

# Catalogue of Best Practices for Jewish Cemetery Preservation











Catalogue of  
**Best Practices**  
for Jewish Cemetery Preservation



Co-funded by the  
European Union

## ESJF European Jewish Cemeteries Initiative

Kaiserstraße 1,  
60311, Frankfurt,  
Germany

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Samantha Shokin / Michele Migliori

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**Best Practices**  
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Presented by the ESJF European Cemeteries Initiative,  
Centropa, and the Foundation for Jewish Heritage  
Co-funded by the European Union

Editor  
Sean McLeod









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## Foreword

### *A note from European Commission Vice-President Margaritis Schinas*

The cultural heritage of Europe is unique, forming a rich tapestry connecting nations and people on the continent and beyond. With vital conversations about inclusiveness and discrimination taking place across the globe, it is more important than ever to recognise that Europe is also multi-ethnic, built on centuries of vibrant cultural exchange.

The Jewish presence in Europe has a history stretching back millennia. These communities have played and continue to play major roles in the development of Europe as we understand it today.

However, the destruction of half of Europe's Jewish population during the Shoah left many of these historic and vibrant communities severely diminished or removed them entirely, their contributions are often left out of the conversation surrounding European cultural heritage, and without communities to safeguard them, Jewish physical heritage around Europe is at constant risk of disappearance.

In many areas of Europe today, Jewish cemeteries remain the final witness to centuries of Jewish life and contribution to local and European culture and history. Sadly, they also attest to the hatred, intolerance and antisemitism which led to the destruction of

these communities. The creation of the European Union is itself a statement that we must never allow these pernicious acts of intolerance to destroy our continent again.

With more than 9,000 Jewish cemeteries across Europe, providing these sites with the protection they need is a daunting task, and one that cannot be achieved without cooperation on all levels, from grassroots initiatives to national governments.

That is why I am proud to present this catalogue, developed as part of Protecting the Jewish Cemeteries of Europe, a series of EU-funded pilot projects aimed at mapping Jewish burial sites. These projects were implemented following calls for proposals organised by the European Commission, and compiled by three Jewish heritage NGOs: ESJF European Jewish Cemeteries Initiative together with the Foundation for Jewish Heritage and Centropa. It provides an extensive guide to preservation initiatives from across nine countries, from small-scale interventions by local residents to transnational partnerships, financed by the Creative Europe programme, like the Parallel Traces project with partners from six European countries.

With projects such as Protecting the Jewish Cemeteries of Europe and all of the excellent initiatives laid out in the catalogue, we can take lessons which will be invaluable in ensuring that Europe's Jewish cemeteries are afforded the protection and dignity they deserve.

**Margaritis Schinas**

*Vice President*

*European Commission*



## Introduction

The history of Jewish communities across Central and Eastern Europe is rich and varied, stretching back millennia. An estimated 8,000 Jewish burial sites in the region attest to this heritage. Each cemetery has a community behind it, each with its unique story, but one feature shared by all is a tremendous sense of loss.

In a few short years, the Shoah brought the long history of thousands of these communities to a cruel, abrupt end. Without their owners to safeguard and preserve them, these Jewish cemeteries have fallen into disrepair, and after 80 years of vandalism and neglect, many are at risk of disappearing entirely, bringing the last physical testament to these ancient communities with them.

The ESJF European Jewish Cemeteries Initiative was set up in 2015 as an international non-profit public foundation registered in the Federal Republic of Germany with the core objective of preserving this legacy. By focusing on the burial sites in the thousands of towns and villages where Jewish communities were wiped out during the Shoah, we have been able to identify and intervene at the cemeteries most at risk of disappearance. As of 2021, the ESJF has demarcated and fenced close to 200 Jewish cemeteries around Europe. Moreover, with the support of the European Union, we have thus far surveyed and mapped some 3,000 Jewish cemeteries across nine European countries.

However, the mission to preserve the Jewish cemeteries of Europe remains vast and cannot be carried out by ESJF alone. As such, it is vital not only to fence and map the sites, but also to identify methodologies for protecting the thousands of cemeteries we cannot yet fence. This requires the support of local communities in the towns and villages of Central and Eastern Europe, as well as the development



of sustainable and cross-generational models by which local Jewish heritage becomes local historical heritage—owned by all so the responsibility for its protection becomes a collective, partnered effort.

This catalogue, produced in the framework of our European Union-funded pilot project, “Protecting the Jewish Cemeteries of Europe”, highlights exactly these models, with examples of preservation initiatives from across nine countries at every level, from grassroots initiatives by local communities to the work of international NGOs and joint actions by European states.

It is our hope that, by examining these models and identifying their relative strengths, we can begin to establish a framework of best practices for intervention and ultimately, for the long-term and sustainable protection of all these sites.

**Philip Carmel**

*Chief Executive Officer*

*ESJF European Jewish Cemeteries Initiative*



## Executive Summary and Methodology

The biggest challenge in compiling best practices for this catalogue was the vast number of examples to choose from. Even by limiting our selection to the nine countries included in both EU-funded pilot projects (Ukraine, Poland, Lithuania, Moldova, Hungary, Slovakia, Croatia, Georgia, and Greece), we still had a great multitude of initiatives to narrow down, and had to determine the following set of criteria to guide our thinking:

- 1 **Diversity**, not only in terms of culture and geography, but also the type of initiative described (public sector, nonprofit/NGO, academia, etc.). We tried to showcase a range of public, private, and grassroots initiatives, even though in many cases these categories overlap.
- 2 **Transferability**, i.e. the likelihood or ability of a particular initiative to be carried out in another country or region. An initiative would not be considered highly transferable if its success was contingent upon having existing infrastructure to carry it out. The majority of the initiatives in this catalogue can be transferred and recreated in numerous countries, using whatever resources are available locally.
- 3 **Impact**, measured by how successfully an initiative was carried out and the response it generated from local and international communities.
- 4 **Sustainability**. By contacting organizers and examining online resources, we determined which initiatives were continuously functioning and chose to include those over “one-off” projects.

5 Lastly, **uniqueness** was included among our criteria to counterbalance transferability. Whereas a cemetery cleanup can be carried out in any country, aspects of it can always be tailored to the needs of a local community. For example, many cemetery cleanups featured here were complemented by culturally specific educational activities that set them apart from other cleanups. Likewise, digital cemetery projects come in a variety of formats that distinguish them from more traditional preservation initiatives.

We acknowledge that compiling this catalogue was not an exact science; that the criteria are subjective and selections debatable. That said, we consulted with a variety of experts to produce this catalogue and make it as comprehensive as possible. We also relied on our surveyors and country coordinators to recommend smaller-scale initiatives that may have otherwise been overlooked (see the section “Voices from the Community” on pages 56-58). In addition to initiatives that we discovered from the field, we included winning entries from our student and teacher project competitions (pages 76-81), which were a direct output from the educational programs conducted within the framework of our second pilot project. Thus by taking this multifaceted approach, we strived to produce a balanced result.

It is important to note that this is not an exhaustive catalogue by any means. For starters, our research was restricted to the nine aforementioned project countries, which meant that we had to exclude countless worthy initiatives by default. We also reasoned that we would only include those initiatives that were either headquartered or conducted the bulk of their work in our project countries. Thus, many fantastic projects based in North America, Israel, and other non-project countries had to be disqualified on this technicality.

We would also like to note that this publication is something of a departure from what was originally envisioned when formulating our pilot project back in 2019. Originally, the catalogue was intended to be a collection of best practices from the 3,000 cemetery sites that ESJF was to have surveyed by the conclusion of the grant. Between 2018 and 2021, ESJF completed surveying the totality of Lithuania, Ukraine, Georgia, Croatia, Greece, and Moldova, and therefore all of the initiatives you see listed here for those project countries are associated with surveyed sites.

By contrast, we surveyed only parts of Poland, Hungary, and Slovakia, and the sites associated with some of our most exemplary best practices were not among those that have been surveyed.\* We decided to include them because 1) they were in relatively close proximity to our surveyed sites and 2) the Jewish communities in those countries are interconnected, therefore excluding those initiatives by virtue of this added technicality seemed unnecessary and would only detract from the value of the catalogue.

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\* For a comprehensive list of surveyed sites, please visit our project website <https://esjf-surveys.org>

Finally, we would be remiss in reflecting upon these past three years without acknowledging the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. When the crisis erupted in March 2020, our second pilot project had just launched and the possibility of travel came to a grinding halt. For that reason, many stakeholder engagement opportunities were missed, which pales in comparison to the scale of suffering and tragedy endured throughout the world during this time. We relied on our local survey teams and country coordinators as our eyes and ears on the ground, but with many synagogues and Jewish community centres on lockdown, there was only so much information that could be gathered from the field. We therefore did the best we could with the resources available to us.

We hope that you find this catalogue to be both informative and inspiring, offering you dozens of project ideas that can aid in the protection of your local Jewish cemetery. The important thing to remember is that there is no one-size-fits-all approach to Jewish cemetery preservation; each initiative you will read about here reflects the unique needs of the community it emerged from. With this in mind, we encourage you to go out and do your part to help protect the sanctity of those buried at these sites, and the memory of Jewish life in Europe prior to the Holocaust.

**Samantha Shokin**

*Project Manager, EU-Funded Grants  
ESJF European Jewish Cemeteries Initiative*



**Michele Migliori**

*Best Practices Officer  
ESJF European Jewish Cemeteries Initiative*





## Jewish cemeteries as a part of local and European cultural heritage



The long, rich history of Jews in Europe, spanning more than two thousand years, is reflected in historical monuments across the continent. Some of these—synagogues, schools, hospitals, and entire “Jewish quarters”—are world-famous, while others are known only to the most experienced historians and guides. Artefacts which can be found in museums give us a deep insight into the religious rituals and everyday life of this ancient community.

One of the most common markers of Jewish presence in European cities is the Jewish cemetery, which functions both as a valuable historical source on Jewish culture and an important city landmark.

The earliest form of Jewish burials were the catacombs—underground chambers. These were typical also in Roman culture, and numerous examples of surviving catacombs (both Jewish and non-Jewish) built in the first centuries of the Common Era, can be seen today. We can also find tombstones from that period in other regions—the North Coast of the Black Sea and Georgia. The inscriptions on these are usually written in Greek, which was the lingua franca of the Mediterranean at the time. These inscriptions were generally brief, mentioning the name and father of the deceased, their age, and occasional references to family connections or social status. The symbols on the stones would be explicitly Jewish, commonly images related to the Biblical Temple of Jerusalem, which was destroyed in the year 70 CE, but nevertheless remained a focal point in Jewish tradition. These symbols include: the Menorah—the seven-branched candelabrum which once stood in the Temple; the palm branch or etrog—a citrus fruit usually brought on the pilgrimage to Jerusalem; the shofar, or ram’s horn, blown during ceremonies; and the gates of the Temple itself. Many of these images persist in Jewish art today.

In the Middle Ages, Jewish cemeteries took on their modern appearance—the field populated with tombstones. These cemeteries were often adjacent to the “Jewish quarters” of towns and were therefore destroyed during the persecution and expulsion of Jews between the 14<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries. The monuments from these cemeteries are still sometimes unearthed during construction works to this day, and are safeguarded in regional or Jewish museums. The text on medieval Jewish tombstones is universally transcribed in Hebrew, and contains not only names and dates of death, but certain blessings, usually drawn from Biblical quotations, to guarantee the deceased a better existence in the other world. The oldest surviving Jewish cemetery *in situ* is the so-called “Holy Sand” of Worms in the western German state of Rhineland-Palatinate, with burials dating back to the late 11<sup>th</sup> century.

As Jews settled more widely in Europe, their cemeteries underwent changes. More and more cemeteries were now located at a distance from towns and villages, a practice shared by several neighbouring communities. Quite often, the plots allocated for Jewish cemeteries were unsuitable for agriculture—forests, rocky hills, or swampland by rivers. These forgotten Jewish cemeteries in the middle of nowhere often serve as the only reminder not only of the Jewish community which built them, but of the settlement in general.

Locating, mapping, and demarcating these abandoned, derelict, and overgrown cemeteries has been one of the main focuses of ESJF’s work. Using cutting-edge technology, ESJF carries out surveys, cooperating with municipalities and NGOs to develop mutually beneficial, long-lasting partnerships with local communities.

However, cemeteries are not only important as historical sites—many also have immense artistic and aesthetic value. In Judaism, cemeteries are considered to be a type of “waiting room”, where bodies are laid to rest until the resurrection of the dead. As such, excessive spending on tombstone decorations was not encouraged. However, with the growing prosperity of the Jewish upper classes and the influence of Baroque art, ornate tombstones became widespread. The imagery on the stones evolved alongside the motifs found in synagogues, and blended both Jewish and non-Jewish elements.

Some of the most common symbols were uniquely Jewish ones, related to the lineage of the deceased. For instance, a pair of hands, making a special gesture known as the “blessing of the priests”, and water vessels. These demarcate different families, allegedly stemming from the Kohanim and Levi’im—senior and junior priests in the Temple. These symbols occur only on tombstones belonging to men.

In Eastern and Central Europe, other popular images included animals, many of which were also associated with certain given names. For instance, the lion, standing for the given name Arye (Hebrew for the lion) and its Yiddish cognate Leyb, is the symbol of the Biblical tribe of Judah, as well as an ancient symbol of Jerusalem. The bird, on the other hand, can represent the female name “Tsippora” (bird) or “Tauba” (dove), but also serves as a universal symbol for the human soul.

Inscriptions from this period tend to be lengthier, using complex poetic language and overlapping Biblical quotations. For example, an 1813 tombstone from Rhodes, Greece, depicted on previous page, reads:

*Blessed be the Righteous judge. My brethren mourn and cry for me, their sorrow is strong like a never-failing stream (Amos 5:24). The days of his life were cut short and made miserable by the disease that spread from Succoth to Zarethan. (1 Kings 7:46).*

*A tombstone for the one intelligent and outstanding, who died in the prime of his life, the respected gentleman Shmuel Yaakov Franko, may his soul dwell in the Garden of Eden. Over and gone (Song of Songs 2:11) on the 9th day of the month of Marcheshvan, in the year 5574 from the creation of the world.*

*And from now on (Jeremiah 8:15) prayers and supplications (Zohar) are his fate in the palace garden (Esther 7:7).*

From the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, more and more tombstones bore inscriptions written in their local language, making them more accessible to anyone interested in research and preservation.

Jewish cemeteries constitute an unusual and even unique part of European cultural heritage. They are sites of profound historic and artistic significance, and provide an insight into the long, complicated story of coexistence between the different ethnic, religious, and cultural groups from whom modern Europe evolved. In recent decades, significant efforts have been made to preserve Jewish cemeteries, not only as monuments to the Jewish history of their regions, but as an integral part of the cultural landscape, generating tourism and, in some places, becoming the source of a strong sense of identity and pride.

Join us in our efforts to safeguard our common heritage!

### **Alexandra Fishel**

*Educational Projects Officer  
ESJF European Jewish Cemeteries Initiative*



### **Ilya Lensky**

*Director  
Museum "Jews in Latvia"*









# Selected Best Practices



# INDIVIDUAL/ GRASSROOTS INITIATIVES



# Ukraine:

## *A Jewish Cemetery Preservation Demonstration Project for Western Ukraine*

This guide and web publication resulted from a research project led by Marla Raucher Osborn of Rohatyn Jewish Heritage (RJH), a Ukrainian non-profit NGO, and was supported by the US Fulbright Scholar Programme during the 2019-2020 academic year.

The website provides information, resources, and guidance to assist project leaders, activists, and volunteers in the rehabilitation and ongoing care of Jewish cemeteries in western Ukraine, and seeks to inspire local initiatives and collaborative projects between Ukrainians and the Jewish diaspora. The web guide includes “best practices” (processes, methods, tools), a large collection of links to resources, selected case studies of regional Jewish cemetery projects, GPS-linked tables of Jewish burial sites, and useful links and references to relevant organisations. The website is bilingual, with information in both English and Ukrainian.

Although the guide was developed for the specific needs of Jewish cemeteries in western Ukraine, many of the resources and recommendations are equally useful to individuals, organisations, and projects beyond the region, and in other areas of heritage preservation. The information has been drawn from a broad variety of foreign and domestic resources working in a number of different disciplines.

For more on Marla’s organisation **Rohatyn Jewish Heritage**, see *the Voices from the Community* entry on page 64.

*Project coordinators:* **Marla Raucher Osborn and Jay Osborn**

*Website:* [www.jewishheritageguide.net](http://www.jewishheritageguide.net)

*Contact:* [www.rohatynjewishheritage.org/en/info/contacts/](http://www.rohatynjewishheritage.org/en/info/contacts/)





## Slovakia:

### *Peter Absolon,*

### *Košice Jewish Cemetery*

Peter Absolon first became interested in Jewish cemetery documentation while searching for the *matzevot* of his ancestors. When he started his research, the maps the community had been using dated from the 1960s, and only half of the Orthodox cemetery had been documented. After he concluded his research, Peter decided to donate the results and the maps of the cemetery to the community as a *mitzvah*.

Since the community did not have sufficient funds to oversee extensive restoration of Jewish cemeteries in the area, he volunteered to take care, maintain, document, and preserve them as a personal project.

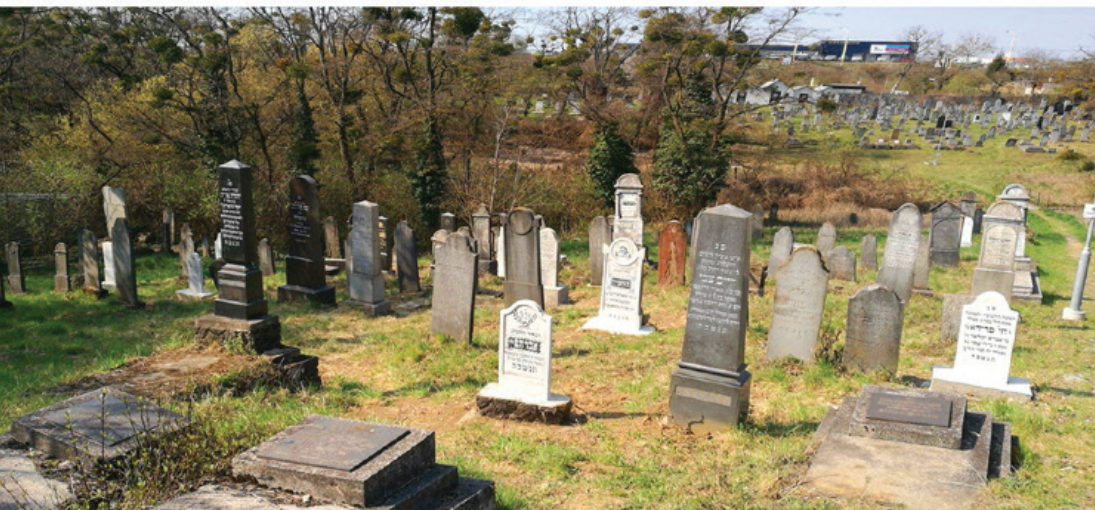
He started with the proper documentation of all burials, photographing every stone at the cemetery, drawing maps and comparing the inscriptions with vital records. He also identified 300-400 tombstones that were either broken or toppled, and, thanks to financial contributions from various donors, he was able to hire a stonemason to fix approximately 120 stones.

Peter supported and supervised restoration work on the cemetery walls and the construction of a new concrete walkway towards the Ohels, both funded by Avoseinu and a group of Chassidic families from New York. Today, the cemetery is well maintained, and vegetation is cleared at least four times a year.

Coordinator: **Peter Absolon**

Contact: [jgs@absolon.eu](mailto:jgs@absolon.eu)

Website: [www.absolon.eu](http://www.absolon.eu)



**Košice Orthodox Jewish cemetery.**

Photo: Facebook Page

"Jewish Genealogy Services Slovakia":

[www.facebook.com/jgsslovakia](http://www.facebook.com/jgsslovakia)

## Poland:

### *Dr. Heidi M. Szpek,*

### *Białystok Jewish Cemetery*

Heidi Szpek is a translator, historian, board member of the Białystok Cemetery Restoration Project, and Emerita Professor of Religious Studies at Central Washington University in the United States.

For nearly two decades, Heidi has undertaken cemetery restoration efforts and research of Jewish cemeteries, primarily the Bagnówka Jewish Cemetery in Białystok, Poland. Since 2010, Heidi served as consultant for organisations such as *Centrum Edukacji Obywatelskiej Polska-Izrael w Białymstoku* and *Aktion Suchnezeichen Friendsdienste* in their restoration efforts of this cemetery, translating epitaphs in their historical setting, offering knowledge of this cemetery to assist in restoration, as well as assisting them in locating ancestral stones.

In 2014, Heidi developed the resource [JewishEpitaphs.org](http://JewishEpitaphs.org), which gradually expanded to include information on Bagnówka cemetery and its restoration. Her current research is focused on the poetry of the Bagnówka epitaphs and its place in Jewish literature. In addition, she is directing a worldwide search for pre-WWII family photos on Bagnówka Cemetery, which are a vital resource in restorative efforts.

Contact: [hszpek@gmail.com](mailto:hszpek@gmail.com)  
Website: [www.jewishepitaphs.org](http://www.jewishepitaphs.org)

*Bagnówka Jewish  
Cemetery in Białystok,  
Poland*





## Multinational: *Christian Hermann Photography*

Christian Hermann is a Cologne-based photographer, blogger, and Jewish heritage activist who has travelled Eastern Europe for years to document traces of Jewish life, including destroyed or misappropriated synagogues, overgrown cemeteries, tombstones used in street paving, and traces of home blessings on door jambs. His work documenting Jewish heritage sites, including Jewish cemeteries, is constantly updated and displayed on his personal blog “Vanished World”, available since 2013.

Christian has also published two photographic books, *Spurensuche* (Searching for Traces), dedicated to Western Ukraine, and *In Fading Lights*, that features 110 photos from 57 cities, including Ukraine, Moldova, Poland, and Hungary. In this context, he prepared and organised photo exhibitions in several cities, showing the current status of many Jewish cemeteries in Eastern Europe, raising awareness among the institutions and the general public.

In 2021, Christian received the Federal Cross of Merit of the Federal Republic of Germany. “The medal may help to direct public attention to Eastern Europe’s Jewish heritage,” said Christian Hermann to Jewish Heritage Europe when asked about how it felt to receive such recognition of his work.

Website: [www.vanishedworld.blog](http://www.vanishedworld.blog)

Contact: [cyberorange@gmx.de](mailto:cyberorange@gmx.de)



Photo:  
Marla Raucher Osborn

## Ukraine:

### *Katy Kryvko, Derazhne Jewish Cemetery*

In 2016, 15-year-old Katy Kryvko discovered a Jewish cemetery in her hometown of Derazhne in north-western Ukraine. Seeing a critical need to protect and raise awareness of the cemetery, Katy approached the ESJF European Jewish Cemeteries Initiative after reading about an ESJF photo exhibition on Jewish cemeteries in Ukraine. Her efforts were a success: thanks to Katy, ESJF was able to fence the site in 2017, and invited descendants of Derazhne Jews from as far as Israel and Canada to the opening ceremony. With the help of her parents and teacher, Katy also helped launch a local initiative to return gravestones which had been removed from the site.

Today, Katy continues to research the history of the Derazhne Jewish community and has recently launched a website called “Derazhne Jewish Heritage” dedicated to preserving this important history. Her efforts have been recognised by international media outlets and presented in a short film by ESJF in 2017. Her work is an excellent example of the proactive approach to heritage preservation necessary for the long-term protection of Jewish cemeteries around Europe.

Website: [katerynakryvko.wixsite.com/derazhne-jh/about](http://katerynakryvko.wixsite.com/derazhne-jh/about)

ESJF video: [youtu.be/murU7bFsua8](https://youtu.be/murU7bFsua8)

Contact: [derazhne.jewish.heritage@gmail.com](mailto:derazhne.jewish.heritage@gmail.com)

*Katy Kryvko with her mother and father in Derazhne*



# NON-PROFIT AND NON- GOVERNMENTAL ORGANISATIONS



# Ukraine:

## “Silence Speaks”

### Rural Initiative Workshop

Founded in Ukraine in 2014, the Rural Initiatives Workshop, a programme of the non-governmental organisation “Other Education,” provides opportunities to help rural youth effect positive change in their communities.

In 2018, the programme worked with high school students from the village of Turyi Remety in the Transcarpathian region of Ukraine to develop a project called “Silence Speaks,” which aimed to raise awareness of cemeteries in the area and conduct cemetery clean-ups. Under the guidance of their teacher and with support from the ESJF European Jewish Cemeteries Initiative, students cleaned the local Jewish cemetery and documented the names of those buried there.

Following the initiative, local mayor Mihailo Bigan visited the school together with representatives from the ESJF and other local authorities who thanked the students for their efforts. The event was covered by a Transcarpathian news station and broadcast on local television.

Website: [dialogue-for-change.org/en/rural-initiatives-workshop](http://dialogue-for-change.org/en/rural-initiatives-workshop)

Video: [youtu.be/jrZ1agWxvIA](https://youtu.be/jrZ1agWxvIA)

Photo: Facebook Page  
“Maysternya Na Seli”  
[www.facebook.com/MaysternyaNaSeli](http://www.facebook.com/MaysternyaNaSeli)



# Moldova:

## *Jewish Heritage Moldova – MAGHID*

Jewish Heritage Moldova – MAGHID Research and Educational Center is a Moldovan nongovernmental organisation established in 2018 and based in the capital city of Chişinău. The main activities of the organisation are the study of Moldova’s Jewish history, research and mapping of Jewish heritage sites around the country, non-formal education, and tourist guidance.

In 2017, in the framework of field research conducted by the ESJF European Jewish Cemeteries Initiative and supported by the European Union, MAGHID project coordinator Irina Shikhova and MAGHID’s researcher Iulii Palihovici discovered gravestone fragments from a demolished Jewish cemetery in Oniţcani, a rural village in central Moldova.

This discovery gave rise to the NGO’s first project—an open-air Jewish museum in Oniţcani, featuring an exhibit on the fragments as well as information about the now-vanished Oniţcani Jewish community. In addition to preserving and commemorating local Jewish history, the project’s goal is to turn Oniţcani into an attractive tourist site to be included on European Jewish tourist routes.

*Project coordinator: Irina Shikhova*

*Website: [www.maghid.org](http://www.maghid.org) and [www.maghid.org/projects/own-projects/onitcani/](http://www.maghid.org/projects/own-projects/onitcani/)*

*Contact: [jewish.heritage.md@maghid.org](mailto:jewish.heritage.md@maghid.org)*



*Open-air Jewish museum in Oniţcani*  
Photo courtesy of MAGHID



# Lithuania:

## MACEVA

Registered as an NGO in 2011, MACEVA is composed of a small group of dedicated individuals involved in maintaining and documenting the last remaining Jewish cemeteries in Lithuania through photographs.

MACEVA performs several activities, including collecting, cataloguing and publicizing information about all pre-WWII Jewish cemeteries in Lithuania; documentation through photographs of the remaining tombstones in all Jewish cemeteries throughout Lithuania; translation of the legible inscriptions from the gravestones, and posting this information on its website, making both the cemeteries and the burials lists available to the public.

Moreover, where possible, MACEVA aims to restore/reconstruct, or at least clean up Jewish cemeteries, with the assistance of and/or cooperation of local municipalities, as well as to raise awareness among local communities about vanished Jewish communities and seek their support to look after Jewish cemeteries.

MACEVA is an open initiative and welcomes everyone who wishes to join. On its website, the NGO provides a set of guidelines and rules to be respected when visiting a Jewish cemetery for potential volunteers interested in documenting a specific Jewish cemetery in the country. These guidelines are a useful tool to foster autonomous work, ensuring that Jewish religious laws are respected.

*Project coordinator: **Sergey Kanovich, Dr. Lara Lempertienė, and Sandra Petrukonytė***

*Website: [www.litvak-cemetery.info](http://www.litvak-cemetery.info)*

*Contact: [info@litvak-cemetery.info](mailto:info@litvak-cemetery.info)*

*Darsūniškis Jewish Cemetery in Kaunas*



## Hungary: *Friends of the Budapest Jewish Cemetery*

The Friends of Budapest Jewish Cemetery is a charitable foundation registered in Hungary, the US, and Canada, dedicated to maintaining the vast Kozma Street Jewish Cemetery in Budapest. Since its founding in 2016, the foundation has organised numerous clean-up and documentation sessions at the cemetery with the participation of local schools. It also launched an online database of the epitaphs, which is regularly updated.

The foundation offers a wide range of services for descendants of Budapest Jews interested in finding and maintaining their ancestors' burial sites. Thanks to funds raised over the last five years, the foundation has been able to assemble its own team of specialised workers to carry out the renovation and maintenance of the cemetery. To date, eleven sections with around 24,000 graves have been cleaned and restored.

*Project coordinators:* **Michael Perl** and **Marc Pinter**

*Website:* **[budapestjewishcemetery.com](http://budapestjewishcemetery.com)**

*Contact:* **[mperl@budapestjewishcemetery.com](mailto:mperl@budapestjewishcemetery.com)** and **[mpinter@budapestjewishcemetery.com](mailto:mpinter@budapestjewishcemetery.com)**



Photo: Michael Perl



## Lithuania: *The Lost Shtetl Project – Šeduva Jewish Memorial Fund*

Since 2012, the Šeduva Jewish Memorial Fund has carried out the Lost Shtetl Project, whose mission is to restore the old Jewish cemetery in Šeduva in northern Lithuania.

From 2013-2014, under the auspices of the “Lost Shtetl” project, the Šeduva Jewish Memorial Fund restored the Šeduva Old Jewish Cemetery, which had been overgrown for decades and whose moss-covered gravestones were falling apart. The restorers cleared bushes, rebuilt the original stone fence, and restored 800 out of 1,300 gravestones in various conditions, dating from the late 18th to early 20th centuries.

Unrecognizable gravestone fragments were displayed in a sculptural lapidarium in the shape of the Star of David, designed by the architectural firm Algimantas Kančas. The project was awarded a Special Mention by the jury for the 2017 European Union Prize for Cultural Heritage/Europa Nostra Awards, under the Conservation category.

Copyright Šeduva Jewish Memorial Fund

*Project coordinator:* **Sergey Kanovich**  
*Website:* [www.lostshtetl.com](http://www.lostshtetl.com)  
*Contact:* [info@loststetl.com](mailto:info@loststetl.com)

Photo courtesy of Jewish  
Heritage Europe:  
[www.jewish-heritage-europe.eu](http://www.jewish-heritage-europe.eu)



## Slovakia:

### *Pamätaj*

The Jewish cemetery in Námestovo in northern Slovakia was founded in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and is located next to the Orava dam. In 1953 when the dam was built, part of the cemetery was completely flooded. In 2012, Karol Kurtulík prepared the plans for the restoration of the cemetery with the help of two architects, which included fencing and the construction of a Holocaust memorial. This project led to the foundation of a local NGO named Pamätaj (“Remember” in English) led by Karol. Together with volunteers, they helped to restore and manage the cemetery.

In December 2019, vandals devastated most of the cemetery, destroying all of the *matzevot*. The following summer, despite the pandemic, the volunteers were able to restore and reconstruct the tombstones. They also created a memorial site (lapidarium) using a few fragments from monuments that couldn’t be put together.

In February 2021, the Pamätaj NGO installed a scannable QR code plaque at the entrance of the cemetery, enabling visitors to instantly download information from the official website. Pamätaj continues to organise volunteer clean-ups at the cemetery, as well as lectures for high schoolers from Námestovo and nearby villages.

*Project coordinator:* **Karol Kurtulík**  
*Website:* [zidovskycintorin.orava.sk/en](http://zidovskycintorin.orava.sk/en)  
*Contact:* [karol.kurtulik@gmail.com](mailto:karol.kurtulik@gmail.com)



Photo: Facebook Page  
 “Židovský cintorín Námestovo  
 ז'ידוועסטאָן”



## Greece: *Pakethra*

Pakethra is an NGO established in 1992 whose aim is to promote, document, and raise awareness of local history in the Thrace historical region and Greek presence in the Balkans. In 2015, the Central Board of Greek Jewish Communities accepted Pakethra's proposal to clean-up and restore the Xanthi Jewish cemetery in Thrace with the help of volunteers. Since then, Pakethra regularly maintains the cemetery site, which had been repeatedly vandalised over the years.

The Xanthi municipality also accepted Pakethra's proposal to build a memorial in memory of those who lost their lives during the Holocaust. Thanks to these activities, the Jewish cemetery has become a tourist attraction welcoming visitors from Greece, Israel and around the world.

*Coordinator: Vassilis Aivaliotis*

*Contact: [vasaiv@hotmail.com](mailto:vasaiv@hotmail.com)*

*Website: [www.pakethra.gr](http://www.pakethra.gr)*

Photo courtesy  
of Vassilis Aivaliotis



# GOVERNMENT AND PUBLIC SECTOR

## Poland: *Coalition of Guardians*

The Coalition of Guardians of Jewish Cemeteries in Poland is an initiative that aims to foster and coordinate clean-ups and restoration work at the nearly 1,500 Jewish cemeteries all around Poland.

The Coalition's main goal is to create a partner network of all "guardians" of Jewish cemeteries in Poland. The network aims to incorporate local governments, non-governmental organisations, and informal social leaders who, as part of their voluntary work, restore the memory of Polish Jews' heritage.

The Coalition also conducts training on cemetery maintenance for those who want to volunteer but do not have any previous experience. It assists its members in obtaining the necessary funds for fieldwork, providing them with information on grants, and assisting with applications.

The Coalition's website was developed in the context of the Civic Initiative Fund Programme for 2014-2020, and with funds from the National Institute of Freedom – Center for the Development of Civil Society. The map of Jewish cemeteries is based on a database created by the National Heritage Board of Poland and the Cultural Heritage Foundation.

Website: [www.cmentarzezydowskie.org](http://www.cmentarzezydowskie.org)  
Contact: [kontakt@dziedzictwo.org](mailto:kontakt@dziedzictwo.org)

*Dębica Jewish Cemetery in Podkarpackie Voivodeship*





# Poland:

## *Rabbinical Commission Cemetery Guidelines*

The Rabbinical Commission for Jewish Cemeteries in Poland (RCC) is a special commission operating at the Office of the Chief Rabbi of Poland whose role is to oversee Jewish cemeteries, mass grave sites, and Jewish burials in Poland. Founded in 2002, the Commission initially functioned as an advisory body to the Foundation for the Preservation of Jewish Heritage in Poland, and currently operates within the Union of Jewish Religious Communities of Poland.

In partnership with the Polish Ministry of Culture and National Heritage, the Commission created a set of guidelines on good maintenance work practices at Jewish cemeteries in the country. The instructions contained in the guidelines apply both to fenced and marked cemeteries, as well as to those whose areas have not yet been secured. The guidelines also contain a series of tips for volunteers working in the field of Jewish cemetery preservation, with a particular focus on the restoration of *matzevot* and cleaning, as well as on which activities are (or are not) allowed to be carried out inside a Jewish cemetery according to *Halakha* (Jewish religious law).

*Website:* [sztetl.org.pl/en/tradition-and-jewish-culture/religion/rabbinical-commission-guidelines-for-the-preservation-of-jewish-cemeteries](http://sztetl.org.pl/en/tradition-and-jewish-culture/religion/rabbinical-commission-guidelines-for-the-preservation-of-jewish-cemeteries)



*Ulanów Jewish Cemetery in Podkarpackie Voivodeship*

## Hungary: *Footsteps of Wonder Rabbis*

The Footsteps of Wonder Rabbis is a Jewish Heritage tourism hub based in the village of Mád in northeastern Hungary. Launched in 2016, the project was co-funded by the European Union, and is led by the Unified Hungarian Jewish Congregation (EMIH), a branch of Chabad.

The project's activities are focused on built Jewish heritage in the northeastern Hungarian Tokaj-Hegyalja region. The project's website offers general tourism information, as well as itineraries on Jewish heritage and pilgrimage sites in the region.

A common issue of most Jewish cemeteries in this part of Hungary is the deterioration of the *matzevot* inside the cemeteries, due to long-standing neglect. This is why this project created a database of the Jewish cemeteries in the Tokaj-Hegyalja region, being a valuable resource for both tourists and genealogists.

The database contains digitized photographs and data on a large number of headstones, alongside other information that can be searched by name or location. Thanks to the GPS coordinates, it facilitates finding a grave when visiting the cemetery.

Moreover, the project's website provides information regarding the history of most of the Jewish cemeteries in the area, including the prominent individuals buried in each of them, as well as their location.

*Project Coordinator:* **Mariann Frank**

*Website:* **[www.footstepsofwonderrabbis.com](http://www.footstepsofwonderrabbis.com)**

*Contact:* **[csodarabbikutja@gmail.com](mailto:csodarabbikutja@gmail.com)**

*Mád Jewish Cemetery*

Photo: Michele Migliori





## **Lithuania:** ***Good Will Compensation for the Immovable Property of Jewish Religious Communities***

The “Good Will Compensation for the Immovable Property of Jewish Religious Communities” determined that the Jewish community of Lithuania would receive a one-time payment of 37 million EUR over a 10-year period as compensation for the communal property that could not be restituted within the framework of the 1995 Religious Associations Law. The funds come from the Lithuanian state budget, with a payment period from 2011-2023.

Since 2014, the Good Will Foundation has been providing grants for projects that correspond to the goals defined by the law of Good Will Compensation. The Government

*Adutiškis Jewish  
Cemetery*





of the Republic of Lithuania transfers an annual payment of 3.6 million EUR, 1.6 million of which is set aside for project grants every year by the Good Will Foundation. Another 1.8 million EUR is being kept as an endowment for future project funding. In this way, the Foundation will be able to fund projects which benefit the Jewish community in Lithuania even after no more Government payments will be available after 2023.

This payment can be used only for the religious, cultural, and educational needs of Lithuanian Jews.

The funding from the Good Will Foundation is allocated via project applications. The Board decides the results of each allocation, i.e. which applicant receives the funding and which not. Public and private entities, NGOs, and research institutes, are among those who can apply to the grants issued by the Foundation. Since 2014, several Jewish cemetery-related initiatives received funding through this Foundation. Funds for cemetery projects were allocated mainly for their cleaning, but also for exhibitions, publishing, street signs, and summer schools.

Among those who received funds for Jewish cemetery-related projects are the Lithuanian Jewish Community (LJC), the Museum of Vilkaviškis district, the PE Cultural Heritage Academy, and the NGO MACEVA.

*Director: Indrė Rutkauskaitė*

*Contact: [info@gvf.lt](mailto:info@gvf.lt)*

*Website: [www.gvf.lt/en/](http://www.gvf.lt/en/)*





# ACADEMIA

## Hungary: *Kibuci Bucik*

The Kibuci Bucik initiative, founded in 2003 by the Lauder Javne Jewish School in Budapest, consists of a group of school students that organises a camp close to a Jewish cemetery in the Hungarian countryside every summer to clean and restore cemeteries. All the participants are volunteers, and they are always accompanied by schoolteachers.

The main activities and programmes of the camp are mapping and documenting Jewish cemeteries; searching for former Jewish-related sites in the village where the cemeteries are located; exploring the history of former Jewish buildings and documenting their current condition with photos and videos; researching the history of former Jewish communities based on the available documents; conducting interviews with the elderly residents of the settlement; and finally, contacting the municipality after the camp is over, so that they can continue caring for the cemetery.

Between 2010 and 2016, the group launched one website every year that was exclusively dedicated to that year's summer camp, documenting every aspect of the Jewish cemetery clean-up. During the same period, the group also filled reports about their initiatives, which were then published online.

The project's main sponsors are MAZSÖK, the Hungarian Jewish Heritage Public Foundation, and MAZSIHISZ (Federation of Hungarian Jewish Communities).

Contact: [javne@lauder.hu](mailto:javne@lauder.hu)  
Website: [www.lauder.hu](http://www.lauder.hu)

### *Csabrendek Jewish Cemetery*

Photo courtesy of Szonja Merényi





*ESJF representative  
Alexander Bessarab conducts  
a drone demonstration.*





## Multinational: *ESJF Educational Programmes*

In 2019-2020 the ESJF European Jewish Cemetery Initiative, within the framework of its first EU-funded pilot project “Protecting the Jewish cemeteries of Europe: Continuation of the mapping process, stakeholders’ involvement and awareness raising” organised a series of educational programmes for teachers and students to raise awareness and understanding of Jewish cemeteries in their respective countries. The seminars were conducted in five countries.

In addition to seminars, ESJF carried out a series of training sessions for university students of engineering and architecture, aimed at introducing the use of UAV (drone) technology with a special focus on heritage preservation. By combining lectures on Jewish heritage, data processing, and the application of drones in the field, this programme equipped students with the background knowledge necessary for conducting fieldwork.

Throughout the pilot project, five teacher training seminars engaged 114 teachers, 20 secondary school seminars engaged 711 students, and three higher education training events engaged 85 university students. In addition, approximately 100 other participants attended online webinars.

The ESJF has since published special guides and handbooks for teachers, local historians, and engineers, and continues to run educational programming outside of the framework of the EU-funded project.

*Project Website:* [www.esjf-surveys.org](http://www.esjf-surveys.org)

*Link to ESJF publications:* [www.esjf-surveys.org/publications-and-reports](http://www.esjf-surveys.org/publications-and-reports)

# JEWISH COMMUNITY

## Slovakia: Žilina Jewish Community

Before WWII, approximately 135,000 Jews lived in Slovakia, with around 800 Jewish cemeteries. Today, the Jewish religious community in Slovakia has only around 2,000 members, yet the cemeteries remain.

Given their reduced community and lack of funds, the national Jewish community has neither the logistical nor the financial means to take care of all the cemeteries. In the past, the community invested 100,000 EUR each year from their own funds to take care of around 150 cemeteries. Today, they can only spend half of this, which is not enough to take care of all the cemeteries in the country.

The Jewish Community of Žilina, with its approximately 50 members, is the only active community in the region. The community works on registering 29 cemeteries in the region with the help of cities, municipalities, civic associations, and volunteers. The Community actively engages with these entities by supervising the restoration works.

Every year the community manages to increase the number of restored cemeteries thanks to donations from abroad. Their efforts serve as an example for other entities to think about the maintenance and repair of the Jewish cemeteries within their own scope.

*Coordinator:* **Pavel Frankl**

*Contact:* [zilina@kehilazilina.sk](mailto:zilina@kehilazilina.sk)

*Website:* [www.kehilazilina.sk/en](http://www.kehilazilina.sk/en)

### *Kysucké Nové Mesto Jewish Cemetery*

Photo courtesy of Pavel Frankl





# Hungary:

## MAZSÖK

In 2017, MAZSÖK (Hungarian Jewish Heritage Public Foundation) was granted around 2.7 million EUR by the Hungarian government to restore and maintain Jewish cemeteries in the Hungarian countryside.

With these funds, MAZSÖK launched a reconstruction programme through two public calls between 2018 and 2020, in which the municipalities could present project proposals to restore their local Jewish cemeteries. A maximum of 55,000 EUR could be requested for restoration work for each cemetery, and the local government had to commit to maintaining the cemetery for the next ten years.

Much of the funding is allocated for fencing the cemeteries as well as installing a Lapidaris plaque—a QR-like technology next to the entrance of each restored cemetery, which visitors can scan with their smartphones to download information.

Around 200 municipalities have participated in the two public calls issued by the Foundation, 89 of which were allocated funding.

*Project coordinator:* **Gyorgy Szabó**

*Website:* [www.mazsok.hu](http://www.mazsok.hu)

*Contact:* [mazsok@mazsok.hu](mailto:mazsok@mazsok.hu)



*Csenger Jewish Cemetery*

## Croatia: *Jewish Community Rijeka*

For years, the Jewish community of Rijeka in northwestern Croatia has been actively working on the preservation, documentation, and cultural promotion of its Jewish cemetery, in collaboration with local and national institutions as well as foreign Jewish organisations.

In 2020, the ceremonial hall of the local Jewish cemetery was renovated and partially reconstructed, thanks to a 60,000 EUR fund co-financed by the city's municipality, Primorje-Gorski Kotar County, and supervised by the local heritage authority. In Autumn 2020, the Jewish community organised an exhibition called "Tahara" dedicated to the restoration of the ceremonial hall and the history of the Jewish cemetery.

In 2018, as part of a privately funded research trip to Jewish cemeteries in northeastern Italy's Friuli-Venezia Giulia region and Croatia, professionals from the Austrian Jewish Museum in Eisenstadt visited the city's Jewish cemetery, documenting 71 tombstones out of the 1,338 total burials at the cemetery. The results and pictures of the research were later published on the Museum's blog.

A few years back, the Rijeka Jewish community launched a website entirely dedicated to the Jewish cemetery. The website contains a map of the cemetery, its history, pictures, and an updated database of its burials.

Website: [www.jc-rijeka.eu](http://www.jc-rijeka.eu)

Contact: [zidovskaopcina.rijeka@gmail.com](mailto:zidovskaopcina.rijeka@gmail.com)

Photo: Fred Demark



# MULTINATIONAL INITIATIVES



## In Search of the Beauty of Jewish Cemeteries

The cities of Biąta, Poland and Osoblaha, Czech Republic implemented a project called “In Search of the Beauty of Jewish Cemeteries”, co-financed by the Micro-Project Fund of the Pradziad Euroregion under the cross-border European Regional Development Fund. The two villages lie just 19 km away from each other.

The joint project sought to develop tourism in the Polish-Czech border area by sharing and preserving elements of their common cultural heritage; namely, Jewish cemeteries. Completed in 2019, the project included the renovation of select tombstones at the Jewish cemetery in Osoblaha and the renovation of the wall surrounding the cemetery. In Biąta, a new, 120-metre cobblestone walkway leading to the cemetery’s entrance was built, along with benches, handrails, bicycle racks, new information panels, and other infrastructure, while other parts of the cemetery were also cleared of vegetation.

In addition, to foster cross-border cultural tourism, a tourist trail between the two cemeteries was charted, as well as a signposted tourist route leading the way to both cemeteries. Finally, the project also included the publication of promotional materials and the organisation of events.

**Contacts: [fodz@fodz.pl](mailto:fodz@fodz.pl) and [sekretariat@biala.gmina.pl](mailto:sekretariat@biala.gmina.pl)**

*More information (English):*

[jewish-heritage-europe.eu/2019/08/04/cz-pl-vandals-target-osoblaha-cemetery/](https://jewish-heritage-europe.eu/2019/08/04/cz-pl-vandals-target-osoblaha-cemetery/)

*More information (Polish):*

[biala.gmina.pl/5277/1549/zakonczenie-projektu-w-poszukiwaniu-piekna-zydowskich-cmentarzy.html](https://biala.gmina.pl/5277/1549/zakonczenie-projektu-w-poszukiwaniu-piekna-zydowskich-cmentarzy.html)

Photo courtesy  
of Biąta Municipality



## Parallel Traces Project

Initiated by the European Association for the Preservation and Promotion of Jewish Culture and Heritage (AEPJ), Parallel Traces is a pan-European project that offers a renewed look at the significance of Jewish heritage. Co-funded by the Creative Europe and Interreg Danube Transnational Programme of the European Union respectively, the project's main activity is focused on three main threads: development of an app; organisation of a pan-European contest to select a series of artworks about Jewish heritage; and hosting local exhibitions of the selected works of the contest.

The project involves six European cities including Wrocław, Poland and Tbilisi, Georgia. For these cities, a smartphone app was created containing information on Jewish heritage sites including local Jewish cemeteries, in order to raise awareness about lesser-known places.

Jewish cemeteries in both cities were also at the centre of the pan-European artworks contest. By unearthing the traces of Jewish cultural heritage in urban architecture in Europe, Parallel Traces offers an original and rigorous perspective on the past, present, and future of European Jewish history, encouraging mutual understanding and respect amongst different cultures and modes of artistic expression.

Website: [www.paralleltraces.eu](http://www.paralleltraces.eu)

Contact: [comms@paralleltraces.eu](mailto:comms@paralleltraces.eu)



Wrocław Jewish Cemetery in Poland  
Photo: Jakub Mozejko



## Rediscover - Interreg

“Rediscover, expose and exploit the concealed Jewish heritage of the Danube Region” is an EU-funded, trans-border tourism and educational project that includes nine mid-sized cities in eight countries: Hungary, Romania, Slovenia, Serbia, Croatia, Germany, Montenegro, and Bosnia-Herzegovina. The more than 1.8 million EUR project is being implemented through partnerships between local governments, NGOs, and Jewish communities in the EU Danube Region.

The main objective of the project is to explore and revive the hidden intellectual heritage and locally available Jewish cultural heritage of project partner cities, all of which share Jewish history and cultural interests.

In this context, Jewish cemeteries in Szeged, Hungary and Osijek, Croatia have been at the centre of various development plans aimed at fostering knowledge among the general public. In Szeged, a smartphone app was launched in 2020 to provide a virtual map of the cemetery to visitors. In Osijek, efforts have been made to restore and conserve the Upper Town Jewish cemetery. In both cities, there will be thematic Jewish cemetery tours presenting the differences and similarities between partner cities.

Website: [www.interreg-danube.eu/approved-projects/rediscover](http://www.interreg-danube.eu/approved-projects/rediscover)

Contact for Szeged: [rediscover@szeged.eu](mailto:rediscover@szeged.eu)

Contact for Osijek: [vesna.Brezovac@osijek.hr](mailto:vesna.Brezovac@osijek.hr)

### Szeged Jewish Cemetery

Photo courtesy:  
Rediscover - Szeged





# DIGITAL PROJECTS

## Ukraine: “Heritage Preservation is a Shared Responsibility”

This webinar was held in cooperation between the ESJF European Jewish Cemeteries Initiative and the ISF Emerging Europe Foundation on May 3-4, 2020 and was open to participants throughout Ukraine. The aim was to teach and raise awareness about Jewish heritage with a specific focus on cemeteries.

At the conclusion of the webinar, the participants were invited to enter a contest for small-scale heritage preservation projects. The winners of the contest received microgrants of up to 3,000 hryvnia (around 90 EUR), allocated by the Foreign Office of the Federal Republic of Germany to implement their projects.

The winning projects showcased the Jewish cemeteries in Ukraine in different creative ways—for example, through online meetings with students, online exhibitions and databases, academic lectures, historical videos, and even a printed calendar. Each project had a specific aim. Some were focused on raising awareness about Jewish culture and history among school students, while others were focused on the artistic side of Jewish cemeteries, analyzing, describing, and exhibiting pictures of various types of tombstones.

One winning project by Anatoliy Kerzhner, z”l, and Eugene Shnaider was a virtual exhibit of tombstones. Another project by teachers Andrii Koshelnyk and Maxym Demchenko was designed to help students engage with their local Jewish cemeteries, and was later incorporated into the educational programming at the Artek.UA summer camp.

*Virtual exhibit by Anatoliy Kerzhner and Eugene Shnaider:*  
[myshtetl.org/cemeterys/cemeterys\\_bird.html](https://myshtetl.org/cemeterys/cemeterys_bird.html)  
 Contact: [info@esjf-cemeteries.org](mailto:info@esjf-cemeteries.org)

*Webinar participants Eugene Shneyder (left) and Anatoliy Kerzhner, z”l, whose virtual exhibit was among the contest winners.*

Photo: Dmitro Polyuhovich



## Poland:

### *Tarnów Jewish Cemetery Restoration*

In 2019, the historic Jewish cemetery in Tarnów in southern Poland was rededicated and reopened after a two-year, full scale renovation. The NGO Friends of Jewish Heritage in Poland described the roughly 700,000 EUR restoration project as “the largest cooperative public-private single Jewish cemetery restoration effort conducted in Poland.” The funding came from the EU and private donors, as well as from state, regional, and local authorities.

The restoration work (carried out under the supervision of the Chief Rabbinate of Poland) included rebuilding the walls of the cemetery, installing sidewalks, restoring over 100 tombstones and a Holocaust monument, and converting the former Bet Taharah (funeral preparation room) into a mini-museum illustrating Jewish funeral customs. More than 5,000 tombstones were also indexed online to help descendants find their ancestors’ tombs in the cemetery.

A Polish and English-language guide to the cemetery is available as a free smartphone and tablet app for both IOS and Android devices, as well as a cemetery guidebook written by project coordinator Adam Bartosz.

*Project coordinators:* **Adam Bartosz**  
*Website:* [www.jewishtarnow.blogspot.com](http://www.jewishtarnow.blogspot.com)  
*Email:* [jewish.tarnow@gmail.com](mailto:jewish.tarnow@gmail.com)

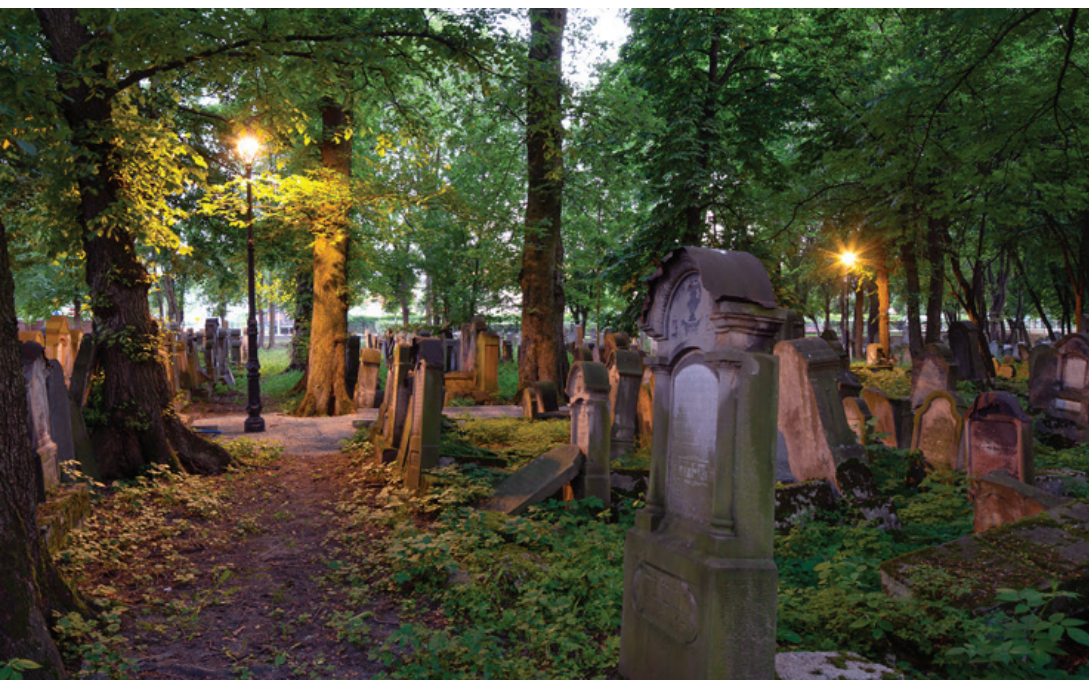


Photo courtesy: Adam Bartosz



## Multinational: *ESJF European Jewish Cemeteries Initiative Cemetery Database*

Within the framework of ESJF European Jewish Cemetery Initiative’s European Union-funded pilot project, “Protecting the Jewish Cemeteries of Europe”, ESJF carried out ground and drone surveys of more than 3,000 Jewish cemeteries across nine project countries (Croatia, Georgia, Greece, Hungary, Lithuania, Moldova, Poland, Slovakia, and Ukraine), the results of which have been compiled in an extensive Jewish cemetery database.

This database, which is open-access and can be found on the ESJF project website, contains detailed coordinates of each surveyed site, as well as information gathered by the surveyors on their condition and preservation status. Each entry in the database is accompanied by photographs taken by the surveyors, as well as a detailed historical overview of the cemetery and the Jewish community which it served.

The database was initially conceived and launched as part of ESJF’s first pilot project grant period. The redesign of the project website facilitated by the second grant period has allowed for significant improvements to be made to the database, including the addition of 3D models of cemeteries.

Website: [www.esjf-surveys.org/surveys-map](http://www.esjf-surveys.org/surveys-map)

Email: [info@esjf-cemeteries.org](mailto:info@esjf-cemeteries.org)

*Dampalo Jewish Cemetery in Tbilisi, Georgia is among the 3,000+ surveyed sites available in the ESJF database.*









# Voices from the Community





BEST PRACTICES  
NOMINATED  
BY ESJF COUNTRY  
COORDINATORS



## POLAND

*Text by Poland country coordinator  
Ewa Arendarczyk*

### **Anna Wencel**, *Galicia region*

Anna Wencel works at the Galicia Jewish Museum as an educator. She has created an exhibition about Jewish cemeteries based on photographs taken in the former Galicia region of Poland. The photos featured in the exhibition are taken by Jason Francisco, a well-known American photographer.

The idea for the exhibition came shortly after Anna started working at the Museum in 2008. A few years later, she was finally ready to compile the materials, select the photographs, and create the content of the exhibition. The conceptual work involved a bit more time, and it took Anna a year to create that exhibition, which is her personal project.

In the photographs from the exhibition, we can find tombstone symbols and learn much more about the languages in which epitaphs on tombstones are written. In Galicia, in addition to Hebrew it is also possible to find tombstones inscribed in German or Polish.

It is a challenge to reprint the exhibition, which after many years of being used by many schools and institutions is already a bit damaged. Anna already has ideas for small changes and corrections.

It is a very important project, which brings knowledge of Jewish cemeteries and burial customs to audiences in different cities and of different ages. It helps to expand knowledge and inspire interest in a culture that was present in many places in Poland for almost a thousand years.

Photo: Wojciech Wojtkielewicz



**Dariusz Popiela, Podhale**

Dariusz Popiela is a Polish athlete. He trains in slalom canoeing and takes part in the Olympics and other competitions. He is also a social activist and works to restore the memory of Jewish communities in Podhale, Poland.

Dariusz' aim is to preserve the memory of the Jewish inhabitants of Podhale. As an adult, he found out that there were Jews living in his village prior to World War II and decided to find out more about them. This was the beginning of the "People - Not Numbers" project, thanks to which he has now fenced and restored the memory of cemeteries in Krościenko, Grybów, and Czarny Dunajec. Currently, he is working to save the last synagogue in Podhale, which is located in Czarny Dunajec.

Together with a group of volunteers, he has cleaned and fenced the three cemeteries, restored the tombstones, and erected monuments commemorating those murdered in the Holocaust.

As he says, he is very happy that the people who help with his work at the cemeteries continue to take care of them later. They mow the grass, light candles, and repair damaged sections of the fences. He is very happy that he has created a unique community that also wants to remember the Jewish inhabitants.

A major challenge he encounters is funding these activities. Thanks to public fundraising on social networking sites, he managed to raise enough money to renovate and restore the tombstones. He also covers some of the activities from his own pocket and tries to involve local authorities.

Thanks to Dariusz' work, people of different ages have an opportunity to meet and work on an important project. The project also shows young people that it is important to remember the past and the Jewish heritage in their region.





**Adam Bartosz, Tarnów**

Adam Bartosz, now retired, is the longtime director of the Museum in Tarnów and caretaker of the local Jewish cemetery, one of the oldest sites of its kind in Poland. On the area covering three hectares there are about three thousand tombstones of varying condition. Adam's goal is to take care of this unique place and try to keep it in good condition for as long as possible. Thanks to his actions, some tombstones have been renovated. Additionally, thanks to the Antyschematy Project with whom he works, several hundred tombstones have been inventoried and the funeral chapel has been restored.

Coordinating so many activities is a challenge for Adam, but he manages it comendably. Recently, the Rabbinical Commission for Cemeteries agreed to transfer the bones of two girls, Salomea Korzennik and Rachela Pachner, from a mass grave in Kołaczyce to the Jewish Cemetery in Tarnów. The burial took place in March 2021 thanks to the efforts of Inga Marczyńska, Dariusz Popiela, and Adam Bartosz.

Adam's actions are very important in preserving the memory of Tarnów's Jews, but also for the long term preservation of the Jewish cemetery and Jewish heritage there. After his retirement, he continues to devote himself to many activities and initiatives.



# UKRAINE

*Text by Ukraine country coordinator  
Andrii Koshelnyk*



## **Tetiana Fedoriv, Zbarazh**

Historian Tetiana Fedoriv became interested in studying the history of her hometown of Zbarazh a few years ago when she visited the local Jewish cemetery for the first time. Through the efforts of local authorities, the cemetery was cleaned and made available for research. Tetiana has now been researching this cemetery for more than seven years.

The epitaphs of the cemetery are one of the tools Tetiana uses to learn more about the Jewish community of Zbarazh. To work with them, Tetiana had to learn Hebrew, which was not easy as there was no one in Zbarazh to teach her. After learning Hebrew, Tetiana was able to study the epitaphs on the tombstones and collect a number of facts about individuals who were once an integral part of the city.

Using this information, Tetiana created an electronic archive of 175 individual matzevot. It was important for her to translate the epitaphs into Ukrainian, because the short texts are more likely to have an impact when someone reads them in their native language.

After publishing two articles, Tetiana continues her research and from time to time finds new matzevot. In the future she plans to create a map of the cemetery to make it easier to navigate.

“I don’t think I’m doing something extraordinary, maybe a little unusual,” says Tetiana. She encourages others going down this path to not be afraid, to be convinced that they are doing good work, and through small steps, accomplish great things.



**Anna Olenenko and Victor Filas, Zaporizhzhia**

Historians Olenenko Anna and Filas Victor live in Zaporizhzhia, a large industrial city in southern Ukraine. They found a Jewish cemetery in the suburbs of the city that was totally destroyed after World War II. They started their project in 2020 with the mission of reexploring the past and enacting historical justice.

The main goal of the project is to save the Jewish cemetery in Zaporizhzhia by having it designated an official cultural site. This will help illustrate the multicultural history of southern Ukraine and Zaporizhzhia. This particular place can be incorporated into the tourist routes that explore urban history from the Russian Empire until today. This is important because it is the only example of a Jewish cemetery that has survived in the city.

The biggest challenge facing the project has been indifference, especially from those who live near the cemetery and dispose of garbage among the tombstones. Many citizens do not consider the history of Jews or other national groups of Zaporizhzhia important. This is due in part to negative stereotypes that still persist today.

In order to combat this, Victor and Anna cleaned the site with the help of locals. 23 tombstones were covered with a layer of sand and had to be completely excavated and reinstalled on the surface. Victor partially restored some broken tombstones.

This is still a work in progress, so Anna and Victor are eager for the cemetery to receive the status of a historical and cultural monument. Fortunately, it will be preserved and included in an official map of Zaporizhzhia.

“Everything is possible,” says Anna to those who are planning to work in Jewish local heritage. “Don’t get discouraged. As historians we need to popularise Jewish cemeteries and create a tolerant environment around us”.





**Marla & Jay Osborn, Rohatyn**

American citizens Marla and Jay Osborn are engaged in the preservation of Jewish heritage in western Ukraine. Their project grew out of interest in the history of Marla's family: her paternal grandmother was born in Rohatyn in Ivano-Frankivsk oblast, and Marla's interest in genealogy brought the couple to Rohatyn in 2008. During a second visit in 2011, Rohatyn's Jewish heritage compelled them to stay.

Rohatyn Jewish Heritage (RJH) began as a headstone recovery project with the mission of bringing all the headstone fragments, which can be found around the city, to a safe place. The main mission is to involve local people with Jewish heritage, highlight links between Rohatyn's history and people in the town and abroad. A key part of the project is bringing foreign Jews together with the local community of Rohatyn in order to recognize the shared heritage of these sites and share responsibility for them.

Some of RJH's accomplishments include an annual clean-up of all Jewish graves in Rohatyn; the recovery and return of more than six hundred Jewish headstones to the old cemetery; as well as organizing and financing professional surveys to determine the physical boundaries of wartime mass graves.

Thanks to these activities, local people are able to learn about the multicultural history of their community and can understand the context of that space. The project gives a much fuller picture of the history of Rohatyn and allows people to connect dots if they go to another city where signs of a multicultural past are more visible.





## LITHUANIA

**Text by Lithuania country coordinator  
Gintarė Liorančaitė**

**Meilė Platūkienė, Alytus**

Meilė is an ethics teacher from Alytus who has been working on Jewish projects for more than ten years. After Meilė submitted an application to the Alytus Town Hall requesting funds to take care of the cemetery, the project was financed by the city municipality. Students from two different schools took part in the project, cleaning the cemetery, restoring letters on the epitaphs, and uncovering gravestones. Further work was done by Meilė and the organisation Maceva. Afterwards, a book about the history of the cemetery and its remaining gravestones was published, titled *Not Recognized. Not Forgotten*.

This project was interesting for Meilė for tolerance reasons. For many years, it was said that the cemetery needed to be cleaned but no one took on the responsibility. The municipality's financial backing incentivised the project, providing the necessary encouragement to start work. No one expected for the city to provide meals for kids. It was a very warm gesture.

Meilė expects to have better financing to republish the book. One more challenge was that the cemetery was abandoned, and no one expected to find more than 50 gravestones. In fact, they found around 200.

There was significant support for the project from the Kaunas Jewish Community, who always expressed their interest in what was happening in Alytus. The book reached the United States and also attracted volunteers from America with roots in the town.

In the future, Meilė would like to clean up the other part of the cemetery, create a film for a Centropa contest, and carry out educational activities regarding the local Jewish community in the renewed synagogue of Alytus.





**Jolita Stačiokaitė, Jieznas**

English teacher Jolita Stačiokaitė became interested in Lithuanian Jewish history and cemeteries in 2014 after joining a programme offered by Centropa. In February 2017, as the Lithuanian Independence centenary celebration was approaching, the State Awareness Centre invited everyone to take part in a challenge to do a good deed every month for one year.

The eighth grade students of the Jieznas Gymnasium took on the challenge. The task for May was to do something good for the community: organise a clean-up event, plant a tree, or do something else to improve the environment in which they were living. Jolita asked a local municipal representative, Mr. Algis Bartusevičius, for assistance and he offered the students to help clean up the former Jewish cemetery site.

The locals are familiar with a mass murder site next to the Jieznas lake, but not many people—young or old—knew of the Jewish cemetery that existed in Jieznas for a hundreds of years. As Mr. Bartusevičius explained, when the Jieznas district was established in 1950, the Jewish cemetery was simply destroyed because the space was deemed useful for other activities.

Mr. Bartusevičius shared his plans that after the site will be cleaned, a commemorative stone will be placed with some words paying respect to the lost shtetl of Jieznas. The students not only worked on cleaning the area but also became interested in the history of the cemetery, who was buried there, the epitaphs, and why Jewish gravestones look different from those of other religious groups. In the future, more restoration work is planned as well as registration of the remaining gravestones and translation of the epitaphs.

Today, Jolita includes the history of the Jewish cemetery in her lessons. During commemorations she continues to take her students there and talks with them about its history.





**Vilija Vaičiulienė, Telšiai**

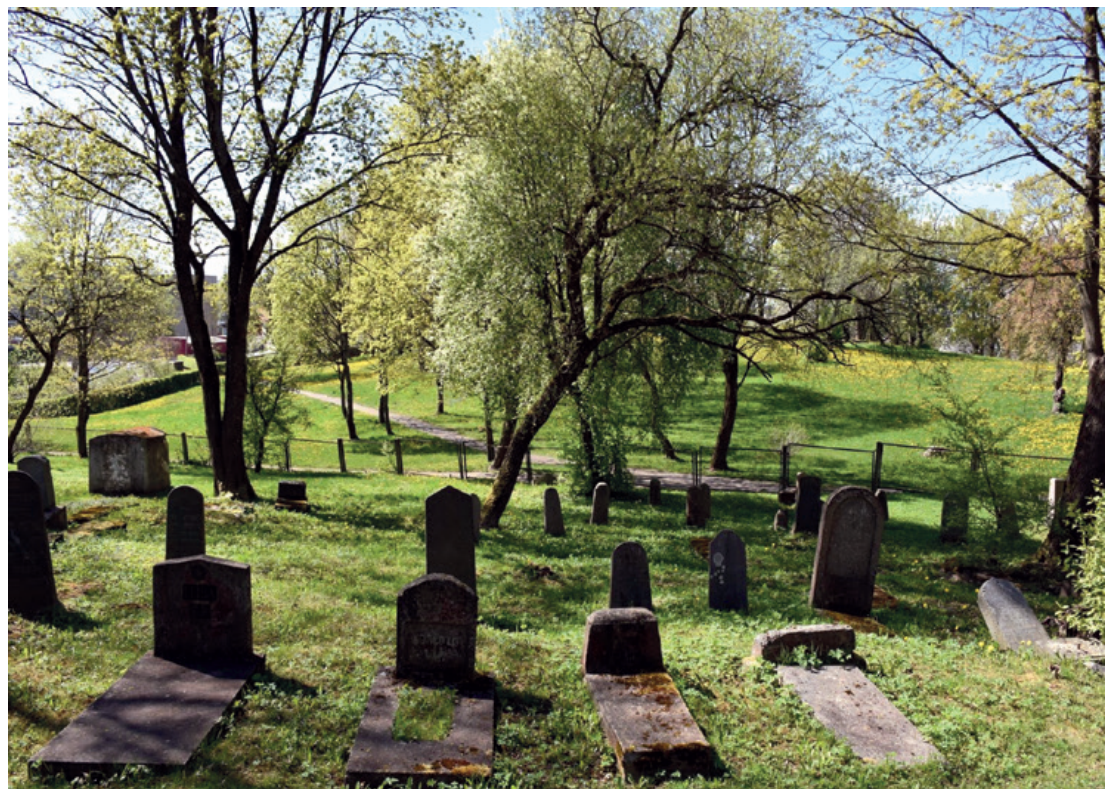
Vilija Vaičiulienė is a history teacher from the town of Telšiai. Three years ago she was invited to research and clean up a local Jewish cemetery and brought her students along to take part.

During the project, 95 gravestones and their fragments were identified, with the oldest remaining and identified burial dating to 1842 and the latest to 1965. The epitaphs were translated from Hebrew, an information stand was placed nearby, and a publication was printed showcasing photographs of the gravestones alongside a short history of the Jewish cemetery. Vilija remembers an epitaph which read: "Let his soul be bound up in the bond of eternal life".

In 1995, the Telšiai Old Jewish cemetery was included in the Lithuanian Registry of Cultural Heritage Objects and is therefore protected by the state. The project was financed by the Lithuanian Culture Council and the Klaipėda Regional State Archive.

The students not only cleaned the cemetery but also researched who was buried there. Among the most famous were Volf Lipkin (also known as Zeev Volf Lipkin), an expert of the Talmud; Shlomo Zalman Abel, one of the founders of the Telšiai yeshiva; and many more. The students also learned about rabbis, epitaphs, and Jewish burial traditions.

This project was presented to the local community and garnered media attention: an article was published and photos were taken by the local press. However, there are still many cemeteries that require further research.



# HUNGARY

## *Text by Centropa project coordinator Sára Szilágyi*



**Péter Somos**, *Nyíregyháza*

Péter Somos' family members rest in the Jewish cemetery in Nyíregyháza, a large site with 2,200 gravestones. He became the caretaker of this cemetery in 2006 after spending 23 years in Jerusalem. He was the cemetery's first caretaker who spoke Hebrew, which was very useful for reading epitaphs and dates. Peter's mission was to preserve the memory of the deceased, which he considers to be his personal duty. His work is critical because only 10 percent of the graves are visited and taken care of by family members. The challenge is that restoration work is continuous and requires financing.

Peter was able to recruit public workers to his cause by establishing a good relationship with the city leadership. He didn't accept volunteers because of the dangers of this work. In the initial years, the cemetery's caretakers cut 400 trees (including roots) and ivies that had damaged the gravestones. Thanks to this initiative, many graves became visible and approachable, enabling people to discover their relatives' graves. For Peter, this result was well worth the effort.

When student groups and NGOs came to visit the cemetery, Peter talked about its history, showed them the memorials of WWI and the Holocaust (located in the cemetery), as well as some of the graves.

In 2011, Peter became Vice President also of the Jewish Community and coordinated the registration of graves to form a database. In the future, Peter believes it is important to research and register the gravestones of all regional cemeteries in a digital photo database. His other idea is to make virtual cemetery visits possible, since there are family members living abroad who sometimes cannot travel to Hungary. By utilizing this technology, relatives could virtually pay their respects and even say Kaddish.



Photo: Csaba Csutkai

**Károlyné Varga, Tapolca**

For the 50th anniversary celebration of the town of Tapolca in Hungary, Károlyné Varga, the leader of the Tapolca Citizens Association's Women Club, wanted to register the tombstones of the local cemeteries as a gift. While putting her idea into action, she was stunned to discover the importance of the Jewish people in Tapolca's history and astonished by the neglect of their cemetery.

Under Károlyné's leadership, the club registered 646 graves in the cemetery and identified all but 130. They wanted to restore a further 142 gravestones that had been demolished and applied for support from the Pantheon Foundation with help from the municipality. With funding secured, they were able to receive permission from the Jewish cemetery organisation MAZSIHISZ to carry out the work.

But before this, the club had to clean the whole cemetery, which was done entirely by volunteers: women between 60 and 90 years old, citizens of Tapolca who were curious to visit the Jewish cemetery for the first time. It was a taxing job, on a large territory (100 by 50 metres), particularly with the COVID pandemic and the summer heat, removing trees and thorny bushes.

Károlyné had an idea for the cemetery to be part of a "memory park," which could serve as a cultural space bringing residents closer to the history of the Jewish people who played an important role in the town's development. She and her museologist colleague organised guided tours for local high school students and other groups to raise awareness of the cemetery and the contributions of the town's Jewish population that was present until 1944.

Károlyné finds it particularly important to speak and raise awareness about the Holocaust so that it can never happen again. While doing the volunteer work, the volunteers felt touched seeing names of those who perished in Auschwitz.





# SLOVAKIA

**Text by Slovakia country coordinator  
Jana Odrobiňáková**



## **Ludovít Chládek, Zlaté Moravce**

Ludovít Chládek is chairman of the nonprofit Shalom Zlaté Moravce, which works to preserve the Jewish cultural heritage of Zlaté Moravce, a town of 12,000 in southwestern Slovakia whose Jewish cemetery was established in 1844.

When Ludovít and his friend Juraj Šabík first saw the poor condition of the local Jewish cemetery, they felt compelled to provide a more dignified resting place for their fellow citizens of Jewish descent. After revitalizing the cemetery area, repairing part of the original stone fence and erecting more than 170 collapsed and broken monuments, they finally reconstructed the Ciduk Hadin (House of Mourning), which houses a museum with an exhibition on the life, achievements, and tragic fates of Jewish families who lived in Zlaté Moravce and the villages of the district since the early 19th century.

There were very few volunteers who were willing to help Ludovít with the time-consuming and physically demanding work. A few local high school students got involved by helping to remove the fallen leaves in the autumn. Scouts volunteered to help clean the monuments from dust and moss, and one college student helped restore texts. All those involved, including Ludovít, did the work without any remuneration.

All planned works were carried out in the years 2014-2018. However, in 2020, part of the original stone fencing collapsed. This is now a serious problem that Ludovít must solve as soon as possible.

Ludovít is convinced that a similar project can be successfully implemented only with the help of dedicated volunteers. It is unimportant how many individuals volunteer; what matters is their perseverance.



**Monika Koncošová, Tisovec**

Monika Koncošová teaches regional history at the Secondary Professional School in Tisovec in central Slovakia. Her aim is to lead students to acquire knowledge on the history of the Gemer-Malohont region and encourage them to protect important historical monuments.

Monika has been dealing with regional Jewish cemeteries for many years, especially in the town of Tisovec. The cemetery is located on the Tisovec-Muráň route and was probably established at the turn of the 20th century when the Jewish community grew significantly. After the Second World War, the cemetery began to decay. Today, it includes 35 monuments, only 11 of which are undamaged.

Monika's students learn about the cemetery in the classroom and visit it often. During the visits to the Jewish cemetery, students gradually get to know its surrounding nature, get acquainted with the signs and character of the Jewish cemetery, the inscriptions on the tombstones, and the arrangement of graves. They also study the history of the period and archival materials concerning the lives of members of the Jewish community in the Gemer-Malohont region.

The Secondary Professional School is also a member of the local branch of Matica Slovenská, a scientific and cultural organisation. Together in 2020, they prepared a new project called "What Cemeteries Talk About" to acquaint the public with the Jewish community and cemetery in Tisovec. The project compares the Jewish and Christian religions through visits to different cemeteries in the city. There had been a great interest in the planned visits to the cemeteries from the public, but the pandemic prevented them from implementing this part of the project in 2020. It has therefore been postponed until 2021 and Monika plans to shoot a video report about the cemetery with her students when the situation permits.



# CROATIA

**Text by Croatia country coordinators Tomislav Šimić and Daniela Sterjova**



**Darko Fischer, Đakovo**

Darko Fischer is an electrotechnical engineer, Holocaust survivor, and Jewish activist originally from Osijek. From a young age, he was active in the Osijek Jewish community where he was also president. During his life he was actively involved in many Jewish projects, including preserving Jewish cemeteries in Croatia.

As an active member of the Jewish community, Darko considered it his responsibility to take care of Jewish cemeteries as well as Jewish heritage in general. During his life, he participated in many commemorations in Jewish cemeteries and helped maintain them in eastern Croatia. The biggest challenge he faced was securing funding for preservation. Since most of the Jewish community perished during the Holocaust, those buried in the cemeteries often do not have descendants to take care of their graves, which are falling into disrepair.

Most of Darko's work was done at the Đakovo cemetery, where tables were placed on each monument, creating a database of victims. The ceremonial house was also completely renovated and a monument was erected to commemorate victims of the Holocaust. Darko also contacted individuals who were interested in finding out the condition of Jewish cemeteries in Croatia. The city of Osijek supported these efforts by declaring the Jewish cemetery a cultural monument. However, given the number of Jewish cemeteries, Darko believes too little has been done so far and much remains to be accomplished.

Darko believes it is up to the younger generations to research the biographies of those buried and continue this vital work. He hopes that his work has prevented these important and large communities from being forgotten and believes that local Jewish cemeteries can be a very interesting subject for students and teachers. Their involvement would raise awareness of the once rich and influential Jewish community in Croatia and advocate for preserving its history.





**Biserka Zajec, Varaždin**

Biserka is an English and French teacher at the secondary vocational School of Economics in Varaždin. She has always been interested in Jewish heritage and the Holocaust, and together with her enthusiastic students she has been working on a Holocaust research project for two years. As part of the project, her class visited Jewish cemeteries on several occasions and filmed a video about it.

While Biserka and her students were conducting research, they realised that the Jewish community played an important role in the city of Varaždin; for instance, several prominent Jewish figures were instrumental in its development. The students hope to draw the attention of the public to the state of the Jewish cemetery in Varaždin, which is currently locked down and completely deserted. Although it is an important cultural heritage site, it has never been included in the city's itinerary of tourist routes.

In the last few years, local authorities have started showing an interest in preserving Jewish heritage sites. They organised a few commemorative events and official visits to the Jewish cemetery, and as the synagogue is going to be renovated, Biserka expects that more attention will be paid to preserving Jewish memory there.

While filming their video and conducting research, Biserka's students learned a lot— first about the existence of the Jewish community in their town, then about the distinguished Jews who once lived there. Most importantly, it raised their awareness of the importance of combating intolerance and anti-Semitism. Biserka hopes their efforts will influence others to act, as it is the only student video project on local Jewish cemeteries in Croatia.



# GEORGIA

*Text by Georgia Country Coordinator  
Teona Dalakishvili*



**Arianne Swieca, Tbilisi**

Arianne is a representative of the World Jewish Congress. She lives in Georgia and outside of her work, she is interested in learning about Jewish heritage in her country. After learning about 23 Georgian Jewish heritage sights, mostly cemeteries and synagogues, she decided to research those sights, document them, and interview local residents as a personal project.

Arianne's mission was based on the fact that, due to emigration, the number of Jewish community representatives is decreasing and there is nobody left to take care of the cemeteries and keep the history alive. One challenge of her research is that there are not many people who remember the sites and their history, so she tries to document what she can with audio recordings. This project is still in progress. The biggest impact so far is that the local residents also discovered that there are many places in Georgia connected to Jewish history.

Arianne did not involve any organisations; mostly she engaged locals in collecting the information, and for that reason her knowledge is very unique. She continues to work toward preserving the memory of Jewish communities in Georgia and hopes others will be inspired to do the same.





**Katty Chikviladze, Surami**

Katty is a member of the student group Hillel Georgia, although the project she implemented in Surami was her own personal initiative. The idea came from her experience interacting with other international Jewish communities. Due to the shrinking Jewish community in Georgia, she realised that there are fewer and fewer people left to care for Georgia's Jewish cemeteries.

Katty organised a visit to the Surami Jewish Cemetery together with a team of youth volunteers. There is no one responsible for maintaining the cemetery, so when they arrived, many of the headstones were overgrown with brush. Katty and her group not only cleaned the cemetery but took pictures and taught the young participants about the specifics of matzevot. In the evening, they organised a gathering to learn more about the symbols inscribed on them.

The biggest challenge for Katty is the lack of necessary resources to organise such a programme. Another problem is that there are not many locals who would like to get involved. The project continues with the support of the Israeli Embassy, and the hope is to recreate this initiative for other Jewish cemeteries in Georgia.









# ESJF and Centropa Education Projects



# STUDENT AND TEACHER PROJECT HIGHLIGHTS



## Process and results

Over the course of the 2020-2021 EU-funded project “Protecting the Jewish cemeteries of Europe: Continuation of the mapping process, stakeholders’ involvement and awareness raising (EAC/S10/2019)”, ESJF joined forces with NGOs Centropa and the Foundation for Jewish Heritage to raise awareness of Jewish cemeteries among teachers and students. Under the leadership of Centropa, the consortium organised seven interactive training seminars for 250 teachers in seven countries, in which experts gave lectures and guided tours of local Jewish cemeteries and led workshops on how to read epitaphs. As a result of these seminars, 92 lesson plans about Jewish cemeteries were submitted by more than 60 teachers in the seven target countries. The consortium also conducted a youth storytelling competition in each of the seven project countries, and despite COVID-19 restrictions and school closures, received 98 entries. Throughout these activities, the consortium gathered valuable insights that will help inform the implementation of other best practices.

Prior to this project, Jewish cemeteries had not been part of official school curricula in any of the countries where we conducted our teacher training seminars. Where Jewish cemeteries had been integrated into school curricula, it was typically within the framework of Holocaust education. One of the goals of the teacher training seminars was to illustrate that Jewish life not only existed but thrived for many generations prior to the Holocaust. In advocating for the protection and study of Jewish cemeteries, we emphasised their significance not only to Jewish communities, but as sites of shared material heritage.

When teachers were invited to create original lesson plans on the topic of Jewish cemeteries, most were interested in projects that reflected the Jewish heritage of their local communities, while others included a Holocaust component – the latter being already an established part of classroom teaching. Given the interest in these types of lesson plans, we feel that school curricula may benefit from greater integration of local Jewish history with cemeteries as one possible entry point, with the intention of generating interest in local Jewish history rather than restricting it to the context of the Holocaust. For guidance on how to implement such lesson plans, we recommend that teachers take advantage of our resource [Jewish Cemeteries in the Classroom: An ESJF Guide](#), available on the ESJF project website.

The following sections feature winning entries from our student project competitions, as well as highlights from outstanding teacher lesson plans that were selected by an international team of judges.

# Featured entries from the Youth Digital Storytelling Competition

For this international competition, students were encouraged to visit local cemeteries and conduct original research using a variety of primary and secondary sources.

If viewing this catalogue as a PDF, click on the titles to see the projects. To view all competition entries, visit [www.esif-surveys.org](http://www.esif-surveys.org).

## **Kyiv, Ukraine**

["Jewish Cemetery in Dnipro" \(Film\)](#)

By Nikita Kashchcaiev, Zhenya Fedorenko, Polina Vishnevetskaya, and Renat Grubuy  
School: EC 141 ORT  
Teacher: **Victoria Kadiuk**

## **Nyíregyháza, Hungary**

["Without a Trace" \(Film\)](#)

By Tamás Véghseő  
School: Katolikus Szent Imre Gimnázium  
Teacher: **Zsolt Zsigó**

## **Kaunas, Lithuania**

["Jewish Heritage to Kaunas Culture" \(Film\)](#)

By Rugilė Šeškutė and Ažuolas Merčaitis  
Schools: Kaunas Jonas Jablonskis Gymnasium and KTU Gymnasium  
Teacher: **Saulius Skučas**

## **Vinkovci, Croatia**

["Jewish Cemetery in Vinkovci" \(Brochure\)](#)

By Nina Brkić, Ivana Vulin, Rebeka Andrijanić, Sara Marčinko  
School: Bartol Kašić Elementary School & Ivan Mažuranić Elementary School  
Teachers: **Ana Volf & Ivana Spajić**

## **Tbilisi, Georgia**

["The Jewish History of Sachkhere" \(Film\)](#)

By Mariam Tedeshvili, Nutsa Marikashvili, Mariam Eradze and Tamar Khakhishvili  
School: Tbilisi School #10  
Teacher: **Lia Tsukhishvili**

## **Ivankiv, Ukraine**

["Present and History of the Jewish Community of Ivankiv" \(Website\)](#)

By Victoriia Tymoshenko  
School: Ivankiv Comprehensive School  
Teacher: **Galyna Dubynska**

## **Warsaw, Poland**

["The Jewish Cemetery in Otwock" \(Film\)](#)

By Amelia Bartnicka, Joanna Szerszeń, Paulina Łomża, Artur Bieńkowski, Julia Skiba, Marta Grunt, Bartłomiej Kołodziej, and Zuzanna Smolińska  
School: XXXV LO im. Bolesława Prusa w Warszawie  
Teacher: **Monika Anuszkiewicz**

## **Zvolen, Slovakia**

["Jewish Cemetery in Zvolen" \(Website\)](#)

By Marek Páleník  
School: ZŠ Hrnčiarska  
Teacher: **Veronika Páleníková**

## Call for lesson plans

The Centropa/ESJF call for lesson plans invited teachers to design a lesson for primary or secondary school students featuring a Jewish cemetery in their country of residence. Teachers were required to follow guidelines for format and structure; make use of reputable databases such as the ESJF survey website; and include important background information pertaining to goals, impact, and transferability of the lesson. Below are summaries of several outstanding teacher lesson plans. To view all lesson plans in full, visit [www.esjf-surveys.org](http://www.esjf-surveys.org).

**Inga Marczyńska of Poland** designed a lesson about forgotten cemeteries, focusing on the Jewish cemetery of Jasło and famous Jews from the community. Students visited the cemetery, found graves, and afterwards watched a presentation about the cemetery's boundaries from before, during, and after the war, comparing the cemetery in the contemporary urban space and the pre-Holocaust era.

**Nina Avramenko of Ukraine** sought to expand students' knowledge of Jewish culture through the study of cemeteries as monuments to Jewish heritage and as a facet of Ukrainian culture. During the lesson, students created an interactive map of Jewish cemeteries in the Chernihiv region, and also studied Jewish funerary traditions and epitaphs.

**Meilė Platukienė of Lithuania** designed a lesson plan about the old Jewish cemetery of Altyus. For this two-part lesson, students visited the cemetery and researched its history, tombstones, and burial traditions. The materials they collected were presented in class, followed by a comparative analysis of the materials and photographs.

**Beáta Várnainé Balogh of Hungary** taught a lesson about children who were born in Szombathely and died during the Holocaust. Students visited the cemetery and watched expert presentations about the children's graves and Jewish burial traditions. The students took photos, interviewed the experts, and made a presentation about their findings.

**Veronika Páleníková of Slovakia** invited her students to research and create a manual about proper conduct in a Jewish cemetery. Afterwards, they visited the Jewish cemetery in Zvolen and conducted field research on gravestone symbols, epitaphs, and more. Their findings were recorded in a table and studied in the context of other cemeteries and world religions.

**Tomislav Vuković of Croatia** introduced students to the Jewish history of Osijek, with a particular focus on sites of material heritage such as the local synagogue. He showed photographs of symbols on Jewish gravestones and asked students to analyse their meaning using the ESJF handbook. The lesson concluded with brief reports by students and a wrap-up discussion.

**Lia Tsukhishvili of Georgia** took her students to the local cemetery in Samgori, where they took photographs and discussed their findings in class. Next, the students were asked to make a collage of photographs and guess the meaning of tombstone symbols. After initial guesses, they re-interpreted the symbols using the ESJF classroom guide.



# CONCLUSION

# Lessons learned

The best practices presented in this catalogue reflect the diverse backgrounds of the individuals who spearheaded them, whether as volunteer initiatives or larger-scale projects under the auspices of an institution. Though varied in their approaches and countries of origin, we find that the most successful projects share the following characteristics:

- A **clearly defined mission**.
- **Formal partnerships** with stakeholders, sometimes reflecting public-private collaboration.
- **Engagement** of local people and youth, cultivating local agency and ownership.
- An **educational component** that highlights the Jewish dimension of local history while promoting diversity, tolerance, and intercultural dialogue.
- Strong **governmental support** and/or **recognition of cemeteries as national heritage sites**.
- An element of **memorialization** and **documentation/research**.

One of our goals in compiling these initiatives was to identify those with a high degree of **transferability**, meaning that they could be easily transferred to or recreated in other locations. Even when an initiative is tailored to the specific needs of a community or country, there are aspects that can be applied to other geographical contexts. For example, the **Rabbinical Commission Cemetery Guidelines** (page 81) were designed as a tool that can be applied universally even though they were written by a Polish institution. Below are a few qualities of best practices that are easily transferable:

- The use of **new and accessible technologies** (e.g. apps) to help disseminate information.
- The **promotion of cemetery tourism** both locally and internationally.
- **Guidance and training** on cemetery restoration and visitor conduct.
- A **fundraising element** to increase resourcing for cemetery maintenance.

One condition that may inhibit the transferability of fundraising efforts is the socio-economic situation of a particular community. Communities with less financial stability or without a culture of personal giving will be less apt to have the capacity to fundraise. In these cases, strong **government and/or municipal support** is especially critical. Fortunately, not all initiatives require significant funding in order to operate, with many short-term and small-scale operations running on a volunteer basis. In addition to the above points, we found that a number of projects connected the present to the past by **engaging descendants** of those buried in a cemetery, fostering dialogue between the families of former Jewish residents and the present-day community. While this element is not always transferable – it is not always possible, much less easy, to track down descendants – it speaks to the value of forging ties between people with differing points of connection to the same cemetery site.

Our hope for this catalogue is to inspire others to launch cemetery preservation projects of their own, either by using existing projects as a model or launching original initiatives. Although we were limited to our nine project countries within the pages of this catalogue, there are countless projects that were left out – so many that it would be impossible to list them all! We encourage activists from these and other countries to use this catalogue as a resource and tool, and we welcome any questions or comments about best practices we overlooked that deserve recognition at [info@esjf-cemeteries.org](mailto:info@esjf-cemeteries.org).

We thank you once again for helping us advocate for the protection of Jewish cemeteries in Europe and wish you the best of luck with your own preservation efforts.





# Acknowledgments

The *Catalogue of Best Practices for Jewish Cemetery Preservation* was completed thanks to the contribution of a number of activists, researchers and professionals who dedicated their time to ensure the highest quality and accuracy of the information presented within these pages.

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## About the consortium



The **ESJF European Jewish Cemeteries Initiative** works to protect and preserve Jewish cemetery sites across the European continent through mapping, surveying and fencing projects, as well as through building strong ties with local stakeholders including Jewish communities, local authorities, and youth. Visit [www.esjf-cemeteries.org](http://www.esjf-cemeteries.org) to learn more.



**Centropa** is a non-profit, Jewish historical institute dedicated to preserving 20th century Jewish family stories and photos from Central and Eastern Europe and the Balkans, and disseminating these stories and photos through films, books, and exhibitions. Visit [www.centropa.org](http://www.centropa.org) to learn more.



*Foundation for  
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