experience from the seminar into my own work. I have spent most of my adult life in a Jewish-Palestinian village in Israel that conducts a variety of educational work, challenging the status quo and advancing equality.”**

Several other issues come to mind that might have enriched the content of the program had there been a scheduled discussion framework for the participants. For example, I know of one participant who is planning to conduct research on what contributes to acts of resistance under oppression. This would be one of several questions that could connect content from the trip to questions that are relevant in many places today (even under circumstances that are much less dramatic than the Nazi occupation). While two or three sessions of this kind would only scratch the surface of each topic, they could also open discussions that would continue among the participants on the bus, during meals and over an evening beer. They could also lead to networking and the creation of co-operative projects among the participants afterwards. In short, I believe that the programme, which was already very good, might benefit by paying a little more attention to what the participants bring to the encounter.



One of the questions asked was how I might incorporate the experience from the seminar into my own work. I have spent most of my adult life in a Jewish-Palestinian village in Israel that conducts a variety of educational work, challenging the status quo and advancing equality. We have grown accustomed to getting on the nerves of many in mainstream society. We also have some experience in giving voice to perspectives and narratives that the official history and civics textbooks carefully ignore or distort. In recent years, the government passed a law imposing sanctions on institutions that acknowledge Israel's War of Independence as a tragedy – “nakba” – for the Palestinian people and that raise questions regarding the nature of Israel's democracy. For those of us seeking to confront our past honestly in co-operation with all parties involved,



this government policy becomes one more obstacle to overcome. A similar situation seems to be taking shape with the recent legislation in Poland. This made it all the more encouraging to meet so many Poles who were determined to confront stories of both heroism and collaboration without appearing to be too concerned with whether or not their opinions received legitimacy from above. This in itself was inspiring. In my case, the seminar marked just the

beginning of a learning process about Poland, but it is already clear that the experience will contribute to my educational work in our own political context.

**Thank you once again.**



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Coby Willner

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# Through Polin Experience – September 2016

**I started my adventure two days earlier, when I arrived in Kraków early Friday morning. I had had only an hour's sleep, but I was so excited that I managed to stay awake the whole day. I hired a driver to pick me up and take me to Kolbuszowa, my grandparents' hometown before the war. Except for a plaque on the destroyed synagogue put up just this year and the old cemetery, there was no sign that Jews had lived there**

However, I am writing this to express my joy when I arrived back in Kraków for Shabbat. I passed 3 synagogues, each with lots of people getting ready for the Friday night prayer service, walking around safely with kippot. I went to the age-old Isaac Synagogue, where there was a student delegation from Israel that filled the place. They sang, danced, and the place became alive. Walking outside in Kazimierz when we had our tour, I was thrilled to see so many Jewish sites still preserved: signs in Hebrew, kosher cafes and a JCC that welcomes Jews and non-Jews for activities seven days a week. Over 75 years after the war, you can act and walk freely as a Jew

The second day, after traveling to Bochnia, we had a fascinating lecture by Dr Gawron who enlightened us with information about post-war Poland. We could have sat there for hours, listening, asking questions, yearning to find out about what was going in Poland today. She was followed by a talk with a Righteous Gentile. In all the years I have been studying the Holocaust, I had never heard a talk by a person who saved Jews during the war. She was so awe-inspiring we gave her a standing ovation. When I thought my



day was complete, we heard another amazing lecture by Professor Webber on how he got his family's hometown's Jewish history to be commemorated. Listening to these three people's stories was an end to a wonderful second day.

The next day, we met two more amazing people: two non-Jews dedicating their lives to rebuilding Jewish sites in Będzin and Gliwice. All through their tours, I kept asking myself why they do this. The time and effort they put in this restoration is unbelievable. In the "rebuilt" synagogue in Będzin, Yaron decided we should pray the afternoon service there. We had exactly 10 men, the quorum (*minyan*) necessary to pray together. Sara and I said Kaddish, the mourner's prayer. Just as amazing was that it was hard to keep the ten Jewish men in one room, but the non-Jews stayed and gave their respect without even asking. That really touched me.

During the rest of the tour, we had some wonderful tour guides who spoke such a fluent English that I thought they were native speakers. We saw places that the average tourist does not get to, which is why I was so thrilled to be on this tour. Friday night in the Reform, but very traditional, temple in the heart of Warsaw was another extraordinary experience. Seeing this place fill up with young local people, some still trying to find themselves, some with *tzitsit* and *payot*, rare for a Reform service. The unfortunate part for me was that I did not get to talk to any of them.

The last day was topped off with a three-hour visit to the POLIN Museum, which I had been waiting to see since its opening. We had two fascinating tour guides, Paweł and Aleksandra.

I started my adventure with Kolbuszowa and ended it with an exhibit on Kolbuszowa before the war. It still amazes me that out of the 1,000 shtetls in Poland this town merits an exhibit, but I was happy. I must come back to this museum.

To sum up, the seminar was all I dreamed of and more. Ever since I came to Poland with my senior class

4 years ago, I always wanted to return with adults and see what I missed. This was it. I saw post-war Poland with a group of 40 fascinating educators from around the globe, each one with his or her own story. Sitting on the bus on some of our long journeys, I am still moved by a few Europeans who had a need to share their stories and feelings and talk to us Israelis.

This whole experience would not have not been possible without the help and guidance of Larysa. From our first correspondence trying to personally help me to our last hug on Saturday, I felt the true warmth and dedication of this lovely person with all the patience in the world, wanting only the best for all of us. Thank you for accepting me to this seminar. Looking forward to seeing all of you in Israel or at some reunion.



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Michał Wawrzyński

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# Impressions from Galicia

**The “Through Polin” seminar organised by the Galicia Jewish Museum is a Meeting with a capital M. Multidimensional and multigenerational – this is the source of its strength.**

Very young and slightly older people from all over the world – the USA, Israel, Uruguay, Europe, Poland – came together. We spoke many languages – from Polish to Hebrew, Yiddish, Russian and Spanish, while the leading language was, of course, English. And we all got on perfectly well. As Wittgenstein said: “... Language boundaries set the limits of freedom.” We really felt free, too: with ideas, thoughts, arguments, jokes... as if we had known each other for years and met in one place just to talk, to experience something important.

The driving force of this meeting was experiencing stories told not only by our guides, but also by the participants whose grandmothers and grandfathers – and even sometimes parents – came from the now-forgotten shtetls and small multicultural Galician towns. For some people, meeting with the history and culture of their grandparents was a trip into the unknown. They said that they imagined it in a completely different way. For others, it was a rediscovery of their roots, a return to the world known from stories told by their grandparents, stories full of nostalgia. Guests from Israel or the USA reacted very emotionally. We Poles, Lithuanians, Slovaks and Latvians, for whom the world of the shtetl – not only Galician one – is not unknown, were looking for traces of





history and learnt to experience them by touching stories known from memories or scientific studies.

The trip through Galicia was a trip to the world of sentiments, collective and individual stories. Each participant experienced it in their own way. But the idea of the journey is very essential for this seminar. Whilst travelling, we discovered the truth about the world and about ourselves; we got to know our travelling companions, their fears and desires. They were no longer strangers. It was a very important lesson for the participants of the seminar – the clash of different cultures, languages, needs and expectations. A lesson conducted in an excellent way that will remain in our memory.

One of the results of this meeting are new contacts and exchange of the experiences, ideas and plans for the future. Each participant deals with Jewish issues – culture, religion, the Holocaust, keeping memory alive... These long-lasting discussions resulted in not only in personal contacts, but also a scope of future co-operation. From my perspective, the world of the Jews of Kujawsko-Pomorskie is almost unknown and has not been rediscovered. The prospect of groups visiting from Israel or the USA has raised considerable interest in my region, and I have already taken steps to organise such a tour. The meeting in Galicia was a good step for

these initiatives. It was a great place to exchange educational experiences, ideas for co-operation and, above all, “meeting positively crazy people” willing to work in multicultural fields.

What was wrong? Time – too little time. For everything. We all agreed that it would be a good idea to stay for another week. It has been suggested to extend the range of the meeting, to visit places connected with Jewish history all around Poland. To make it possible we probably need money and time. Who knows, maybe next time?

One more observation: this wasn't “a trip” only through places of extermination, though the problem of the Shoah dominated during the guided tours. Many times, we could notice that the main problem, especially for younger Israelis, is the presentation of Poland as a land of ashes without reference to the over one thousand years of Jewish culture, to Jews as our neighbours and fellow citizens. “Through Polin” fills this gap successfully and provides analytical tools for further work on culture and history of Polish Jews.

One last word. It is thanks to these initiatives that the rapprochement of cultures and nations becomes a reality. I can't imagine that this program will not be realised again in the future.

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Kasia Nieużyła

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# Through Polin

**I registered for the “Through Polin” programme out of curiosity and a desire to get to know the heritage of Polish Jewish history. My expectations were small and simple: to be able to talk to people from around the world, see interesting places, and gain knowledge in order to be a better guide and artist. As soon as I met the other participants, I realised that the seminar would be far more than what I expected.**

People of different backgrounds, faiths and origins met to go deep into the difficult history of Jewish life in Poland. It became clear to me that this was not just a random meeting of random people, it was an unusual encounter. Each of the members had an interesting story to tell, something inspirational to share and to learn from. Usually, when people go on a group trip it can be hard to truly connect with one another as it takes time to develop a relationship. Here, maybe because the topic of the trip was challenging and encouraged discussion, people could talk on a deeper level than usual and feel connected. The hours spent on the bus were times for sharing, exchanging experiences and discussion. I had time to talk to each participant personally and develop some unique relationships.

Firstly, this seminar meant a lot for me as it opened my eyes as to how much history we Poles share with Jews. I had just a brief idea about the topic before, but this seminar made a revolution in my perception. We saw many places that I had no idea existed, histories that I did not know had happened. The museums in Chmielnik and Markowa – two tiny places, a little town and a village where people from around the world come to pay tribute to history. Brzostek – a forgotten cemetery that gained new life thanks to Professor Jonathan Webber. These are only some

of many stories that made me realise the revival of Jewish history that is taking place in Poland. People searching for their roots find them here where we, the descendents of their Polish neighbours, still live. The co-existence of Poles and Jews that was brutally cut by war is now rising from ashes. There is a new chapter in history that is now taking place; it seems to me to be a period of reconciliation and remembering the forgotten past.

Secondly, “Through Polin” made me feel responsible for the knowledge that I had the chance to gain. What should I do with that? How should I spread it? How can I make it into a lesson? I see the story of Holocaust as a strong message for our times, a red light. Where do intolerance, ideology, division and indifference lead to and how severe are their consequences? The question that I carry in my head

is how to educate people on this topic, how to reach young people and make them feel interested and responsible for the future. I think more educational programmes need to be done in schools: meetings with Righteous Gentiles, more movies or theatre plays on this topic, more discussions around this topic with regard to the present. I strongly believe in the power of interactive education: when you meet someone, talk to others or see something artistic, it goes to your head much faster than pure, rote knowledge. I think it would be a great idea to develop a programme for schools that would provide students with workshops, discussions and meetings with interesting people who are willing to share their knowledge about Polish-Jewish heritage. This surely would broaden young people’s horizons and could serve as a way to prevent intolerance.





Finally, the question that resonates constantly in me is what can I do with the talents and abilities that I used during the experience from “Through Polin”? As a dancer and choreographer, I would love to create things that would touch the topics covered during the seminar. The undeniable fruit of this seminar is artistic co-operation with some of the participants. Along with Karolina Kogut, I am seriously planning an artistic project based on inspirations that we found during the seminar. We would love to use our talents to create something special, interesting and educational that would broaden people’s perception

of Polish-Jewish history. If our plans go well, the next step would be to co-operate with Israel-based people on projects about the shared Polish-Jewish heritage. These are our plans for now, but I truly hope that this is just the beginning of my “Through Polin” adventure.

I feel very grateful that I had the chance to participate in this seminar. It made me a more competent tour guide, a more mature artist and – most importantly – a better person!



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Anna Nosková

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# Through Polin: Study Visit Essay

**Maybe it seems a bit pompous to dedicate an essay to somebody, but these are special circumstances. I would like to dedicate my written words and thoughts to the current generation of Poles who are dedicating themselves to preserving, not forgetting, and commemorating of the Jewish culture and presence in Poland.**

Coming to Poland in the last week of September of 2016 was rather special. Since it is the neighbour of my country, the Czech Republic, and a member of the Visegrad Group, we should share a lot of similarities, right?

“I have to talk with Polish people about what actually happened here during the Second World War? Where all the vanished people are, the cultural heritage which not so long ago contributed so significantly to this country?” I asked myself whilst riding on a bus through a countryside which is so similar, yet so different, from my homeland.

“What happened, oh my God, this is just too much. How do I cope with this? How do you cope with this?” my voice wants to shout out loud to the houses in the village that surrounds Zbylitowska Góra. The memorial to 10,000 executed people surrounded by beautiful trees felt stronger than any other place I visited during the “Through Polin” study trip. I cannot forget how my fingertips were tingling and breath was so heavy.

At that moment, I felt that I had no hope for mankind. How can life can continue to go on? After all these terrible crimes were committed on innocent people? Where were You, my God, Adonai? Did You take a



vacation? How can I trust You after You did not even protect the Ulma family? The museum is beautiful; we can forever admire the courage of Józef and Wiktoria Ulma, the parents of 6 children who decided to hide the Jews and were killed because of that.

“Everybody is gone,” I said sadly to myself in Będzin when we met our guide, Piotr Jakoweńko. Będzin is no different to other towns in Poland: the Jewish presence was here and, even after 70 years, something is missing. I am convinced that most Poles feel it, subconsciously at least.

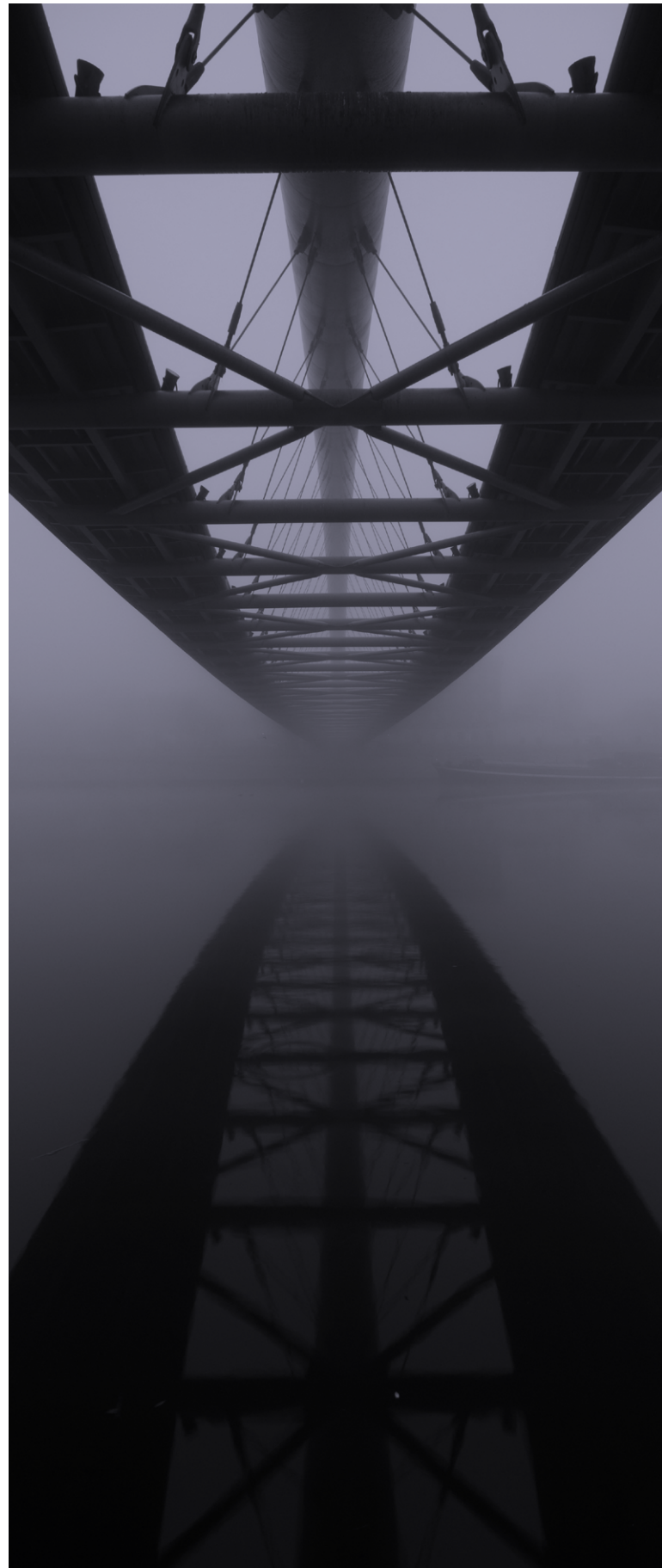
I mention Piotr Jakoweńko, our Będzin guide, who made our visit to this not very beautiful town very special. With his wife Karolina and without any help of local authorities, he decided to save and restore the local Jewish prayer house.

“Why? Why you dedicate your time, energy and money to preserve something Jewish?” was the most common question. “I felt something was missing here,” said this humble man.

Extreme sadness, grief and nostalgia mixed with gratefulness and an emotion that, in the end, maybe humanity is not so lost and damned were my most frequent feelings during the study trip. Even though weeks have passed, I am still shattered by the power of these emotions and I will process them for a long, long time.

Being of the third generation of post-Holocaust Jews, living in Central Europe, I often feel my life was stolen from me. Of course, I could move to Israel or America, but why? I am European, from the very heart of this continent. This is my place. Why was the life of my community shattered to ashes and I have to live on these ruins? Where is the spirit of all those who lived, created, smiled, loved, said *l’chaim* and *mazal tov*? Is it all gone?

Despite being brought up in a very secular way (as you know, communism destroyed the faith in God in people), I find my peace with the rabbis. Firstly,





when I went to JCC-Kraków and listened to an amazing American rabbi explaining the sound of the shofar. Lots of people gathered inside and in the garden as we listened to the shofar, ate apples and honey, and wished each other *Shana Tova*. I guess not everybody who came for this event was Jewish. People who came here and gave their time, attention and respect maybe wanted to learn more about the culture and traditions of their once-lost neighbors, who have started to appear again.

“*Lecha dodi*,” chanted Rabbi Stas Wojciechowicz at our Shabbat service in Warsaw, and my soul was at peace. “I wish we could build a JCC centre in Prague and a Reform community similar to Ec Chaim, where we could feel friendly but connected, free but framed within our religion and tradition.” These were my constant thoughts on my way back home.

The first Polish woman I knew who deeply cared about the Jewish presence in Poland was Aleksandra Engler-Malinowska. We met in Berlin at a conference on Jewish storytelling. I was impressed: a non-Jewish person dedicating so many thoughts of her everyday life to the Jewish nation? Why? Aleksandra was the

first, but definitely not the last, Pole I met who cared about Jews and who not only continue remembering my nation in Poland, but also build bridges to the future. My special thank-you goes out to all of you: Larysa Michalska, Alicja Zioło, Paweł Łukaszewicz and many others. I will admire what you do and will spread the word about you wherever I go.

Finally, let’s end with my family, who did not appreciate me going to Poland at all. You have to understand, part of my family came from Lviv. Their name was Miaskowski, and a lot of them died during the Second World War...

I wish my family could see the hope I saw, the courage and the “never give up mantra” I saw all around me during our study trip. I wish my grandparents could shake hands with Mrs Mirosława Gruszczyńska, who, along with her mother and sister, saved a young Jewish girl. I still remember the kind and wise look in her eyes, how she looked on me with such humbleness, when after her speech I had tears in my eyes.

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Yaron Barsheshet

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# Through Polin, 2016 Article

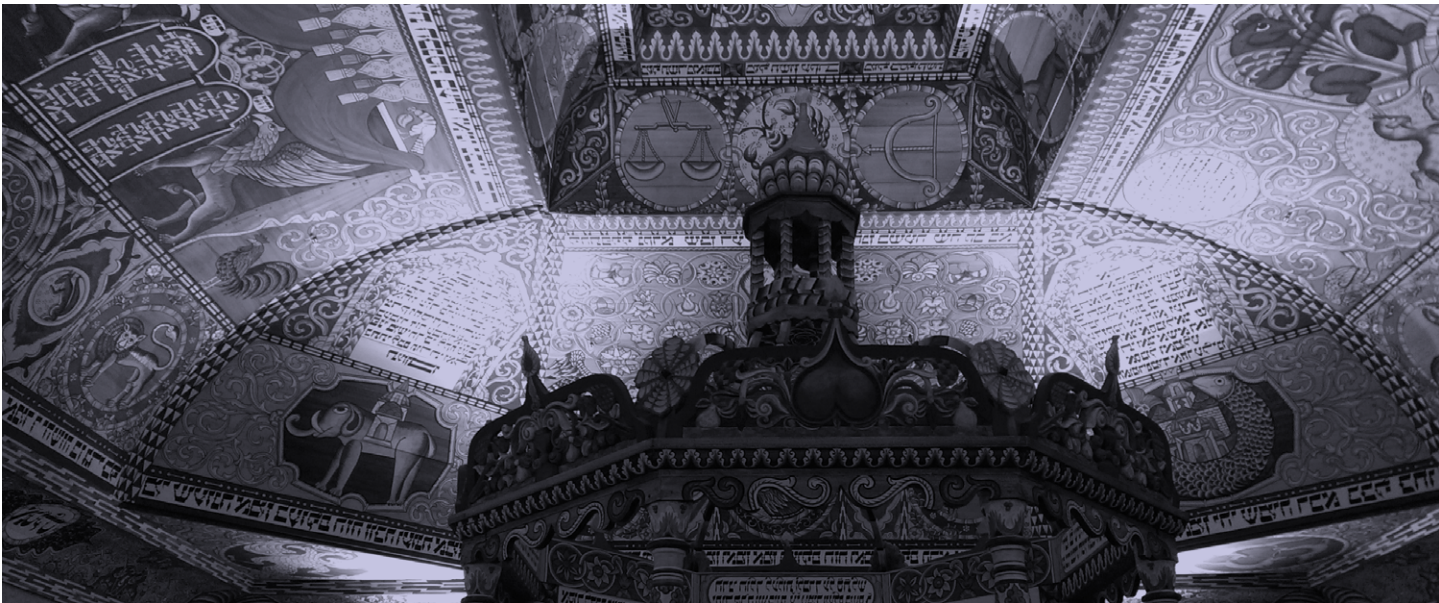
**First, I want note that the seminar was for me a fascinating meeting both with regard to my familiarity with the seminar participants and with regard to its content and the places visited during the tour. I would like to share a few key points that were significant innovations for me during the seminar.**

## **Meeting with the non-Israeli seminar participants**

I got to talking with my colleagues during the seminar and, to my surprise, I discovered that most of them are engaged with Jewish history and the revival of Jewish cultural and heritage in their hometowns through educating young people and adults, educational activities, museum management, or other work or activities that have a touch of Jewish cultural heritage. The point that caught my attention the most was the fact that there were many young people in their 20s whose parents and grandparents likely did not witness the Holocaust, but nevertheless dealing with Jewish culture and heritage is a central element in their lives. For example, I was introduced to a colleague who, along with his father, runs a museum in Slovakia that won UNESCO recognition as a world heritage site. Likewise, I talked to two friends, one of whom teaches at the Museum of the History of Polish Jews Warsaw and the other works as a museum guide in her hometown.

In my conversations with these youngsters, I found out about their great interest in Jewish culture. I found myself explaining and sharing about Jewish holiday traditions, kashrut issues, Jewish law and Jewish culture. My impression was that this is a trend that is gaining momentum, which was strengthened





by seeing in places where locals, most of whom are the third generation after the Holocaust and World War II, guided us. I don't know how to explain what the roots are for this awakening and what motivates these young people to engage with Jewish culture, but I can't ignore the trend I saw before my very eyes. My discussions with these people only began thanks to the seminar, and I believe that this relationship has improved us and created beautiful and important insights for all of us.

### **Instructional tours**

The tours we took each day were exciting for me. I was rejuvenated both by the information, and particularly by the cultural and architectural wealth as well as the unique human scenery the Jews contributed to those towns and cities. My heart was especially touched by the tour in Będzin by a local guide who really revived the Jewish past through inspiring teaching. Besides his inspiring story about how he and his wife came to delve into Jewish heritage and the efforts he makes – even at his own expense – to maintain and preserve Jewish sites in the town, an authentic and significant point in his talk was that without Jews the city has lost its identity and become just another city. This is a strong way of putting it,

but I would dare say it can be a precedent for cities and towns in Poland because it shows a clear recognition that the Jewish heritage, an integral part of the 1,000 years of Jewish history in Poland, was a major element in Poland's cultural richness and that the contributions of Jews to Poland encompassed all aspects and fields in the country. All of these cultural assets are lost to Poland today.

### **Relations between Poles and Jews**

As stated above, it was felt throughout the tour that all dealing with Jewish heritage throughout Poland's long history are full of respect to this unique history. The rescue story which we exposed in Markowa Museum was inspiring. However, the fascinating conversation we had with Dr Gawron of Jagiellonian University about the fates of Jews after the war sadly rekindled thoughts about the relationships between Jewish Poles and Polish people during the war and afterwards. Towards the end of the conversation, the professor said that what is happening today in Poland regarding treatment of minorities is worrying her and dealing with Jews as a minority role in Polish history can be important learning about relations to minorities today in Poland. I had a fascinating conversation with one of my colleagues, where I caught



**“The tours we took each day were exciting for me. I was rejuvenated both by the information, and particularly by the cultural and architectural wealth as well as the unique human scenery the Jews contributed to those towns and cities. My heart was especially touched by the tour in Będzin by a local guide who really revived the Jewish past through inspiring teaching.”**

myself saying that the preoccupation of Poland with the Jewish issue arose, among other reasons, from Polish people asking how this could have happened after centuries of living side by side; how did Polish people “change their skin” with regards to Jews during the Holocaust. That question of integrity and fairness is engraved firmly in my memory. Thus, I ended the seminar at this point with significant questions concerning the world’s attitude towards minorities in general, and to Polish and Jews in particular – relations where light and darkness are jumbled. As educators and leaders, we must stand up bravely to this not-so-simple question, since it is only this way can the growth of humanity be directed.

In conclusion, I would like to thank all involved in this important work: Larysa and all the team from the Galicia Museum, the lecturers and instructors, to my fellow participants and to the Polish Foreign Ministry who recognises the importance of this seminar.

**Be blessed, all of you.**



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Halina Bendkowski

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# Through Polin, 25.09– 01.10.2016

**As I said in my farewell speech at the POLIN Museum in Warsaw: too much positivity makes you blind. I would add now: too much negativity does too.**

Yes, I think all the guides on our Polin tour tried to do their best – and some of them were not only very knowledgeable, but deeply involved in researching the “common” history of Jewish and non-Jewish people in pre-war Poland. Most notably, Professor Jonathan Webber’s approach of “Cultural Diplomacy in Holocaust Memory Work” was positively impressive. Even more so was Pjotr Jakoweńko from the Cukerman’s Gate Foundation in Będzin, who gained all of our admiration for his extraordinary research and work. Without any push for academic titles or economic privileges, he and his wife Karolina established a local history foundation in Będzin to show the common history of Jews and Christians in pre- and post-war Poland.

Contrary to the very positive experience in Będzin, I still think that the visit to Wadowice, the birthplace of the Polish pope, John Paul II, was disappointing. The guide was not well prepared enough for the inevitable questions about relations between Catholics and Jews in Poland. The same in Jasna Góra, where the monk-guide amused me with his Catholic pride for the permanent praying in the vast monastery, where he offered us the opportunity to kneel if we wanted to do so. He was not too surprised



that not one of our group did. After the guided tour, as we looked down the grand boulevard named for John Paul II, the guide added, “In the German times, this street was called Adolf Hitler Boulevard.”

My surprise was even greater when the monk reported that Adolf Hitler was once a visitor to Jasna Góra. “And how was he received?” I asked. But I did not get an answer. Our guide just shrugged his shoulders. I at least would have been interested in the historical background of how it happened that the openly evil propagandist of Jewish destruction used the Catholic site of Jasna Góra. Or vice-versa?

All those who are interested in a better understanding between Jewish and Christian people in pre- and post-war Poland have to take the path of admittedly uneasy enlightenment. For post-war Germans who challenged the history of their fascist parents during and after 1968, it is alienating when many Polish people still distinguish between Poles and Jews. In Germany, at least in a democratic context, this distinction would be criticised immediately as a still-prevalent exclusion of others, relegating them to remain strangers. We have learnt the model of inclusion as in the USA; we express the integration of all those who want to live in Germany as Jewish-Germans or Italo-Germans or Turkish-Germans. I don't want to gloss over the reality in Germany, not at all. I only want to show the different approaches to a very disturbing history and efforts to find a better approach.

There is a bitter, but real, joke about the German sense for perfection. Once, they wanted to be the most efficient murderers and now they want to be the best accusers of themselves.

For many Jews I know, especially in the US, Poland is the land of ashes. This still determines the confrontation with memory. There is no way around it. And everyone who is dealing with Polin has to confront this reality. Once a Jewish home of 3.5 million Jews, it is now the land of their ashes.

Those who come now to visit Poland as the home of their ancestors have their personal breakdowns. That is neither easy for Jews from all over the world, nor for the young Polish people who also study Jewish history. No one wants to be reduced to ashes in life.

The Polish people who now demand a common look at the common history in Polin are right, but there are problems when the Polish government does not allow research into the complicity of Catholic anti-Judaism and their thoughtless antisemitism.

I completely agree with Poland's stance clarifying that Poland was occupied by the Germans, their politics





and camps of destruction. Of course, reality is never black and white; this banality is too self-evident and should not be used as an excuse for not researching specifics. Therefore, I very much appreciate having had a chance to encounter different people who are seriously involved in reflecting on Polin's history and present.

As I said in the beginning: too much positivity makes you blind.

I would add now: too much negativity does too.

I admit, I am haunted by the negativity of history in Poland, where I was born, and in Germany, where I had to learn to resist the overwhelming burden of confrontation with former murderers – who after all were the victorious losers of gruesome history after the end of the Second World War. Until now, I had never met Polish people (including my own Polish family) who missed the Jews. Thanks to our Polin tour, I am now more confident and relaxed

than before. This means I want to learn more, and to develop contacts and connections for the future.

So, I would like to apply for the next Polin tour.

In the meantime, I will continue to guide tours to Israel and to join tours with more understanding about the former Jewish Polin. I am able now to describe the work of the Galicia Museum and the Gliwice Museum. My American-Jewish friends trust me to come with them back to their ancestors' land, so I will continue to be interested in the ongoing developments of the Jewish trail in Poland, but I still would need more support.

It was a good beginning for me.

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Magdalena Pulikowska

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# Through Polin – Through My New Experience

**It has been two weeks since the end of “Through Polin” and I am still thinking about the seminar. Do the other participants feel the same? Who created that unique atmosphere and how?**

I must admit that “Through Polin” was not my first trip to places where the Jewish revival has a strong, ambitious role in building a dialogue between Jews and non-Jewish Poles. I have already participated in some projects, seminars and study visits. A few of them had an international character and were dedicated to people who want to develop their knowledge and improve skills. In my opinion, “Through Polin” was one of them, but also had something more, something different from the others. What was it? I will try to explain with a few examples, which are absolutely subjective, and show what I have seen during the week of “Through Polin”.

I heard about the project in August when I was in Warsaw. I took part in the “Polin Academy Summer Seminar” (PASS) at the Museum of the History of Polish Jews in Warsaw. There, I met Larysa Michalska, an education assistant from the Galicia Jewish Museum. She told me about “Through Polin”. I thought that it would be a great opportunity to take part in this seminar and meet other people who work in education. I decided to send my application.

When I got the message from Larysa about my acceptance to the project, I was excited and eagerly awaited the start of the seminar.

Someone once told me that if you want to go on a journey, it does not matter where you go, but with whom. People create everything. I did not realise that in just one week I would find new friends. I felt like part of a big, international family. I had the occasion to talk with everyone. From the fundamental question, “What are you doing in your organisation and why do non-Jewish Poles do something for Jews?” to drinking a beer at night and talking about life. I am sure it is not a coincidence that these people were with me. I am thinking here especially about the Israelis. This is important; conversations between Israelis and Poles have changed the points of view of both nationalities.

I am studying Jewish Studies at Jagiellonian University in Kraków and I am learning Hebrew. I had the opportunity to speak with people from Israel, hear what they said and just practise. I will not forget that moment when we visited the Jewish cemetery in Bochnia. I was walking through the cemetery path and looking at the inscriptions on the graves and at the same time listening to discussions in Hebrew. During the farewell in Warsaw, I told people one thing and I would like to repeat that sentence. I am moved and inspired after this trip and the places where we have been. We have visited cities which have renovated synagogues and cultural centres, preserved Jewish cemeteries, and people who are doing something to keep the Jewish tradition alive. Places like Chmielnik – Świętokrzyski Sztetl, Cukerman’s Gate in Będzin or the Upper Silesian Jews House of Remembrance in Gliwice and even the *bimah* in Tarnów are unique and full of life. But there are many places where the Jewish revival does not exist. No Jews, no preservation, no commemoration. We should remember that and show people from abroad that is the real landscape in Poland, even if Poles are not proud of it. I know how hard it is to try and work in a town with old Jewish monuments and no initiatives. Maybe there should be a lecture

about this or using at least one city as an example to see and understand the complicated situation? In my opinion, it is worth thinking about this point in future.

What I have learnt during the seminar? More than I would have expected. Each day was full of new experiences. I returned to Kraków with a feeling that is not the end. This is the beginning of a new journey – co-operation with people who really want to stay in touch and, furthermore, to create new initiatives. Even now I am sharing e-mails and planning meetings for the next year. Sounds wonderful, doesn’t it? Of course, but it would not look like this without the hard-working Larysa and us participants. I hope that this strong group will remember our seven days getting know each other and getting know Poland more.

Education is extremely important in building a society which is conscious of Jewish history; on the other hand it’s not simple. However, there is no time to waste. It is time to work. Thank you to the Galicia Jewish Museum for this seminar. It showed me that I can try more and more every day if I really believe in myself and my skills.





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Kaja Kogut

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# Through Polin, study visit 2016

**The Galicia Jewish Museum invited to Kraków a group of people devoted to the peaceful co-existence and co-functioning of communities, religions and cultures. A venue for cultural dialogue with an international outreach, the “Through Polin” study visit successfully linked a variety of nations. The organiser of the study visit, the Galicia Jewish Museum, gives an important place to the protection of cultural heritage, issues of ethnic minorities and the development of tolerance. Through exchanging thoughts and ideas, we were able to explore mutual stimuli for creative work and support dialogue in public life.**

By taking part in the “Through Polin” study visit, I wanted to fill in some gaps in the knowledge I acquired during my university studies. I wanted to learn more about my country, its Jewish heritage and history through a global level of understanding. That was what I expected. But what I experienced exceeded my expectations. During our study visit, I had the chance to have an intellectual and emotional journey to deeper levels of understanding. What happened in my mind and, what I consider even more important, in my heart is very significant for my personal, intellectual and psychological development.

It was such a privilege to share my beliefs, my dreams, my plans and fears with this group of beautiful people, who I truly consider my friends even after such a short time together. It was an honour to hear their opinions, views and feelings, and also to become part of their way of expressing a whole spectrum of emotions, from sadness to gratitude and even praise. Everything we experienced together – our smiles, tears, prayers and everyday conversations – has strengthened my

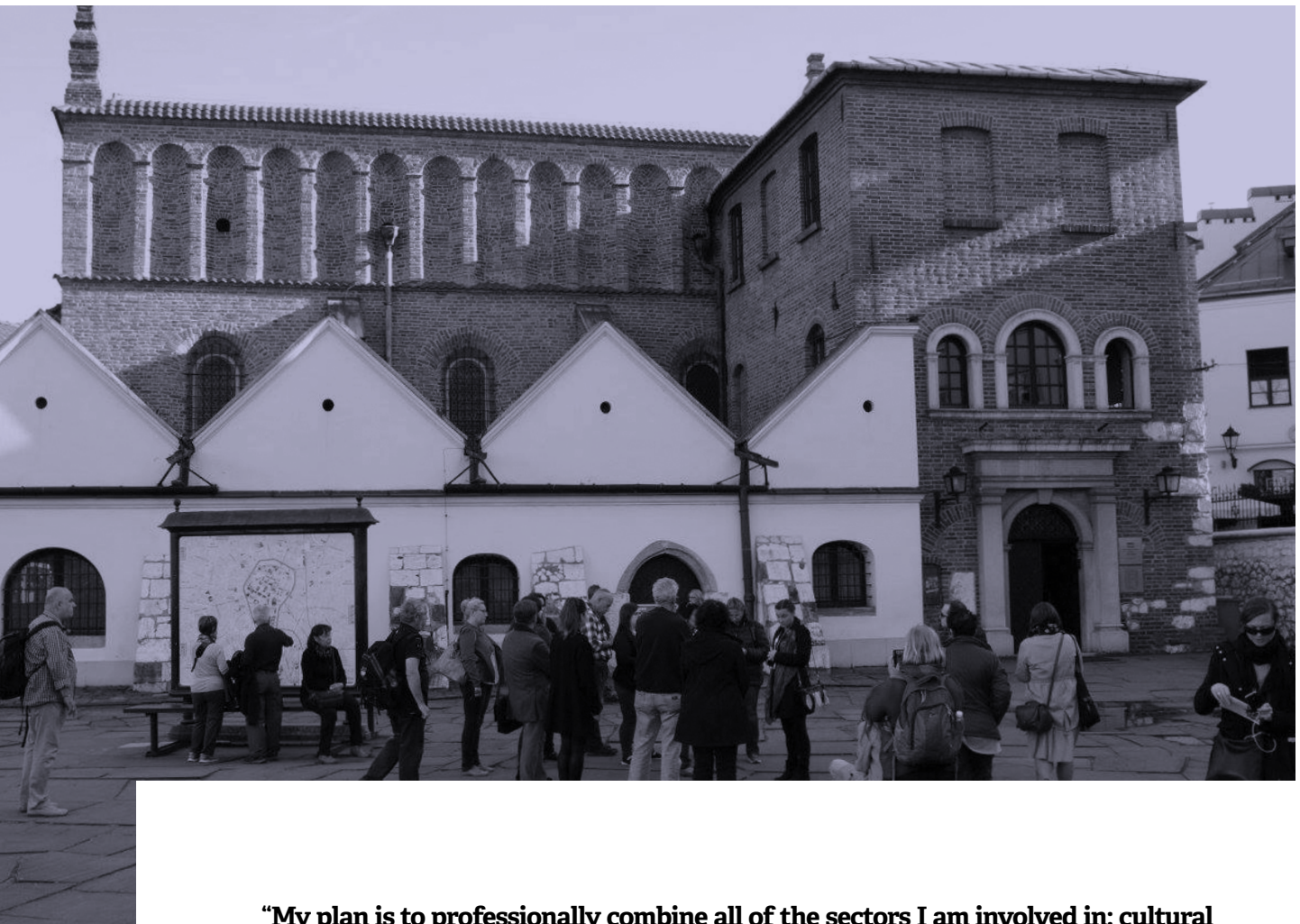


faith in humanity despite the cruel and inhuman chapter of our common story we were exposed to during the study visit.

But, what's next? What am I going to do with these stimuli? How am I going to commemorate the moments we shared and created together? My international artistic experience (especially connected to theatre) and co-operation with cultural and educational institutions showed me the value of projects like "Through Polin". And "Through Polin" showed me the way of embracing them. I would like to start a professional co-operation with the Galicia Jewish Museum and other participants from the study visit. Some arrangements have already

been made. After our project finished, I had a few meetings with groups of people interested in Jewish heritage in Poland and actively take part in artistic life here in Kraków. My plan is to professionally combine all of the sectors I am involved in: cultural and educational projects, Jewish and religious studies, and artistic programmes. The guiding idea is to expand awareness and tolerance through interdisciplinary co-operation. I want to focus on fringe target groups as well as on people who are particularly interested in Jewish life in Poland due to their roots or education. I am convinced that art can be a very good conveyor of knowledge, a powerful therapeutic tool for groups and individuals alike, and a great source of joy for people of any age





**“My plan is to professionally combine all of the sectors I am involved in: cultural and educational projects, Jewish and religious studies, and artistic programmes. The guiding idea is to expand awareness and tolerance through interdisciplinary co-operation.”**

and culture. I think we should use it as a safe space for education and creating a more tolerant society.

For me, the whole point of taking part in such a project right now seems more vivid than it was before the study visit started. During the week of meetings, lectures, trips and conversations with other participants, I realised that this is what I want to do – and I’m going to do it.

If you believe in God, I’m sure that it was His plan to give me the opportunity to participate in such a beautiful thing. If you believe in fate, I can tell you that the project showed me my way of embracing it. And if you just think of the world as one big junction of coincidences, I want you to know this coincidence was the most inspiring one in my life.

Nevertheless, I am thankful for that.



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Markus Fischer

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# “Through Polin” Essay

**This was a revisit, actually. It's very rare for a Holocaust Memorial Service person to get to visit his or her future workplace twice before their internship. I came here in July for a quick impression with some of my colleagues from the Austrian Service Abroad. Needless to say, it was a good impression. The second time, however, I came here as a participant of “Through Polin”. A full exposure.**

Entering the lobby for the second time; mingling with all those amazing people from around the world; getting to know them, their roles and views was very exciting. Right then and there, I sensed that it was going to be a valuable stay.

After a cordial welcome, the programme started with a guided tour through the Galicia Jewish Museum's permanent exhibition “Traces of Memory”, the very same tour I will guide during my internship. Since the exhibition consists of photos, it was very important for me to visit some of the places such as Tarnów and the cemetery in Bochnia to get background that will surely be helpful when I'm guiding. The most haunting place, however, was the Buczyna forest in Zbylitowska Góra. I had to loosen my scarf so I could swallow whilst walking through it.

Obviously, the meetings with the Righteous Gentile, Mirosława Gruszczyńska, and the lecture given by Prof Webber were further highlights of our first days in Galicia.

The following days expanding the programme to different parts of the country displayed the commitment of Polish people and institutions to their Jewish heritage very impressively. They included the Ulma Family Museum in Markowa, displaying yet another series of brave interventions in the horrors of the

persecutions of Jews; the Upper Silesian Jews House of Remembrance in Gliwice; and the “Świętokrzyskie Shtetl” museum in Chmielnik, all of which are quite new institutions showing a great deal of federal and municipal engagement.

The private, voluntary work of non-Jewish Polish people we experienced firsthand in Będzin with the Cukerman’s Gate Foundation and in Chmielnik with the man trying to preserve the mikveh. These strengthened the image of Poles tied to Jewish heritage and their will to preserve it.

I very much liked the two evenings that gave the us insights into Jewish communal life in Poland today. The evening at the JCC in Kraków where we heard the shofar as well as the Shabbat dinner in Warsaw added to my knowledge of the Jewish religion and culture. Both the hospitality and the food were very enjoyable.

The tour through the Polin Museum on the last day was an appropriate end to a fantastic week.

Though we had to take the tour in a rush, I could not help but marvel at the quality of this institution. I will definitely come back and take the time it takes to absorb everything this fantastic museum has to offer.

I’d like to start off the final page by thanking the sponsors who made this visit possible, as well as all the guides and people involved in the excellent organisation, especially Larysa. One of the great things about the programme was the fact that it started out in Kraków and Galicia (the tour of Kazimierz and the ghetto district; the lecture by Dr Gawron and the places mentioned above), making the whole of Jewish Poland accessible from there. The visit to Jasna Góra was a welcome extension to the programme.

Looking back, this was far more than additional preparation for my internship. I will always treasure the experiences I had and the people I met. I left with warm feelings and will come back even more motivated for my Holocaust Memorial Service.



**“I will always treasure the experiences I had and the people I met. I left with warm feelings and will come back even more motivated for my Holocaust Memorial Service.”**

In every sense, Jewishness is an important cultural papilla of this country. “Through Polin” directs the eyes and minds of its participants right to this very notion and casts no doubt on great confidence in the future, provided we keep giving it through our work.

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Nitza Shabtay-Melamed  
and Osnat Ur-Leurer

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# Seminar Essay

**Shalom.**

**The “Through Polin” seminar was an interesting week of study and an opportunity to be in an environment of study, sharing knowledge and thoughts.**

**After a short welcome session to get to know each other, we received a tour of the permanent exhibition of the Galicia Jewish Museum, which was interesting and knowledgeably guided by Larysa. The tour sparked thoughts for educational ideas that could be implemented for future groups visiting the Museum.**

The tour of Podgórze, the former Jewish ghetto and Kazimierz was interesting and pleasantly guided by Alicja. No doubt more time should have been allocated to the tour to enable in-depth learning, especially in Kazimierz.

The visit to Bochnia was extremely touching. There is a well-kept cemetery, which is cared for by local residents who see it as their own commitment or mission to do so. Ms Zawidzka guided the tour through places showing Jewish life in the city, showed us that memory is an important value, and enriched our options for future visits to the city – and not just to the cemetery where groups are currently being guided.

The Ulma Family Museum of Poles Saving Jewish People during World War II in Markowa was important. Telling this personal story through photos enables one to understand the complexity and personal choices by these people. With that said, I would recommend offering some personal time here, because this museum requires personal reflection and individual learning more than a group tour. The museum and monument (which we did not visit) could be a whole unit to understand the complexity and heroism of those who chose to help.

It was inspiring meeting and getting to know Karolina and Piotr, especially from the perspective of



how private initiative can make a difference and how active education about the past can make significant change. The visit to Cukerman's Gate allowed us to see one of the small synagogues which were very common in the past. This is a place we have visited before and will visit again in the future. The quick tour Karolina took us on in Gliwice brought up the question of commemorating Jews who lived in a city that used to be in Germany but today is in Poland, an issue we were not aware of before.

The visit to Chmielnik, especially the encounter with man who purchases properties and renovates them – in this case, the house that used to be the *mikveh* – was very special. We hope he will be able to finish the renovations, which will enable groups to visit, and the creation of a tour that will start in the former synagogue (today the Education-Museum Centre), go to the *mikveh* and then the cemetery that will tell the story of the Jewish community and their relationships with the people of this town.

The visit to the Jewish Museum in Warsaw was an excellent way to wrap up the seminar because of its emphasis on Jewish life in Poland throughout the years and emphasising Jewish culture.

The meetings with Prof Jonathan Webber and Dr Edyta Gawron were in-depth and enlightening. We can definitely see possibilities to try and incorporate such encounters with some of our groups. We also want to start the process of thinking how to incorporate meetings at the Galicia Museum for Yad Vashem adult groups.

We would again like to thank the entire Galicia Museum team and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs for the opportunity to take part in this seminar.



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Andrzej Kujawski

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# Through Polin

**For centuries, Poland was home to the largest and most significant Jewish community in the world; no small town in Poland was without a Jewish synagogue, prayer house or cemetery. During the Second World War, the majority of Jewish sacred buildings and cemeteries were damaged or destroyed by the Nazis.**

The Shoah is one of the greatest tragic, moral and ethical failures in the history of humanity. Remembering the Shoah and telling the truth about these terrible events is our duty as educators. Our actions, words and deeds will speak for those who no longer have a voice, for those who suffered and died during the Shoah.

In 1939, several hundred synagogues were blown up or burnt by the Germans, who sometimes forced the Jews to do it themselves. In many cases, Germans turned synagogues into factories, places of entertainment, swimming pools or prisons. By the end of the war, almost all of the synagogues in Poland had been destroyed.

During the Second World War, Jewish cemeteries were desecrated and stripped of their matzevot as part of the Nazi attempt to exterminate Jews and their cultural legacy.

Our group visited places that are important for the history and culture of Polish Jews. The history of Polish Jews, more than a millennium long, is a part of history of Poland. Jewish history prior to the Holocaust has nearly been forgotten in Poland. The Polish nation recovered from the war, but the Jewish culture was lost and nearly completely eliminated from our country, leaving behind only



dim shadows of the past in the memory of the Polish people.

As educators, we have the opportunity to change this narrative and raise questions about what our role is when it comes to preserving Jewish culture in Poland. We should not limit our heritage preservation activities only to the protection of objects. It is equally important to broaden the public's knowledge about the history of Jews, who contributed to cultural heritage of Poland. These two different cultures can still complement and enrich each other. We should remember and honour the heritage of the Jews who once called Poland home. It is important to preserve the memory of those who perished and those who survived.

Jews are not a footnote to Polish history. We Poles have to look at Polish-Jewish history as part of our own cultural heritage: something to be appreciated and remembered, not cast aside. This history is rich and full of beauty, but has been overshadowed by the darkness of the Holocaust.



**“We Poles have to look at Polish-Jewish history as part of our own cultural heritage: something to be appreciated and remembered, not cast aside.”**



Our mission is to protect and commemorate the surviving monuments of Jewish cultural heritage in Poland. Our goal is to help form relationships between the youngest generation and descendants of Jews who lived in Polish towns and villages before the war.

There is a growing interest in Jewish culture and religion. In the past 27 years, Jews and non-Jews in Poland have brought about an amazing revival of Jewish culture, including Jewish studies programmes, a national student network, an annual book fair and film festival in Warsaw, and Kraków's Jewish Culture Festival.

The purpose of our study visit was to generate an exchange of experiences and good practises, as well as raising awareness of the urgent need to restore and preserve the final material remnants of the Jewish community and not allow the Jews to disappear from our collective memory.

This study visit was well-organised and all of the guides were very knowledgeable and friendly. Participating in it was an exciting experience and an important learning tool for me. Many thanks to Larysa for designing the itinerary with great precision.



# Participation in the “Through Poland 2016” Programme Insights, Questions and Issues to Think About

**One of the main goals of the programme was to expose participants to various models of commemoration and memory design that exist in Poland in the context of centuries-old Jewish history in Poland and the way Jewish life came to a tragic end in Poland 70 years ago.**

## **Models of commemoration and memory design in Poland**

This topic of commemoration and memory design is interesting in several aspects, and I will briefly present two key aspects. The first is the cultural relationship between two communities – Jewish and Christian – which was created during centuries of neighborly coexistence, on the same land and in the same cities, towns and villages. Cultural relations and interactions between these two communities had ups and downs, but in any case affected both communities during their years of living together. The tours we had as part of the programme demonstrated firsthand the interplay of these communities, who lived so long as neighbors. The second aspect is the way commemorative memory design activities developed in Poland over the last 60



years, and various models of commemorating which were created in different places. During the tours we had as part of the programme, we saw several distinct models of commemoration and memory design. Our visit to the Buczyna forest near Zbylitowska Góra and to the memorial in Tarnów for the 728 political prisoners, the first deportees to Auschwitz, demonstrate the model of commemoration and design memory from the time when Poland was under communist rule. They were based on the verbal and design language of the “Hitler terror regime”, with no distinction of Jews as victims. This verbal and design language derives from the world of the Polish communist authorities; at the time Poland was a member state of Warsaw Pact, along with East Germany.

Another commemorative and memory design model which can be identified distinctively in recent years is a local-authority memorial model. Here, local authorities or municipalities decide by their own initiative to memorialise the Jewish community that lived there for many years. The most prominent examples of this model are the municipal museum commemorating the Jewish community in Kraków established in the Old Synagogue; the monument erected by the City of Kraków in Plac Bohaterów Getta (the name of the square itself is also a part of the memorial and the memory design); the memorial sites and commu-

nal buildings, mainly from the ghetto period, around Podgórze; the memorial plaques to the Bochnia ghetto on the city’s streets and the monument to the Jews of Bochnia erected by the City of Bochnia; and the museum commemorating the Jewish community of Częstochowa, which was recently unveiled by the Częstochowa municipality.

However, the most interesting model of commemoration and memory design we saw was present in the tours we had to Markowa, Będzin and Gliwice, and as we heard in the lecture by Prof Jonathan Webber. This model of commemoration and memory design, which we can call “the popular model” has only emerged in recent years and is very significant in Poland. This model is based on personal initiatives by individuals who believe it is important to appropriately commemorate and respect the local Jewish community as part of the history and heritage of a city or locality (such as in the cases of Będzin and Gliwice), or to appropriately commemorate and respect the rescuers of Jews in a certain area (such as the case of Markowa). These independent and individually-based activities slowly create public pressure, bringing the local authorities into joining the initiative and bringing public resources to the memorial project. Prominent examples are the museum commemorating the Ulma family and the rescuers of Jews in the Podkarpackie region established in Markowa, the Upper Silesian Jews House of Remembrance in Gliwice and the Cukreman’s Gate Foundation in Będzin. These activities of commemoration and memory design began as initiatives of private individuals, but, as in the cases of the Ulma Museum in Markowa and the Upper Silesian Jews House of Remembrance in Gliwice, bring in the local authorities and public resources for assistance. When the local authority does not have the necessary resources to assist the commemoration project, as in the case of Będzin, funding is based on the resources of individual donors and affects the quality of the commemoration project.

## Insights

Poland has not been under a communist regime for over 25 years. It would be expected that the language of the texts on the national memorial sites related to the



Holocaust will be changed to specifically identify the murderers and particularly the identity of the victims (e.g. at the memorial site in the Buczya forest near Zbylitowska Góra.)

The accumulated experience shows that commemorative activities and the ensuing memory design project which are initiated by individuals create a sense of

solidarity and a broad infrastructure of public acceptance. As a result, they cause the local authorities to join these activities and invest public resources in these commemoration projects, creating public legitimacy for these projects. The local community gains from how these projects create an infrastructure for and ethos of local heritage and solidarity with the Jewish community, which was an integral part of the community. On the basis of these commemoration and local memory design projects, municipalities can leverage educational activities for the benefit of their residents.

Hence, these activities should be encouraged, both at the level of individual initiatives as well as at the level of the local authorities in order to leverage commemorative projects to create community identity and establish commemoration and memory design projects as a base for educational activities.

### **Implementing knowledge gained in the “Through Polin 2016” programme**

As a guide for high school students from Israel visiting Poland as part of a programme set by the Israeli Ministry of Education, deepening themes of remembrance and design characteristics of memory in Poland will help me a lot in presenting various aspects of this issue for these students during their trip. In addition, the direct interactions with other participants in this programme will help future exchanges of information based on co-operation with partners in the programme.

### **Summary**

The “Through Polin 2016” programme was a well-constructed plan that balanced and exposed the participants to various models of commemoration and memory design existing in Poland through Jewish history in Poland. In addition, the integration and collaboration of the educators participating in the programme has a convenient personal basis for future co-operation. Personally, I really enjoyed participating. I will use the knowledge gained in the programme. I would be happy to participate in activities like this programme in the future.



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Irina Pocienė

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# Through Polin – Poprzez Polin Study Visit

**Two weeks later, looking at the pictures of the amazing group I was lucky to meet during this trip, of the amazing places where history, memory and life are being preserved – in many cases with the support of the local authorities and communities, other times by a person using his individual financial resources – I cannot believe that this study trip was not a dream.**

This was my first extensive journey within the topic of Jewish history and life. I knew that Poland's museums are very modern and that there is a lot to learn from their good examples. That was why I decided to go: as a person working in a museum and in the field of education, as a person who cares about the history of my own country, as a person willing to do at least something to preserve the memory of the glorious Commonwealth that once called Lithuania "Lite" and "Lita".

Through the optimal length of the trip, excellent organisation of the seminar, the variety of activi-



ties and places visited, this study trip was exceeded any expectations I could ever have. It became my personal transition journey. Besides the knowledge I gained, due to the diversity of the group I got so many answers. Answers to questions which are very deep in my heart. The diversity in the group – diversity of memories, opinions and stories – was the most valuable part to me.

After the stories were shared in the group, Prof Jonathan Webber's lecture, after the visit to Cukerman's Gate Foundation, I shall preach that this history does belong to all of us; it is our responsibility and duty to care how it's being preserved and told.

The Museum-Education Centre in Chmielnik is to me the best example of how an abandoned synagogue building can be used to present the life of the shtetl – with personal stories, sounds of psalms and the feeling of loss all together.

I would like to thank all the participants of the group, the Galicia Jewish Museum and the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs for this unrepeatabe experience that I will remember all my life. I promise I will not only keep the memories, I will pool interests.



**“Besides the knowledge I gained, due to the diversity of the group I got so many answers. Answers to questions which are very deep in my heart. The diversity in the group – diversity of memories, opinions and stories – was the most valuable part to me.” \***

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Sara Shunami

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# Through Polin

**My parents, Guta Schwartz and Arie Bzezina, were born in Poland. My mother was born in Przemyślany, Galicia, and my father was born in Otwock, near Warsaw. They survived World War II, met after the war and got married. Guta and Arie left Europe, arriving in Israel in 1948**

My experience of the seminar at the Galicia Jewish Museum was very sensitive and felt like coming back to my origins. It was my first visit to Poland (and not the last one, I hope). From this point of view, the seminar was very successful because I felt as if my parents were with me, showing and explaining their youth and my origins to me.

I would like to thank the organisers of the seminar very much for the planning and thought that were invested into its organisation.

I have a few impressions from the seminar – from visiting several impressive museums and universities that taught us about Jewish life in Poland from many perspectives.

The Galicia Jewish Museum. I chose to come to this seminar after I saw it was to take place in the “Galicia Jewish Museum” in Kraków. My mother, Guta, was born in Galicia and all the hours I spent in the museum, I thought about my mother and her family. My mother was the sole survivor of a family of six brothers and sisters. All of her family and relatives were murdered by the Germans.

Jagiellonian University’s Institute of Jewish Studies was the first of its kind was established in Poland after the Second World War, in 1986. Its purpose and main





subjects are the history and culture of Jews in Poland. It is amazing that the Polish nation began researching and teaching Jewish history. More than 150 students are studying this topic there now.

The Museum of History of Polish Jews in Warsaw is in my opinion the most modern museum in the world today. It is amazing, beautiful and shows 1,000 years of Jewish history both visually and audibly. I wish we could have such a museum in Israel. In my opinion, Poland should advertise this special museum and invite all Jews to come and learn about Jewish culture and history.

The Chmielnik Museum is an educational study centre. It is an interactive museum based in the historic building of the Chmielnik Synagogue. This museum deals with the pre-war shtetl. The museum presents a glass bimah, conference room and a multimedia library.

Another important institution we visited was the Ulma Family Museum. This is the first museum in Poland commemorating Poles who helped Jews during the Second World War. I was excited when I saw a photo of a building in Przemyślany which reminded me the building where my mother was born. She was saved during the war by a Polish man who hid her in his basement. I intend to find this family with the help of Yad Vashem in Israel.

Out of more than 3 million Jews in prewar Poland, only around 8,000 remain today. This means Judaism

nearly vanished from Poland during the Second World War. We visited many cemeteries in the Kraków area. Some of them were mass graves where hundreds or thousands of Jews were buried; this is the remaining evidence of the once-glorious Polish-Jewish community.

Finally, I would like to explain how I am going to use the knowledge and experiences I gained during the seminar. I have already met with a group of 10 teachers, told them about the interesting seminar and showed them pictures. I also have many friends and all of them would like to hear about the seminar. Finally, I have a connection with the Tel Aviv municipality. I will meet with their school managers, share my experiences with them, and encourage them to visit Poland and experience it all for themselves.

Thanks again to the wonderful Larysa and all the staff.

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Mateusz Lagosz

# The importance of education and how the “Through Polin” programme is beneficial to the community.

**The JCC serves many purposes. It acts as a community, cultural and educational centre for people. It serves these purposes for Jewish people, people who are discovering their Jewishness, and non-Jewish people who are interested in Judaism. In my work, I’m responsible for creating and implementing educational programmes for children and teenagers, along with co-ordinating the Jewish Student Club “Gimel”, which operates out of our JCC.**

My name is Mateusz Lagosz. I’m 24 and I work for JCC-Kraków – the Jewish Community Centre in Kraków.

In the educational part of my work, we provide Jewish education to both Jewish and non-Jewish kids. Their knowledge levels varies from very good to nearly nothing. We meet with the children of our members every week for workshops whose main purpose is to educate the young generation. This programme is inspired by Judaism and the values that are the most important in the Torah.

In my life, I’ve meet many people working in different positions, many of them involved in education. With the knowledge that I’ve gained during my life, I have to say that education is probably the most important value that you can receive and give. I also believe that stereotypes and aggression towards some groups of people are created and kept alive just because of a lack of proper education. This touches everyone.

I’ve visited Israel a few times in my life and I’ve spent many hours at meetings with both Israeli and Amer-

ican-Jewish students visiting Poland. During these meetings, I've learnt that many of them didn't know much about Poland prior to their visit and their knowledge is sometimes painful for someone who is Polish. Many of these kids are not familiar with Polish-Jewish history and Jewish life in Poland today, outside of some well-known and sad facts. Some of these people think that Jewish life in Poland does not exist, that it was completely destroyed during the Second World War and that there is nothing left besides the sad fact that main sites of the tragic events of Holocaust are located in modern Poland. Unfortunately, many of them had very bad stereotypes about Poland; they were afraid of antisemitism and aggression in Poland towards Jews, which they had heard about from their friends, parents and, unfortunately, from their teachers.

Stereotypes can, of course, be seen among groups of Polish non-Jews, too. Many stereotypes are still alive and most of the people that have this attitude towards Jewish people probably haven't seen a Jewish person in their whole life; their hurtful opinions are only created because of a lack of proper education.

We can change this by providing good education. I believe that programmes like "Through Polin" might be one of the best ways of doing so. They give another point of view to teachers, informal educators, guides, museum workers and employees of non-governmental organisations. Prior to the programme, many of us had different points of view, sometimes even holding many stereotypes. Meeting each other and participating in this excellently-created experience has led to many changes in our perspectives. During the programme, we saw places that I had not been aware of. We saw amazing examples of people working together in order to preserve or keep alive Jewish tradition and history in Poland.

The participants have seen different sides to the topic. After the week of the programme, just talking with each person from the group could lead to the positive thought that, with this experience, we might change many people. We received an amazing amount of information here, and people who work as teachers

in Poland and Israel will certainly provide better education to their pupils. Furthermore, this also applies to guides, museum and NGO workers.

The programme also led many of us to thinking about how to do even more together. The group will certainly be active at many different levels of co-operation.



**“The participants have seen different sides to the topic. After the week of the programme, just talking with each person from the group could lead to the positive thought that, with this experience, we might change many people.”**



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Anna Munk

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# Preserving Jewish Heritage

**First a toot!  
Then a hoot!  
Steam is churning,  
Wheels are turning!**

**Julian Tuwim – “The Locomotive”<sup>1</sup>**

Today, almost every adult and child in Poland can recite a fragment of this poem, but not all of them know about the author’s Jewish origins. Julian Tuwim was a well-known Polish poet of Jewish descent, born in 1894 in Łódź. He survived the Second World War abroad, but returned to Poland when the war was over. He used to say about himself: “I am a Polonised Jew, a Jew-Pole, and I don’t care what either side thinks about it. Raised in Polish culture (...) I have become attached to Polishness with the whole of my soul.”<sup>2</sup> He is only one of many examples of people of Jewish origin who had a significant impact on Polish culture.

Before participating in the “Through Polin” project, I did not realise how unique a country Poland is. Because of the thousand of years of common Polish-Jewish history, today Jewish heritage, culture and architecture are permanently etched into the landscape of Polish cities and villages, into Polish language, literature and many other areas of life. Almost every place in Poland was somehow connected with the Jewish community in the past and every place has its own unique story. We had the opportunity to learn about this at the meeting with Dr Edyta Gawron and at the lecture by Professor Jonathan Webber. Nowadays, there are many projects that aim to preserve Jewish heritage and educate people about the basics of Jewish religion and culture as well

as of the everyday life of the Jews who used to live in Poland. What perhaps would be unusual in another country is that these projects in Poland are often the initiatives of non-Jews. During the “Through Polin” project, we had the opportunity to meet with one of the founders of the Cukerman’s Gate Foundation, who told us the story of the foundation. It was the initiative of two people who, despite the lack of support from the local authorities, decided to care for and protect Jewish cultural monuments as well as to commemorate the memories of the Jews of Będzin.

What is the motivation of all these people? Many of reasons could be mentioned, and I think that every person who became interested in Judaism or Jewish history at some point in their life could give their own. There is also at least one common reason that would be mentioned by most: curiosity. When you grow up in a place like Poland, you are surrounded by Jewish heritage. In many cities, there are still Jewish cemeteries, buildings that were synagogues or prayer houses and other elements that remind us of the Jewish community that lived here before the Holocaust. Local people still remember their Jewish neighbours and often tell stories about them to their descendants. Children read poems written by authors of Jewish descent. Those stories and the surrounding architectural remnants can awake curiosity as to who the people who lived here before were, what their lives were like, why they are gone.

I was born and grew up in Kraków, just a 15-minute walk from Kazimierz – the historic district founded by King Kazimierz the Great. From its foundation in the 14th century until the beginning of the 19th century, it was an independent city where Jewish and Christian culture coexisted and intermingled. Through the windows of my school, I could observe the new Jewish cemetery during lessons.



On the first day of the “Through Polin” project, we had a guided tour of Kazimierz, where the Galicia Jewish Museum is also located. During the walk, we had the opportunity to visit the surviving synagogues. Today, some of them have other roles (the oldest synagogue is a museum), but four of the seven are still active and are used by the local Jewish community. Thanks to co-operation between private people, the



**“Over the past several years, the situation in Poland has changed. Currently, it is possible to implement a number of projects that would have been impossible before 1989. Although many good things have already been achieved, there is still a lot of work to be done” \***

local government and the Jewish community, today we not only can visit Jewish monuments but we can also observe and join the revival of Jewish life in Kazimierz. Each year at the beginning of summer, the Jewish Culture Festival takes place in Kraków. As we can read on the Festival’s website: “In 1988, Janusz Makuch and Krzysztof Gierat decided to remind the public [of] Polish-Jewish history and the Jewish contribution to the development of our country, its culture and society.”<sup>3</sup> From year to year, interest in the Festival has grown and today it is one of the biggest annual events held in Kraków. The Jewish Community Centre in Kraków was founded with the help of the Prince of Wales.<sup>4</sup> When Prince was visiting Kraków in 2002, he met the representatives of the Jewish community. Moved by the stories of people who survived the Holocaust, he asked the community how he could help them and learnt that they need a place where the members could meet and spend time together. After the meeting, he contacted the international organisations World Jewish Relief and the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee. Thanks to their collaboration, the Kraków Jewish community has enjoyed their own space for eight years. The JCC not only organises events for Jewish people, but also brings together anyone interested in culture, religion and Jewish tradition. Last year, more than fifty young people participated in the yearly volunteer service programme during which they have the opportunity to get to know members of the community, learn about Jewish religion and culture, and help build a Jewish future in Kraków.

During “Through Polin”, we had the chance to visit many places connected with Jewish history. These were both large Polish cities and smaller towns and villages. We also met a lot of people involved in the protection of Jewish heritage in Poland, including representatives of major institutions as well as individuals who volunteer their time and funds to achieve this goal. We listened to the individual stories of each person and also learnt about the history of each of these places. There is no way to tell about the thousand years of Polish-Jewish relations in just





a week, but I think that “Through Polin” made it possible to bring it closer to people visiting Poland for the first time. It is important that Poland is not seen only as a place of concentration camps during the Second World War, but also as a place where Poles and Jews lived side by side for hundreds of years. As Professor Jonathan Webber explained, the preservation of Jewish heritage in Poland must be based on dialogue – a process of cultural diplomacy. This dialogue should have the participation of the local community, local government and authorities, as well as institutions from around the world that would like to help. For example, the renewal of the local Jewish cemetery in Brzostek was made possible thanks to co-operation between various communities and the residents of Brzostek. Just as with the locomotive of Tuwim’s poem, all elements must be engaged to make this process was possible.

Over the past several years, the situation in Poland has changed. Currently, it is possible to implement a number of projects that would have been impossible before 1989. Although many good things have already been achieved, there is still a lot of work to be done. Educational programmes such as “Through Poline” give the possibility to involve a wider group of people who would like to help, but often do not have sufficient knowledge of how to do so.

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<sup>1</sup> [www.poemhunter.com/poem/the-locomotive](http://www.poemhunter.com/poem/the-locomotive)

<sup>2</sup> From an interview with Julian Tuwim, *Nasz Przegląd* (Our Review), 1924

<sup>3</sup> [www.Jewishfestival.pl](http://www.Jewishfestival.pl)

<sup>4</sup> [www.jcckrakow.org/en](http://www.jcckrakow.org/en)

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Einat Keinan Tachnai

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# Renewing Jewish life in Poland

**The number of the young participants was the first thing caught my eye when I entered the Galicia Jewish Museum in Kraków. Young people from all over the world, casually dressed, warm, friendly, and curious. We, the Israelis, gathered in one group. Most of us were a bit older; some of us are certified guides in Poland and, although it was not our first visit to Poland, we were eager to learn and take part in this experience.**

Yes, now I can say for sure that it was a special experience, interesting and exciting.

Between the lectures and the guided tours, we got to know the participants. Among them was a woman and her daughter, who defined themselves as Catholics from Kraków. Then, the woman found out from looking into her family documents that her grandfather was Jewish... and now she wishes to learn about Judaism. Actually, they describe themselves as “Jewish Catholic”, which is new to me.

From various conversations I had with some of the group members, I came to the understanding that there are multiple definitions to being “Jewish” and that each of us can define himself as he wishes. There are quite a lot of Polish people that seek to learn and connect to Judaism even though they are not Jewish. They claim that the history of Poland and the history of the Jewish people goes together.

I was mostly impressed by the couple from Będzin – a young, non-Jewish couple that are working to preserve the memory of the Jewish community in their town. They rented the old synagogue, renovated it, and it is now a place to visit and learn about the long-gone Jewish life. They diligently organise tours and sessions to make sure we will remember the Będzin Jewish community. This is inspiring! And

they are not the only ones contributing their time to this purpose.

During the guided tours, I was impressed by the numerous sites that were established – local museums, memorial sites and monuments. It seems to me that Judaism is being regenerated in Poland these days.

It was interesting to learn how all the seminar participants are involved in various aspects of Judaism. A young guy from Uruguay organises cultural events for the Jewish community of his hometown; a girl from Warsaw guides tours in the Jewish museum there; a girl from Israel focuses on the continuity of Jewish linkage between the young Israeli generation, tour guides in Poland, museum guides in Poland and people organising Judaism-related events.

It is exciting and heartwarming to see this growing activity and to think that maybe this is not the end of the Jewish community in Poland.

I wish to thank the Galicia Jewish Museum (and especially Larysa, who led this event). Thanks to their initiative, I was part of this meaningful bonding experience.

The seminar was well organised with all the locations, guides, hotel with the delicious food, the tours and lectures. We had the opportunity to meet interesting experts who contributed to our learning experience, and I made new and fascinating friends.

I am sure that our week in Poland will be in my heart and will lead me in future events and projects here in Israel. I hope that we will be able to continue this experience and have additional seminars soon! Maybe in Jerusalem



**“It is exciting and heartwarming to see this growing activity and to think that maybe this is not the end of the Jewish community in Poland.”**



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# Through Polin

**“Before the outbreak of World War II, more than 3.3 million Jews lived in Poland – the largest Jewish population of Europe and the second-largest Jewish community in the world. Poland served as the centre of Jewish culture and a diverse population of Jews from all over Europe sought refuge here, contributing to a wide variety of religious and cultural groups. During Edyta Gawron’s lecture at the Institute of Jewish Studies at Jagiellonian University about the post-war situation in Poland, we expanded our knowledge about the reasons and aspects of today’s reality. Jewish culture in Poland exists largely in the background now, with intermarriage being the norm and most Jewish individuals not practising. Jewish culture and identity in Poland are being carried on by individuals who are not necessarily Jewish. The “Through Polin” project was a chance to learn the answer to the question, how much is Poland an important part of Jewish heritage? We saw many ways and forms of how to preserve memory and popularise this culture. We met people from a variety of institutions that are not only commemorating the past, but are also building contemporary Jewish life in Poland.**

Before the outbreak of World War II, more than 3.3 million Jews lived in Poland – the largest Jewish population of Europe and the second-largest Jewish community in the world. Poland served as the centre of Jewish culture and a diverse population of Jews from all over Europe sought refuge here, contributing to a wide variety of religious and cultural groups. During Edyta Gawron’s lecture at the Institute of Jewish Studies at Jagiellonian University about the post-war situation in Poland, we expanded our knowledge about the reasons and aspects of today’s reality. Jewish culture in Poland exists largely in the background now, with intermarriage being the norm and most Jewish individuals not practising. Jewish culture and identity in Poland are being carried on by individuals who are not necessarily Jewish. The

“Through Polin” project was a chance to learn the answer to the question, how much is Poland an important part of Jewish heritage? We saw many ways and forms of how to preserve memory and popularise this culture. We met people from a variety of institutions that are not only commemorating the past, but are also building contemporary Jewish life in Poland.

It was very inspiring to spent five days in Kraków-Kazimierz, which is one of the oldest cities in Poland. The knowledgeable team of volunteers and staff at the Galicia Jewish Museum was always on hand to give a warm welcome and offer guidance. I had many positive emotions from the professional guided tours around the historic quarter of Kazimierz. The only thing is that I wish it would have been longer because I liked it so much. The streets of the old Jewish city still evoke a sense of the past. The small Jewish shops in Kraków made me feel like I’m in another century. The unique memorial to victims of the Kraków ghetto in the form of oversized bronze chairs on the Plac Bohaterów Getta, inviting people to sit and think about the life and coexistence, was also moving. Kraków is like a time machine. Life goes on, but what it will look like depends on us.

Positive authorities are very important in life. Obviously, the “Through Polin” project did not run short of them. We had the pleasure to meet with the Righteous Gentile Mirosława Gruszczyńska. In my opinion, meetings like this are always fruitful because face-to-face encounters are so unique. We also visited The Ulma Family Museum of Poles Saving Jews in World War II in Markowa. It is a modern, but tiny, museum in an old Polish village approximately 8 km from Łańcut. It tells a story of courage and of the tragic fate of local people helping Jewish families to survive the atrocities of the Second World War. It also gives some insights and context to local culture and life before and during the Second World War from a perspective of a little Jewish girl and Polish villagers. The tour took about 30-45 minutes to get a grip on a story and pay respect to average people living simple lives showing heroism and decency in

tragic times. Their names are displayed; they are not anonymous.

During these few days, we had the opportunity to visit some institutions like Cukerman’s Gate Foundation and the “Świętokrzyski Sztetl” Education and Museum Centre, which conduct educational

**“These were really good days. Long days. A lot of positive energy, many ideas, inspiring people. I had a chance to hear many stories and saw many perspective on the same subject, since the people I met came from different countries and were of different ages.”**



activities for local people that include the practical protection of Jewish heritage and broadening their knowledge of the Jewish history of their city and the region. Before the Second World War, many cities had outstanding Jewish communities, which made up the majority of residents. These activists strongly believe that they ought to do these things



for the present-day inhabitants of their cities – to acquaint them with the rich Jewish heritage, which is to be much appreciated as it constitutes our common history. For people like me, who work in institutions whose main aims are the care and protection of Jewish cultural monuments and the commemoration of the many centuries of Jewish presence in Polish cities and regions, these cities were inspiring and fruitful. We saw many problems and different solutions for how to handle them.

On the last day, we visited the POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews in Warsaw. It was a perfect summary – that the history of Poland cannot exist without the history of Jews, and the history of Jews cannot exist without the history of Poland. It is our common story, this 1,000 years of Polish-Jewish history from the Middle Ages until today. The POLIN Museum is located in Muranów, Warsaw's prewar Jewish neighborhood and the site of the former Warsaw Ghetto, facing the Ghetto Heroes' Monument. In our group, there were some people for whom it was their first trip to Poland. They found answers to questions such as how did Poland become the centre of the Jewish diaspora and the home of the largest Jewish community in the world? How did it cease to be so and how is Jewish life being revived? It wasn't my first time in this museum, but each of my visits are special. I like the construction and ideas which could be referencing the crossing of the Red Sea from Exodus. This museum is really big and there is no way to get to learn everything your first time there, or even the second. I always find something new that grabs my attention.

These were really good days. Long days. A lot of positive energy, many ideas, inspiring people. I had a chance to hear many stories and saw many perspective on the same subject, since the people I met came from different countries and were of different ages. All of the preparation was well-conceived. Thanks to the "Through Polin" project I made many new friendship and contacts. And the best memories ever from Kraków!



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# Through Polin

**“Through Polin” was one of the most extraordinary study visits I have ever participated in. In my essay, I will try to express my impressions and regards.**

My first impression goes back to when the programme started on 25 September. There were a lot of foreigners, coming from different backgrounds and countries such as the United States, Israel, Uruguay, Germany, the Baltic States, etc. That was something that made me feel very comfortable and happy, because exchanging ideas and having long conversations with one another eventually made us friends and we felt at home. I would say that I really enjoyed throughout the program and I got a chance to be a participant in such a useful study visit.

Some overall positives for the programme. It was a very well-organised study visit where we travelled many places where one can see traces of the Jewish past and present or discover forgotten Jewish history in some small towns where Jews lived for many centuries. This study visit was a beneficial experience for me and also gave me unforgettable memory which I will carry forever.

The Galicia Jewish Museum, one of the most successful and well-structured museums in Kraków, deals with Jewish past and present and attempts to rebuild Jewish life in Polish Galicia. I spent an unbelievable week having the chance to be part of this museum and the “Through Polin” programme. The first day, we explored the museum itself as well

**“My feelings about the programme mainly focus on the visit to the places where the Jewish life once flourished. After arriving in Kraków and going through the introductions, I knew that our week together was going to be wonderful.”**



as the Kazimierz district, where we were able to find all kinds of traces of Kraków's Jewish life. At this point, I would like to thank our guides throughout the programme. They were really well-educated, communicative and made us feel comfortable. They taught us more than what we knew before coming to the programme. Before going to further details, I ought to thank Larysa for being with us throughout the trip and for giving us very interesting tour of the Galicia Museum. She also managed the entire programme's schedule and helped us when we needed any kind of assistance.

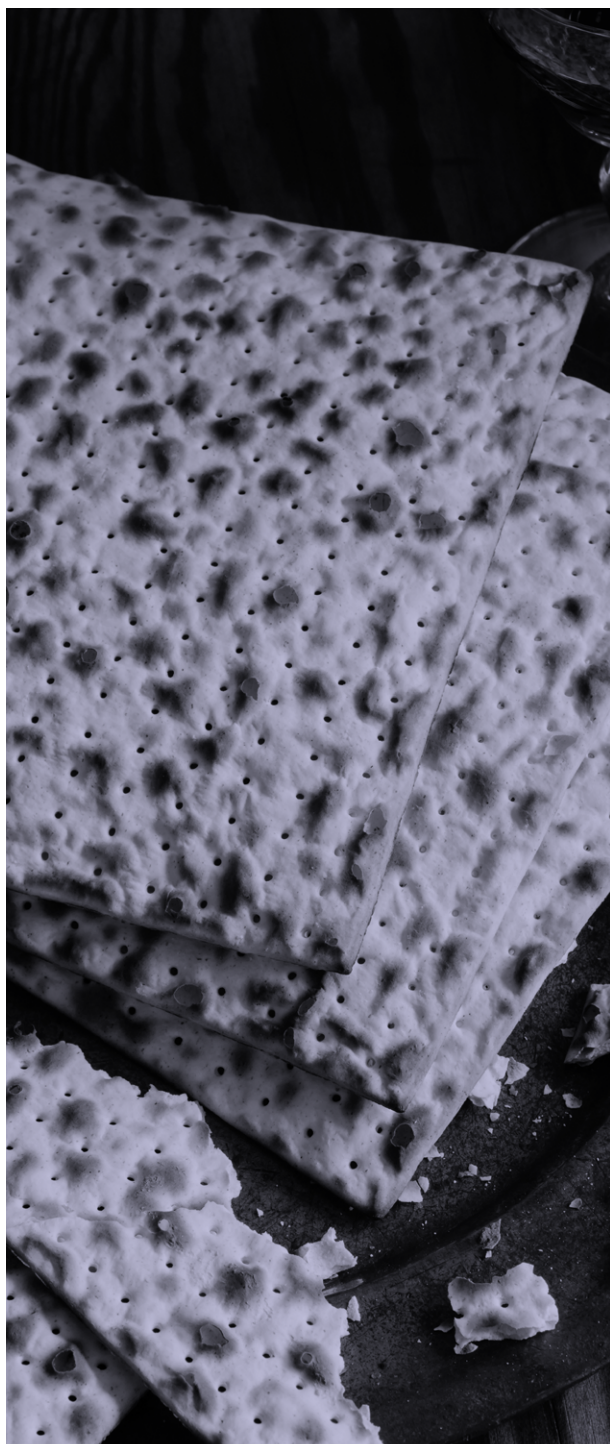
Besides tours, the programme included organised lectures with professors and academics, a meeting with a Righteous Among the Nations honouree and meetings with other important people connected with Jewish life in Polish Galicia. All of the organised events, including meetings, visits, lectures and even

the catered meals were an integral part of our study trip. Through them, we became acquainted with and learnt many things during this programme. It was a great pleasure to be a participant and to contribute to it in a positive way.

My feelings about the programme mainly focus on the visit to the places where the Jewish life once flourished. After arriving in Kraków and going through the introductions, I knew that our week together was going to be wonderful. I have to say that I was very surprised when we first visited the town of Bochnia. I learned a lot of things from Ms Iwona Zawidzka, who guided us through Bochnia and the Jewish cemetery. An essential thing was to see Jews from different background buried together in the same cemetery. Jewish people fought for the Austrian, Russian or Prussian empires in the 19th century, but they all were buried in the same

spot. In one word, hearing distinctive perceptions of local people to the Jewish life in Polish Galicia made me think how different life in Poland was before World War II.

The programme included a lot of visits like the Bochnia trip, and I had a chance to talk to our



guides and participants in order to improve my background knowledge. Nevertheless, as I mentioned above, the integral part of this trip for me was to meet with academics and professors. Their outstanding background and very broad worldview made me surprised and, in a way, inspired me to go further in my own academic work on Jewish life, tradition and culture. Thank you go to the Galicia Jewish Museum for organising the visit to the Institute of Jewish Studies at Jagiellonian University and for the meeting with Dr Edyta Gawron, the director of the Centre for the Study of the History and Culture of Kraków Jews. I must say that I learned a lot from her lecture about Jews in post-war Poland and truly enjoyed it. It is obvious that nowadays, we see a lot of people are in a process of rebuilding Jewish life in Poland and this institute plays a unbelievable role in this process. Also, another wonderful lecture was given by Prof Jonathan Webber. He is a really good man and knowledgeable expert in his field. His outstanding lecture about how he rebuilt Jewish cemetery and his cultural diplomacy in Brzostek was unbelievable. I am glad that I got a chance to participate in this programme because it gave me a lot of knowledge about Poland, Galician Jews, Jewish history, etc.

Furthermore, I would like to touch on some of the visits we made during the programme, to Gliwice, Tarnów, Markowa and so on. Exploring the Jasna Góra monastery and meeting with representatives of the Cukerman's Gate Foundation, who were truly amazing and very passionate about their project, were unforgettable.

Overall, we had a great time during the programme, great study visits and wonderful food. Finally, I must thank the Galicia Jewish Museum and its staff members for organising such an event. Also, many thanks to the Polish Foreign Ministry for funding this unbelievable programme and giving us the opportunity to participate in this project.



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Arie Keshet-Baksht

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# Through Polin Seminar Summary

**As someone born to Holocaust survivors with Polish roots and as a positive psychologist, the seminar was a very significant personal, educational and professional experience. The seminar provided me with extensive exposure to the intensive activities taking place in Poland to preserve and celebrate the Polish-Jewish heritage – and a first-hand learning exposure to Polish-Jewish historical landmarks.**

I was impressed with the efforts and genuine motivation of both government officials and of the young Polish women and men to learning about and preserving Polish-Jewish heritage in all of the locations that we toured. The seminar and its staff – Larysa, the officials and the guides – managed to create a learning-educational dialogue and exchange of ideas between the members of the seminar from Poland, Israel and around the world that carries the potential to continue and develop in the future via Facebook and the internet.

**The highlights of the seminar for me were:**

Meeting Professor Webber and learning about his cultural diplomacy, an inspiring initiative. I am considering the possibility of applying a similar approach in the towns where my parents were born.

Visiting the various cemeteries and synagogues that are being preserved and renovated. This gave us first-hand exposure to the intensity and scale of Jewish past in Poland and the scale of commemoration efforts.

Visiting the various museums that preserve and celebrate Jewish-Polish heritage. I was very impressed with the visits to the Galicia Jewish Museum, the Education Centre-Museum in Chmielnik, the POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews in Warsaw and the Ulma



Family Museum in Markowa. Again, we got first-hand exposure to the intensity and scale of Jewish past in Poland and the scale of commemoration efforts.

Learning about and gaining exposure to the Righteous through the meeting with Mrs Mirosława Gruszczyńska and visiting the Ulma Family Museum in Markowa

Meeting and engaging in dialogue with staff members and seminar participants, especially those from Poland and Europe as well as those with previous educational and relevant professional backgrounds, about their interests, perceptions and plans. I talked with several seminar participants about their future projects. With Nikita I talked about the possibility of comparing the way Jewish heritage is preserved and commemorated in Germany and Poland. It seems that in Poland there are more bottom-up initiatives versus German top-down ones. With Kasia and her friend I explored the possibility of expressing Righteousness as an exception to the rule through dance and exploring ways of using dance as a means of expressing how making exceptions to the rule transforms the rule.

The current efforts at preserving and celebrating Polish-Jewish heritage are impressive. As far as my impression goes, the emphasis is on the documentation, preservation and celebration of the magnificent Polish-Jewish past for current and future genera-

tions. By placing more emphasis on the Righteous as a universal humanitarian model of behaviour, the EDUCATIONAL narrative of Polish-Jewish history can be upgraded and energised with present and future implications and potential. The Righteous as a universal humanitarian model of behaviour can serve as the major component of the educational objectives for learning the Polish-Jewish history. Although few in number, the Righteous carry an intensive potential for learning, with many future and present implications.

One of the people we met told me that Polish emphasis on the Righteous might be perceived as an attempt to obscure certain historical events. My answer and suggestion would be to create international or Polish-Jewish-Israeli-European teams that will create educational programmes around the Righteous phenomenon. For example, I learned that Józef Ulma was a man of versatile interests; he stood out – and was an exception to the norm even before the War – as a librarian, a photographer, active in social life and the local Catholic Youth Association. He was an educated fruit grower and a bee-keeper. What other personal and sociological, cultural and religious characteristics contributed and might have contributed to his becoming an exception to the norm? What can be done in terms of educational programmes to transform the exception to the norm into the norm, nowadays and in the future?

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Shavit Ben-Arie

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# Through Polin Concluding Essay

**It was with great pleasure that I accepted the invitation to join the “Through Polin” programme. I was happy to return to Poland after a long time, but, more importantly, I found the program very intriguing. “Through Polin” offered a different and refreshing view on Poland and the issues of Polish-Jewish relations, as visits to towns such as Gliwice or Chmielnik are not usually included in trip plans. From the very beginning, it was clear that the schedule provided a valuable insight on such towns and sites.**

I was very happy to get acquainted with the Galicia Jewish Museum and its valuable work. While Kraków had a rich Jewish history and has plenty of well-preserved sites to offer visitors, it is clear that an institution such as the Galicia Jewish Museum has an important role in serving as a central resource centre, as well as serving as a place presenting the Jewish past in the wider territory of Galicia. The Museum’s main exhibition “Traces of Memory” is impressive and offers a comprehensive insight on both positive and negative aspects of dealing with the distant past. Seeing the combination side by side was enlightening.

To me, the program offered several highlights:

First, the lecture “Cultural Diplomacy in Holocaust Memory Work” by Prof Jonathan Webber was a valuable case study and should be set as an example for hundreds and thousands of towns across Eastern





**“The Ulma Family Museum of Poles shone an important light on the actions of individuals who risked their lives and families in a dark time. Personal stories are, to me, the most powerful means of telling history and seeking empathy.”**

Europe. While I am not necessarily supporting an exact fulfilment, as I believe erecting too many monuments does not help the cause at hand, I do think that much can be learned from his experiences and benefit working with local communities, even if it does not have a greater impact.

While I thought, and still do think, that it was a wise decision for the programme to focus on preservation and revival, I support the wise choice of the single example for showcasing aspects of commemoration. I believe that our visit to the monument at Zbylittowska Góra touched all of the participants. As a descendant of a family from Tarnów, it was also a journey of great importance to me personally.

The Ulma Family Museum of Poles shone an important light on the actions of individuals who risked their lives and families in a dark time. Personal stories are, to me, the most powerful means of telling history and seeking empathy. The presentation of dozens of stories from Podkarpackie region alone is a just cause that is most likely to make an impact in the years to come.

Our meeting with the dedicated people active in preserving the Jewish past in Będzin and Gliwice was refreshing and impressive. It was motivating to see what private citizens, some as volunteers, can do to bring forward social change and affect the way Polish history is recorded for years to come.

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**Sarah Tauber**

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# **Galicia Jewish Museum History Trip: Reflections**

**This trip was my second to Poland. The first, a year earlier, included visits to Warsaw, Kraków, Katowice, Skarżysko-Kamienna and the Auschwitz-Birkenau camp. On this earlier trip, I spent most of my time with relatives, as I have extended family that still lives in Poland due to the fact that one of my father's relatives converted to Catholicism during World War II, married a Polish Catholic, and chose to remain in Poland with her parents and her husband. She had several children who now have their own children and grandchildren. In addition, my father's father was born in Przemyśl and grew up and attended**

**university as a lawyer in Lwów in the interwar period. Indeed, my father's life was saved because he was in Lwów during the period of time when the Soviets occupied it between 1939-1941. Thus, my connection to Poland and to the region of Galicia is both personal and professional.**

As a professor of Jewish Education at one of the premier institutions of higher Jewish education in the United States, I saw this trip as a chance to learn more about Poland through an experiential educational trip in a region of Poland that had a rich, thriving and complex history. The museum that sponsored the trip seems to care very much about its mission as an educational institution. One area of my scholarship and knowledge base is modern Jewish history, in particular the history of Jews in the region of Galicia during the era of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, and then after during the interwar period when it became part of the new Polish state. I had not traveled at all in this area, however, and hoped to see more of the region to get a clearer sense of the life of the Jews before the war in particular. I also was interested by the international nature of the group of people who were invited to participate on the trip. To me, this represents a very essential form of trans-national and trans-cultural exchange that is vital for educators to understand and value.

Indeed, the most moving aspect of this trip was my getting to know some of the younger participants, who are mostly not Jewish but who are strongly drawn to learning about and devoting all or part of their careers to sustaining the memory of Jewish life in Poland. I found these young adults to be reflective, thoughtful, educated and passionate. As a person who helps to prepare young adults for careers as Jewish educators, rabbis, cantors and the like, I was impressed by the openness, seriousness and friendliness of these fellow travelers. There were many conversations that transpired with them, not only about Polish Jewish history, that helped me to get a clearer sense of the ideals that they hold and their own struggles to create societies that are humane and just. Time spent in the bus and over meals were important informal parts of the trip that allowed for the participants to get to know each other as people and then share our views about what we saw, heard, felt and thought. I appreciated the meal times as very valuable opportunities to build relationships with our cohort.



In fact, if there were one important recommendation I would make as an educator myself for the next group, it would be to allow more time to have focused dialogue – listening, conversing – about how the participants were processing the visits to the various sites. Given that there were people from varying ages, nations, religions and languages coming together for very emotional and serious encounters with the past (cemeteries, killing fields, ghettos), we all would have benefitted at appropriate intervals during the week from a facilitated dialogue about what the encounters meant to us as human beings, no less than as educators or guides or travelers. For example, an Israeli participant whose parents were the only survivors of the Shoah had a different reaction to the mass grave than a young Polish person. Both were very affected by the visit, but in different ways. That needs to be discussed as part of the shared learning that was taking place. In the evening, there was a little bit of informal conversation to process what we saw and did when people went out for a drink, but I feel that the programme would have been enhanced by making time for more processing in a co-ordinated way. I recognise that there was a lot to see and do, but sometimes “more is less” in that there is only so much sightseeing of such serious subjects that people can take in and receive. Some careful building into the schedule of such dialogue time would have been very valuable and would have enhanced our learning.



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Barbara Munk

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# Everyone has their own history...

**The history of the Jews in Poland dates back to the ninth century – over a thousand years. For many centuries, Poland was home to the largest Jewish community in the world due to a long period of religious tolerance and social autonomy. The exhibition at the POLIN Museum in Warsaw tells about this long history, presenting the heritage and culture of Polish Jews, the development of Jewish culture, and the social, religious and political diversity of Polish Jews.**

The rulers of Poland usually protected Jews. King Kazimierz the Great in the fourteenth century is the greatest example. We can see that Poles and Jews lived as neighbours. Poland became more tolerant in the fifteenth century, just as the Jews were being expelled from Spain, as well as from Austria, Hungary and Germany. Thus, Poland and Lithuania became the main centre for Ashkenazi Jews. During this time, the eminent Talmudist Moses Isserles (the Remu) lived in Kraków. Besides being an outstanding religious scholar, he also studied history, astronomy and philosophy. We learnt about him and the history of Jewish Kazimierz in Kraków during our tour of the area. We visited the famous synagogues and Isserles' grave. Moving into the present, we visited the Jewish Community Centre (JCC). JCC-Kraków was created in response to the needs of the developing Jewish community of Kraków.

Over the centuries there was, however, persecution. We learnt about pogroms that happened in Kraków and Bochnia. Traders and artisans were jealous of Jewish prosperity. Also, the Jewish community was devastated by many conflicts, such as during the Chmielnicki Uprising of 1648 and the Swedish

Deluge in 1655. But Poland was still a good place for the Jews and many Jews felt themselves as Poles. During the Partitions of Poland, many Polonised Jews participated in the national uprisings. Many played a significant role in the fight for Poland's independence during the First World War, joining Józef Piłsudski's Polish Legions. After the First World War, there were a number of Jews who immigrated to Poland from Ukraine and Soviet Russia. Most cities in Poland had Jewish neighbourhoods and settlements, small towns called shtetls. Poles and Jews lived as neighbours. We learnt about such places during guided tours in places like Tarnów, Bochnia, Częstochowa, Markowa, Wadowice and Chmielnik. We became acquainted with a unique place, Brzostek, during our meeting with Professor Jonathan Webber.

Starting in the nineteenth century, many Jews in Poland embraced assimilation. Some became famous scientists, artists, painters, poets or actors – Isaac Bashevis Singer, Bruno Schulz, Jan Brzechwa, Bolesław Leśmian, Julian Tuwim, Maurycy Gottlieb and Chaim Goldberg, to name just a few. One of my relatives, Maria (Ria) Munk, was involved in Viennese bohemian life and was painted by Gustav Klimt.



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## Yona Grinberg

**First of all, I want to say that I am very happy and satisfied that I took part in this seminar. From my point of view, it is very important to go and visit the places where there are still the traces of Jewish life from the past. Even moreso, it is important to meet the people who take care of those places. Since I am a tour guide in Poland, it was not the first time for me to see most of these places. But it was the first time I got to hear and be with a local Polish guide, and listen to their guiding and explanations.**

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I visited the Galicia Museum several years ago when Chris Schwarz was still alive. I am glad to see that the museum has expanded its activities and organise meetings alongside the wonderful photography exhibition.

Bochnia was a new place for me to visit. The visit to the Jewish kirkut was the most impressive part of our visit to this town. Our guide there, Ms Iwona Zawadzka, was full of knowledge about the people buried there and about Jewish history in Bochnia.

Meeting Ms Mirosława Gruszczyńska was very emotional. We are lucky to have the opportunity to meet such great people.

Meeting with Prof Jonathan Webber was amazing! He is a man of action. His Brzostek project is something to learn from and to imitate wherever possible.

Visiting Będzin was wonderful, especially meeting a special and amazing person like Piotr. Such people should have help from some companies to continue their projects.

To see the renovated Beit Tahara in Gliwice was a pleasant surprise to me; it is very impressive and beautiful. Karolina is doing great work there, and having the Upper Silesian Jews House of Remembrance keeps the place alive, even it is by the cemetery.

The visit in Częstochowa and the exhibition there was important, but the explanation was too long. We also could have used more time to go round alone. The visit in the big cemetery was impressive, as was the visit by the wonderful monument designed by



Mr Samuel Willenberg. Our visit to the Jasna Góra monastery and being guided there by one of the priests was a special and important visit.

Chmielnik, and the “Świętokrzyskie Shtetl” Education-Museum Centre was another pleasant surprise. It is magnificent and Sylwia was great. Having the opportunity to see the mikveh was also good. I wish that Chmielnik could be included on every visit to Poland.

Meeting with the representative of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Mrs Helise Lieberman was a meeting which clarified and explained some of the activities in Poland. It was also interesting to meet the people who come to the Ec Chaim synagogue in Warsaw.

The last place to visit was the POLIN Museum in Warsaw, which in my opinion is the most interesting and beautiful of all the museums we saw. I spent some days in this museum and have a certificate to guide there, which is why I was not with the group during this visit.

This seminar was helpful to me, and I intend to take my groups to some of the places we went to such as Chmielnik, which was new to me.

Once again, I want to thank you for having the opportunity to participate in this seminar. Thank you, Larisa, for your part in this week, for your care for everyone and everything!

**“The last place to visit was the POLIN Museum in Warsaw, which in my opinion is the most interesting and beautiful of all the museums we saw.”**



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# Through Polin

**When I told my family and friends that I was going to go to Poland for a week for a special Jewish project, they were shocked and tried to push me not to do it. We live with a huge stereotype about the level of antisemitism in Poland. However, I decided to go and should say that it was the one of the few right decisions that I have made in my life.**

My journey to Kraków was twice as long as planned, but, due the excellent communication, I felt calm. I knew that I would not get lost, but if I did someone would definitely find me and help me rejoin my group. I was late for the introduction and the excursion to the Galicia Museum, but I was happy to see Kraków with our guide, Anna. Kraków is a beautiful city and it was amazing how all the guides we met in Kraków during our tour love their city so much. Only in loving a city is it possible for it to be talked about so; and everyone loves Kraków now.

Thank you for the opportunity to meet Mrs Mirosława Gruszczyńska. Please, take care of her! She is beautiful and her story is amazing. The most amazing thing is that the brother and sister of this Jewish girl survived the Second World War thanks to people like Mirosława. Professor Jonathan Webber is absolutely amazing, too. After our conversation with him, I believed that nothing is impossible!

One of the brightest impressions for me was the museum in Markowa. The place is unique by itself due the many photos, which was so rare for the beginning of the last century. The story of family is so touching. I was excited by how everything in the museum was understandable, logical and interesting.

Tarnów became nice and interesting because Alicja Ziolo was there to tell us about it. It is a very Euro-

pean town, like hundreds I have already seen, but everything changed when I saw the bimah and the place from where first train to Auschwitz departed. The saddest moment of our tour was the visit to Zbylitowska Góra. Just speechless; there were only tears. And the most impactful thing is that none of the people from this village did anything to help any of the Jews who didn't die at that moment. The cynicism of the government is shown on the monument.

Such different places in just one day – Markowa and Zbylitowska Góra. It is strange that people living in one country can be so different. But, maybe one bit of advice. I am sure that Zbylitowska Góra must be in every tour, but after this visit people need something to recover. It is very difficult to see such a place as the last stop in a day. Perhaps, afterwards the group could be offered the opportunity to see a concert or do some other activity, even if they have to pay extra. I'm sure that this would not be a problem – I just saw our group, usually so talkative and active, unable to speak at all. And that was very difficult morally. Honestly, the next morning I did not want to go anywhere because I was afraid to see something like I had the previous day.

But, the next day was fantastic Będzin. It was so fantastic thanks to the amazing guide we had there. The things he is doing for the Cukerman's Gate Foundation give me the hope for humanity. Gliwice, I think, will be very impressive for visitors in couple of years when all of the plans for the House of Remembrance for the Jews of Upper Silesia will be completed.

There was also a very interesting museum in Częstochowa. But, perhaps the guided tour there was too long. It was pity to see that only tour organisers were listening the guide, while the participants were reading the exhibition by themselves. But the shofar blowing in the evening was a nice surprise for all of us.

Everything in Warsaw was just great. The POLIN Museum absolutely deserves the status of the best

European museum. Shabbat with the Ec Chaim community was very touching.

But, please do not take my words too personally. This is just my opinion. Some of the minuses just show that this tour was organised by humans, not robots. Overall, I should say huge THANKS to Larysa Michalska for the great organisation. First off all, I was impressed with the level of how everything was organised. It was very nice to see how the organisers tried not to forget about food issues – Kosher, gluten-free, lactose-free, vegetarian – we were a complicated group! Secondly, I appreciated the very kind manner of how all things could be solved if something went wrong. Additional thanks to other guides, Alicja and Tomek – it was very nice and fun to spend time with them, as much as it was possible to have fun on such a serious tour.

One of the biggest treasures of this tour was our group. Young and older, men and women, Jews and non-Jews – each of them are so special. Even if we didn't have a single excursion, it was worth it to come just to meet such amazing people. I hope we will co-operate in future, and I also hope to participate again some day in a programme like "Through Polin 2016".





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# Through Polin

**This visit to Poland was not my first, but this time I really got to feel and see this country. Many thanks to the organisers! I've spent many hours telling my friends about this trip and many hours thinking about it. It's hard to put what I feel on paper as I'm not a writer. That's why I'll just write a few words about what happened that week.**

First, I had a rather difficult time at the border: angry guards, a long journey to Kraków, searching all night for the hotel and finally finding it! In the morning, I met a nice man, Mr Arie. We had coffee and cigarettes, like in a film by Jim Jarmusch. Then came conversation, and then a friendship. I thought Arie would be the only person I would be able to talk to, since my English isn't perfect and neither is my self-confidence, but everything went much differently. That day, so many people from the group came up and spoke to me, and I realised how many friends I was making. All of these people were so great and nice, as were the guides.

Each day added so many impressions, experiences and thoughts. The biggest influence on my consciousness had to be our visit to Markowa. The story about the people and children killed by the Nazis and its apt presentation by the museum created a picture of the past. It was hard to keep my emotions that day. They say we should forgive these people who committed these crimes, but the system which created these people cannot be forgiven.

Coming back home to Ukraine, I have started an initiative to establish commemorative markers at the places where the mass shootings took place. I hope I will be successful!



**“It was hard to keep my emotions that day. They say we should forgive these people who committed these crimes, but the system which created these people cannot be forgiven.”**