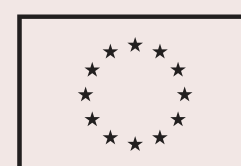


Difficult Heritage Remembrance Framework

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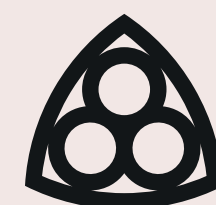
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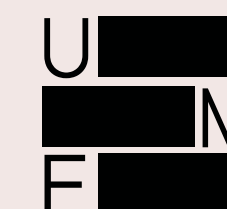


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Introduction

Why do we call Jewish heritage difficult?

Not all Jewish heritage is difficult by definition. Material heritage objects and sites can also be places of celebration of culture, places of learning and identity-building. In Poland, however, many sites related to 1000 years of Jewish history were desecrated, misused, destroyed during and after WWII. These damaged and neglected sites, along with the tragic legacy of the Holocaust, form a particular type of heritage that is often called “difficult heritage”. This difficult heritage consists of a broad diversity of sites, such as abandoned, destroyed or inappropriately repurposed architectural heritage (synagogues, bathhouses, schools, etc.), neglected or desecrated Jewish cemeteries, unmarked burial sites of victims of the Holocaust, as well as the material remains of the infrastructure of genocide.



What is DHRF?

DIFFICULT HERITAGE REMEMBRANCE FRAMEWORK was created as part of the “[NeDiPa: Negotiating Difficult Pasts](#)” project implemented in 2022-2024 in Poland and funded by the [Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values](#) programme of the European Union.

The project has been exploring and building on the experiences of three Jewish organizations active in Poland and beyond: the [Zapomniane Foundation](#), [FestivALT](#) and the [Urban Memory Foundation](#) and upon the initiatives of local communities, local activism, and research through a series of nearly thirty physical and virtual events organized in five categories. These are: commemorations, conferences, community building, public events, and online educational training. We included the most current approaches from memory studies, environmental protection, heritage preservation, and community organizing, involving a variety of stakeholders such as citizens (especially youth), non-governmental organizations, research centers, local authorities, law-makers, educators, architects, artists, and more.

DHRF is an **online resource** that enables easy access to knowledge (including crucial terms and concepts from the field of heritage & memory studies), consisting of a **toolkit and guidelines** addressed to various stakeholders, such as: memory activists, heritage professionals, local and national authorities & policy-makers, teachers and educators.



Photo Alicja Szulc

Why do we need DHRF?

Poland is now emerging out of this post-Holocaust landscape after many decades of various groups of memory activists and public institutions undertaking commemorative efforts to protect these sites. However, even now, these groups are confronted with a lack of tools and common standards for dealing with this heritage.

The Difficult Heritage Remembrance Framework derives from a Central and Eastern European context, but it can serve as an inspiration and provide a toolkit for other countries – in Europe and beyond – that are dealing with diverse types of difficult heritage.

The missing guidelines and standards often lead to conflict or the opening of social divides when commemoration initiatives and activities are introduced. This is mainly due to strong taboos surrounding the history, ownership and legacy of these places. At the same time, there are many dedicated local memory activists, devoting their time and resources to caring for these sites. This document is intended as a living resource that can support their efforts.



Photo Klaudyna Schubert

How does DHRF work?

Difficult Heritage Remembrance Framework is a living document that will be continuously developed after the project is completed as a resource open for co-creation and contributions from various stakeholders (the consortium intends to publish updated versions of the framework at least once every two years).

Difficult Heritage Toolbox is a growing resource of tools, ideas, case studies, methods and inspirations dedicated to dealing with the difficult heritage of WWII and the Holocaust that can also be adapted to other contexts, i.e. legacies of other genocides and violence.

Difficult Heritage Guidelines are a set of principles and recommendations that will be supplemented, consulted and updated also after the project ends.

The Jewish perspective on difficult heritage sites in Poland

The sheer volume of difficult Jewish heritage sites in Poland compared to the relatively small size of existing Jewish communities combined with the simultaneous lack of mainstream knowledge about Jewish memorial practices and traditions result in an urgent need for a frame of reference for a growing number of memory activists in Poland.

While the immediate neighbors of these sites are usually non-Jewish, there is a need for combining the local and the Jewish perspective in developing sustainable practices of care for these sites and their commemoration.

There are some basic principles resulting from Jewish religion and tradition, as well as Jewish religious law (the Halakha) that should be respected when dealing with a site related to Jewish history and/or history of the Holocaust. We list these principles below.



Photo Jason Francisco



1. Any site containing Jewish human remains should not be disturbed.

According to Jewish tradition and law, both the spiritual and the physical are sacred and the human body is sacred even after death. It is believed that the soul and body remain connected even after death, so if the bones are disturbed here on earth, the soul is also disturbed. It is said in Talmud: “It is forbidden to move the dead and their bones from the place where they rest.” (*Jerusalem Talmud*, Moed Katan 2:4).

In principle, exhumations are not allowed in Judaism except for very rare and specific cases. In practice this means that no digging, construction works, invasive archaeological research or even some type of maintenance work should be carried out in sites containing human remains.

In the case of Poland, any kind of activity in these sites that risk disturbing the ground must be consulted with the Rabbinical Commission for Jewish cemeteries before work can begin. Also, in the case of Poland, civil society actors such as the [Zapomniane Foundation](#) can provide [further guidance and assistance](#).

In principle, one should not walk on graves. However, this rule is only possible to follow when it is known where a grave or burial zone is situated. Unintentionally stepping on an unmarked grave is not considered inappropriate. This is a primary reason why the marking of Jewish graves and their boundaries are so important.

2. A Jewish cemetery once established, remains a Jewish cemetery forever, even if there are no tombstones.

In Jewish tradition there is no such thing as a “former Jewish cemetery”. This means that even if an area where a Jewish cemetery was turned into a park or was built over and there are still human remains in the ground, the site should still be called a Jewish cemetery and treated as one. There are between 1200 - 1400 Jewish cemeteries on the territory of contemporary Poland - many of them deprived of any visible signs above the ground (fence, tombstones, gate, etc), yet the regulations of the Jewish religious law apply to them in the same manner.

The instructions of the Rabbinical Commission for Jewish cemeteries of Poland (RCC) apply equally to both fenced and marked cemeteries, as well as those whose boundaries have not yet been recreated in the field.

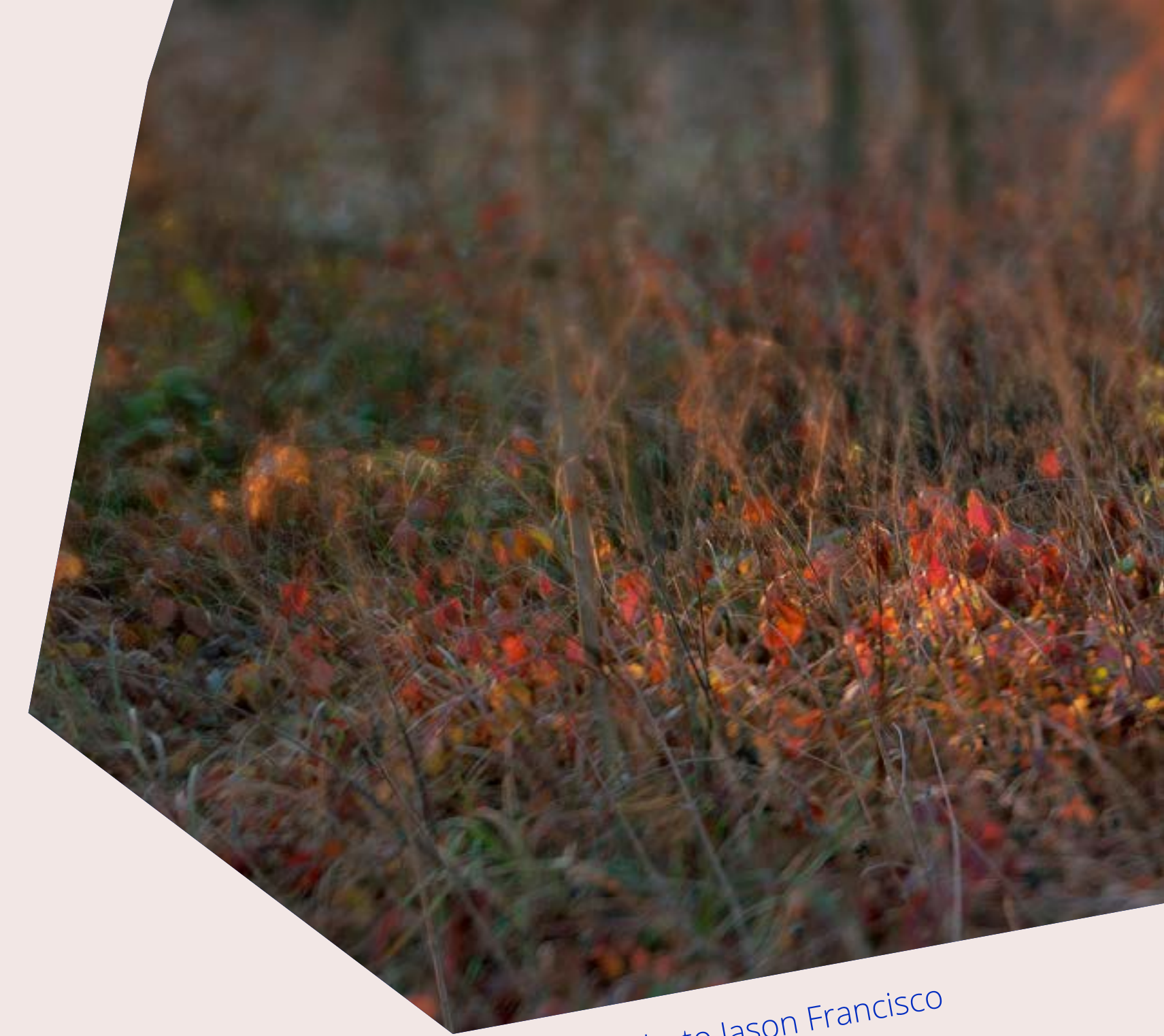


Photo Jason Francisco

3. From the point of view of Jewish tradition, the most important thing is to ensure the peace of the deceased and the integrity of their burials.

Therefore, all work carried out on cemeteries, including projects related to the reconstruction of their historical boundaries, should take into account these priorities.

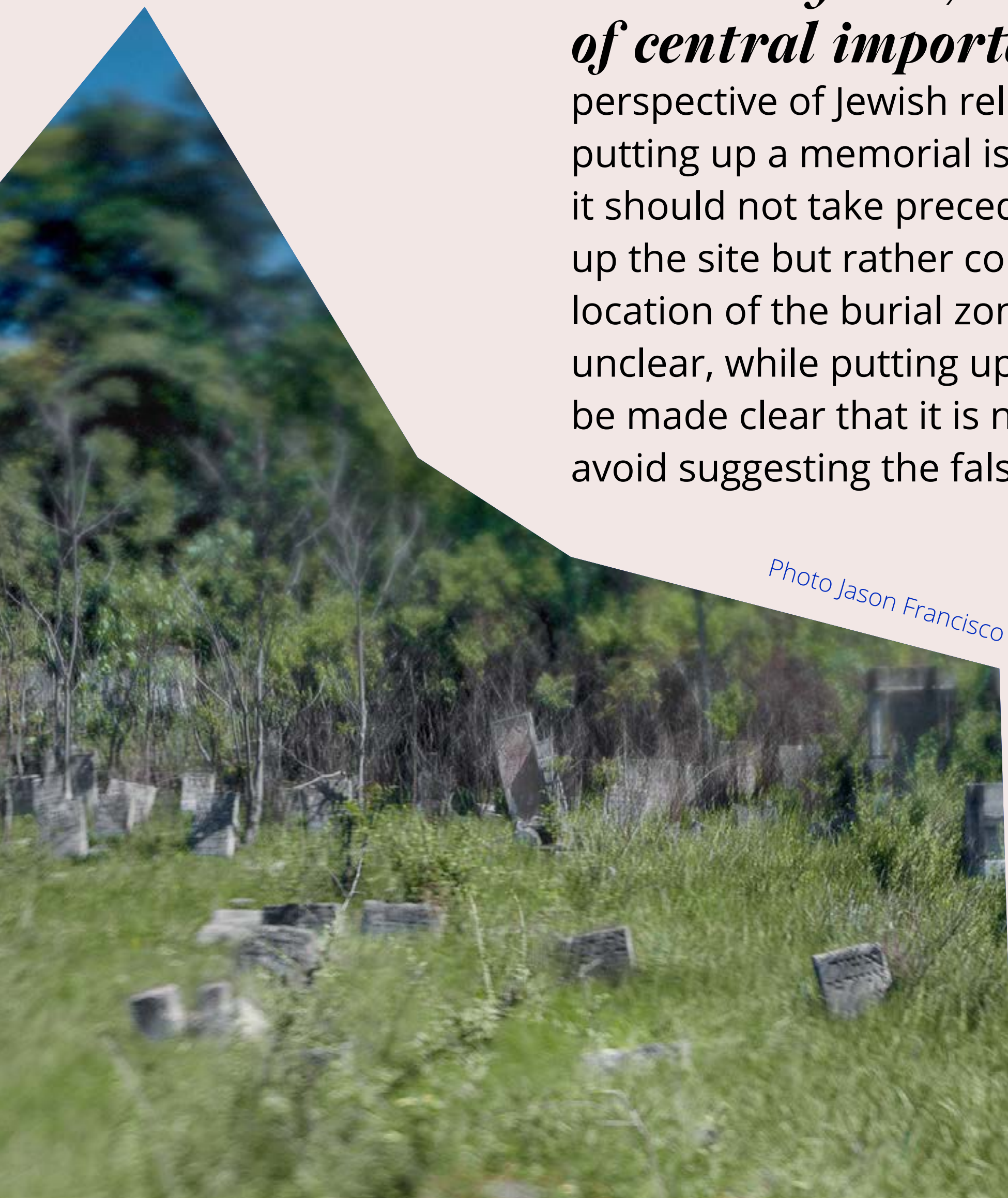
It should also be noted that if a cemetery was deprived of any visible signs above the ground, one of the possible forms of protection of their burial zone is to change the development of the area into a “green area” (e.g. a park or a square) along with publicly accessible information that the given area is a cemetery so that there is no doubt that this area should not be used for recreational purposes.

4. Marking the boundaries of a cemetery and/or a grave is of central importance from the perspective of Jewish religious law. While putting up a memorial is a sign of respect, it should not take precedence over marking up the site but rather complement it. If the location of the burial zone or/and a grave is unclear, while putting up a memorial it should be made clear that it is not a tombstone to avoid suggesting the false location of a burial.

5. According to Jewish tradition, Jewish tombstones (plural: matzevot) belong to the dead. If a matzevah (singular form) is found outside the cemetery, it should be returned to the cemetery from which it came. If it is not clear which cemetery it belongs to, it should be returned to the nearest Jewish cemetery. See [Instruction for the Return of the Matzevah](#) (in Polish).

6. If there are fallen or partly destroyed matzevot on the Jewish cemetery it is not allowed to arrange them in a way that imitates their original position, i.e. suggesting that they are standing on the actual, original burial place. The Rabbinical Commission for Jewish cemeteries of Poland (RCC) recommends that the optimal solution in such a case is to create a lapidarium integrated with the existing fence or close to it. Matzevot should be installed in such a way that their inscriptions remain visible. In the case of Poland, the exact location of the lapidarium or other form of exhibition of tombstones should be agreed to with the RCC.

Photo Jason Francisco



7. In Poland, in principle, it is not allowed to dig up, lift or reposition gravestones that have fallen over, became overgrown, or that have been absorbed into the ground unless advised so and supervised by RCC or Jewish community representatives. According to Jewish tradition and religion, the priority is to protect the remains of the dead, not the tombstones. Therefore, any activities that may damage the bones beneath the surface of the earth are prohibited, even if they are intended to protect the tombstone and its inscriptions.

8. Putting small stones on graves is part of Jewish tradition. It is a sign of memory and it is considered a contribution to marking the site of the grave. There are certain false suppositions about other objects that can be left on Jewish tombstones - while it is allowed to bring flowers and light candles in Jewish cemeteries, it is not customary and placing coins or other valuables is not appropriate and can be offensive to Jewish people visiting the site.

Photo Jason Francisco

9. Former synagogue buildings, prayer houses and ritual baths (mikvaot), if they lost their primary function to serve the Jewish community, can hold other functions as long as these are not disrespectful to the history of the place. It is recommended that these types of Jewish heritage sites serve educational, cultural, or community purposes and that any elements of cultural heritage in or on these structures, such as polychromes, furniture, and any architectural elements should be protected and preserved. Bear in mind that the central architectural part of a synagogue is the Aron Hakodesh, a wooden cupboard that houses the Torah scrolls. It is typically located on the wall facing East to indicate Jerusalem. Many synagogues have niches in which Aron Hakodesh were located and they still serve as valuable spatial indicators to the former function of the buildings and they should be considered an essential part of the cultural heritage of the place.

10. Torah scrolls and other religious texts in the Hebrew language (and sometimes also in vernacular language) are, according to Jewish law and tradition, to be treated with great respect. When they are damaged or worn-out they are to be buried in a Jewish cemetery or stored at a specially dedicated place at the synagogue. In both cases the location for placing these objects is called the Genizah.

Photo Jason Francisco



11. Traces of mezuzot, a scroll of parchment inscribed with passages from the Torah and affixed in a case to the doorposts of a Jewish home, can still be found in many homes in Poland. Either still visible or hidden underlayers of paint or other materials used for renovation, they can be re-discovered and documented. Traces of mezuzot represent the intimate life of the pre-war Jewish community and are valuable cultural markings in a house or an apartment's space. It is recommended to preserve, protect and document these traces whenever possible. These traces inspired a memory project at [POLIN Museum of the History of the Polish Jews](#) [read more [here](#)].



Toolbox


The set of tools and methods proposed in this framework is based on the guiding principles of: civic engagement, community consultation, engaging multiple stakeholders, interdisciplinary approaches combining arts, academia and urbanism, and coalition building. It is based on the experience of working with difficult Jewish heritage in Poland and Central & Eastern Europe, but it can also be useful for other contexts and geographies.

Methods

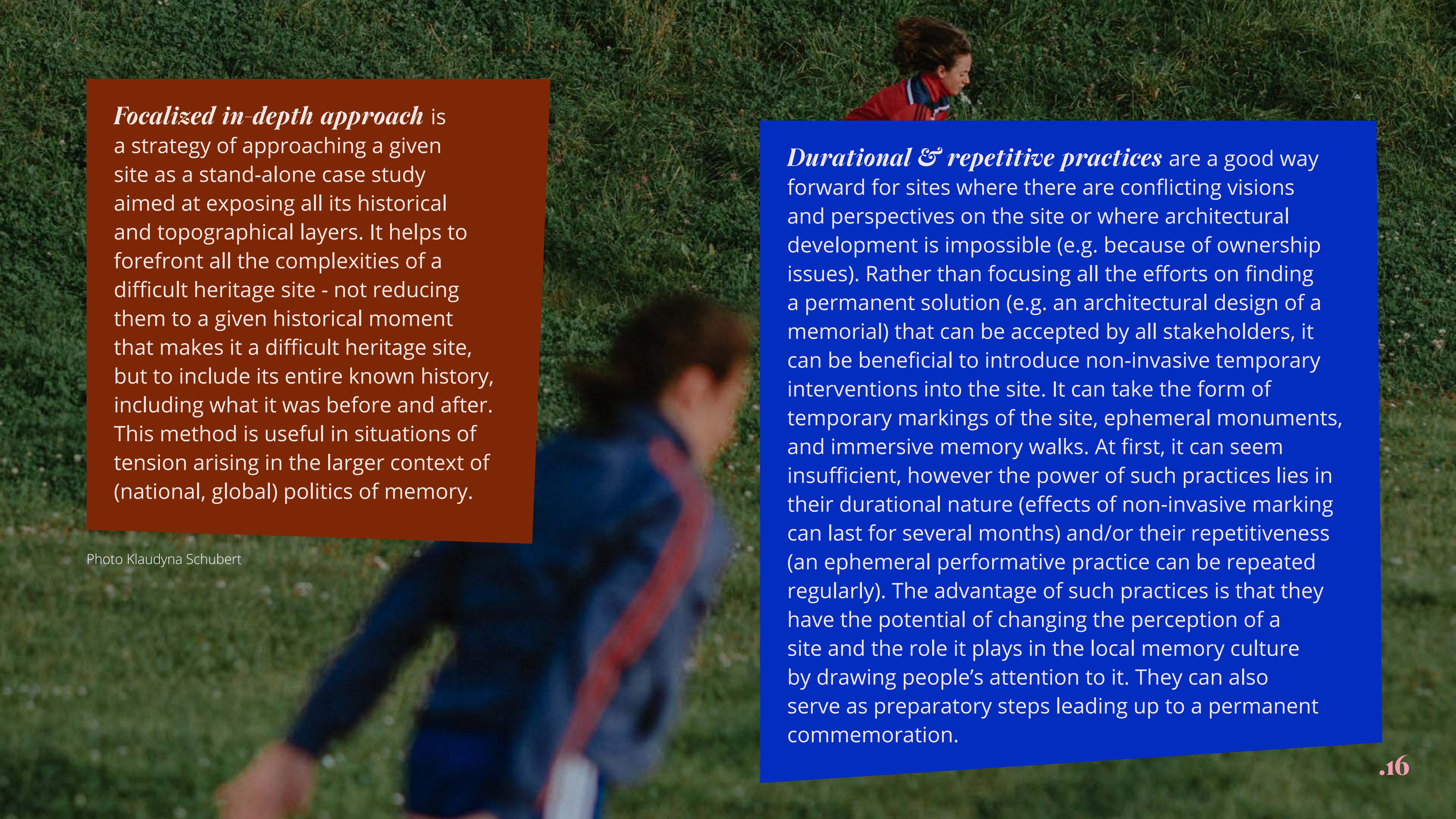
Prototyping is a word usually associated with programming and developing technology products. However, it can be useful in dealing with difficult heritage as well. Prototyping is an experimental process in which design teams test ideas by implementing them on a small scale for the purpose of checking if they work as intended and respond to the users needs. As described above, dealing with difficult heritage can be challenging and unpredictable. That is why it is good to take small steps and test various approaches before committing to a definitive solution. In the case of difficult heritage sites this might mean using various forms of temporary marking for the site, conducting a series of ephemeral commemorative activities, etc. The advantage of such an approach is that it allows various stakeholders to gather and experience different forms of remembrance and at the same time create a platform for negotiations. Moreover, it allows the wider public to get familiarized with the potential new uses of the site. It can also create an opportunity for new stakeholders to come forward.

Artistic intervention is a situation when an artist or a group of artists interacts with a given site, a space or a situation. In the context of this document, this describes an approach in which an artist or an artistic collective is invited to make a public-facing intervention into a difficult heritage site that can take the form of an individual or participatory activity which can, but does not have to, result in a temporary or permanent change to the site.

Photo Zapomniane Foundation

A close-up photograph showing a person's hands working on a rectangular concrete block. The block has two large, raised letters, 'L' and 'G', on its top surface. The person is using a brush with dark bristles to clean or finish the surface of the block. The work is being done on a wooden surface, possibly a workbench. Various tools, including a yellow pencil and a metal tool, are scattered on the wooden surface around the block. The background is slightly blurred, showing more of the wooden surface and some other tools.

Practices of care are small gestures that stakeholders might be encouraged to take in relation to the site. It is an example of a community-engagement strategy in which stakeholders contribute to the change in the local memory culture by participating in marking of a site or improving its condition it (e.g. through cleaning, landscaping and planting) and subsequently are invited to care for the results of their work (e.g. watering the plants). The advantage of this approach is that it gives everybody who wants to join a given heritage community something concrete and tangible that they can do which also creates and strengthens their relationship to the site and builds a sense of stewardship.



Focalized in-depth approach is a strategy of approaching a given site as a stand-alone case study aimed at exposing all its historical and topographical layers. It helps to forefront all the complexities of a difficult heritage site - not reducing them to a given historical moment that makes it a difficult heritage site, but to include its entire known history, including what it was before and after. This method is useful in situations of tension arising in the larger context of (national, global) politics of memory.

Photo Klaudyna Schubert

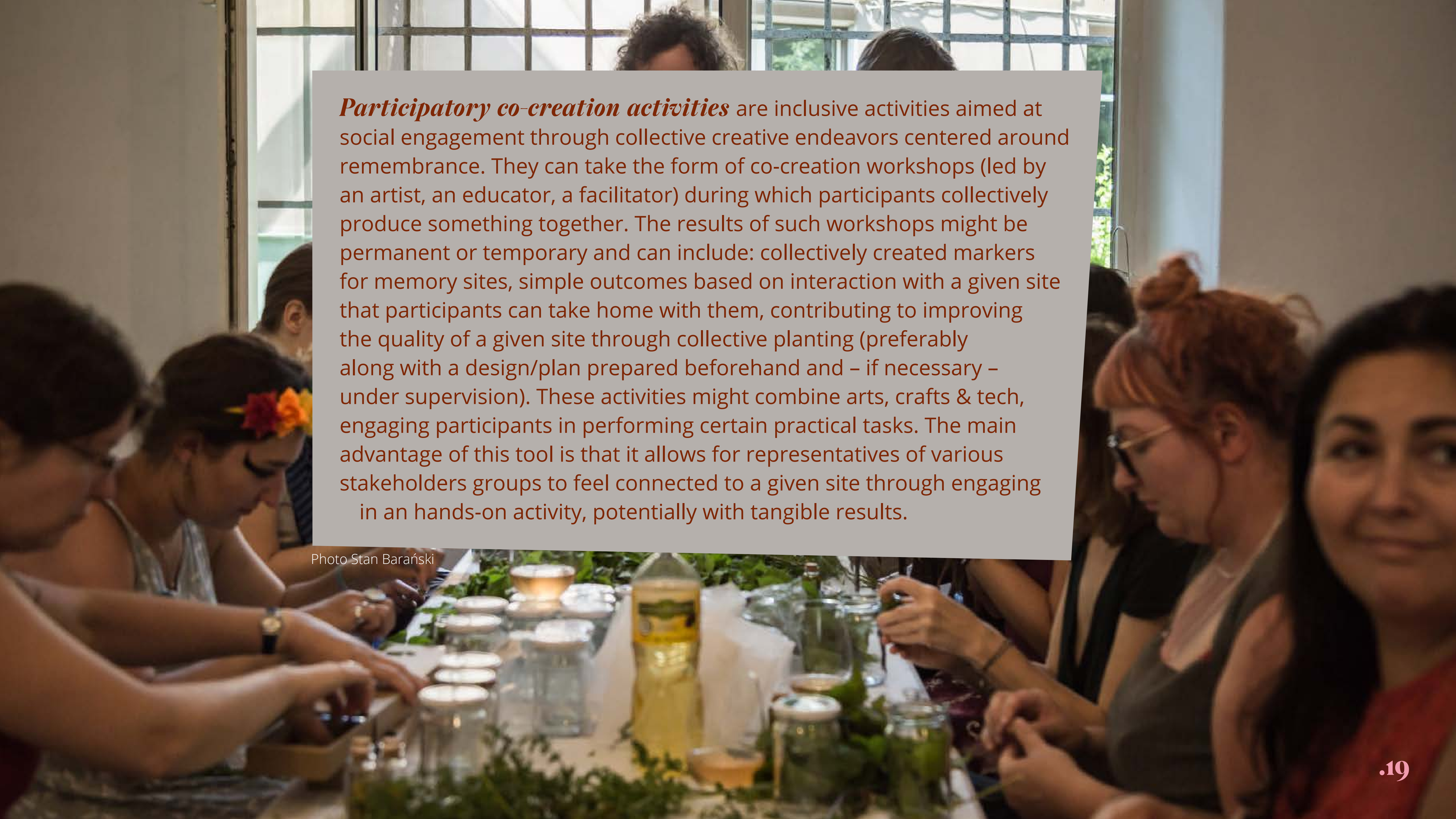
Durational & repetitive practices are a good way forward for sites where there are conflicting visions and perspectives on the site or where architectural development is impossible (e.g. because of ownership issues). Rather than focusing all the efforts on finding a permanent solution (e.g. an architectural design of a memorial) that can be accepted by all stakeholders, it can be beneficial to introduce non-invasive temporary interventions into the site. It can take the form of temporary markings of the site, ephemeral monuments, and immersive memory walks. At first, it can seem insufficient, however the power of such practices lies in their durational nature (effects of non-invasive marking can last for several months) and/or their repetitiveness (an ephemeral performative practice can be repeated regularly). The advantage of such practices is that they have the potential of changing the perception of a site and the role it plays in the local memory culture by drawing people's attention to it. They can also serve as preparatory steps leading up to a permanent commemoration.

Practice-oriented research describes a research based-approach to dealing with difficult heritage sites in which various forms of research are conducted before and during commemorative activities happening at the site. This includes archival and historical research, non-invasive field research, social research, audience research and more. This is not a new approach in and of itself, however while archival and historical research might be treated as an obvious part of any commemorative initiative and non-invasive research is often required in order to conduct any construction works on a difficult heritage site, this is not always the case for other forms of research, especially social and audience research. Practice-oriented research describes an approach in which various forms of research, not limited to those focused on the history of the site, are conducted to support successful commemorative processes, including studies of social resonance and the needs of various stakeholders.



Tools

Green commemorations are a new approach to remembrance in public spaces centered around environmental sustainability (use of landscaping, local materials and technology in the service of ecology), accompanied by high quality interventions (artistic excellence, quality of architecture and spatial planning, strong scientific underpinning) and following the principle of social inclusion (proposing community-based processes mediated through culture and arts). The idea of green commemorations proposes conscious memory interventions into the natural, social, urban and rural environments that include various stakeholders and a variety of voices into the process. It offers a solution for commemorating sites of trauma either located in natural surroundings or by turning them into green spaces. It allows for creating open, respectful spaces enabling symbolic dialogue between victims, survivors, activists and local communities in the time of the ongoing climate crisis.



Participatory co-creation activities are inclusive activities aimed at social engagement through collective creative endeavors centered around remembrance. They can take the form of co-creation workshops (led by an artist, an educator, a facilitator) during which participants collectively produce something together. The results of such workshops might be permanent or temporary and can include: collectively created markers for memory sites, simple outcomes based on interaction with a given site that participants can take home with them, contributing to improving the quality of a given site through collective planting (preferably along with a design/plan prepared beforehand and – if necessary – under supervision). These activities might combine arts, crafts & tech, engaging participants in performing certain practical tasks. The main advantage of this tool is that it allows for representatives of various stakeholders groups to feel connected to a given site through engaging in an hands-on activity, potentially with tangible results.

Photo Stan Barański

Immersive memory walks focus on the invisible aspects of the surroundings and explain decisions and motivations behind the reality that makes certain heritage difficult - if known. The walks enable participants to see the unseen or to notice new fragments of their environment. It is focused on asking questions and reflecting on the dynamics and entanglement between the past, the present, and the future rather than presenting the history of the site only. It also engages participants in a conversation and invites them to share thoughts and look for solutions together as a community. The walks have a strong learning component as well as a community building element.

Photo Klaudyna Schubert

Ephemeral monuments are performative commemorative activities aimed at drawing attention to a given site and its history through a temporary intervention that can (but does not have to) take the form of a participatory event. It can be a performance, a flash mob, a dance piece (where it is appropriate), and various forms of artistic interventions happening on a given site or in its close vicinity, intended either as an artistic event for an invited audience or addressed to random passers-by. The advantage of ephemeral monuments is that without changing the topography, architecture and/or landscape of a given site, they can contribute to changing the meaning of it and the role it plays in local memory cultures.

The Typology of Jewish difficult heritage sites in Central & Eastern Europe

This typology of difficult Jewish heritage sites was developed on the basis of existing research and consulted with various experts in the course of the project.

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

Examples →

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

Except for the major centres of genocide such as Auschwitz, Treblinka, Majdanek and others on the territory of East Central Europe, there are also material remains of other examples of the infrastructure of genocide, including numerous smaller camps, e.g. labor camps. The Adampol labor camp can serve as an example. The camp - located in close proximity to Sobibor - existed between 1941 and 1943. Its prisoners were slave workers that worked on farmland. The number of people imprisoned in Adampol was estimated at 600 men, women and children. Many people died there and their bodies were buried in individual and mass graves in the vicinity of the camp. In the spring of 1944 a special unit supervised by Sicherheitsdienst officers arrived at Adampol to conceal German crimes. Human remains were dragged out of their graves and burned on a specially constructed fire grate.

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

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



Photo Fundacja Zapomniane

2. Burial sites of the victims of the Holocaust (including those un-commemorated and unmarked)

On a private plot in Sulbiny, in June 1944, 39 Jews were shot by military policemen and the Gestapo at the military training square. They were local Jews from Garwolin in Eastern Poland, mostly tailors and shoemakers, recruited to work in the barracks. The location of the grave was made possible thanks to the testimony of an inhabitant of Sulbiny, whose uncle saw the bodies right after the execution in the place where they were buried. It was not the only crime against people of Jewish nationality in Sulbiny. In May 1944, the Nazis also shot 42 Jews. Their burial place is unknown. In the same year, Wehrmacht soldiers shot approximately 60 Poles and 70 Jews near the Wilga river. The bodies were buried at the place of execution. The site has not been commemorated, nor marked so far. The [Zapomniane Foundation](#) conducted research on the site and would like to undertake activities leading to a commemoration.

The overall number of similar sites (individual, collective and mass burials) is estimated at around 1,500.



Photo Fundacja Zapomniane

3. Killing sites & sites of violence

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

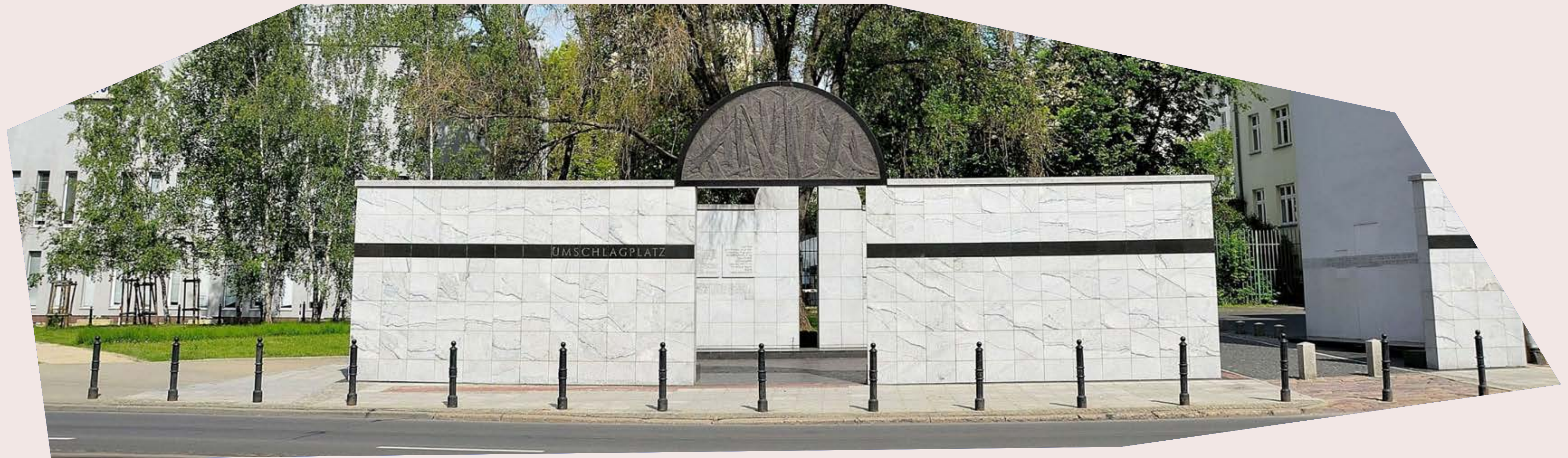


Photo Adrian Grycuk

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

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

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

The hidden Jewish cemetery at Gwarna Street is an example of a place that disappeared from the map of the city after the war. Located opposite the Main Railway Station, it is now part of a yard surrounded by blocks of flats. It remains a forgotten and neglected space, which was revealed by archaeological research and exhumations in 2017 carried out as a result of the construction of a hotel in this area. The 2000 spatial development plan of the Wrocław City



Source: Urban Memory Foundation

Council calls for the revitalization of the area and the creation of a memorial park, including the introduction of greenery but it has not yet been implemented as of 2024.

For several years, the [Urban Memory Foundation](#) has been making efforts to commemorate the cemetery, and in 2020-2022, together with [FestivALT](#), the Foundation ran the “Place of Remembering and Forgetting” project involving the local community and other stakeholders around a possible commemoration. The result of these works is, among others, Anna Schapiro’s artistic and educational project and a report on research among stakeholders entitled “Commemoration of the Jewish cemetery at Gwarna Street in Wrocław in a social perspective” presenting the analysis of data collected in the field and the conclusions drawn from these studies and from the reconnaissance activities undertaken by the [Urban Memory Foundation](#) in the last two years. The report states, among other things, that “representatives of the local community generally agree that a pre-war Jewish cemetery should be commemorated at Gwarna Street. The topic of creating a small park or square was approved by the vast majority of research participants. (...) The green area could become an intercultural stimulator of attachment to the place, which - due to its practical function - will also be valuable for people who do not understand and do not fully identify with the history of the cemetery as a place of remembrance of the Jewish community.”

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

In 1896 a magnificent prayer house and yeshivah for the Chevra Tehilim Congregation (The Society of Psalms) was opened in the Jewish Quarter of Kraków (Poland). The building was designed by the prolific Polish-Jewish architect Nachman Kopald. During the Holocaust, the Nazis devastated the building's interior. After the war and until 2006, the building housed the "Krakowiacy" singing and dancing group.

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

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



The Mezcal bar did not survive and was subsequently rented out to a bar called Hevre, where people are invited to enjoy drinks and food in “atmospheric Jewish ruins.” The creation of Hevre involved the deliberate destruction of the former site of the Aron Hakodesh to create a new door, including the loss of important historical ornamentation. It is unclear how and why the city’s heritage department gave permission for this to happen.

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

The site remains un-commemorated, and unmarked. [FestivALT](#) is currently conducting archival research into the history of the building and will undertake activities leading to raising awareness about the site’s history.



Photo Jason Francisco

6. Sites of difficult-micro-histories

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

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



Photo Natalia Romik

Useful definitions


Communities of implication

– groups of people who have been implicated in genocidal violence even if they were not themselves the main perpetrators. It describes people (and their descendants) who supported the perpetrators (e.g. by betraying the victims), benefited economically from the violence (e.g. acquired property or other goods). The term was inspired by Michael Rothberg's concept of implicated subjects proposed in his book "The Implicated Subject: Beyond Victims and Perpetrators" (2019) and further developed by Erica Lehrer in her article "[Material Kin: 'Communities of implication' in post-colonial, post-Holocaust Polish ethnographic collections](#)" (2020).

Difficult heritage – material legacy of past violence and/or oppression which is contested and can evoke emotional, often painful, responses in the present. It often challenges widely accepted versions of a community or nation's past or stated values. Difficult heritage connects with questions or problems in the present and causes the public to question their understanding of the past and present.

Although the term was originally developed to describe the site of Nazi rally grounds in Germany, it has been widely used to describe various types of heritage, including Jewish heritage and the difficult legacy left behind by the Holocaust. The term was coined by Sharon Macdonald and presented in her book *Difficult heritage. Negotiating the Nazi Past in Nuremberg and Beyond* (2008).

Heritage community – the traditional definition of people that are entitled to care for a certain heritage was focused on communities formed by blood ties, ethnicity, or place of residence. The term "heritage community" proposed by the [Faro Convention of the Council of Europe \(2005\)](#) introduces a new understanding of such a group - as a community of will. This new enhanced definition emphasizes the principle of shared responsibility assumed by those who are not directly related to particular heritage cultural backgrounds, but are willing to take responsibility. The Council of Europe defines a heritage community as "people who value specific aspects of cultural heritage that they wish, within the framework of public action, to sustain and transmit to future generations". The Convention stresses the important aspects of heritage as they relate to human rights and democracy focusing on the relationships between heritage and communities and society.




Halakha – the collective body of Jewish religious laws that are derived from the Written Torah (the compilation of the first five books of the Hebrew Bible) and Oral Torah (Mishnah, Gemara, which together form the Talmud).

Multidirectional memory – a term conceptualizing what happens when different histories of extreme violence confront each other in the public sphere with the focus on sites of extreme tension involving the remembrance of the Nazi genocide of European Jews in relation to slavery, colonialism, and decolonization. The term is an attempt to get beyond the phenomenon of “competitive memory.” It proposes that rather than seeing the memory of various events as competing with each other for public attention, he suggests memory can work productively through negotiation, cross-referencing, and borrowing. The term was coined by Michael Rothberg and described in his book “Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization” (2009) and explained in [his article](#).

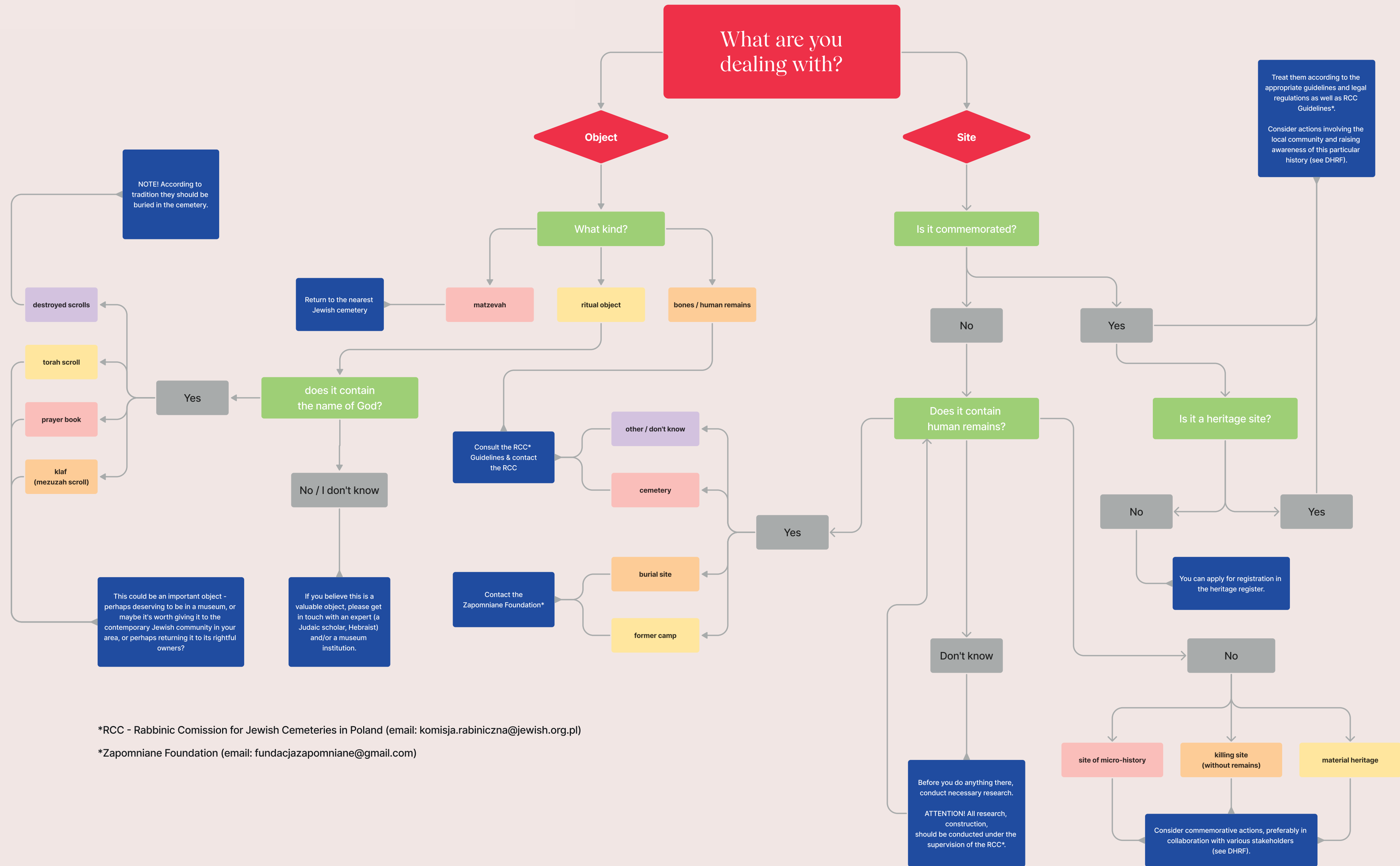
Memory activism – a term describing a growing phenomenon of grass-root initiatives across the globe aimed at influencing how the past is being used, presented and institutionalized in the present. It captures the engagement of various individuals, communities and civic society organizations in the field of remembrance and memory that were traditionally dominated by public institutions. Memory activism can be perceived as a result of social dissatisfaction with certain narratives about history or the need to address topics that have been silenced or repressed. In 2023 “The Routledge Handbook of Memory Activism” was published, proposing new analytic frameworks for understanding the phenomenon.

Non-sites of memory – dispersed locations of various genocides, ethnic cleansings, and other similarly motivated acts of violence, which are not commemorated but are not completely forgotten either. Usually they function in local contexts in a negative way: they are removed from dominant memory cultures through lack of visible signs of commemoration (monuments, plaques, markings) or/and through intentional neglect. What they have in common is a lack of information (altogether or of proper, founded information), of material forms of commemoration (plaques, monuments, museums), and of reparations (any official designation of the scope of the territory in question). Non-sites of memory also have in common the past or continued presence of human remains (bodies of deceased persons) that have not been neutralized by funerary rites. Such localities are often transformed, manipulated, or contested in some other way (often devastated or littered). The term was first used by Claude Lanzmann, the French documentary filmmaker who in the 1970s visited with his crew un-commemorated post-camp and post-ghetto sites and was further developed by Roma Sendyka in her article [“Prism: Understanding Non-Sites of Memory”](#) (2015).



Non-invasive research – research conducted in places where the remains of Jewish victims of the Holocaust are likely to be found are subject to restrictions resulting from Jewish law (halakha). Instead of the tools of traditional archaeology, non-invasive archeology is used to avoid disturbing the remains. This includes the analysis of satellite images and archival aerial photographs, topography analysis using LiDAR (Light Detection and Ranging) and geophysical tools (e.g. Ground Penetrating Radar) enabling identification of changes or objects located underground. Researchers combine these research methods with the analysis of archival documents, interviews with the local community, analysis of accounts left by the witnesses and participants of events, and documents generated by these people, for example, hand-drawn maps. Only the combination of the analysis of different types of data can make it possible to formulate proper conclusions.

Roadmap



*RCC - Rabbinic Commission for Jewish Cemeteries in Poland (email: komisja.rabinczna@jewish.org.pl)

*Zapomniane Foundation (email: fundacjazapomniane@gmail.com)



Case Studies

01

Esther's Willow in Chrzanów

*#greencommemoration
#prototyping #practicesofcare
#artisticintervention*

How can the symbolism of a White Willow help to commemorate annihilated residents?

Context

In the town of Chrzanów there is a place that used to be called Esther's Square, where the Great Synagogue stood until its demolition in the 1970s in Communist Poland. A weeping willow (White Willow) was planted there sometime later, which became part of the local landscape until it was unexpectedly cut down in 2018. Before the Nazi genocide, Jews made up half of 20,000 residents of Chrzanów and their history and memory in the city weakens each year.

Esther's Willow is a public project of the artists: sisters Marta and Katarzyna Sala from Chrzanów (Poland) and Robert Yerachmiel Sniderman from Philadelphia (USA), whose ancestors lived in Jarosław and Warsaw in Poland.

The central aim of the artistic intervention was to replant the tree at the site of the synagogue and name it Esther's Willow, bringing back to life the currently unnamed square.



Highlights

- Countering death, destruction and then neglect brought by the Nazi and the Communist regimes in a small town in southern Poland
- Benefitting from symbolic associations of a planted tree (White Willow) in Polish and Jewish culture, related to melancholy, remembrance and uniting cultures, in order to bring people together



Photos by Stan Barański

Challenges

- HOW to symbolically bring back memory into public space as an answer to mass execution and irreversible destruction?
- HOW can nature and plants become “allies” in commemorative practices?
- HOW to intervene in a small town’s area and how to involve the residents in remembrance activities?

Description

On July 3, 2022, a Silent Procession commemorating the former Jewish community of Chrzanów marched through the streets of the town. Its participants set off from the vicinity of the railway station to finally arrive at the former Esther Square, where the artists planted the willow in the place where the Great Synagogue once stood.

Artists Katarzyna Sala, Marta Sala, and Robert Yerachmiel Sniderman led the planting of Esther’s Willow—a white willow sapling. Traditional cultural-medicinal uses and cosmological meanings of the willow in Central and Eastern European rites served as the project’s ethical-aesthetic guide. The artists’ four-years-long process of research and collaboration brought together regional and local institutions, current residents, descendants and survivors to mark, contemplate, mourn, and honour the square and the generations that lived there.

The gesture of replanting the tree revealed an old, intimate space of ancestral transcultural experiences where Jewish and Slavic communities jointly revered willows. In their worldviews, the willow appeared

as a tree of power, an antidote to cure disease, infertility, and bodily pain. The willow as a link between the living and the dead was able to once again create a bridge and a basis for mutual relations. The artists were also inspired by a traditional practice of using “silent water” - water drawn from a natural body of water by night, in silence, for medicinal purposes, a practice used by Jews and Slavs alike. The silent march through the town’s streets was accompanied by musicians carrying their instruments, which remained silent throughout the walk and participants carrying jars of silent water. The Procession symbolically reversed the course of history, following the opposite route from the death march of the Chrzanów Jews, which then took them to the Auschwitz Concentration Camp. As soon as the tree was planted, the musicians started to play and residents watered the tree with silent water.

The inhabitants of Chrzanów took part in the event. The descendants (the son and family) of one of Chrzanów’s residents, a woman named Esther (Estera in Polish) that perished during the Shoah, came from Israel to attend the ceremony. Before the war, Estera lived in Chrzanów and prayed at the synagogue in Esther Square, from where she was taken to Auschwitz.

Solutions

1. Designing an artistic interventions that is easy for the public to engage in (free entry, in public space, ability to join anonymously)
2. Activities appealing to a broad public that help build joint interest and inspire care for the site with nature and planting
3. Combining known and comfortable memory practices (like memory marches) with new artistic language (silent water, silent march, carrying the tree sapling)
4. Carefully deriving the idea for the intervention from the context and history of the site





Lessons Learnt

- The initiative took four years of research and preparations to materialise: comprehensive, sensitive and inclusive commemorative practices require necessary prep work and consultations
- The initiative came to life following a meeting of Polish and American artists in Berlin in the context of another exhibition: creating favourable conditions for like-minded people to meet is crucial for fostering future and meaningful collaborations
- Involving descendants in similar projects and giving them the occasion to participate first-hand is crucial for remembrance and social justice
- Empowering local cultural institutions as custodians and keepers of memory is key, from an early stage of the project, to shape the sense of ownership for results and paths forward

Funding and Credits

Esther's Willow was carried out as part of [FestivALT](#) 2022 edition, within the context of a joint project "Places of Remembering and Forgetting" (2021-2022) between NGOs from two Polish cities, Wrocław and Kraków ([Urban Memory Foundation](#) and [FestivALT](#) respectively) as well as [Negotiating Difficult Pasts](#) (NeDiPa) – EU-funded project. It has benefitted from funding from Norway Grants from the Active Citizens – National Fund (EEA Grants) as well as by the European Union ([Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values](#) programme of the EU). [Allianz Kulturstiftung](#) has also supported the initiative.

The project was conceptualised by three associated artists Marta Sala, Katarzyna Sala and Robert Yerachmiel Sniderman together with [FestivALT](#) in Krakow. Collaborators included: The Irena and Mieczysław Mazaraki Municipal Museum in Chrzanów, Municipal Centre for Culture, Sport and Leisure of Chrzanów, PhD Marek Tuszewicki and Śomi (Dominika Śmigocka).

Further Information

- Video material documenting the event can be found [here](#).
- Further information about the initiative can also be found on [NeDiPa project's blog](#) and [FestivALT's projects section](#).
- An article describing the project has been published in Polish mainstream daily paper [Gazeta Wyborcza \(in Polish\)](#)

02

Pikule – Green Commemoration

Landscape architecture and memory work in marking Holocaust graves in the forest

#greencommemoration
#in-depthapproach
#practice-orientedresearch

Context

Central and Eastern Europe is heavily covered with the forgotten graves of Jews murdered during WWII in what came to be known as the Holocaust by bullets. Its victims rest in unmarked graves in forests, roadside ditches and fields. While the exact locations of these nameless graves and the number of victims resting in them often remains unknown to researchers and their descendants, some are still preserved in the memory of the local communities. Since 2014, the [Zapomniane Foundation](#) has been searching for, locating, studying and commemorating the forgotten graves of these Holocaust victims in Poland. The

Foundation collects and receives information from individuals and communities about locations as well as the history of such places. In 2015, the [Zapomniane Foundation](#) carried out non-invasive field research on an unmarked Jewish burial site located in a forest near the village of Pikule (the Lublin region in Eastern Poland), where eleven local Jews were hiding in a dug-out and were subsequently killed by unknown perpetrators in 1942. The supposed site of the burial was indicated to the Foundation by one of the locals who had learned this story from a now-deceased colleague from the neighbouring village.

Challenges

- HOW to establish the precise burial location with the best non-invasive methods possible?
- HOW to carry out a commemorative practice in a forest, respecting both the memory of the victims and the surrounding nature?
- HOW to embed local remembrance practice of the Holocaust in the local context?



Highlights

- Bringing the local, vernacular memory to the forefront & integrating it into local memory culture – from individual testimonials to remembrance practices with the whole community
- Carrying out a participatory process leading up to a commemoration, engaging local community, local authorities and NGOs, schools, cultural centre, forestry officials, and other parties
- Setting up distinctive, harmonious with nature (forest setting), spaces of remembrance of Holocaust victims with the use of original landscape architecture techniques and green commemoration approaches



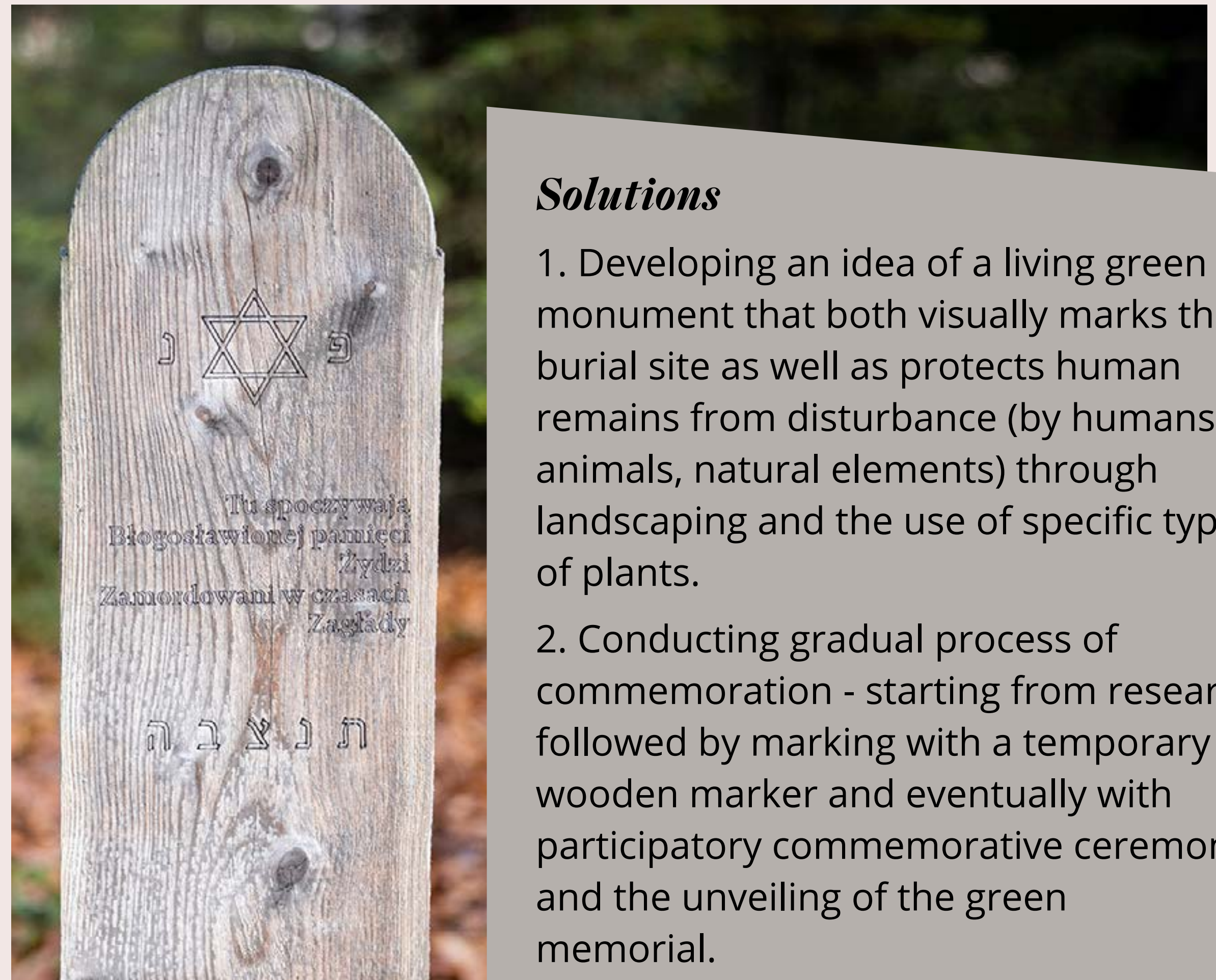
Description

In 2015, [Zapomniane Foundation](#) recorded the in-person testimonial of the resident and indicated the supposed location of the mass grave following his exact indications. The Foundation also established first contacts with the local authorities, local organisations, as well as the local Forest Inspectorate in charge of the land and carried out non-invasive research.

In 2017, the site was marked with a symbolic wooden matzevah as part of the “30 matzevahs in 30 days” project, supported by the [Matzevah Foundation](#) from the US.

Five years later, in October 2022, [Zapomniane Foundation](#) carried out research of the hiding place and the place where the victims were buried using a georadar and state-of-the-art technology (find more information about the methodology [here](#)). This non-invasive method allowed the team to pinpoint the exact location.

In 2020 the [Zapomniane Foundation](#) established a collaboration with local activists and local schools in Janów Lubelski. It was followed by a creative workshop combining technology and traditional crafts engaging local youth. During the workshop the participants co-created a wooden matzevah for a local Jewish cemetery that was uncommemorated and unmarked.



Photos by Alicja Szulc

Solutions

1. Developing an idea of a living green monument that both visually marks the burial site as well as protects human remains from disturbance (by humans, animals, natural elements) through landscaping and the use of specific types of plants.
2. Conducting gradual process of commemoration - starting from research followed by marking with a temporary wooden marker and eventually with participatory commemorative ceremony and the unveiling of the green memorial.
3. Establishing a long-term collaborative process involving multiple stakeholders leading up to a commemoration, including public authorities.



In preparation for the permanent commemoration of the site, a landscape architect ([Natalia Budnik](#)) was involved in order to design, with the Foundation's team and an invited expert, a sustainable memorial for the site. It was decided that the location of the dugout and burial site will be marked with plants which will both visually demarcate it as well as secure and protect it from natural factors such as animals, erosion and others.. It was important for the team that the plans chosen for the memorial would correspond to the local ecosystem and characteristics of this particular forest. The Foundation closely cooperated with the Forestry Inspectorate and local authorities to obtain the permit for a commemorative monument, while also consulting botanists and biologists.

In November 2022, a memorial ceremony took place in Pikule. A stone matzevah and an information board were placed alongside the wooden one. On the morning of November 4, 2022, the monument/tombstone in the village of Pikule was unveiled, together with the local community and local representatives: a regional museum, the Janów Lubelski Forest Inspectorate, as well as the local authorities of Janów Lubelski and neighbouring communes, representatives of the clergy, including a Rabbi and a Bishop, the youth from local high school, and representatives of Jewish organisations.

The official ceremony was accompanied by cultural events: a photo workshops for local high school students, a film screening at a local cultural centre as well as meetings with residents organised by a local NGO, [Janowskie Stowarzyszenie Ławeczka Dialogu](#), working on remembrance and multicultural history of the region. More than 100 people took part in commemoration: more details about the programme can be found [here](#).



Lessons Learnt

- Involving local population and local authorities from the very start in co-creating the commemoration and an educational program
- Looking for non-invasive ways to honor the memory of the victims and surrounding nature
- Building a comprehensive programme of commemoration, with a dedicated ceremony and specific accompanying events for various audiences (film screening, an event for high school students)



Further information

- The [Zapomniane Foundation](#) is still proactively looking for information on the identity of the victims and the location of other Jewish burials in Pikule. For further information, consult the [Foundation's website](#).

Funding

The first symbolic commemoration (a wooden matzevah) was carried out with the support of the Matzevah Foundation. The [Zapomniane Foundation](#) benefitted from the financial support of the [Polish Ministry of Culture](#) and [National Heritage and International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance](#). The commemoration in 2022 was carried out as part of the “[Negotiating Difficult Pasts](#)” project, financed by the [The Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values](#) (CERV) programme of the European Union. The project partners, [FestivALT](#) from Kraków & [Urban Memory Foundation](#) from Wrocław, were also closely involved.

03

Marking Memory Sites with Pigments

#prototyping
#greencommemoration
#practicesofcare
#artisticintervention

How can artistic practice help working with difficult heritage sites and local communities?

Context

The area of the former KL Plaszow German Nazi concentration camp in Krakow, founded on top of two Jewish cemeteries, remains today largely unmarked, while functioning primarily as a recreational site. Local residents often enjoy outdoor walks in this area, oftentimes with their dogs, although usually without full conscience of what was previously located there. Awareness of this history is minimal – even among the residents – and the city has continued to issue building permits on part of the site, so that what is actually commemorated today is only about half of the site. The destroyed 18th century Jewish cemetery at ul.

Gwarna (former *Claassenstrasse*) in Wrocław is an example of a place that disappeared from the map of the city after WWII. Located opposite the Main Railway Station, it is now part of a yard surrounded by blocks of flats. It remains a forgotten, hidden and neglected space, which was brought to attention by archaeological research in 2017 carried out as a result of the construction of a hotel in this area. The year 2000 Spatial Development Plan of the Wrocław City Council calls for the revitalization of the area and the creation of a memorial park, including the introduction of greenery but it has still not been implemented.



Photos by Stan Barański,
Aga Jabłońska, Filip Morawski

Challenges

- HOW to combine remembrance, commemorative practices and art in a participatory manner for sites marked by neglect, taboo, or social divisions?
- HOW to carry out commemorative practices through art at heritage sites marked by past violence in a way that is respectful for a variety of stakeholders and the natural environment, while allowing the artist the space for self-expression?

Highlights

- Marking and commemorating the boundaries of destroyed Jewish cemeteries in a public space of two major Polish cities for the first time in the post-war era in accordance with rules of the Jewish religious law
- Involving local residents in commemorative practices.
- Opening dialogue on possible ways of permanent commemoration and markings of the cemeteries



Description

In 2022, visual artist Anna Schapiro was invited by two activist organisations from Wrocław and Kraków to work with the sites of three destroyed Jewish cemeteries, one located in the city centre and two within the territory of a former German Nazi concentration camp.

In September 2022 in Wrocław, Schapiro used natural earth pigments to create the “Three Earths” artistic installation originally foreseen to last for seven months, temporarily marking in two places the still visible borders of the destroyed Jewish cemetery on Gwarna Street (former Classenstrasse). One appeared on the paved surface of Plac Konstytucji 3 Maja Square, and the other on an old wall that separates the yard of a current residential area from Gwarna Street. The work brought out the previous historic and topographic layers of the place and its transformation in time. The pigments showed the colourful spectrum that can be found within the earth – from



yellows, greens, and reds to browns and more. Schapiro used a fresco technique that she intentionally exposed to natural and urban forces: rain, wind, interactions with pedestrians and others.

Anna Schapiro noted that the process differed greatly from the usual idea of setting a permanent monument with a call for projects. Instead, the artist, together with the activists, reflected on the neglected un-commemorated area and looked into innovative ways of addressing this situation.

The art project was accompanied by guided tours of the artworks led by Wrocław-based activists from the [Urban Memory Foundation](#) and city guides. The participants were able to not only experience and learn about the idea behind the artworks, but also to find out more about this part of Wrocław and the history of the destroyed Jewish cemetery in Gwarna Street.

You can find more information about “Three Earths” [here](#).

Lessons Learnt

- Participatory and temporary artistic practice in the areas of remembrance can offer new perspectives to contemporary discussions on the role of memory, public space & local history, while asking important questions about the role of art and artistic expression in our daily life and societal issues
- In order to be respectful, the preparations need to involve a range of stakeholders from day one: residents, local authorities (incl. those in charge of heritage protection), descendants and affected communities, clearly explaining the goals, expectations, mutual doubts and fears as well as hopes
- Embedding artistic interventions in a broader context – for example with thematic conferences, seminars or discussions – allows the possibility to closely link the art practice with hands-on discussions & knowledge exchanges
- Breaking away from the usual commemorative practice (structured calls for proposals with specific requirements, creating new structures/monuments) in favour of a more open process can bring in valuable results and foster participation
- Taking the time and going slowly when carrying out the artistic process, especially a participative one, can bring in the aspect of community building and shared reflection



In October 2022 in Kraków, Anna Schapiro created another artistic installation, “Moving Earth”. The success of the project in Wrocław gave rise to the idea of realising a similar artwork on the much larger, open territory of the former German Nazi concentration camp of KL Plaszow, where two Jewish cemeteries are also located. The question of materials was already solved, but the artist decided to change the technique a bit – instead of mixing the pigments with a binder and actually painting over architectural elements, the pigments were to be thrown onto the ground in order to create a visual representation of the borders of the cemeteries.

Pigments used in Kraków also reflected the colour of local soil – deep orange. The artist felt that a different approach was needed compared with what had been done in Wrocław, as precise identification of the borders of the cemeteries was almost impossible to achieve. Together with the organisers, she opted for a participatory process, throwing the pigment together with numerous volunteers: local residents, activists, researchers, and members of the Jewish community.

In order to ensure that the artistic intervention was carried out in a respectful and participatory manner, the artist and activists closely involved stakeholders including: the local residents, the Rabbinical Commission for Jewish Cemeteries in Poland, the Jewish Community in Kraków, and the KL Plaszow Museum as well as the office of the Municipal Conservator of Monuments.

“I was not The Artist, I was just one of many, many people involved in the creation of the work, and one of even more who made it possible for me to be there and do what I was doing. (...) An artistic work makes it easier to open the door, to name what is unnamed, mark what is left unmarked, to start the discussion on a deeper, more open-minded level.” – Anna Schapiro

As a result, cemeteries were marked in the public spaces for the first time after the war, what is more it was done with the cooperation of all parties involved in the ongoing conflict about the future shape of KL Plaszow commemoration. More details about the event can be found [here](#).



Solutions

1. Introducing a temporary marking strategy into a site that is lacking any definitive forms of commemoration that would be useful for understanding the site's topography.
2. Engaging local residents in the process of marking the site, which serves as an opportunity for them to learn and create a sense of shared ownership.
3. Using commemorative artistic interventions improves the aesthetics of the public space without limiting its functionality and use by local residents.

Funding

Artistic interventions of Anna Schapiro in Wrocław and in Kraków were carried out as part of a joint project “Places of Remembering and Forgetting” (2021-2022) between NGOs from two Polish cities, Wrocław and Kraków ([Urban Memory Foundation](#) and [FestivALT](#) respectively). The project has been funded by Norway Grants from the Active Citizens – National Fund (EEA Grants) and further developed & supported by the [NeDiPa](#) project (funded by [Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values](#) programme of the EU in 2022-2024).

Further Information

To find out more about the artistic and participatory process of creation from the artist herself, read an interview with her under this [link](#). You can also find more information about Anna Schapiro [here](#). For further information about the artistic projects of Anna Schapiro in Wrocław and Kraków, do get in touch with [Urban Memory Foundation](#) and [FestivALT](#).



Anna Schapiro is a Berlin-based Jewish visual artist. Her visual works move between sculpture and painting, oftentimes working with natural earth-based pigments. Anna is addressing, discussing, and challenging current social problems in many of her projects. Her works have been shown in Basel, Berlin, Dresden, Hamburg, Heidelberg, Łódź, Lublin, New York, Porto, Stuttgart and in Wrocław. In the case studies from Poland, she was stepping into tense relationships between different stakeholders and decades-long history of neglect.

04

Still Standing – a monument in motion

#greencommemoration
#durational&repetitivepractice
#practicesofcare

How can performing arts take part in debates surrounding difficult heritage sites?

Context

The site of KL Plaszow in Kraków, a former concentration camp founded on top of two Jewish cemeteries, today serves primarily as a public park and recreation area, without sufficient information about the site's history and topography. The performance, Still Standing, was first created as a response to heated debates surrounding the potential forms of commemoration of the KL Plaszow site.

The performance was based on the choreography of Israeli choreographer Noa Eshkol, which was originally prepared for the 10th anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising in 1953, and performed in the Lohamei Hageta'ot (Ghetto fighters) kibbutz in Israel.



Photos by Klaudyna Schubert

Description

Still Standing was created in 2020 by Weronika Pelczyńska (dancer, choreographer) and Aleksandra Janus (anthropologist and researcher) in cooperation with Monika Szpunar (dancer & choreographer), with the support of [FestivALT](#). The performance with two female performers, shown for the first time on 3 October 2020 at the site of KL Plaszow, explores the body as a vehicle of memory and site-specific live sculpture. It was accompanied by an audio recording for the audience to listen to while watching the movements of the performers.

This performative piece was an attempt to raise awareness among visitors about the location of a former concentration camp and Jewish cemeteries, and aimed at engaging the audience and sparking conversations about the current status and the future of the site.

By placing the bodies in space—with its layers of history—the performance creates images for the observers to interpret. By exploring

relationships turned into physical action it creates a constant shift from the past to the present, and from the collective to the personal.

From the start, Still Standing was foreseen as a performance that can be adapted to other contexts and shown in other locations. So far, it has been performed on several other occasions outside of KL Plaszow, with the goal to create a temporary monument for people to gather together outside and reflect and discuss.

In 2021, Still Standing was performed in Lublin at the [Lubliner Festival](#) – the festival of Jewish culture organised in this city in Eastern Poland in order to embrace its multicultural identity and Jewish past and history. The performance was produced by [FestivALT](#) in cooperation with the Centre for Culture of the city of Lublin. It took place at one of the main squares of the Old Town of Lublin, with the audience using their phones to listen to an audio recording about the Jewish heritage and past of the city.



Highlights

- Combining choreography and storytelling (audio recording) as another form of commemoration - a “monument in motion” in order to foster the audience’s link and empathy with the difficult heritage site
- Creating an ephemeral monument serving as a platform for people to reflect and discuss
- Raising awareness of a difficult heritage site among residents that pass it by on a regular basis





Challenges

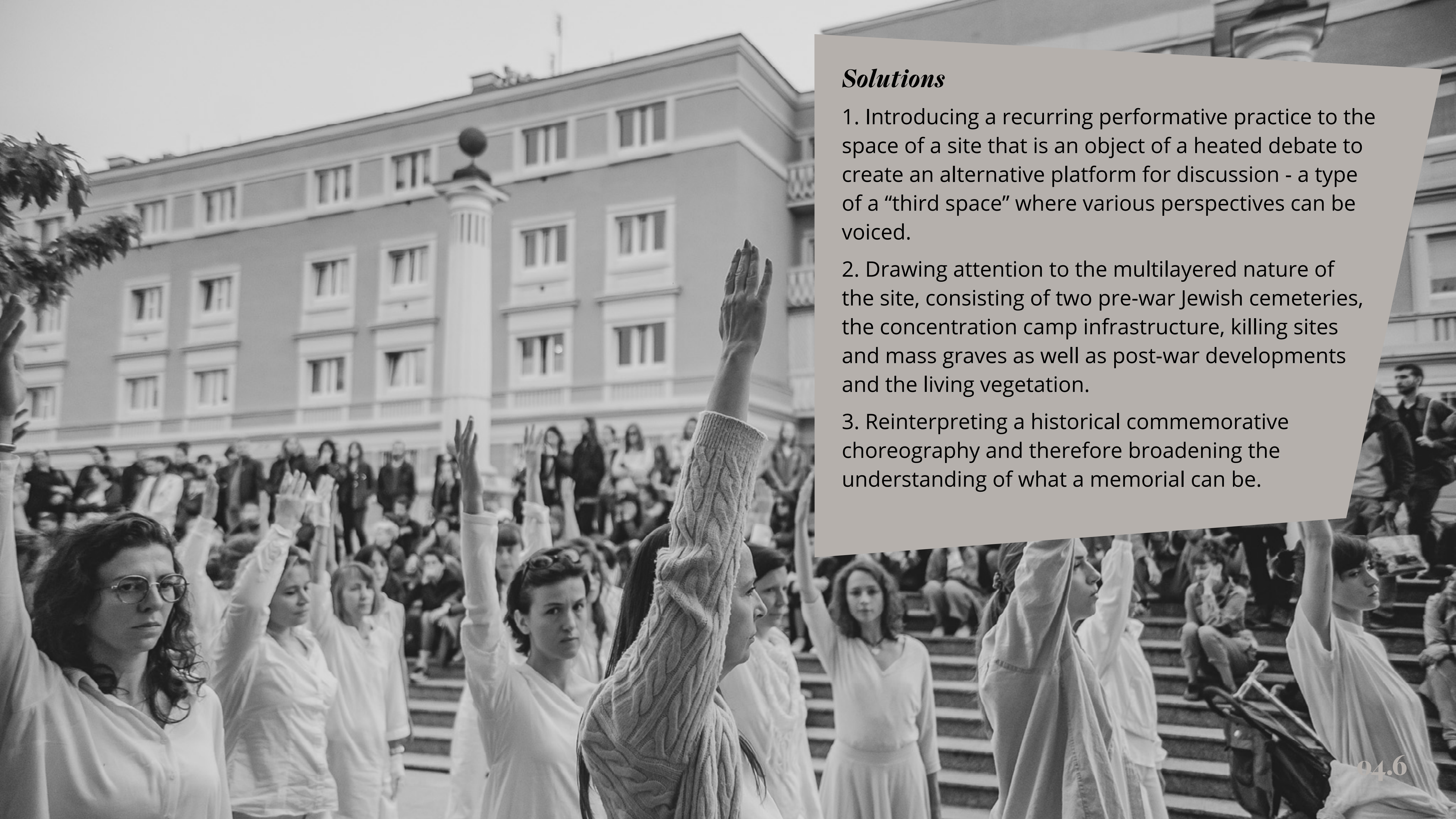
- HOW can performing arts step into oftentimes intense debates around forms of commemoration and (lack of) memory?
- HOW to strike the right balance between the abstract form of performing arts and the concrete discussions and reactions of the stakeholders?
- HOW can a pre-existing performing arts piece be adapted to the specific context of various difficult heritage sites?

In 2023, Still Standing was performed on May 16th in Warsaw, as part of the commemoration of the anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising of 1943. On this occasion, it was produced by [FestivALT](#) in cooperation with the [POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews](#) and the Mazovian Institute of Culture and [PERFORM Art Foundation](#). The three performers were accompanied by saxophonist Natan Kryszk.

The Warsaw iteration was a collective performative action, bringing two performers as well as eighty people including local residents and other interested individuals starting at the Monument to the Ghetto Heroes outside of the Museum and ending at another nearby landmark. An audio track that the audience listened to on their phones provided a narrative for reflection and made reference to the destruction of the Great Synagogue of Warsaw perpetrated by SS troops exactly on that day 80 years earlier.

Again in the summer of 2023, Still Standing was performed at the [Vilnius Biennial for Performance Art](#) in Lithuania, aimed at reflecting, among other goals, on the multicultural past of the city. The performance took place at the site of the Piromont Old Jewish Cemetery, which had been closed down by the authorities during Soviet times, and is now a green area and the location of the Vilnius Palace of Concerts and Sports. The performance was funded by the [Adam Mickiewicz Institute](#) of Poland.





Solutions

1. Introducing a recurring performative practice to the space of a site that is an object of a heated debate to create an alternative platform for discussion - a type of a “third space” where various perspectives can be voiced.
2. Drawing attention to the multilayered nature of the site, consisting of two pre-war Jewish cemeteries, the concentration camp infrastructure, killing sites and mass graves as well as post-war developments and the living vegetation.
3. Reinterpreting a historical commemorative choreography and therefore broadening the understanding of what a memorial can be.



Lessons Learnt

- Outdoor artistic performance can help to tackle the issues of time, space, remembrance, and forgetting by closely linking the performers and audiences to the specific location and its history
- Minimalistic performance art forms can be more effective in letting people to reflect at their own pace, with their own feelings without being overwhelmed
- Context and embedding a performance is crucial – this can easily be done by providing the recorded narrative (the audience can also listen to it prior, or re-listen to it after the performance)



Funding

Still Standing was first developed thanks to the support of [FestivALT](#), with the partners listed above cooperating and contributing financially to different iterations of the spectacle. Its various iterations were also supported by the Allianz Foundation, [Paideia - European Institute for Jewish Studies](#) and the [Thinking Through the Museum](#) project of Concordia University. Later it was performed as part of the [NeDiPa](#) project in Krakow in partnership with the [POLIN Museum of History for Polish Jews](#) and [PERFORM Artistic Foundation](#).

Further Information

You can find further information on Still Standing on the [website of FestivALT](#). The information about the performance in Lublin can be found [here](#) (in Polish), while the information on the performance at Vilnius Biennial for Performance Art (with audio recording) is available [here](#). The information about the performance in Warsaw is available on the website of the [POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews](#). You can also read the review (in Polish) of the Warsaw spectacle [here](#).

05

The Jewish cemetery on Gwarna St. in Wrocław

#greencommemoration

#artisticintervention

#practice-orientedresearch

How do residents perceive the question of commemorating a Jewish cemetery?

Context

Wrocław, formerly called Breslau was part of Germany before World War II and was home to one of the largest German Jewish communities in Central Europe. Decimated by the war and the enormous upheavals following the shift of borders (with Breslau becoming Wrocław and becoming Polish), the pre-war Jewish history of the city was almost completely wiped out. Preservation endeavours were also thwarted by the Communist authorities in Poland before 1989 in an attempt to homogenise its population and eradicate multiculturalism.

This history did not spare the Jewish cemetery on Gwarna Street (formerly known in German as Claassenstrasse), once a burial place for over 4,000



members of the Jewish community and in existence since the 18th century. The cemetery was destroyed during the final months of World War II, during the siege of the city. The plot of the cemetery, located in the city centre by the main Railway Station, is currently built over with apartments, garages, a municipal sport hall, and partially constitutes a de facto “no man’s land” typical for many of Central and Eastern European cities struggling with their tumultuous history and problematic Communist heritage where private land ownership and public space planning did not exist.

In 2020, the [Urban Memory Foundation](#) (UMF) was started in Wrocław out of a civic initiative launched two years prior to commemorate the site of the Jewish cemetery of Gwarna Street. The Foundation currently runs a number of local, national, and international projects. In 2022, as part of its activities, the Foundation carried out a comprehensive field study and public survey among the residents, stakeholders and descendants as to the potential commemoration of the Jewish cemetery of Gwarna.

Photos by Marcin Szczygieł. Documentation of the project implemented under Microgrants - a support program for grassroots local initiatives, coordinated by the Wrocław Institute of Culture

Highlights

- Directly asking stakeholders and residents for feedback as to expectations towards remembrance and commemorative practices in their own city (Wrocław)
- Involving the most interested parties in co-shaping the future of public space around them, taking into consideration both past (a neglected and abandoned Jewish burial site of Gwarna Street) and present (quality of public space and residents’ needs)



Further information

You can find more resources about the Breslau Jewish Cemetery on Claassenstrasse (now Gwarna Street) [here](#).

The full report (in Polish) is available [here](#).

Challenges

- HOW to seek opinions of direct stakeholders (residents) regarding commemorative practices that have an impact on their immediate surroundings?
- HOW to strike a balance between the expectations of residents and the requirements of respect towards a burial site?
- HOW to address potential conflicts, years of neglect and reconcile various perspectives?



Description

In 2022, the [Urban Memory Foundation](#) carried out a comprehensive survey and field research on the attitude of the local community towards the commemoration of the former Jewish cemetery on Gwarna Street. As part of the research, a total of 78 interviews were conducted with a group of 100 people. The activities described in the report were carried out by a team of 21 volunteers - mainly PhD students and graduates of Wrocław universities.

The result of this work was synthesised into a report, analysing the data collected in the field as well as drawing conclusions from a range of activities carried out by UMF during the course of two years. The report was compiled under the guidance of Wrocław-based sociologists, together with local Jewish studies' experts, architects and urban planners.

Among the key findings, the report concluded that although most residents know that a Jewish cemetery was located in the vicinity, their knowledge of the details surrounding its history vary considerably.

Furthermore, the interviewees were predominantly in favour of finding ways to commemorate the Jewish cemetery, for the benefit of the local community and social justice. Additionally, they tended to indicate that a well-thought-out and intelligent way of commemorating it could help to better organise the currently chaotic public space, which suffers from an overabundance of concrete, disarray and lack of vision.

Solutions

1. Treating the inhabitants of the area as partners, listening to their voices.
2. Presenting a variety of options for what a site can be after it is commemorated without focusing on commemoration only and respecting the inhabitants' needs and concerns.
3. Consulting the immediate neighbours of the site before moving ahead with any architectural design.

Lastly, the interviewees believed that the commemoration should closely involve the stakeholders and residents from early on, via carefully designed public consultation processes and without shying away from honest and open discussion.

Funding

The stakeholders' report on commemorating the Jewish cemetery on Gwarna Street was published by Urban Memory Foundation, as part of a project "Places of Remembering and Forgetting" (2021-2022), funded by Norway Grants from the Active Citizens – National Fund (EEA Grants). The community event for residents in 2021 was co-funded by the Municipality of Wrocław - Mikrogrant NGO and the ROI Community – Schusterman Family Philanthropies.



The report states, among other things, that “representatives of the local community generally agree that a pre-war Jewish cemetery should be commemorated at Gwarna Street. The topic of creating a small park or square was approved by the vast majority of research participants.

(...) The green area could become an intercultural stimulator of attachment to the place, which - due to its practical function will also be valuable for people who do not understand and do not fully identify with the history of the cemetery as a place of remembrance of the Jewish community.



Lessons Learnt

- Representatives of the local community mostly agreed that a commemoration of the pre-war Jewish cemetery of Gwarna Street could become an intercultural stimulator for the local community, creating a sense of belonging and attachment to Wrocław
- Emphasising the practicality of solutions proposed for commemoration could be valuable for people who do not fully identify with the history of the Jewish cemetery as a place of remembrance, i.e. green area or a small park could help to increase the attractiveness of public space & be compelling to most residents
- Public consultations with stakeholders around public space & commemoration should help to debunk myths and fears, address concerns and create safe space for exchanges – all perspectives are valid and should be taken into consideration, especially if coming from neighbours and the most concerned residents!



Photos by Stan Barański

06

A Jew, a Neighbour and a Dog

#prototyping
#greencommemoration
#immersivewalks
#durational&repetitive

How to introduce the principles of respect for a burial site via neighbourhood walks?

Context

The area of the former German Nazi concentration camp Plaszow in Krakow, originally established on top of two Jewish cemeteries, remains largely unmarked today and functions primarily as a recreational site. Local residents often enjoy outdoor walks in this area, often bringing their dogs, usually without a full understanding of what was previously located there. Awareness of this history is minimal – even among the residents– and the city has continued to issue building permits on parts of the site, so that what is actually commemorated today is only about half of the actual site.

For several years, [FestivALT](#), a Krakow-based annual festival of Jewish art and activism, organises thematic guided tours for dog owners (coming with their pets if they so wish) and interested residents to present the correct rules of behaviour at Jewish burial sites according to Jewish law, while explaining the topography of the site.



Highlights

- Presenting the practicalities of Jewish religious law concerning cemeteries in a hands-on and discursive manner
- Responding to the specific needs of the neighbours of a difficult heritage site without imposing regulations on them, but rather presenting the Jewish perspective in dialog the challenges the site poses

Challenges

- HOW to educate the residents about a difficult heritage site in an instructive yet non-patronising manner?
- HOW to negotiate new uses for difficult heritage sites?
- HOW to strike a balance between the expectations of residents and the requirements of respect towards a burial site?



Description

In January 2022, [FestivALT](#) decided to organise a pilot action involving a neighbourhood walk with dogs for all interested residents and individuals, who gathered together in a friendly atmosphere to educate everyone about the practicalities of Jewish law and what is permitted on the grounds of a Jewish cemetery. Although the first iteration of the action was not widely publicised, it brought together a number of local residents and their pets and proved to be a success.

During the walk with residents and visitors, Aleksander Schwarz, an expert on Jewish burial and cemetery law, introduced participants to the rules of behaviour at Jewish burial sites according to Jewish law, and explained the topography of the site. The walk was designed as a presentation of these rules in practice, with the focus on how the space can also be used by dogs.

The tour took in the key sights of KL Plaszow and the walkers were also issued with headsets so as to allow dog owners to walk comfortably together from a safe distance.



The guide, Aleksander Schwarz is an expert for the Rabbinical Commission for Cemeteries, a specialist in Jewish law in the field of cemeteries and burials, and the vice-president of the [Zapomniane Foundation](#). He reconstructs the historical borders of cemeteries and searches for un-commemorated burial grounds of Jews from the time of the Holocaust, based on non-invasive research methods consistent with Halakha, the laws of Jewish life. Aleksander now leads all the walks accompanied by his dog named Jaga.

Three neighbourhood walks with dogs led by Aleksander Schwarz around KL Plaszow took place in 2022, while the experience was also repeated in June 2023, during the 7th edition of [FestivALT](#), the annual festival of Jewish culture and activism in Kraków.

The organisers of [FestivALT](#) have sought to benefit from the neighbourhood walks as an opportunity to build relationships and understanding between locals and the Jewish community in the city of Kraków. The walks are not only an occasion for the participants to learn about the do's and don'ts related to Jewish burial sites, but they also constitute an opportunity to share thoughts, expectations and impressions about the role of memory, commemoration and public space.

An idea was developed in reference to another type of immersive memory walks practised by [FestivALT](#) on the site focused on the medicinal qualities of plants that grow in the area called – [Medicinal Plants of Plaszow](#).

Solutions

1. A discursive format that allows for the meeting of various stakeholders, in particular local residents and representatives of the Jewish community.
2. A real-time consultation and negotiations of tailor-made solutions for the site and its users, including non-human users.
3. A return to tradition and Jewish law for clues and finding innovative ways of dealing with contemporary challenges.



Lessons Learnt

- All stakeholders should have a say about commemorations and remembrances that touch upon public spaces that they interact with regularly or even on a daily basis. There is a need to make compromises that allows everyone to use public spaces while also working together to find an agreeable manner to do so with respect to the past and history
- In order to cultivate a tangible culture of memory, it is more effective to organise walks or events that use participatory methods rather than simply counting on markers, signposts and information plaques.

Funding

The neighbourhood walks organised during 2022 editions of [FestivALT](#) were carried out as part of a joint project “Places of Remembering and Forgetting” (2021-2022), funded by Norway Grants from the Active Citizens – National Fund (EEA Grants). It was further carried out by “[Negotiating Difficult Pasts \(NeDiPa\)](#)” project funded by the Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values programme of the EU as part of the Green Commemoration event series.

Further information

You can read more about the initiative on the [website](#) of The First News.

Guidelines

The set of guidelines presented below is connected to the Theory of Change elaborated during the course of the [NeDiPa](#) project ([link to the full version of Theory of Change](#)).

Our main assumption is the following:

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

We invite memory activists and all relevant stakeholders to include these guidelines in their work with Jewish heritage sites that can be identified as sites of difficult heritage. We believe they can also be highly relevant for people working with non-Jewish difficult heritage in Central & Eastern Europe and beyond.



1. Map all the relevant stakeholders

When starting the work you might not be aware of all the stakeholders that should be invited to the table - start with mapping the ones that you are aware of and use the snowball effect, asking the ones who know about others.

- go beyond the local - think of the stakeholders who might not be present locally (e.g. in the case of Central & Eastern Europe and Jewish heritage - representatives of contemporary Jewish community and descendants living abroad),
- make sure you know what identities, religions & traditions should be taken into account when dealing with a site and contact relevant experts and organizations,
- be ready for the fact that the stakeholders you reach out to can have conflicting needs and expectations - make sure you have enough time to listen to them and - if needed - go through a negotiation process,
- accept the unknown - be ready for new stakeholders to emerge in the process and be agile in your plans so that there is room for adjustments.

2. Conduct research about the site

There might be various layers of complexity of the site and the sooner you uncover all of them, the better chances for success of your endeavor. Make sure to gather necessary knowledge on:

- land ownership - be mindful that there might be multiple owners or even that it might be unknown,
- boundaries of the site - be mindful of the fact that the contemporary borders might not be the same as the original ones,
- relevant regulations that apply to the site (e.g. heritage regulations, landscape regulation, local land use plans, in the case of Poland and Jewish heritage - rules of the Rabbinical Commission for Jewish Cemeteries),
- existing plans for commemoration or development on the site that other entities have already created or might be in the process of preparing,
- history of the site that can be discovered through archival research (conduct research yourself or make sure to reach out to people who can do it for you if necessary),
- risk that the site contains human remains ***Do not disturb the site if that's the case!***
- any material traces of the history of the site above and/or underground (e.g. foundations of buildings) ***Do not conduct any invasive works unless you have ruled out that the site contains human remains.***

3. Recognise the site as a site of difficult heritage

Commemorative projects might fail because they are approached as just another construction/design project. Such an incorrect diagnosis might result in insufficient time and resources being allocated to deal with the project and a lack of thorough risk assessment.

- use the definition to help explain the nature of the site to all relevant stakeholders,
- be transparent in exposing all the layers of difficulty - all the stakeholders should be aware of all the aspects of the site and its history,
- be clear in communicating the complex nature of a site and the challenges related to it - do not give your partners and stakeholders a false sense of simplicity of the process; not disclosing the troubling or challenging parts of the history creates a risk of it sabotaging the process at a later stage,
- prepare the stakeholders for the fact that the work can open up social divisions and decide how you will deal with them.

4. Respect the cultural and religious rules, requirements and obligations related to the site

If the site you are dealing with belongs to a culture/religion different from your own, consider yourself a custodian of the site and make sure you respect the cultural and religious rules related with the site even if they are not intuitive for you.

- consult experts and/or members of the community in question at all stages,
- explain the rules and requirements to your partners, allies, volunteers (or invite experts or members of the community in question to do so),
-
-
- use it as a learning opportunity - consider embedding anti-discrimination or intercultural communication training into your project.

5. Look for allies & build a wide coalition

If you are dealing with a neglected or un-commemorated site, remember that it has been left this way for a reason. Changing its status means challenging the status quo, which might seem threatening to some people. Building a wide coalition can be a source of strength you might need going forward.

- make sure to engage representatives of the communities which can recognise this heritage as their own,
- make sure to engage experts (e.g. historians, researchers, etc) and in particular experts being members of the communities related to the site (if there are ones),
- establish relationships with relevant authorities (e.g. local government, in the case of Poland & Jewish heritage: the Rabbinical Commission for Jewish cemeteries, etc),
- look for institutional partners – both locally and internationally,
- if you have the capacity to guide their work, engage volunteers.

6. When you get to the point of planning the implementation of the end goal, include a long-term perspective with a maintenance and educational program

Make sure to have a long-term vision and budget to maintain and care for the site as well as to plan educational programs that will assure a role in the local community life and awareness raising efforts.

- involve several partners - especially locally,
- find at least one reliable long-term sponsor who will secure implementation of your vision and who will care for the site,
- diversify the budget for maintaining the site,
- find a dedicated lead person/team and a group of collaborators to sustain and implement your vision,
- build partnerships with similar type of organizations/sites and exchange knowledge and keep on learning,
- build educational programs and keep engaging stakeholders, especially locally.

7. Devote your attention to the process, not only the end goal

Designing a monument or a commemorative plaque might seem central to the project, because it is a visible and tangible sign of memory. However, putting up a monument or a plaque is fairly easy - what requires real effort is ensuring that it is welcomed, cared for and integrated into the local memory culture after it is installed. That is why the process leading up to any tangible commemoration is crucial.

- start small and be agile - announce your plans early in the process, it will give you an opportunity to observe the reactions and plan next steps in an agile manner,
 - be clear about your goal (e.g. a commemoration) but don't impose ready solutions you came up with on other projects – it is important that the process is truly participatory and inclusive,
 - choose the right pace of the work – your endeavor may require getting people used to the idea; you can do that through thematic walks, open lectures/workshops, that do not make a physical intervention to the site,
 - connect the site to the contemporary context - look for links between the needs of various stakeholders and what the site is and can be; maybe the local community lacks green areas and you can plan a memory park that pays respect to the history of the site as well as responds to the present needs?
- consider using marking as an intermediate step - you can change the physical appearance of the site gradually by marking it with temporary signs; marking is a great opportunity for community-engagement,
 - do not be afraid of collaborating with artists – what they often bring to the table are open forms that might appeal to multiple stakeholders, including ones with conflicting needs,
 - don't confuse being flexible with being conformist – have a clear goal (e.g. commemorating a site) and define what you can let go of (e.g. your esthetic vision of a memorial) and not (e.g. historical truth and accuracy).

see “The Jewish cemetery on Gwarna St. in Wrocław” on page 61

8. Human remains

If you are dealing with a Jewish cemetery or other site containing Jewish remains in Poland, contact the Rabbinical Commission for Jewish cemeteries (RCC) and follow the rules listed below.

According to the RCC, in areas of Jewish cemeteries or sites containing Jewish human remains – ***it is not allowed:***

- to carry out any work on Shabbat, i.e. from dusk on Friday to dusk on Saturday, and during Jewish holidays,
- to dig in the ground,
- to remove soil,
- to enter into the area with heavy equipment (only the RCC can issue appropriate consents),
- to remove roots of trees and shrubs,
- to unearth gravestones,
- to arbitrarily bury bones,
- to undermine the cemetery fence,
- to open graves.

It is allowed:

- to trim trees, shrubs, annuals, biennials and perennials to the ground level,
- to remove the stumps and roots of old trees,
- to burn weeds, branches and wood in cemeteries - in accordance with occupational health and safety regulations,
- to mark out alleys on the ground - after consultation with the RCC,
- to fertilize additional layers of soil, provided that the fertilized soil is free from debris and other pollutants,
- to clean of tombstones,
- to install commemorative and information boards - after consultation with the RCC.

All tasks related to the renovation, conservation and care of tombstones in Jewish cemeteries in Poland should be carried out in accordance with the art of conservation, and in case of any doubts - consulted with the RCC.

In the case of reproducing inscriptions during the renovation of matzevot in Poland, consultation of the content with the RCC (Hebraic consultation) is required, no chemical substances should be used on tombstones without the permission of the relevant Heritage Protection Office, and tombstones or inscriptions on them should not be painted without the approval of the proposed paints and techniques by the appropriate Heritage Protection Office. Matzevot should not be cleaned with hard brushes, including wire brushes because valuable information they may contain can be damaged or lost as a result of such activities.

Useful policy documents and further references

• European strategic documents and initiatives

[EU Strategy on Combating Antisemitism and Fostering Jewish Life \(2021-2030\)](#)

[New European Agenda for Culture](#)

[EU Work Plan for Culture \(2023-2026\)](#)

[European Framework for Action on Cultural Heritage](#)

[Participatory Governance of Cultural Heritage: Report of the Open Method of Coordination EU Member States' expert group](#)

[European Heritage Label](#)

[European Heritage Awards / Europa Nostra Awards](#)

[Faro Convention \(Council of Europe\)](#)

• Other projects and networks

[Parallel Traces - a new lens on Jewish Heritage \(2018-2021\)](#)

[Mapping the Jewish Cemeteries of Europe \(2018-2023\) - publications](#)

[European Route of Jewish Heritage - Council of Europe](#)

[Europa Nostra network](#)

[Future for Religious Heritage network](#)

[Memory Activism in Poland – Report](#)

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