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THE PRESENCE OF ABSENCE. TRANSGENERATIONAL LOCAL MEMORY OF THE HOLOCAUST AMONG HUNGARIANS

The paper reports on the results of a non-representative focus group research aimed at exploring the local memory of the Holocaust in Hungary. The research took place between 2021 and 2024, almost 80 years after the events of 1944, at the historical moment when communicative memory is transforming into cultural memory. The sites of the research were villages, small and medium-sized towns, and the capital, precisely those scenes where the drama of the Holocaust took place in the summer of 1944. The results of the research showed that the Jews disappeared, but signs of their former presence remained. The traces of past Jewish life, however, became increasingly obscured over time in the minds of the successive generations.

Keywords: Holocaust, memory, forgetting, trauma, locality, generations, Hungary

LOCAL MEMORY OF THE HOLOCAUST IN HUNGARY

Our research into the local memory of the Hungarian Holocaust was carried out at the moment of the transformation of communicative memory into cultural memory. The research began in 2021, almost 80 years after the original events had happened. According to Jan and Aleida Assmann, this is the time frame when the transformation of communicative memory into cultural memory is unavoidable (Assmann, 2012).

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Hitler in fact fought two wars simultaneously between 1939 and 1945. The first was fought against the armies of the Allied Powers and the second was against the Jews (Dawidowicz, 1975). In 1944 it was clear he would not win against the Allied Powers, but his chances to win against the Jews were much better. By 1944 the Jewish population had been deported or decimated in all countries occupied by the troops of Nazi Germany. The only exception was Hungary, where 825,000 Jews had been largely left untouched. This does not mean that they were not discriminated against or repressed but their lives were not in immediate danger. Antisemitism was rampant in the country due the propaganda of the popular extreme right-wing political forces which had been successful in channeling the sense of social injustice of the masses against the Jews who were stereotypically seen more rich than the average non Jewish population (Karady, 1993).

The relative security of the Jewish population in Hungary vanished in a fortnight when the Wehrmacht occupied Hungary on 19 March 1944, on the direct orders of Hitler. A couple of days later, a new government was formed at the behest of the Germans which, in contrast with the previous government, was outspokenly antisemitic and ready to yield to the will of the Germans to eliminate all Jews from the territory of the Hungarian Kingdom. The design of the deportation of the Hungarian Jews was put together by the "Master" of the Holocaust, Adolf Eichmann, the main architect of the deportation of Jews all over Europe. While Eichmann's staff was small in numbers, consisting of not more than 200 individuals, the last battlefield of Hitler's war against the Jews had become Hungary, which itself had regained territories between 1938 and 1941 which it had lost in 1920 as a result of the Trianon Peace Treaty.

The new government was eager to assist Eichmann and its staff in accomplishing the well-established German design of the genocide. The process began on 5 April by forcing all Jews to wear the yellow star on their clothes, followed by numerous restrictions including confining them to local ghettoes prior to their deportation, mainly to Auschwitz-Birkenau. The whole process was carried out with unbelievable speed and precision. The first transports began leaving Hungary on 14 May and, by 9 July, 434,351 Jews had been deported from all over Hungary except the capital. The deported were mainly children, women and old men scattered throughout the enlarged territory of the country. While few settlements were not inhabited by Jews, the distribution of the Jewish population was rather unequal and favored the cities where the ghettoes were established. The adult men were drafted into the army as unarmed labor servicemen. The head of state, Miklós Horthy, had remained in his post and prompted by Roosevelt, the Swedish King, and the Pope, halted the deportation on 6 July sparing the lives of most of the Jews living in Budapest. With the fall of Horthy on 15th October the persecution and deportations resumed, but the majority of the Jews living in Budapest survived (Braham, 2016).

For a long time, the communicative memory of the Holocaust in Hungary was characterized by silence and the signs of the existence of the Jews who had been deported from the towns and villages were muted. Nobody was willing to speak about the empty ruined synagogues, the decaying cemeteries, the houses, shops, factories and public buildings they had built, all of which had been transferred to new owners.

The question is, however, whether the physical signs of the Holocaust are sufficient to open up the local history and if they are capable of keeping alive the memory of the tragic events amongst people who are increasingly distanced in time from the original horrific events.

Without the awareness of the horror of the Holocaust, the transformation of communicative memory will likely result in a ritualized cultural memory and the painful cognitive dissonance stemming from the dramatic events will be lost. The antidote to repression, relativization, trivialization, responsibility shifting, lack of guilt, or to the inability to mourn is a dialogical, discursive cultural memory, the revival and maintenance of which is a task that requires constant social pedagogical effort (Mitcherlich and Mitcherlich, 1968). To accomplish this, the intergenerational exploration and exposure of local memory patterns of the Holocaust, together with the creation of online and offline spaces for dialogue, is required.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In order to explore the patterns of local memory, we launched a series of focus group studies in the autumn of 2021. The research was conducted among members of three age groups in villages, in small and medium towns and in the capital (see Note). In each settlement, before the respondents were questioned, a cultural anthropological field study was carried out, aimed at exploring the social texture of the site with a specific attention to the local remnants of Jewish life (see the list of settlements in Appendix 2).

There were three reasons why we decided not to create a representative sample of the settlements concerned. The first reason came from the difference between the present size of the country and the enlarged size of the country during the events of the spring and early summer of 1944. The second reason is connected with the chilling similarity of the script of the process in every settlement, which began with forcing the Jews to wear the yellow star on their clothes in public places followed by severe restrictions of everyday life, confiscation of movable and immovable property, and ending with moving into the nearby ghetto and from there being transported to Auschwitz in cattle wagons, each packed with 80–100 persons. Moreover, the cast was also the same in every settlement, with perpetrators, victims, beneficiaries of robberies and looting, passive bystanders and rescuers performing the same roles in the local drama of the deportation everywhere. The third reason stemmed from the difficulty of recruiting respondents living in the individual spots. Proceeding in the research, we had to realize that the local communicative memory of the Holocaust was blurred in every settlement by distrust, fear, anxiety, and a repressed sense of guilt. Consequently, those who voluntarily agreed to participate and came to the interview were members of a self-selected group who were not deterred by the dark shadows of the memory of the deported Jews who were their neighbors, acquaintances, and business partners. Conspicuously enough, with one exception, no descendants of the former perpetrators or beneficiaries of looting showed up.

Instead of conducting personal in-depth interviews we decided to apply the focus group method that allows the study of responses in a more natural conversational mode in contrast with the one-to-one encounter between the interviewer and the respondent. Focus groups are not only a means of marketing research but this qualitative research method can be used in other domains of social research as well (Morgan, 1996; Blood et al., 2001).

All materials related to the research are available for the public (see Appendix 3).

The questions addressed to the members of the groups were formulated in six thematic blocks (Appendix 2).

RESULTS

VILLAGES

Of the many available options, we first chose Ricse in northern Hungary. The famous Hollywood tycoon, Adolf Zukor, was born in Ricse. Orphaned at an early age, he completed 4 civic classes in Mátészalka, then became a grocer's apprentice in a nearby village. At the age of 15 he emigrated to America, where his talent, diligence, and exceptional sensitivity to new things led to a hugely successful film career after he founded the Paramount Pictures film production company. He did not forget Ricse, where the Juhász Fountain which he donated still stands in the village square.

Although there is still a Holocaust survivor in the village, we were unable to reach this person directly. We did find one young interviewee, but he knew virtually nothing about either Zukor or the Jews.

No one from the young and middle generation was willing to answer but among the elderly group we found two men who were keen to do so. Both of them had vivid memories of the Jews of Ricse and knew Adolf Zukor, after whom the village community center is named. Zukor's birthplace will soon house a museum. These elderly villagers also knew the houses of the Jews who had once lived in the village, and were able to tell us where the synagogue was, which later became a savings bank. They also know the fenced, closed Jewish cemetery. In their childhood memories, they remembered local Jews who had been mentioned by their grandparents. However, communication barriers were strong, and fear, trauma and guilt seem to be dominant in the interviews.

Unconscious antisemitic clichés and stereotypes (solidarity, wealth) emerged in the responses while responsibility for the Holocaust was attributed to Hitler and the Germans. The memories are colored by resentment towards the period's non-Jewish population. The memories of neighbors looking for gold in the houses of deported Jews are mixed with the memory of Jews helping those in material need.

The village setting brought the memories of the elderly participants closer together in space and volume, but they were buried by silence, making the intergenerational transmission of memories impossible. Not surprisingly, the same pattern of remembrance was found in Körösladány, far away from Ricse, in Békés county.

SMALL TOWNS

As we have stated above, during the research the process of finding interview subjects was difficult. Half of the potential interviewees contacted by our helpers in Kőszeg and Szeghalom declined the invitation. Several of them asked the questions "who", "why" and "for what" they wanted to "use" the interviews. Others expressed their confusion as to "why" we were dealing with "Jews again". Our interviews represent the thoughts about the Jews and the local Holocaust of those who, despite the fear, anxiety and hidden sense of guilt, were willing to participate in the discourse of collective local remembrance.

ELDERLY PEOPLE

The interviewees gave different definitions of Jewishness. One of them clearly defined Jewishness as a religion, stating that if a person who identified himself as Jewish was not religious, he would not call him a Jew.

Several people mentioned the categories "people", "nationality", "nation". The wording of one of them ('in the Far East, the Jews were constantly at war for survival') also refers to the vagueness of the knowledge related to the Jews. Another interviewee considered it a characteristic of the "Jewish people" that "they were not assimilated…even after traumas and shocks, the Jewish people's consciousness was able to survive". Another respondent, responding to the utterances of his peer members in the group, defined Judaism as a "chosen people", which in his opinion meant that the Jews were a "leading group" and "this is what the consciousness of being chosen means".

From the interview passages quoted, we can see that the definition of Jewishness is surrounded by uncertainty on the part of the people interviewed. This is coupled with the vagueness of knowledge about Jewish culture and history, as well as the stereotypes (not necessarily negative and not perceived as offensive by our interviewees, but existing) of the "sense of belonging together" and "leading ethnic group". In relation to the historical persecution of Jews and anti-Semitism, several respondents mentioned the religious aspects of the persecution of Jews ('god-killing' stigma, Easter processions turning into pogroms). The " cohesive power of being Jewish" was also highlighted again.

In this context, this stereotype was referred to as the cause of the persecution of Jews. In a related context, one of our respondents explained that, unfortunately, "it pays to harm a minority", especially when a minority is "prominent" in economic and intellectual life, as was the case with the Jewish community. This and the resulting 'envy' were mentioned by several people.

The latter narrative is a fascinating illustration of the unreflected presence of the stereotype of the Jewish minority as a 'privileged minority' in economic and intellectual life, even among those who, like our interlocutors, see discrimination against Jews as a decidedly negative phenomenon.

In relation to local signs of memory, all the respondents agreed that in the settlement where they live as one of them put it, "of course there are traces". Accordingly, our interlocutors were familiar with the built monuments visible in the city (most of them in Kőszeg mentioned the synagogue and the Jewish cemetery), but they also stressed that the city had so far failed to make the mass graves on the outskirts of the city, which are marked with a memorial sign, more visible and public. They believe it would be important to commemorate the victims with a memorial park. One interviewee added that the stumbling stones should also be made more visible and the Jewish cemetery should be kept in a tidier condition. In Szeghalom, no traces of Jewish life remained but the interviewees mentioned a "Jewish tree" that according to them had grown where the synagogue had stood in 1944. The synagogue was demolished but the tree was certainly a fake sign since the synagogue was in fact built in another place in the town.

For the older generation we interviewed, the memory of the deportations is clearly linked to personal, communication memory. However, these personal memories are not the direct

recollections of the witnesses. By "personal memory" our interviewees meant stories they had heard from Jewish acquaintances, friends and colleagues. One of the interviewees stated that while the rightwing Arrow Cross party members were responsible for the deportations, the Kőszeg bourgeoisie "stayed away from these things". The possibility of resistance and help to Jews was dismissed, also by the interviewee quoted, the "the above-mentioned citizens, who would have been 'shot in the head if they had helped''. What emerges from this section of the interview, therefore, is that while our interviewees are empathetic with the victims of the Holocaust (and even have more personal, detailed knowledge of the events through their acquaintances), the more general social patterns of forgetting and avoidance are equally dominant in their narratives.

In relation to the importance of Holocaust remembrance, the respondents agreed that it should be remembered because, as one of them put it, "it should not be taken off the agenda because it could happen today". One of them referred to the importance of making local memorial spaces more visible and the importance of building a memorial park on the site of mass graves. Some, however, argued that remembrance should not be "one-sided", stressing the need to remember "reality". In this fragment of an interview, we can observe a mild yet clear opposition to the idea that the narrative of Jewishness in memory can be over-represented in relation to 'reality'. However, this was only the comment of one of the participants, the other interviewees did not speak about this, and one of them even stressed that the events of the Holocaust must be conveyed in an experiential way so that the commemorators can also experience the horrors of the Holocaust.

MIDDLE-AGED PEOPLE

In this focus group, the categories "religion", "origin" and "chosen people" are also mentioned as definitions of Jewishness. One of them refers to the aspect of Jewishness as an identity ascribed by the majority. Here he also mentions the example of the Holocaust as a tragic consequence of this ascribed identity.

There are two comments in this interview that are different from those mentioned above. One interviewee sees that "lately, in certain circles, it has become fashionable" to be Jewish and believes that there are people who, although not Jewish, "would like to become Jewish."

In another interview extract, we again encounter a narrative about Jewishness that is not intended to be malicious but is used without reflection. According to this narrative, the person our interviewee sees as Jewish is "a very good merchant". Accordingly, when he sees that "someone is very keen to sell his goods" he thinks that "he has Jewish ancestry". He adds, however, that he does not mean this "in a negative way at all" but "in a positive way".

The reference to 'certain circles' and the stereotype of the 'good trader' associated with Jewish ancestry were not coupled with overt anti-Semitic statements in the narratives of our interviewees. This again (as we have seen in the case of the older generation in Kőszeg) points to the uncritical emergence of general antisemitic narratives among our interviewees. These narratives can therefore be accepted and used by those who otherwise reject all forms of antisemitism.

Likewise, the stereotypes that might be interpreted as antisemitic in other contexts are also thought-provoking in the context of the reasons for persecution: ''they are good with money'', ''they are a closed, secretive group'', ''I blame them too for being isolated'', ''they

do not accept Christ'', ''they provoke antisemitism, which they would not if they were a little more integrated''.

However, the interviewees were unanimous in their condemnation of the persecution of Jews. However, they also cited as reasons for the persecution perceptions linked to the prejudices and stereotypes cited above, such as "envy" and "fear" of majority societies, stemming from "wealth", "closed-mindedness", "rejection of full integration" and "fear". In this light, we again encounter stereotypes in cultural patterns in this section of the interview.

Members of the focus group listed traces of Jewish memory in Kőszeg, but several of them also emphasized that most of the residents and even the visiting Jews are not aware of them.

In the view of one of them, this is also a failure on the part of the Jews, who should find the financial means to do so. Another interviewee, however, believes that these memorials should not be identified as Jewish, as neither evangelical nor Catholic memorials are specified, either. Therefore, like the latter, the Jewish monuments should be called "Hungarian monuments in Kőszeg".

Furthermore, several participants stressed the need to publicize the intangible traces of local memory, especially the memory of non-Jews who hid Jews during the Holocaust.

We can also see from these narratives that the emphasis on the 'otherness' of Jewishness is more intense in this generation, with the critical overtone that this 'otherness' is a result of the rejection of assimilation by Jews into 'Hungarianness'.

The narratives about the causes of the deportations are also complex. On the one hand, the respondents are unanimous in their condemnation of the horrors of the Holocaust. The reasons, according to them, were ''well-functioning propaganda'', ''sheepishness'', ''the German aggression'' and ''the desire for profit from Jewish wealth''. The latter is also highlighted by one of them as a direct cause of the deportations from Kőszeg.

On the other hand, the shifting of collective responsibility also appears in several narratives. According to this narrative, the deportations were carried out by a ''despicable small group''. The majority did not help the Jews because they were ''afraid'' and, moreover, no one knew what was happening, since ''the Jews had also reported their own addresses'', since even they were unaware of what was happening. In a related context, one interviewee describes the ''public discourse'' of the time with the help of a personal memory recounted by her grandmother, that non-Jews believed that Jews were ''finally were taken to work''. In this way, our interviewee tried to illustrate that the people of Kőszeg did not know ''what the end of the deportations would be''. However, the brutality of the statement "finally they were taken to work" was absolutely not reflected, not even noticed.

In the light of the examples cited, it can be concluded that the group's memory narratives of the deportations also carry with them a rejection of local and general social responsibility.

The respondents unanimously agreed that we should not forget the Holocaust.

YOUNG PEOPLE

What was new in these groups is that two of the respondents mentioned personal contacts with Jews. One respondent mentions that his Jewish acquaintance has "no shame" about being Jewish. Another referred to his Jewish acquaintance as one whose "parents are Jewish rather than him." Other group members did not know Jewish people personally. We found,

that even among people having Jews on their social network there is a prevailing sense of uncertainty, distance and stereotypes about attitudes towards Jews.

At the same time, the fact that young respondents mentioned the responsibility of the Hungarian local authorities and the gendarmerie in the deportations is indicative of the more reflexive, courageous memory narratives of young people. They were equally sharp in their criticism of the passive participation of the non-Jewish population in the Holocaust. In the words of one of them: 'It happened openly and in full view of everyone, and no one did anything'. In connection with this, they see that it is precisely because of this passivity that "there is collective feeling of guilt".

The focus group participants agreed on the need to remember. They stressed the need for more "memory care", i.e. for everyone to experience the events of the Holocaust at least once as a defining experience. Two of the group would also make a visit to a concentration camp compulsory in all European schools, including Hungary.

THE CAPITAL CITY: BUDAPEST

A special feature of the Budapest interviews was that Jewish and non-Jewish interviewees participated in the focus groups together.

ELDERLY PEOPLE

Among the elderly Budapest residents questioned, the topics of Judaism, the Holocaust and antisemitism were of great interest. Participants included survivors, descendants of survivors and non-Jews of Christian faith. There were a mixture of men and women.

The answers to the question "who are the Jews?" highlighted the difficulty and complexity of defining the category itself. Some focused on religious practice, others on birth, culture and behavior. The aspect of external identification was raised, which already included stigmatization and prejudicial discrimination. There was also an emphasis on a narrative based on self-classification.

The next question concerned the causes of what Wistrich called the 'longest hatred' phenomenon (Wistrich, 1991). One respondent, citing the example of Polish Jewry, drew attention to the indispensable role played by Jews in the economy and the ressentiment amongst non-Jews as a result of the role that Jews played. The envy felt by the majority at the success of the Jews, the love of knowledge, the peculiarity of entrepreneurship and risk-taking, came up in most responses. Others, non-Jews, emphasized the 'victim competition', claiming a share in the ranks of victims, alongside Jews, those sent to the gulag, Gypsies, Swabians, homosexuals. Some recalled their childhood, when they were ostracized. Some explained the millennia of Jewish persecution by factors of otherness, alienation and difference.

As in the other groups here we had also a separate question related to the traces of the Jews' past and current presence, which are physically perceptible but carry meanings beyond their physical existence. Respondents mentioned the large number of buildings built by Jewish architects, the synagogues that were in operation and reopened, the stumbling blocks commemorating those killed and deported in 1944, the neighborhoods that were once the site of ghettos, and the sites of contemporary Jewish cultural life.

The conversation really heated up when the events of 1944 were recalled. The Jewish participants, partly from personal memories and partly from what they had heard from their parents and grandparents, listed the tragic events of 1944, which began with the German invasion on 19 March 1944 and continued with the humiliating deprivation of rights. Everyone was aware that the Jews living in the immediate area of the capital were not deported as cruelly and systematically as the Jews in the countryside. The conversation was made vivid by personal and harrowing memories of being moved to separate houses, of the massacres following the takeover of power by the Arrow Cross government on October 15, and the remaining Jewry of Budapest being forced into the two ghettos. Respondents also remembered the helpers who brought food to the ghettos, carried messages, and hid children. They remembered the Swedish diplomat Raoul Wallenberg particularly warmly, who was present wherever help was needed and possible.

Everyone was alerted by the question in which we asked from whom, when and where the respondents learned about what happened in 1944, who, when and from whom learned that they were Jewish. The answers highlighted silence, taboo, late oral communication and in some cases surviving written (diary) forms. Denial, silence, silencing, and late, gate-crashing communications were dominant for both Jewish and non-Jewish respondents, in which paradoxically enough silence was also considered as communication.

At the end of the discussion, the dilemmas of forgetting, remembering, forgiving, and communicating the past to future generations were discussed by the group members. They agreed that what was discussed is now history for young people, and that they can only learn from it if the confrontation is experiential and cathartic. What happened must not be forgotten, because inter-group hatred is still a living force, the antidotes to which are education, discovery, knowledge, tolerance and individual freedom.

MIDDLE-AGED PEOPLE

Most of our middle-aged Budapest respondents believed that anyone who identifies themselves as Jewish is Jewish. One interviewee, however, believed that being Jewish "depends on who is asking."

The historical causes of persecution and antisemitism are identified by the majority of group members as a lack of knowledge about Judaism and the resulting stereotypes, prejudices and scapegoating. Anti-Judaism is also mentioned in this group as a means of " enraging the masses".

As in other groups, the unreflective use of stereotypes associated with Judaism ("rich", "educated", "more powerful", "above the average") and the "envy" associated with these stereotypes as a cause of antisemitism and historical persecution. The emergence of these stereotypes is also interesting because they were mentioned by Jewish and non-Jewish respondents, which indicates the general social presence of stereotypes and prejudices related to Jewishness.

Some of our interviewees believe that the signs of Jewish memory are "everywhere, in the stones, in the synagogues", "there is no other place in the world with so many Holocaust memorials".

Other respondents also agreed on the visibility of Jewish built heritage and signs of Holocaust remembrance (monuments, stumbling blocks) in Budapest.

Thus, the signs of local Holocaust remembrance and the presence of Jewish culture in Budapest are strongly represented for those who are actively involved in local Jewish cultural life, while for others these signs are not visible with such intensity.

As with the previous topics, the narratives related to the deportations also produced several different interpretations during the focus group interview.

Several of our respondents emphasized the tragedy of the deportations, which, as one of them put it, "people cannot comprehend with common sense". It was also repeatedly mentioned that even immediately before the deportations, the Jews in Hungary were not aware that such a terrible thing could happen to them as Hungarians. All of the interviewees who mentioned the latter idea referred to their own Jewish family history as a reference in their memories.

In relation to the deportations, some of the focus group members also shared other fascinating family and personal memories. In these narratives, the Holocaust and its aftermath become personal family events. The focus group interviews contributed to a deeper understanding of intergenerational memories. of the Holocaust, as can be illustrated through the following interview sample:

> My grandmother has stories, the one who was born in '23. She's the only one I know on my mother's side. She died in '99. So I have a personal connection to that. And she would always tell me about how the soldiers came and then she would pretend to be such a nutter, working and all that, and then she would cook like that for the Germans and the Arrow Cross and the Russians later on. And that's how the story went, and he always joked about it. It stuck with me from when we were kids, the things she used to gibber and things like that. And it's a really nice story… And then in 2003 we received a letter from the German state saying that they had managed to identify her. And I don't remember which camp, but one of the camps near Dachau, that she enjoyed hospitality there… In our family it happened like that, that there is a story, and then when the German state writes that they want to give my mother a lump sum of compensation because they identified my grandmother and they succeeded and everything is correct, and then the circle is closed…

The contents of the interviews show the coexistence of the will to forget and the compulsion to remember, illustrating the consequences of personal coping mechanisms in trauma-induced forgetting.

YOUNG PEOPLE

Members of the focus group of young people in Budapest also mention culture and religion as definitions of Jewishness. To the latter, one of them added that Judaism is more complex than Christianity because, in addition to religious affiliation, origin is also a criterion for belonging to Judaism. Several of them mention, like members of the middle-aged generation, that "a Jew is someone who claims to be Jewish".

Two referred to the fact that Jews are not different from others. One said that "there is no real distinction any more" between Jews and non-Jews. The mention of Jewish otherness as an anachronistic characteristic only emerged in this group.

Another respondent thought-provokingly, referred to the socially charged meaning of the word ''Jew'': ''there is something hurtful about uttering it''. Here, our interviewee

explained that, even as a non-Jew, he had experienced manifestations of antisemitism since childhood. For this reason, he feels that the word ‘‘Jew’’, when uttered, is in itself ‘‘hurtful’’, like a ‘‘swear word’’ for him.

Many of the respondents see the causes of hatred and antisemitism towards Jews, as in the other focus groups, in human evil, scapegoating and anti-Judaism. In the case of one interviewee, we encountered the stereotype that Jews were “more resourceful in adapting and that this was inherited”. It is thought-provoking that this interview fragment comes from someone who found the word ‘‘Jew’’ offensive. Antisemitism in his environment seems to influence his thinking even when he is denouncing it.

Another interviewee also voiced a stereotype (“a people for their own sake”) while also reflecting on this. In his view, the social isolation of Jews and the adaptation strategies that go hand in hand came about as a consequence of the persecution and discrimination suffered over the past centuries.

Most of the group members listed in detail the signs of Jewish culture and Holocaust remembrance in Budapest. In addition to synagogues, Jewish cemeteries, memorials and stumbling blocks, the whole of Újlipótváros and the area around Kazinczy Street were also mentioned. The latter was even described by one of our interviewees as “little Tel Aviv” and “a microcosm of Jewish heritage”.

However, some critical views emerged that there are still significant gaps in the visibility of commemorative signs. The “party quarters” in the seventh district were mentioned by several people as the site of the old ghetto. One of the respondents noted that the “slum” had some star-shaped houses with “no memory”. Another interviewee said it was a “disgrace” that crowds of people are partying uncontrollably in this area, and that no one thinks about, or even knows, what happened there a few decades ago. Related to this, one of our interviewees suggested that the boundaries of the former ghetto should be marked and the information about it should be used to preserve the memory of the neighborhood and the Holocaust.

The group also voiced a range of opinions and narratives about the deportations.

Several interviewees were uncertain in terms of their knowledge of what happened. The explanation of one of them is instructive: “I had a history teacher with a T-shirt of Great Hungary, it was not much talked about”. One of our interviewees from the group added to the sentence quoted above, in connection with the knowledge also related to the deportations, that the problem in her opinion is that her generation no longer has any direct family knowledge of the Holocaust.

The members of the focus group agreed on the importance of remembering the Holocaust, while some comments provoked lively discussion and reflections among the interviewees, which recurred throughout the discussion. Namely, one interviewee asked whether, for those for whom Holocaust remembrance is “not as important”, the responsibility to remember is “not an imposition”. Two other interviewees also mentioned the ‘imposition’ of remembrance on schoolchildren and the need for remembrance to focus on ‘facts’ only. The majority of the group emphatically disagreed with these views, since, as one of them put it, “if there is silence, the horror of the period can happen again”.

SUMMARY

Memory is a fundamental condition of human individual and collective existence. It is through memory that time makes sense. Forgetting, repressing, distorting, arbitrarily rewriting what happened in the past makes people vulnerable and unable to shape the present and the future.

Hungarian society is plagued by a variety of collective amnesias, and this research has focused on one with the most serious consequences: memory loss and distortion. We recruited the participants through personal contacts, many of whom, however, did not agree to take part in the research which we filmed.

From the group interviews, extremely fascinating family and personal memory narratives emerged, often with cathartic power. The trans-local and trans-generational perspective chosen proved to be very productive. In Kőszeg, for example, we found that uncertainty, distance and the existence of the same stereotypes were prevalent in attitudes towards Jewishness in all three generations, while in Budapest, transgenerational memories revealed more complex patterns/heterogeneous narratives compared to other sites.

The answers to the question "who is a Jew?" given by those with a Jewish identity revealed semantic heterogeneity and epistemological uncertainty. In contrast, respondents whose identity was outside the semantic field of the name "Jew" were driven to essentialist and homogenous definitions of the term, even including non-malicious but unreflective and uncritical displays of antisemitic narratives.

Responses to questions exploring the reasons for the persecution of Jews showed that classical antisemitic narratives are also present in those with a Jewish identity, and that among non-Jews these narratives are accepted even by those who otherwise reject all forms of antisemitism. The field of interpretation and explanation of the Holocaust in Hungary in 1944, regardless of their involvement, generation or locality, evoked associations in all participants of incomprehension, inexplicability, and the chaotic organization of the world, with Evil as the ultimate organizing principle.

Local remembrance of the Holocaust is not possible without remembering the actual presence of Jews in the place. Complete forgetting, not knowing, was relatively rare. The majority of respondents, of all ages and in all types of places, could recall both intentional and non-intentional signs of the deportation, persecution and of Jewish life in the place in the period before. However, the mentions were typically unreflective, simply describing the memory of the Jews who had disappeared. From the interviews, we can conclude that the ghettoized and ritualized memory of the Jews who once lived and were exterminated and expelled is animated by their abstract, elusive, mysterious absence, which is explained by the lack of discourse that revives the shared past of Jews and non-Jews in the place. Only in rural areas is there a memory frozen in the buildings once built by Jews; in small towns, in the capital, in the squares and busy streets, there are still the well-maintained or poorly maintained department stores, hotels and apartment blocks, but no one knows who built them, who worked and lived in them, before the former builders were eliminated. In the absence of signs to remind them, those who live today do not know who set the stage upon which they now live.

The absence of discourse is not only a feature of the public communication, but also of the communication within families and between generations. The most dramatic testimonies obtained during the research brought to the surface the silencing and tabooing of the trauma of the Holocaust and the further traumatization that inevitably occurs when the taboo is broken, yet with healing effects.

As a cathartic climax at the end of the discussions, the participants were confronted with the dilemma of forgetting vs. remembering, to which the majority of respondents clearly responded that the past cannot be erased, however painful it was, it must be filled with life in order to never return in its reality.

The focus group interviews recorded by video proved to be an excellent opportunity to address future generations, to confront the collective social responsibility for the Holocaust, which one of our interviewees expressed as "happening openly and in front of everyone and no one did anything".

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APPENDIX 1

LIST OF SETTLEMENTS

Villages
Ricse, Körösladány

Small towns
Kőszeg, Szeghalom

Medium size cities
Miskolc
Nagyvárad (Oradea)

Capital
Budapest

APPENDIX 2

Questions of the focus group interviews

1. Who are the Jews?
   – Who are the Jews?
   – Do you have any personal experiences related to Judaism?
2. Reasons for anti-Jewishness, antisemitism:
   – Why have Jews in the Western world been singled out and persecuted from ancient times to the present?
3. Local memory:
   – What happened in 1944?
   – How was the deportation carried out?
   – Where was the ghetto?
   – Who and what did they do to the deportees?
   – Were any of them helped or hidden?
   – Where were the deportees taken?
   – Did any of the deportees return to the settlement?
4. Culture of remembrance – Intergenerational communication:
   – Did grandparents or parents talk about the deportation?
   – Did they talk/discuss the Holocaust or the local deportations with others?
   – What and how they learned about the Holocaust and local deportations in school history lessons?

5. The spaces of memory:
   – Are there Jews living in the settlement today?
   – Is there a synagogue or Jewish cemetery in the settlement?
   – Are there stumbling stones, street names, memorials commemorating the Holocaust?
   – Are there Holocaust commemorations?
6. Understanding, remembering, forgetting:
   – Why did what happened come to pass?
   – Should the Holocaust and the deportations be remembered?

APPENDIX 3

The materials of the audiovisual documentation of the research can be accessed at: www. holocaust memory.org

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COLLECTIVE MEMORY OR COLLECTIVE OBLIVION? THE CASE OF HOLOCAUST MEMORY IN THREE POLISH LOCALITIES

The aim of this article is to show the scope and content of the memory of Jewish deportations and the Holocaust today through a study conducted in three Polish towns of varying sizes with a rich Jewish past (Kraków, Nowy Sącz, Muszyna) which I surveyed in 2023. Additionally, I wanted to identify the channels in which the memory of the Holocaust and deportations circulates in the surveyed localities. The research was conducted with representatives of three generations, so it is also important to show how age differentiates the memory of Jewish deportation and the Holocaust. Both age and the size of the locality turn out to be important in differentiating the extent of this memory. Moreover, an important conclusion of the study is that the memory of those events is limited and subject to repression, at risk of falling into oblivion. Relatively speaking, most of the memory of those events is preserved in larger cities among representatives of the middle generation, which is related to the existence of material memory infrastructures there facilitating the formation of local communities of memory of Jews and the Holocaust. Based on the three focus group interviews I conducted, it can be concluded that the dominant channel of memory transfer about local Jewish history and the Holocaust is communicative memory. Conversations about Jews and the Holocaust, if they do occur, generally happen with family members or acquaintances, but relatively rarely at school. Generally, conversations are initiated by people already interested in the topic and here the role of communities of memory, such as the Sądecki Shtetl, is very important.

Keywords: Holocaust memory in Poland, communicative memory, community of memory, Sądecki Shtetl

The Polish dimension of Holocaust memory is quite a specific case. On the one hand, we are beneficiaries of "time of remembrance," that is, the period of democratization and the unlocking of social memory that began in Poland with the political transformation of the 1990s. It was a time when "all countries, all social, ethnic, and family groups experienced a profound transformation of the relationships they traditionally had with the past" (Nora, 2022). On the other hand, the specter of the 1939–1956 "sleepwalking revolution" described

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by Andrzej Leder, i.e., the process of displacing the knowledge of the post-war seizure of Jewish property from the symbolic imaginarium and the displacement of guilt associated with this fact, still hangs over us, especially the oldest generations (Leder, 2014).

Although World War II ended almost 80 years ago, the topic of the Jewish presence in Poland still runs through debates by historians, sociologists, journalists, and politicians. It is not a topic that is taken up readily, but it does not let itself be forgotten for various reasons. There are also manifestations of the remembrance of Jews in discussions outside the circle of experts. Perhaps these threads are even more important, for only grassroots memory is capable of preserving the presence of three million Jews in pre-war Poland from oblivion.

It is precisely the study of this grassroots memory concerning Jews and the Holocaust that was the goal of the project "Research on Transgenerational Holocaust-memory in Central Europe," conducted between 2022 and 2023 by researchers from four European universities in the countries of the Visegrad Group: Eötvös Loránd University (ELTE) in Budapest (Hungary), AGH University of Kraków (Poland), Comenius University in Bratislava (Slovakia), Charles University in Prague (Czech Republic). The project was initiated by the Hungarian side, in particular Richard Papp. The aim of our research was to gain an in-depth empirical understanding and interpretation of the contemporary meanings of Holocaust memory. The research project had funding for 2022–2023 from the Visegrad Fund. An additional goal of the project was to gather visual documentation, leading to the decision to record the interviews. The visually recorded interviews were used as sources of further analysis as well as exhibition products. Thus, the visual documentation can be used in museum exhibitions related to the Holocaust memory (film recordings, interviews) or in a repertoire of programmes planned in addition to exhibitions (organisation of socio-drama events using research results and experiences; discussions related to the visual documentation of the research and other sensitising films; organisation of clubs). In addition to the above, the visual documentation will contribute to the studies of social memory in the social science courses and research programmes of Central European universities.

The aim of our research is to gain an in-depth empirical understanding and interpretation of the contemporary meanings of Holocaust memory. The objective formulated in this way is very general in nature. In the course of the study, questions were asked about various issues and dimensions of memory. Respondents were asked about attitudes toward Jews, about the memory of places, people, and events, and finally about the moral evaluation of Holocaust memorialization practices. It is difficult to report on all this in a single article, so I have narrowed the research problem accordingly. Here, I am interested in answering two interrelated questions:

1) What is the scope and content of the memory of the Holocaust and deportations in the surveyed localities among representatives of each generation;
2) through what channels does the memory of the Holocaust and deportations circulate today in the surveyed localities?

In addition, we were interested in exploring the content of conversations on such topics, as well as what facilitates and hinders them. In other words, with whom, when, where, and

in what situations are these topics discussed. Finally, we sought to understand how communication on these topics depends on the age and size of the respondents' places of residence.

The study was conducted in three localities and across three generations in four Central and Eastern European countries – Hungary, Poland, the Czech Republic, and Slovakia. Thus, it can be said that the study is intersectional as the aim was to indicate the relationship between non-memory/memory and the variables of age and place of residence.

The age ranges of each generation were defined as follows in the project: 18–30 years, 31–70 years, and 70+ years. Representatives of the first generation are the youngest people, whose adolescence in the case of each of the countries studied fell in the years after the already-made political transformations of the late 1980s and early 1990s. The middle generation are those whose adolescence fell during the post-war years: the period of socialism and satellite status to the Soviet Union. The oldest generation are those who often remember the years of World War II and sometimes the period before it. They are the only ones who are likely to remember a time when a Jewish presence in Poland was the norm. They also remember times when that presence was dramatically interrupted.

The second key variable is the place of residence. The initial idea was to select three locations in each country where the research would take place: a large city (preferably the capital), a smaller town, and a village. Originally, in the case of Poland, these were to be Warsaw, Tarnów, and Wąsosz. Warsaw is the capital and has a rich Jewish history. Tarnów is a city with a population of over 100,000 whose population before World War II was 45% Jewish. Wąsosz is a village in Podlaskie province where one of the pogroms of the Jewish population took place in 1941 (similar to the one in nearby Jedwabne described by Jan Gross). Ultimately, however, a combination of convenience sampling and the author's own network of contacts conditioned the selection of sites, with research conducted in Kraków, Nowy Sącz, and Muszyna.

METHODOLOGY

As part of the research, I conducted three two-hour focus group interviews on consecutive days. On July 3, 2023, an interview was held in Nowy Sącz; on July 4, 2023, an interview was held in Muszyna; and on July 5, 2024, an interview was held in Kraków. All of the interviews were recorded by a film crew from Hungary.

The prerequisites for taking part in an interview were Polish nationality and having a connection to the place where the interview took place. The study was aimed at diagnosing the state of memory of Polish nationals, hence the mentioned requirement. The sampling was mixed, employing purposive selection and snowballing. Purposive selection depended on the availability of local gatekeepers. An acquaintance put me in touch with a group of people who run the Sądecki Shtetl association in Nowy Sącz. It was they who organized the group for the interview in Nowy Sącz and then introduced me to the person who helped me in Muszyna. The situation in Kraków was quite different where I had to rely on my own contacts. I made targeted contacts with people who were interested in the issues covered by

the study and also asked them to contact their friends, employing the snowball method. In the end, I managed to mobilize 21 people:

- 8 people in Nowy Sącz: 6 women and 2 men. 18–30 years old: 2 people; 31–70 years: 4 people; over 70 years old: 2 people;
- 8 people in Muszyna: 6 women and 2 men. 18–30 years: 2 persons; 31–70 years: 5 persons; over 70 years: 1 person;
- 5 people in Kraków: 2 women and 3 men. 18–30 years old: 1 person; 31–70 years: 4 people.

From the outset, it is necessary to point out the significant methodological limitations of a survey designed in this way. The study sample is small and obviously unrepresentative, with the largest problem proving to be the implementation of the survey in Kraków. Although we are dealing with the largest city here, unfortunately, 2 people dropped out at the last minute, so in the end only 5 people took part in the interview. It was not possible to invite people from the oldest generation, so the generational representation for this interview was incomplete.

During each of the interviews, I stuck to the ready-made script provided to me in advance by Richard Papp. However, due to the limited time of the interviews, it was not always possible to ask all the questions. For some questions I slightly modified the script, choosing to test local knowledge with map sketching, for example. The questions comprehensively examine the historical and current processes, changes, and socio-cultural contexts of memory. The interview questions start the conversation with general topics that might reveal the interviewees' more general attitudes towards Judaism and the stereotypes and prejudices related to Judaism. The second set of questions focuses specifically on local memory. The questions cover the spatial representations of memory as well as the details of local historical memory. The third set of questions approaches the culture of memory. Interview partners are asked about how Holocaust memory was communicated in their socio-cultural context. The questions also cover other aspects of the interviewees' knowledge of the Holocaust and/or the motives for forgetting and silence. Following questions focus on the present from the perspective of recent reports of antisemitism. The answers to these questions may allow us to analyse the links between Holocaust memory and contemporary anti-Semitic narratives. The final questions of the focus group interview ask about the current state and significance of Holocaust remembrance.

It should also be mentioned that the survey was conducted before the October 7, 2023 Hamas attack on Israel, which may be significant in the context that the dynamics of attitudes toward Jews and the actions of the state of Israel changed strongly after the attack. The initial solidarity and sympathy were replaced by resentment and outbursts of antisemitism in many countries around the world. It can be assumed that such a large change in context could have affected the responses of the subjects and the course of the interviews (Kapralski et al., 2019). However, it is impossible to determine this without revisiting it.

The primary ethical problem concerned obtaining informed consent for the use of the subjects' images. The problem concerned ambiguities related to when and under what circumstances their images would be used. The information on this subject contained in the survey

design is quite sparse and vague, in addition to being more concerned with future planned activities, and as a result I was unable to explain to the subjects exactly when, where, and in what situations their images would be used. Despite this, I was able to obtain written consent from all those who participated in the interviews.

SOCIAL MEMORY – A CONCEPTUAL TOOLBOX

As Marian Golka writes, "Memory has many types, for it is an overly indefinite, multiform phenomenon, taking various social forms and performing various functions in different societies" (2009, p. 25). Immediately afterwards, he lists a number of its types: witnessed and transmitted memory; actual and potential; dormant and active; remembering and unremembering; archival and selective; coherent and heterogeneous; universal and local; dominant and dominated; exceptional and trivial matters; instrumental and autonomous; created and spontaneous; staged and authentic; institutional and cultural; official and private; recorded and celebrated; memory of facts and memory of values; and fortuitous and unfortunate. It is therefore difficult to speak of a single form of social memory. Since the publication of the pioneering writings of Maurice Halbwachs (2008), studies on the subject of social memory (or collective memory) have gained momentum. This has been fostered, for example, by the climate of "time of remembrance" that characterized the last decades of the 20th century. The toolbox of social memory studies has been systematically expanded and I will try to use several of these conceptual tools in an attempt to answer the research questions posed. The following theoretical categories will be key for me: communicative memory, post-memory, communities of memory, and memory infrastructures/implants.

Jan Assmann (2015), distinguishes various types of memory in his works, including communicative memory. This term refers to the type of social memory that is transmitted through human interaction and face-to-face communication in everyday conversations. In Assmann's view, communicative memory is characterized by several important features. First, it has a short temporal span: it usually covers a period of up to three generations (about 80–100 years). It is a memory concerning events whose participants and witnesses are still alive or have directly transmitted their experiences to the next generation. Second, it is a spontaneous and informal memory: it is transmitted in an unforced manner, in everyday conversations, and family or social relations. Third, it has no formal media: unlike cultural memory, which is stored in written forms (e.g., books, museums, monuments), communicative memory is ephemeral and depends on direct human interaction. Fourth, it is linked to living witnesses: it is based on direct reports from people who experienced the events described or heard about them directly from others.

This type of social memory is often cultivated within so-called communities of memory. In Maurice Halbwachs' terms, a community of memory (*la communauté de souvenir*) is a real, living social group that has been brought together as a result of a shared experience of the past, and thus possesses and cultivates its own images of it, valued in its own way (Halbwachs, 2008, p. 225).

Post-memory is a term that appeared in Marianne Hirsch's autobiographical book (Hirsch, 1997), which is a combination of the reconstruction of a family's past and theoretical reflection on the cognitive value of narratives about the past, and photography as a document of the past. Hirsch is interested in the cognitive value of memory. She calls post-memory a certain type of individual memory that shapes the self of the subject. Post-memory accumulates content remembered and stuck in consciousness, not from our own experience, but from the experience of our relatives, who, by recounting it, relive it with us. Fundamental to this type of memory are empathy and the intertwining of the subject's narratives about his own experience with those of those close to him (Kaniowska, 2014).

Hirsch recognizes post-memory as an important type of memory also because it unifies intergenerational ties, and removes generational distance; moreover, it provides a basis for deep personal reference to the past. Post-memory is, in her opinion, "a strong and very special form of memory precisely because its reference, object, or source is mediated not by recollection, but by imagination and creation […]. Post-memory characterises the experience of those who grew up dominated by the narratives that preceded their birth and whose own later histories have been displaced by those of a previous generation marked by traumatic experiences that can neither be understood nor reconstructed" (Hirsch, 1997, p. 22).

A key role in the process of memory transmission – in addition to symbolic communication taking place between significant others – is also played by material infrastructures of memory. Marian Golka writes in this context about the so-called memory implants, i.e. "secondarily and post factum created carriers of collective memory: buildings, records, images or films, as well as the content of knowledge, which are supposed to fill in the gaps of memory, reconstruct its presumed content or even create it in a new form, which would be in accordance with the current politics of the collective or the current arrangement of interests, values and goals" (Golka, 2009, p. 161). Memory implants make it possible to sustain the fragile structure of collective perceptions on a given topic, allowing to keep past events from being forgotten.

Golka notes the diverse nature of the determinants of the implantation process (Golka, 2009, p. 165). Its type is influenced by political (politics of memory), cultural (documentation of monuments of the past threatened with destruction), urban-communicative (the need to arrange an empty place in space), or tourist-economic (attracting tourists' attention and money) factors. In the case of Holocaust remembrance, both universally and locally, all of these considerations overlap.

It is also worth distinguishing between several key dimensions of Holocaust discourse. Their coexistence, overlapping, or disconnectedness, is relevant to the issue of memory transfer discussed here. At least four dimensions of Holocaust discourse can be identified.

Global, cosmopolitan discourse. This is the narrative that portrays Jews as victims of the Holocaust globally. It can be seen as a cornerstone of the founding myth of the European Union (Kapralski, 2016). Over the past few decades, it has been institutionalized through various means not only on a European scale, but also in much of the world. These processes are referred to as the formation of a cosmopolitan Holocaust memory (Levy and Sznaider, 2002) or the Europeanization of Holocaust memory (Kucia, 2016). It has been operating in Poland since the 1990s, serving as the basis for the reorganization of the axiological consensus in Europe after the elimination of the Iron Curtain. It is presented by the countries of "old"

European Union as a normative standard to countries seeking accession to the European Union, making it a politically charged topic. The transmission of this model of memory is carried out through, amongst others, various types of activist cultural texts (films: "Schindler's List", 'The Pianist', series: "Unorthodox", 'Shtisel', 'Fauda').

Domestic discourse, oriented towards Jews as victims of World War II. This is a reflection of the cosmopolitan discourse in the Polish dimension. The role of Poles as co-conspirators in the Holocaust is emphasized here (the pogroms in Podlasie during World War II, post-war pogroms). It is supported by political forces with a more liberal and left-wing profile. An important factor in activating this level of discourse was the publication of Jan Gross's book *Neighbors. The Destruction of the Jewish Community in Jedwabne* in 2000. Amongst others, one way in which this discourse is implanted is through such cultural venues and events as museums (Auschwitz, Polin, Galicia) and festivals (the Jewish Culture Festival in Kraków).

The national discourse, oriented toward Poles as victims of World War II and glorifying the role of Poles as a nation supporting Jews during the Holocaust. This is strongly supported by right-wing circles and nationalist organizations. The contemporary driver of this discourse was the historical policy promoted in the 21st century by historians from the environs of the Law and Justice party. Andrzej Nowak can be considered its promoter, who in his famous article "Westerplatte or Jedwabne" (2001) contrasted the "community of pride" with the "community of shame." He argued that even a mythologized message (Westerplatte) creates a national community, while a "message of shame" (Jedwabne) kills it. The case of Barbara Engelking, director of the Holocaust Research Centre at the Institute of Philosophy and Sociology of the Polish Academy of Sciences, was an example of the political campaign against supporters of this discourse. Her April 2023 commentary on TVN24 about the difficult Polish-Jewish relations during World War II was strongly criticized by the then Minister of Education and Science, Przemysław Czarnek, who threatened to stop the public funding their research because, in his opinion, the employees of the Institute of Philosophy and Sociology of the Polish Academy of Sciences were vilifying Poles. The clash of these two national discourses with opposing vectors is clearly present in scientific, journalistic, and political discussions of recent years, laying the groundwork for an "unwanted debate" (Nowicka-Franczak, 2017).

Local memory discourses. They can coexist with both cosmopolitan discourse and national anti-Jewish-oriented discourse, depending on local conditions. In the case of the local memory of the residents of Nowy Sącz, Kraków, and Muszyna, discussed further below, we are generally dealing with the former case.

HOLOCAUST MEMORY IN THREE LOCATIONS

Nowy Sącz, Muszyna, and Kraków are three Polish localities I visited in early July 2023 to investigate, with a small sample of people, the memory of the Holocaust and the deportation of Jews. I was interested in both the local and more universal dimensions of this memory. It is important to note the differences between the three locations, especially between Kraków and Muszyna. Kraków is the second-largest city in Poland, visited by millions of tourists each year with an extremely rich Jewish history. Muszyna, on the other hand, is a small town with

a much poorer and less exposed history of inhabitation by the Jewish minority. Nowy Sącz is a separate case. Its peculiarity is determined by the thriving Sądecki Shtetl association, whose role I will write more about.

NOWY SĄCZ

Nowy Sącz is a town in Małopolska province with a population of about 80,000. Before World War II, Jews made up roughly one-third of the town's population. The Jewish community was extremely active in the socio-cultural and political fields but the German occupation put an end to Jewish life in Nowy Sącz. In the spring of 1940, the Judenrat was established and Jews displaced from neighbouring spa-towns found their way to the city: Muszyna, Krynica, and Piwniczna. On August 12, 1940, a ghetto was established consisting of two parts: in the center and in the Piekło district. It also received Jews from other parts of Poland, including Łódź, Sieradz, Lviv, and Bielsko, as well as smaller towns around Nowy Sącz. A total of about 12,000 people were housed there and the district was extremely overcrowded. The first execution of a group of Jews and Poles took place in May 1940 but gradually the terror intensified and the final liquidation of the ghetto took place on August 23, 1942. All Jews destined for deportation were gathered at the Dunajec River, instructed to appear with a certain amount of food and luggage and with marked keys to their apartments. They were told that they would be deported to Ukraine for labor. After a selection was made and about 800–900 young men were chosen for this purpose, the rest of the Jews were deported in three transports to the death camp in Bełżec.[2]

Today in Nowy Sącz there is material infrastructure for the memory of former Jewish residents (two Jewish cemeteries, a synagogue). Thanks to the efforts of activists from the Sądecki Shtetl, the official opening of the Holocaust Victims Memorial Square, dedicated to Jewish victims of the Holocaust, was held on August 28, 2022. Among other things, there is a plaque commemorating the victims of the 1942 deportation (about 12,000 names). The originator of the idea to open the Square was Dariusz Popiela, a mountain kayaker, Olympian and social activist, and creator of the "People, Not Numbers" project, working with the Sądecki Shtetl. The city authorities are positively disposed to such initiatives.

In the case of Nowy Sącz, an extremely important institution that restores the memory of the city's Jews, their deportations, and the Holocaust is the Sądecki Shtetl. I have already mentioned the assistance I received from people from this association in finding subjects for the interviews. The beginning of the Sądecki Shtetl dates back to 2010 when the idea of taking an interest in the fate of the Jews of Sącz began to germinate among the people who run the Nomina Rosae Foundation, which operates locally and is dedicated to popularizing historical knowledge. Łukasz Połomski, Artur Franczak and Maria Molenda, independently interested in the subject, at that time met Jakub Müller, a Sącz Jew who survived the Holocaust. He became a bridge between the past and the present, providing knowledge about the local history

[2] Source of information is Wirtualny Sztetl, the portal of the POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews in Warsaw (https://sztetl.org.pl/pl/miejscowosci/n/538-nowy-sacz/99-historia-spolecznosci/137763-historia-spolecznosci).

of Nowy Sącz and activating others to learn more about it. Since 2021, the Shtetl has been a separate association, extremely active in the field of restoring local Jewish memory. Not only in Nowy Sącz, but in Limanowa, Grybów, and Gorlice as well. My interview in Nowy Sącz took place at 12/14 Lwowska Street, where the grand opening of the "Jacob's House" Educational and Museum Centre took place two days later. Members of the Shtetl publish widely and are involved in local educational initiatives. It is through their efforts, in cooperation with Dariusz Popiela, that the Holocaust Victims Memorial Square was created. One of their initiatives is the organization of the anniversary of the deportation on the Dunajec River.

The level of knowledge about the local history of the Holocaust and the deportation of Jews among the participants of the group interview in Nowy Sącz was relatively high, but it was not evenly distributed among the interviewees. Those with direct ties to the Sądecki Shtetl or their relatives were clearly dominant in this regard. They all emphasized the role of the Shtetl in promoting knowledge of the subject. One participant (man, 78) used the metaphor of "shtetl yeast" ("*drożdże sztetlowe*") in this context, the addition of which pays off with an increase in memory, and not only in Nowy Sącz itself, but also in nearby towns.

Importantly, people from the middle generation had the most to say on the subject. A person associated with the Shtetl (woman, 46) assesses that in recent years one can certainly observe an increase in local knowledge in this area, but "this is such Sisyphean work, because all the time there are young people, new people, new people, but systemically we are not very much supported." She stresses, however, that while she is now very familiar with the subject, before her encounter with the Sądecki Shtetl five years earlier she had no knowledge of the subject. Neither her school nor her family was an environment for her to discuss the subject. It was only a chance meeting with Łukasz Połomski, who had a lecture on the subject for the students of the school where she served as principal that triggered in her the need to engage with the subject. Most of the four interviewees from this generation were able to accurately reconstruct the course of the deportation of Jews in Nowy Sącz, especially the days of the deportation on the Dunajec River. Also, the awareness of the existence of places related to Jews in Nowy Sącz for these people was the highest. I was able to assess this awareness thanks to the fact that I asked my interviewees to draw sketch maps of Nowy Sącz, marking such places. Almost all of them showed the Dunajec River, the site of the ghetto, a synagogue and two Jewish cemeteries.

The accounts were somewhat differently distributed between those of the oldest and youngest generations. The oldest generation was represented by two interviewees and their level of knowledge varied. One of the interviewees (woman, 70) had a basic understanding of local Jewish history, but mainly because her daughter is involved in Shtetl activities and they happen to talk about the topic, which has made her "more interested in the subject in recent years than she ever was in her life." She has tried to bring up the subject with her grandson and with neighbors who are of a similar age to her, but has received no interest. She summarized her statement on the subject as follows: "I certainly miss the fact that in the course of my education I didn't hear so many words and interesting facts about Jewish life." Quite a different case was the second representative of the oldest generation (man, 78). His level of knowledge about Jews in Nowy Sącz, Poland and the world is above average, but even he said that this topic did not exist in his consciousness at all before 2000, despite the

fact that he received a "solid Kraków education" in his youth. The topic thus appeared in his life relatively late. Since then, it has been a topic of conversation in his case, but with a limited circle of people (selected family members, a doctor friend, and people from the Shtetl with whom he is in regular contact). Although he sees a "growing trend" when it comes to the subject of Polish Jewish history, he poignantly diagnosed the state of knowledge on the subject among representatives of his generation: "It's a little late, a little late… My entire generation is lost, unfortunately." The accounts of people from this generation harmonize well with Andrzej Leder's thesis of the "sleepwalking revolution," for the time of their adolescence and adulthood fell during the decades when the memory of Jews in Poland was effectively erased. Only the "time of remembrance" that came with the political transformation enabled them to activate these resources through communicative memory (Leder, 2014).

The opinions were similarly distributed among two representatives of the youngest generation. One of them (male 18) clearly knew more about the history of Polish Jews. This was not only, in his opinion, the result of conversations with his mother, who is involved in the activities of Sądecki Shtetl, but also of the fact that this topic is present in his school. However, this is not the result of the school's systemic efforts, but the initiative of a single history teacher interested in the subject. The second interviewee (woman, 18) said that in her school this topic is not discussed in lessons at all, and that any supplementation of this knowledge lies in one's own hands. However, she herself does not do this.

All interviewees emphasized the systemic lack of knowledge transfer on this topic in schools. This state of affairs has not changed even with the political transformation and the eruption of memory of various minority groups. There are exceptions, such as the aforementioned school of one of my youngest interlocutors, but the norm is the omission of the memory of Jews at school, both locally and universally. Trips to Auschwitz, organized by many schools in the eighth grade, do not change much here. For the most part, they do not have a long-term impact on students' awareness, as my youngest interviewees from Muszyna also confirmed.

MUSZYNA

Muszyna is a town in Małopolska province, in southern Poland, close to the border with Slovakia. It is a very small town by Polish standards, with a population of less than 5,000. The choice of Muszyna as a research site was dictated by the fact that people from the Sądecki Shtetl put me in touch with a local activist who is active there in restoring local memory of the Jews. Thanks to her help and involvement, it was possible to arrange an interview. She also took part in the interview herself.

Before World War II, a large Jewish minority (about 800 people) lived in Muszyna. Among other things, they ran hotels and restaurants, actively contributing to the development of the resort. Until the mid-1930s, Polish-Jewish relations remained good. With the rise of nationalists after the death of Marshal Piłsudski in 1935, antisemitic tendencies also increased. In September 1939, German troops occupied Muszyna. At the end of December 1940, the Jewish community in Muszyna was liquidated. At that time, the Jews of Muszyna were deported to Grybów and Bobowa, and then to the ghetto in Nowy Sącz. After the liquidation of the Nowy Sącz ghetto in 1942, they were transported to German Nazi death camps (mainly) in

Bełżec and Auschwitz. Of all the Jews of Muszyna, only two survived the war. At the turn of 1941–1942, a labor camp was set up in Muszyna for several months for about 150 Jews brought from the Nowy Sącz ghetto.[3]

Currently, there is a lack of any material infrastructure to remember the Jews who lived there before the war. The only such place is the Jewish cemetery, located in the southeastern part of the town. Established in the 19th century, the necropolis, covering an area of 0.3 hectares, houses about 80 matzevot (matzevot is a Jewish tombstone). After World War II, the cemetery fell into oblivion. In 1995, restoration work financed by the Eternal Remembrance Foundation was carried out, while in 2016 the Nissenbaum Family Foundation built a new fence around the cemetery.

Compared to Nowy Sącz, local knowledge about the Jews is much less. There is no association operating on the scale of the Sądecki Shtetl there. Nor is there a comparable number of local memorial infrastructures. Apart from one person, a representative of the middle generation (woman, 43), no one else knew much about Jews, deportations, and local Holocaust history. However, two of the interviewees (woman, 66 and a woman 68, i.e., at the intersection of generations) knew a lot about the subject, but in only relation to other localities (Krynica Zdrój and Białystok). This was confirmed by the maps they drew of Muszyna to illustrate their private topographies of Jewish places. Only in the two cases already mentioned (woman, 43 and a woman, 66) were these maps rich in detail. In the case of the others, the only place drawn was the Jewish cemetery.

The aforementioned woman, aged 43, is the local activist who organized the interview in Muszyna. One could say that she is a local leader in nurturing the memory and knowledge of the pre-war Jewish minority. As she said, the impetus for her interest in the subject came from her conversations with her two grandmothers, who were eager to share their knowledge on the subject with her. Not only the stories of the people themselves, but also the Jewish topography of Muszyna. However, she herself admits that little is known about the deportation of Jews from Muszyna. The memory of this fact is noticeably weaker here than in the case of Nowy Sącz, where the deportation on the Dunajec River has become quite embedded in local memory. Even the aforementioned grandmother of the local activist, when telling her about the details of the life and residence of pre-war Jews in Muszyna, "doesn't remember that moment when they were deported, doesn't know how it happened." The activist also talks a lot about the subject with others. The importance of these conversations was emphasized by her colleague, another of the interviewees from the middle generation (woman, 50). As she stated, this is a frequent topic of their conversations, very inspiring to her. In turn, a 66 year old woman noted that there are quite a few people with whom she can talk about these topics, including her children, who are open and "comfortable in the world." It was different in her family home, where conversations on the subject were much more difficult, as "Jews didn't have good PR." She noted that a few decades ago, being raised in such a spirit was the norm.

[3] Source of information is Wirtualny Sztetl, the portal of the POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews in Warsaw (https://sztetl.org.pl/pl/miejscowosci/m/1209-muszyna/99-historia-spolecznosci/137715-historia-spolecznosci).

The only representative of the oldest generation in the group (woman, 75) said that "it's hard to talk about Jews." She tries to broach the subject with other people, but does so rather infrequently, because it is a sensitive topic. It should also be noted that while only this one person in the surveyed group was over 70, three other women were of similar age (66, 69 and 69), making them closer to the oldest generation rather than the middle generation.

Representatives of the youngest generation in this group (two men of 16 years each) spoke the least. The topic is not very important to them, although it occasionally comes up at school. Both have a school trip to Auschwitz behind them but had little to say about it. One of them is the son of the local activist I wrote about earlier. The topic comes up during their conversations but is generally initiated by his mother and she tends not to bring it up with anyone else. It is difficult to accurately assess their silence. It is possible that the group interview situation, where they were by far the youngest participants, simply intimidated them. Perhaps in an interview situation with people of a similar age they would have spoken more.

KRAKÓW

Kraków replaced Poland's capital, Warsaw, in my study due to time pressure and accessibility (I live and work in Kraków). Kraków has an extremely rich Jewish past, with Jews probably living here from as early as the 11th century. Initially, the Jewish community lived in the vicinity of present-day St. Anne's Street, while in the 15th century they were resettled in nearby Kazimierz (now a well-known tourist district of Kraków). In 1939 they made up about 25% of Kraków's population. The persecution of Jews in Kraków began immediately after the German army occupied the city on September 6, 1939. Between 1939 and 1940, Jews were displaced from Kraków en masse. In March 1941, a ghetto was established, one of the largest in Poland, and was then liquidated in March 1943, housing about 15,000 people. The Płaszów labor camp, operating from October 1942 to January 1945 (during which transformed into a concentration camp), was also located in Kraków. Of the approximately 70,000-strong Jewish community in Kraków, about a thousand people survived the war. During the communist period after the war, following successive waves of removals, this number gradually declined. It was not until the 1990s that the atmosphere changed. The Jewish Social and Cultural Society was reactivated and the Jewish Community of Kraków became active. New educational and cultural initiatives, as well as those related to the preservation of cultural heritage, were supported by the R. Lauder and Nissenbaum foundations. The resurgence of Jewish culture in Kraków is fostered by the Jewish Community Centre of Kraków and the Jewish Culture Festival in Kazimierz. Since 1997, the city is again the seat of the rabbinate.[4]

Kraków is also a city with an extremely rich infrastructure for the remembrance of Polish Jews, with numerous synagogues and Jewish cemeteries. There is the Galicia Jewish Museum and branches of the Historical Museum of the City of Kraków dedicated to Jewish memory (Old Synagogue, Oskar Schindler's Emalia Factory, and Eagle Pharmacy). Steven Spielberg's

[4] Source of information is Wirtualny Sztetl, the portal of the POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews in Warsaw (https://sztetl.org.pl/pl/miejscowosci/k/512-krakow/99-historia-spolecznosci/137527-historia-spolecznosci).

film "Schindler's List" was also shot in Kraków. This fact caused the memory of the Jews in Kraków and their Holocaust to transcend the local dimension, becoming part of the global and universal memory.

The people I had the opportunity to interview in Kraków, without exception, were very interested in the topic and had considerable knowledge in this area. This was also the most age-homogeneous group among those interviewed in the three towns. Four of them were representatives of the middle generation, being of similar age (range 39–47). They are also characterized by a high level of cultural capital. Interestingly, also because of this, this interview was the most difficult for me to conduct in terms of keeping discipline. My interviewees were extremely talkative, often interrupting each other and even arguing among themselves. Two of them are also related to this topic in a professional sense. One of them (man, 39) is employed by the Jewish Community Centre of Kraków, while the other (woman, 47) is the co-author of a book that has interviews with Poles who rescued Jews during World War II. If only because of this, Jews in Poland are a frequent topic of their conversations with others.

The interviewees knew a lot about deportations, the Holocaust, and the living conditions of Jews in Kraków (and elsewhere) during World War II. Their statements were dominated by themes related to the ghetto and its liquidation; the Płaszów camp; and Oskar Schindler's rescue of Jews. They themselves noted that the reason for pointing out such associations could be Spielberg's "Schindler's List." There was also the theme of the deportation of Kraków's Jews. The question about their knowledge of deportations and the Holocaust not only provoked much discussion on the main topic, but also on numerous side topics. Also, the maps of Jewish Kraków they drew are rich in detail, generally related precisely to the ghetto, KL Płaszów camp, Schindler's factory, and Kazimierz with its synagogues and cemeteries. Historical knowledge, as well as the availability of local memory infrastructures, on this subject is extremely rich and easily accessible, as can be seen from the level of awareness of my interviewees. Here we are dealing with a situation diametrically opposed to that in Muszyna, where this knowledge is available mainly in niche local publications and oral transmissions.

Perhaps unique here is the case of a representative of the youngest generation (a 22 year old man, a university graduate). Although he is about twenty years younger than the rest of the interview participants, his level of knowledge on the topics of interest, and his level of involvement in the discussion was the same as the rest. This distinguishes him from the youngest generation representatives from the interviews conducted earlier in Nowy Sącz and Muszyna. While those there spoke little and only when asked, the youngest participant in the Kraków interview was a full participant and initiator of both discussions and disputes.

Unfortunately, I was not able to successfully invite anyone to represent the oldest generation. Two people close to that age did not arrive for reasons beyond their control, informing me of this on the day of the interview, which did not allow me to find a replacement for them.

For most of my Kraków interviewees, the Jewish theme is a topic of everyday conversation, primarily with acquaintances. At the same time, it should be noted that it is a very broad topic and, as one of them (man, 39) states, they tend to discuss present rather than past topics in this context. He talks mainly about "what's going on now? – where is the kosher store, where are some synagogues, what's going on in bubble one, bubble two, gossip from Warsaw, gossip from Kraków, the preparation of some holiday, or what event? This is the

Jewish bubble. But the Holocaust is not in it. It's more a question of how to approach Israel. This is such a difficult topic." Two of the interviewees (a woman, 43, and a man, 44) also said that they visit Israel once or twice a year, "just to be there, to hook a Friday, a Saturday, a Shabbat, to feel that atmosphere as well. Because that God lives there." Given that they are married, this is the subject of their conversations. Interestingly, as many as three interviewees noted that this is not a topic of conversation for them with their parents (people aged 60–70), due to their parent's negative attitudes towards Jews. If such topics do come up in their conversations, it generally leads to arguments and disputes.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the three group interviews I conducted, it can be concluded that the dominant channel of memory transfer about local Jewish history and the Holocaust is communicative memory. Conversations about Jews and the Holocaust, if they do occur, generally happen with family members or acquaintances, relatively rarely at school. Generally, conversations are initiated by people already interested in the topic. Here the important role of the Sądecki Shtetl as a community of memory within which and thanks to which the topic is still alive, can be seen quite clearly. In general, however, this is not the topic of conversation. Even if the topic is brought up with family members or acquaintances, it is only with some and relatively rarely. Lack of conversation and oblivion prevail.

It is also worth mentioning an interesting example of how the post-memory mechanism works. I am referring to the case of Jakub Müller, a direct witness of the Holocaust in Nowy Sącz, who instilled the memory of the Jews of Nowy Sącz in Łukasz Połomski, later founder and president of the Sądecki Shtetl. It was Müller who became the transmission belt for the transgenerational transfer of memory, creating the basis for a deep, personal reference to the past for members of the Sądecki Shtetl and their community.

The survey was conducted in three types of localities and with representatives of three different generations, so it is also important to show how age and size of place of residence differentiate the memory of Jewish deportation and the Holocaust. Both of these variables are important in differentiating the extent of this memory, although it should be noted that the memory of those events is small and subject to repression.

Relatively the greatest memory of those events is preserved among representatives of the middle generation and they were the most active during the interviews. People from this generation are the beneficiaries of the "time of remembrance," i.e. the unlocking of minority groups' memorials in the wave of the era of political transformation. They have much better access to knowledge and to the material infrastructures of memory than representatives of the post-war generation, and they are the ones who engage in activism in this field. The oldest generation, against this background, turns out to be the "lost" or "sleepwalking" generation. Due to their lack of access to knowledge, the validity of taboo subjects during the communist era, they often make up for their deficiencies in this area only now, through contact with the middle generation or from the media. They had access to witnesses of the Holocaust, but these too were often silent on the subject. The youngest generation, on the other hand, is in

a rather paradoxical situation. On the one hand, they have open access to knowledge and material infrastructures, but on the other hand, the competition of other interesting topics in today's "culture of overflow" (Szlendak, 2013) is so great that this topic rarely has a chance to be in their field of attention. As a result, the younger generation forgets in a trivial way (Kapralski et al., 2019, p. 63). Some of them dutifully go to Auschwitz in the eighth grade of elementary school, but this experience does not leave them with deeper emotions. These only appear occasionally, as a result of conversations with parents or a teacher. Because of their age distance, they also have infrequent contact with Jews or witnesses of the Holocaust, which is not conducive to activating memory.

The size of the city also matters. The smaller the locality and the less developed the local memory infrastructures/implants, the less memory, regardless of generation. The larger the locality, the greater the opportunity for memory cultivation, which is related to the existence of material memory infrastructures that facilitate the formation of local communities of memory about Jews and the Holocaust there. A good example of this is Kraków, where the local memory of Jews is nurtured, while access to it is relatively easy. In addition, there is more room for activists to operate in larger centers and this facilitates the formation of memory communities centered on the memory of Jews and the Holocaust (JCC in Kraków, Sądecki Shtetl in Nowy Sącz). There is also a noticeably greater tendency to refer to a globalized, cosmopolitan discourse of the Holocaust in the case of those surveyed from larger centers. As a result, it is easier in larger urban centers to engage local government authorities in Holocaust commemoration initiatives, as exemplified by both Kraków and Nowy Sącz. Authorities in such localities, which are often more liberally oriented, are more likely to subscribe to the cosmopolitan discourse of the Holocaust and more prone to support the activities of activists in the field of remembrance, making the task easier for communities of memory such as the Sądecki Shtetl.

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"*YIZKOR*": A CASE OF HOLOCAUST MEMORY ACTIVISM IN A CZECH VILLAGE

The article explores the construction and preservation of Holocaust memory in the small Czech village of Kosova Hora. The study, based on focus group interviews, reveals how local Holocaust memory is shaped by a unique combination of activism, local history, and communal practices. The article highlights the role of a Jewish couple who, by rescuing and restoring the village synagogue during the Communist era, created a central site for Holocaust remembrance. This act of preservation catalyzed broader local engagement, resulting in a collective effort to remember the Jewish community that once thrived there. The synagogue now serves not only as a cultural and educational center but also as a place for religious commemoration, despite the absence of a local Jewish population. The research concludes that such localized efforts are crucial for sustaining Holocaust memory, showing how minority activism can embed itself within majority memory, even in small and seemingly ordinary communities.

Keywords: memory, activism, Holocaust, Kosova Hora, village, ethnography, focus group interview

INTRODUCTION[1]

In this article, we introduce one case study from our ethnographic research for the Visegrad fund project *Research on Transgenerational Holocaust-memory in Central Europe*,

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which consisted of recording focus group interviews on the transgenerational memory of the Holocaust connected to specific sites of memory in the Czech Republic. Together with the main applicants of the research project, we consider it important, in addition to the victims who lived through the horrors of the Holocaust, to understand the practices and narratives of the present-day bearers of Holocaust memory. In this way, we can conceptualize the current state of Holocaust memory in Central Europe and its challenges.

In line with social scientific discourse, we think of memory as collective (Halbwachs, 2009), that is, as a shared space of experience, expectation, and practice (Assmann, 2001). Erll (2011, p. 8) emphasizes that:

> [m]emories are not objective images of past perceptions, even less of a past reality. They are… highly selective reconstructions, dependent on the situation… *Re*-membering is an act of assembling available data that takes place in the present… individual and collective remembering are never a mirror image of the past, but rather an expressive indication of the needs of the person or a group doing the remembering in the present.

Memory represents a significant present connection between the past and the future, one that is constantly negotiated through various human and non-human actors assembled in commemorative networks (cf. Latour, 2005). At the same time, memory itself is productive – it is active through negotiation, mutual reference, and borrowing (Rothberg, 2009).

In the following text, we will observe memory as constantly produced and at the same time productive. We ask, 1) **who** are the present-day bearers of the local memory of the Holocaust; are they Jewish minority or non-Jewish majority actors?[2] 2) **how do they produce it**, i.e. what are **their main memory practices**? 2a) what **sites** of memory do they produce? We understand sites of memory as spaces where memory begins to work and compose images of the past into a story (Nora, 1998). In our case, these will be physical sites of memory (a synagogue, a memorial stone, or a plaque). We consider these spaces as social products of memory as well as its producers (cf. Lefebvre, 1991). 2b) What commemorative **performances** (Connerton, 1989) do they produce? 3) How do they **conceptualize** them? We viewed their narratives of Holocaust memory as constructed and performed in a specific research situation, thus analyzing the active, collaborative construction of the past in conversation (Welzer et al., 2010).

As per the methodological design of the project supplied by the main applicants, and together with their visual documentation team, we organized four focus group interviews in the Czech Republic. Each of them was in a different locality. The localities were chosen in a cooperation with our gatekeeper David Kraus. An ethnographic research and document analysis preceded the interviews. On this basis, in each locality, the interviewees were chosen with slightly different logic appropriate to the context of the locality, its history, and contemporary situation. We treated these four ethnographic field sites as four different cases. In the project task, there was the capital city, the middle-sized city, and one village or a small town with a historically documented Jewish settlement. For this article, we have chosen to introduce the case of how Holocaust memory is constructed and reflected upon at the smallest settlement chosen by us for the Czech part of the project.

[2] In this article, we observe Holocaust memory only in the relation to the Jewish victims of the Holocaust.

ETHNOGRAPHIC SETTING: *KABBALAT SHABBAT* IN KOSOVA HORA

The Kosova Hora village is located in the Příbram region in Central Bohemia, Czech Republic, approx. 80 km south of Prague. Formerly a township, this village has now approx. 1,400 inhabitants. We have learned about the remarkable story of the local Holocaust memory activism (Jurková and Seidlová 2020) already in the preparatory phases of the research project, both from our Jewish gatekeepers and media.[3] That's why, on Friday 15th of October 2021, we found ourselves in front of the rescued synagogue in Kosova Hora:

> We stand in front of the former small town's baroque synagogue, reading the Hebrew imperative '*Yizkor*' ('Remember!') on the stone memorial, followed by a Czech sentence: '*Památce kosohorských Židů zavražděných v nacistických koncentračních a vyhlazovacích táborech*' ('In memory of the Jews of Kosova Hora murdered in Nazi concentration and extermination camps'). In Jewish tradition, *Yizkor* is also the name of a memorial prayer recited for deceased loved ones.[4] Then, we walk around the building to enter a little Jewish square, where we find the main entrance to the building. The approx. thirty participants of the irregular Friday Evening worship (*Kabbalat Shabbat*), which takes place once a year, are already there. However, they are not locals, as the Jewish Community of the Kosova Hora has not been renewed after the Holocaust. Most of the participants arrived from Prague, the members of the Jewish Liberal Union (ŽLU). The place of honor in the first row belongs to the private owners of the synagogue, the Ehl family. We are all seated facing the *Aron HaKodesh* ("holy ark" in English), where the Torah scrolls are kept in a synagogue. It is typically located on the wall facing Jerusalem, the holiest place in the synagogue. However, this ark is empty, as the Torah of the prewar Jewish Community of Kosova Hora was first stolen by the Nazis, then sold by the Czechoslovak communist government to the United Kingdom, and now it is located in the Jewish Congregation of the San Geronimo Valley near San Francisco. The Kabbalat Shabbat service is led by the female *hazzan* of the ŽLU, Jaroslava Hannah Maxová, a former operatic singer, whose gentle yet powerful mezzosoprano fills the space, while performing the liturgical pieces from the *siddur* (prayer book), sometimes accompanied by the voices of the community's mixed choir. At one point, Mr. Ehl, the synagogue's owner, is called in front. He unrolls a Torah-like scroll and reads the list of names written there. The names belong to the victims of the Holocaust from Kosova Hora (Fieldnotes, 15.10.2021)[5].

[3] "[Our journal] brought more extensive information about Kosova Hora, a small town near Sedlčany, in last year's July issue, in connection with the completion of repairs to the local synagogue and its opening to the public. About a year later, a memorial to the local Holocaust victims was created and unveiled on 28 June 2013 by the local civic association Synagogue Kosova Hora and the municipality. It stands by the synagogue, in the middle of the former Jewish Quarter, which at its height had thirty numbers, a school and a mikveh or ritual bath. Most of the houses have survived to this day and in their totality represent an important urban unit. The way the local people remember their fellow Jews who were murdered by the Nazis or scattered to all corners of the world is exemplary. Thanks and appreciation are due to all those who have helped to ensure that the yizkor, remember, which is written in Hebrew in the text of the monument, remains in the memory of the place and the people who live there or come to visit." (Daníček, 2013, p. 16). For further media representation see e.g. (Anon., 2007, Daníček, 2011, or Kratochvíl, 2013).

[4] It is traditionally said in the synagogue on Yom Kippur, Shemini Atzeret, the last day of Passover, and the second day of Shavuot. The prayer asks God to remember the souls of the departed and grant them peace.

[5] Fieldnotes from the same event in 2022 and 2023 can be found in Škodová (2024, pp. 25–27).

The event has also been reflected on the website of the Jewish Liberal Union:

> The dimly lit synagogue hall was the scene of a breathtaking commemoration, a deeply emotional event, as the last service was held there almost 80 years ago. The ŽLU Rimon Choir contributed to the festive atmosphere of the evening. Also present were Mr. Petr Ehl and his wife, who in 1987 purchased the ruined Kosova Hora synagogue and thus saved it from planned demolition. Mr. Julius Müller spoke about the history of Jewish settlement. Jews had lived here since the 16th century and in the 18th century they made up 35% of the town's population. After Kiddush, we met for dinner in a local small pub and promised to continue to revive the memorial sites and to remember the Czech Jews, whose legacy we respectfully claim and want to carry into the future (Anon., 2021).

Kosova Hora is a small, insignificant, at first glance quite ordinary village in the Central Bohemia Region. During our first visit to the village, we were struck by the strong echoes of its Jewish past and decided to choose it as a field site for our research project.

THE SITES OF MEMORY

The first mentions of Jewish settlement in Kosova Hora (historically also known under the German name Amschelberg) are from the 15th century. The Jewish ghetto was established in the 17th century; it consisted of approx. 30 houses surrounding a small square with a synagogue built in 1740. After the second half of the 19th century, the Jewish inhabitants were more than one-third of the local population. At that time, they began moving to Prague and other larger cities. As expressed by one of the participants of the interview, whom we introduce later:

> 00:11:18 Synagogue owner: There were four hundred Jews in the Kosova Hora in 1870 but at the time of the deportations, it was thirty-five.[6]

Almost none of the Jewish inhabitants have survived the Holocaust. Most of the original Jewish houses have been preserved to this day, including the cemetery and the synagogue.

Apart from the exceptionally high ratio of Jewish population in the city in the 19th century, a similar story could be told about many Czech and Moravian villages. As almost none of the Jewish inhabitants returned to the villages, cemeteries began to overgrow, synagogues began to crumble, and the Communist regime, which was in power in the former Czechoslovakia from 1948 to 1989, certainly did not care neither for Jewish memory nor for the memory of the Holocaust. Similarly, the synagogue in Kosova Hora, which was owned by the Jewish Religious Community of Prague during Communism, was on the verge of disintegration in the early 80s and before demolition. The story of the rescue of the local synagogue is crucial for understanding how this building works as a main site of the local memory of the Jewish population and the Holocaust while triggering further local memory practices of an emergent heterogenous commemorative network.

[6] This and the following quotes are taken from a video-recorded focus group interview conducted by Novotná and Seidlová, Kosova Hora, 11.07.2023. Unless mentioned otherwise, the names of the interviewees are anonymized.

The synagogue was discovered by a Jewish couple who had nothing to do with Kosovo Hora, but they managed a unique feat: at a time when private ownership of a house other than for living or recreation (second homes, cottages) was not allowed in Czechoslovakia, they managed to buy the synagogue and neighboring rabbi's house, while claiming it as their house of recreation – i.e. their private weekend house or a "cottage" as the Czechs say.

The local Jewish memory activism of this couple, their insistence on rescuing a Jewish site despite and because of the loss of the local Jewish community, was such a rare act of resistance in Communist era Czechoslovakia, one sustained up to the present, that it calls for attention on its own. However, their efforts became a triggering point for the non-Jewish locals to construct the present memory of Kosova Hora with a significant layer of the Jewish past and the Holocaust. Therefore, we decided to organize one of the focus group interviews specifically in this village. We invited the couple who saved the synagogue, the mayor of the village, the vice-mayor, a local chronicler and former history teacher, a young history teacher, and one non-Jewish eyewitness of the Holocaust in Kosova Hora.

THE ACTIVIST'S STORY OF THE SITE'S RESCUE

The story of the rescue of the synagogue as a site of memory dominated the first part of the focus group interview. As the synagogue owner remembered:

> 00:36:11 Synagogue owner:
>
> In the late '70s and '80s, my wife and I were documenting Jewish cemeteries and monuments in general, because… The commies, as if they felt that their time was soon over, they still demolished some of the remnants of synagogues that the Nazis had not had time to demolish and burn. Well, in the late '80s, they started to destroy even the cemeteries, too. So at various places, we didn't have time to document them, as there was a bulldozer going already, right? So when we were returning to Prague, we drove through Kosova hora. Well, we were at the cemetery, and I took photos of it. And then we were looking around the ghetto and in front of this impoverished synagogue […] when the locals here saw some guy with two suitcases and a tripod, it didn't escape their attention. So they were watching, asking questions. And I said, the synagogue, what's up with it? They said: 'Don't go up there, it will fall on your head, it's terrible. It's going to happen anyway. It will be demolished. […] I said, well, whose is it? And no one knew exactly. So I went to the national committee […] They said: No, it's not ours, no. That's what the Jews have. I said, what Jews? They said, well, it's some community [the Jewish religious community of Prague]. They want to transfer it to our property, well, we'll tear it down. There is no money [for the reconstruction]. And repairing Jewish monuments? That was not popular at that time. So we arrived in Prague, and the next day, I went to the Jewish community. And as I've asked, they said, well, we do [own it]. I said they're gonna tear it down! They said, well, we don't know. […] And I said: Okay, well, if they want to tear it down, then transfer it to me instead of the national committee and I'll fix it. And you're, like, some kind of… A company or something?, they asked. I said, no, a private person. They said, well, yeah, but we can't transfer that to you. […] I said, well, I'm not an institution, so how do you want to do it? Well, we'd sell it to you. I said, okay, so sell it to me. Well, they said,

we'd have to make a price estimate. I said, make an estimate. […] I haven't seen such a rush till then. Never seen it, can't even see it today. [Laughing]

While the institutions have been "relieved of this burden", the couple manually reconstructed the synagogue and the rabbi's house on their own, for all their private money:

00:42:27 Synagogue owner:

So you just buy it, you buy the synagogue, well. And then we spent years fixing it up. We put all our money into it, then we took out a mortgage. Well, so it was just fixing, fixing, fixing.

After the political turn in 1989, they established an NGO, Kosova Hora Synagogue:

00:42:50 Synagogue owner:

Then we set up a civic association so that we could get some funding, […] well, you can't get that on your own, right? So we got some money from various institutions, even from private individuals. And then we went on to make this prayer house with this money because we had already collected it. Then it was finished. So we moved, and we sold our apartment in Prague. We've paid off the rest of the mortgage. Well, here we are.

Since then, the couple has been living in the neighboring rabbi's house. The NGO takes care of the building and since 2011, they have opened it to the public as a space for cultural events with a few boards on the history of Jews in Kosova Hora.

THE ACTIVIST'S STORY OF THE INVENTED MEMORIAL OBJECT

In the last few years, occasional Kabbalat Shabbat services have been organized here by one of the liberal Jewish communities in Prague, the Jewish Liberal Union. Their service which happens once a year at the end of August serves as a memorial service as well, when the synagogue's owner reads the names of the victims of the Holocaust from Kosova Hora from a Torah-like scroll, which the owner has ordered to be made for this purpose:

00:55:07 Synagogue owner:

It's in those Terezin books which you can download from the Internet. So you find these thirty-five people in them, with all their [data…] and the numbers of transports and everything completely. Well, that's it. It's not a problem. I just… had it done like this [Holocaust victims' names are written on the scroll]. Everybody's thinking, you got a Torah! I say, please, where would we get it from? [Kosova Hora's] Torah is over there in America, isn't it? […] but this [memorial scroll…] is based on that prayer for the martyrs of the Shoah El Male' Rachamim. And, in Rabbi [Karol] Sidon's translation, in that prayer, it's also mentioned that […] they're like the martyrs of the Torah, the victims. Well, I was saying, if they're martyrs of the Torah, then it could be made as Torah, and, so everybody's looking at it, and everybody really likes it. I have had the rollers made, it's like a Torah. And there are the names written on that canvas. Well, we always read them on Yom HaShoah. And then at that Kabbalat Shabbat service as well.

THE REFLECTIONS ON THE LOCAL YOM HASHOAH EVENT

00:56:54 Researcher 2: So you're organizing a Yom HaShoah?

00:56:56 Synagogue owner: Oh, sure, regularly. We alternate with [the city of] Sedlčany […].

The mayor and vice-mayor of the village added further color to the image of the event:

00:57:11 Mayor:

This is one of the regular (event), I would call it, annual, as Mr. Ehl rightly says, Kosova Hora alternates with Sedlčany every year. And I have to admit, it's always crowded and it's a truly commemorative event. I am glad that we are regularly reminded of this here, and it is important to constantly remind ourselves of these things so that the younger generation in particular does not forget.

00:57:39 Vice-Mayor: It's good that there are school kids involved.

The Holocaust memorial event in the Kosova Hora synagogue is thus referred to as being performed by a majority to a majority (the locals taking it as their own memory) while having the intentionally transgenerational aspect. The synagogue which mostly lost its ritual function, becomes a meaningful site of memory not just through a few information boards about the local Jewish past, but mainly as a site of memorial performances with a newly invented symbolic quasi-religious art object. The Torah-like scroll with the names of the victims functions as a powerful tool of local memory production in the framework of the Yom HaShoah organized by the locals for the locals, remembering the victims primarily as locals, as well as during the exceptionally organized religious ritual (Friday evening worship) by the non-local Jewish people (with the active performance of the synagogue owner) to the non-local Jewish people, remembering the victims primarily as Jews.

THE LAST EYEWITNESS AND THE CHRONICLER: COMPLEMENTING NARRATIVES

Thus, the space of the synagogue also became a logical site for the focus group interview. With the cameras on, the space shaped its dynamics and provided a platform and listening audience for remembering by the local eyewitness. During the interview, the eyewitness constructed her narrative of the time of the deportations and before them, with the topic being commented on by the local chronicler:

00:11:53 Chronicler:

When the deportations happened, there was nothing to shop for. Sedlčany was already slowly evicted and the Kosova [Hora] citizens had nothing to buy because there were no local traders except bakers.

00:12:10 Eyewitness:

I kind of remember that time as a little girl, because I was born in 1933. And so I was six years old […] when the Germans came. And then I remember well when they took them away when

there was this deportation of the Jews. Next to us, for example, here in the synagogue, there were the Lamberts, the couple, the elderly couple, and I remember them being taken away. And they put them in a truck that took them from Kosova Hora to Benešov and from Benešov to Terezín, right, they were concentrated there, then they were taken to Poland to those concentration camps. I remember that well. It was whole families. And every time they had a holiday, Mrs. Lambert would bake matzos and give them to us kids. And I also remember when the services were here, the rabbi would come, and we used to play here [in front of the synagogue] as kids … it was called the Jewish market, and we would peek in the door [of the synagogue] and the rabbi would let us, as long as we didn't get naughty and disturb the devotion, he didn't chase us, nothing, he let us be and we played. We wanted to speak Hebrew too […] there were about twenty of us, there were a lot of kids, we got along very well with them, we played with the kids and it was all so cool.

The eyewitness's narrative has been constructed nostalgically when without pause, the tragic event of the deportations of her Jewish neighbors was interspersed with happy memories of her childhood with her Jewish friends, a picture of an idealized past. She remained the only one in the village, who still remembers the victims personally. Together with the chronicler, they also remembered a local survivor:

00:20:49 Eyewitness:

[…] I went to Prague, [to] the chapel in the Jewish cemetery [i.e. the Pinkas Synagogue, which serves as a Holocaust memorial]. So all the Jews there, those who were from Kosova Hora, who lived here and were taken to those Concentration camps, they are all listed there. All the people I knew who lived here, they're in that chapel. Nobody came back, only one came back… Kaufmann. There were two of them, the Kaufmann brothers, Otto and Ludwig, so he came back. [Otto] didn't come back, but only his brother Ludwig came back. And with him came… Jirka Gertner. He came from Vrchlabí, where they had some kind of textile factory, in Vrchlabí, if you know. I think you do. [She turns towards the Chronicler.]

00:22:30 Chronicler:

[…] so I knew Mr. Kaufmann Ludwig. He used to visit my grandfather, my grandfather was friends with Jews. He spoke to them, in German. And he [Kaufmann] used to come to us. Then I was at his funeral and I'll show you where he's buried and so on. And he was telling why he survived.

At another moment of the interview, the chronicler mentioned other more or less local people identified as Jewish who survived the war:

00:53:00 Chronicler:

I would also like to say that Jehuda Poláček went to class with my father, but he served in the British army, so he was also actually a survivor, one of those Kosova Hora citizens, so we are slowly getting to those who are… There is also a certain Mrs Heřmanová mentioned here. But I don't think she lived in Kosova Hora.

00:32:00 Chronicler:

So, and let's not forget one more thing, that mixed marriages were normal here, yes, it was nothing against anything, so actually Hildegard Holan, née Stern, also survived the Holocaust de facto.

The absence of the survivors in the village has surely shaped the dynamics of the group interview, the tone of which has been remarkably respectful and warm, while speaking of the lost Jewish neighbors. The story of a mutually peaceful and beneficial co-existence has also resonated in the narrative of the chronicler (a former headmaster of the local elementary school), who has become an expert on the local Jewish past, giving us an extensive tour through the Jewish cemetery later.[7] However, the behavior of the non-Jewish locals during and after the Holocaust was not mentioned throughout the whole focus group interview. The chronicler only briefly suggested the perspective of the locals from that period.[8] Rather, the memory of the hundreds of years-long stable co-existence with a Jewish minority in this locality was more dominant than the memory of its tragic end. The other minorities and groups that became victims of the Holocaust have not been mentioned by the participants at all.

CONTESTING THE DOMINANT MEMORY LAYER

If the memory of the eyewitness and the synagogue owner has been constructed primarily emotionally, although from different perspectives (childhood with Jewish neighbors vs. identification with Judaism), the memory of the local chronicler has been rather systematic. For him, as well as for the mayor of the village, the Jewish past creates just one of the multiple layers of the place, even though important:

01:02:50 Synagogue owner:

I think that if it weren't for the Jews in the Kosova Hora, not even a dog would bark at this village.

01:03:00 Chronicler:

I don't think so. However, the medieval Czech word 'Hora' ('a mountain') means a place of mining. So when the mining probably died out here by the Hussite wars, the Jews became really like the movers and shakers. Everybody's been digging around their fields, whereas the Jews brought progress. Until the Holocaust, basically. Well, you're right about that.[9]

[7] E.g., 01:07:19 Chronicler: Historically, no pogrom against Jews has been documented. Except for one [conflict]. That was more of a pub brawl. 1892. […] then those cronies, during the village festival, they broke the windows of the synagogue and in the shop and so on. So that's the only 'pogrom' against Jews that happened here […] So they just sort of got along.

[8] 00:19:29 Chronicler: […] that might have bothered the locals. I'd like to go back to the Holocaust. It was very strange to the local [Czech] people that the Jews were the ones who claimed the German nationality the most. They spoke German, they had German names, and the locals found it strange that the Germans were their greatest enemies, when in other times, they [the Jews] were so vehemently in favor of them. The Heller factories, for example…all their invoices were written in German until the Holocaust, yeah.

[9] Cf. 00:24:54 Chronicler: But there were actually some big businessmen here, the local population didn't seem to be involved. And they still don't, yeah. Well, here's where I have to use the comparison with the Vietnamese ethnicity, because here today, the Vietnamese control the business. Because no one in Kosova Hora is attracted to business. He's got business and he's going to quit, he's just not willing to sacrifice that and… I was going to say something else, that there was in the 17th and 18th Century also a center of Jewish scholars. We mustn't forget that, because we're going to show the cemetery.

01:03:34 Mayor:

But otherwise, we would certainly not agree that Kosova Hora… that not even a dog would bark at it. It has its own rich history.

To reverse the impression that the minority's past forms the dominant memory layer of the village, the mayor and the chronicler mentioned other non-Jewish monuments of the Kosova Hora, such as the Renaissance castle. However, when mentioning their active part in the education of the locals about the preservation of the Renaissance houses, the significance of the village's heritage has been constructed again through the Jewish monuments.[10] At the same time, the role of the activist Jewish couple in saving the synagogue as a local monument has been acknowledged in the interview by the village representatives,[11] pointing out further new secular functions of the building, such as a concert hall.[12] The activism driven by particular strong individuals logically becomes limited by issues, such as health.[13] However, their efforts triggered further activities, when the local council began to nurture the memory of its Jewish past in the village public space. The village has placed visible notice boards advertising the synagogue, even though the synagogue is not a tourist place and is opened only upon request to the owner. There is also a stone monument in front of the synagogue, a floral decoration in the shape of the Star of David, and an accessible Jewish graveyard.[14]

THE MAYOR: A STORY OF THE MEMORIAL PLAQUE WITH ITS TRANSNATIONAL AND TRANSGENERATIONAL CONTEXT

Even the present building of the Municipal office with an attached public park became a site of Jewish and Holocaust memory, although slightly contested:

00:50:30 The Chronicler:

So there you can see that actually a hectare of four hundred Jews and suddenly one Jew built a house with a garden that was as big as the whole ghetto. Yeah, and that house is the most lavish,

[10] 01:04:15 Chronicler: We managed to save the Renaissance houses, right? T(o repair) this house here costs a lot of money, and it's not a heritage site, so the mayor and I, we argue that there must be a peaked roof and that they can't put plastic windows in there and so on. Or there's that ghetto too, that's all in the original place. So I think Kosova Hora is European significant because it had everything. Too bad there's not that Jewish school…

[11] 00:43:38 Mayor: I know this from a local government perspective. Kosova Hora was very lucky to find such heartthrobs who actually saved such a devastated building for future generations. So for that I would like to thank them very much, of course, because… the building will continue to be used here, the way they renovated it, it's beautiful.

[12] 00:44:10 Vice-mayor: The synagogue is also used for culture, there used to be nice programs here, too bad the covid interrupted it a bit. Really, I have experienced so many nice concerts and events here.

[13] 00:44:22 Synagogue owner: There were some more (events) here, but it's true that now, we don't have those anymore. […] And we have some medical problems now. 00:44:32 Synagogue owner's wife: But it would be good to put something together again. 00:44:36 Synagogue owner: But they have to put me together first… 00:44:36 Synagogue owner's wife: Well, I know, I understand, but it would be good to slowly do something about it again, because everything just runs to seed, doesn't it?

[14] A property of the Federation of the Jewish Communities in the Czech Republic.

isn't it, it is the municipal office now. When I was headmaster of the school in 1991, Mr. Poláček from Jerusalem or Tel Aviv got the house in restitution. I don't know exactly now.

00:52:22 Mayor:

Mr. Poláček's descendants have been here several times to see already with their great-great-grandchildren the building, which serves as the municipal office, and their condition of the sale was that there would be a memorial plaque in the hallway of the municipal office saying that they lived there.

00:52:44 Synagogue owner:

I'd like to say that the plaque deserves to be outside on the building. And not in the hallway, where actually no one's coming, are they? Except for us who go there.

00:52:56 Mayor:

It's not over yet…

00:52:58 Synagogue owner:

No, well, that wouldn't be such a problem, would it?

While mentioning the memorial plaque on the Municipal Hall building, the story of its previous owner, a local Holocaust survivor, has been further revealed. The transnational path of Julius Yehuda Poláček (1920, Kosova Hora – 2000, Jerusalem, Israel) has been tangled with the story of his family's house in Kosova Hora, which was confiscated during the German Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia, remained as such during the Communist era (when it was used as an elementary school) and has been successfully claimed back by him and his family from Israel only in the early 1990s, after the political turn in Czechoslovakia in 1989. The point of the memorial plaque being a condition of the sale of the building to the municipality reveals the active role of a survivor's descendants in the local memory production for the first time in the interview. The mayor's pointing towards the transgenerational aspect of the transborder, transnational family remembering activated by the need to regain the family heritage of a (at that time badly demolished) building and sell it to the municipality to save it, has been further emphasized by his mention of personal visits of the survivor's descendants during the searching-for-family-roots travels. The mayor contextualized his narrative of re-purposing the Poláček's estate through the council's further activities "to commemorate Jewish history".[15]

[15] 00:48:06 Mayor: It's true that both the park and the building of the original school,… the house was basically devastated. It's also, I guess, there was a demolition plan. The municipality was still considering demolition under the previous mayor. And sometime in the year 2002, the previous mayor František Pilík tried very hard to save the building, to repair it. Which was a great credit of his. And with the help, of course, of both state support and subsidies, he managed to save this object. Of course, we are trying, because we are proud of our history, so we are trying now, at the present time, the present council, within our financial means, to commemorate Jewish history. So to that end, we have basically had the plaza repaired, and the Star of David in

LOCAL SCHOOL TEACHERS OF HISTORY: THE TRANSGENERATIONAL PERSPECTIVES

The former and the present history teachers have then highlighted the transgenerational aspect of the local memory from the non-minority's perspective while bringing up the Yom HaShoah memorial event again:

> 00:57:50 Chronicler:
>
> Not only do children from the [elementary] school participate, but it is a tradition here that Kosova Hora [high school] students…when they do some term papers, the only topic is either the Holocaust, that or so… even the [university students…], so I always have to give them the materials. And so if they need some interesting original topic, they always find it here. Topic [for a] term paper, or a Master thesis even.

The current history teacher, herself a generation younger than the chronicler, confirms his words, pointing out that the students from this region who study with her at the high school in a nearby town are interested in the subject of the Holocaust, especially through the lens of local memory.[16] She has been actively involved in the local memory production herself as one of the volunteers who researched and translated period documents, which are presented on the information boards in the synagogue, and which she then presents to the students who visit the space with her.[17]

APPENDIX: NOT EVERYTHING IS AS IT SEEMS

Let us return to 2021, when we first visited Kosovo Hora for an extraordinary memorial service:

> The service ended with a joint kiddush (toast) by all present. We walk outside the synagogue and see a large piece of cloth draped over a large pile of cut wood at the opposite house in the evening gloom. It certainly wasn't there before the service, but no one pays attention to it now

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the middle with the beautiful trees is a reminder of that. We took advice from architects, of course. And I'm kind of happy about it. And we believe it is a worthy reminder of the Jewish settlement in Kosovo Hora. And it is not the end, because we would like to improve this picturesque area of the Jewish market. But this will of course be subject of negotiations with the property owners. I suppose that will be more complicated. But there are no small challenges.

[16] 00:58:33 Teacher: And I can confirm that students are indeed interested in this topic, […]. They are not interested in some old history, but, as they say themselves, they are interested in the history that still concerns them now, and in fact, we can actually [apply] the history of the Holocaust to the topic that of course still concerns them now, because the immediate, […] the 20th century [history] is attractive for them and the local theme is attractive here.

[17] 00:44:47 Chronicler: I would like to remind you that thanks to Mr. and Mrs. Ehl [Synagogue owners], The Kosova Hora's historiography has also progressed. Behind us, we see various new documents that have been discovered and here a professor from the grammar school translated them for us because she has studied old German. And thanks to her, the (knowledge of) history of Kosova Hora has shifted a lot.

> either. What catches our eye, however, is its colorfulness. One of us asks the chazan: 'Look, isn't that a Palestinian flag?' 'Yes, it is a Palestinian flag', she says, a little surprised. 'And what do you think of that?' 'That's just antisemitism,' she replies. 'Do you think it's antisemitism?', I ask. 'And how else would you like to understand it?', she replies a little sternly (Fieldnotes, 15.10.2021)[18].

We consider this situation to be significant in illustrating the complexity of Holocaust memory. In fact, it provokes us to ask ourselves how the current inhabitants of the community contemplate the memory of the Holocaust in moments when we do not directly ask about it. Looking at the village website, the synagogue and cemetery are mentioned among the monuments, but they are not so prominent compared to the narrative led by the mayor and the chronicler in our interview. Indeed, the Holocaust is described on the village website as follows: "The advent of fascism greatly affected life in Kosova Hora. Virtually the entire Jewish community left."

Suddenly, this surprisingly stark statement puts Kosova Hora back among the many Czech and Moravian communities that, in constructing narratives of local memory, still tend to soften, if not displace, the burning moments of 20th century history.

CONCLUSION

We followed a story in which a married couple's extraordinary activism built a unique place of remembrance for both the Jewish community and the Holocaust in a small, otherwise unremarkable community. The Jewish owners of the synagogue have gained the respect of the locals during their four decades of involvement, preserving a local Jewish memory site as a cultural-educational as well as a (potentially) sacred place. Thus, the memory practice of a particular, originally non-local activist couple was crucial in constructing the public local memory of the Holocaust by saving and repairing the synagogue, thereby materializing and anchoring that memory in the middle, right in the center of the village (as opposed to the Jewish cemetery, which is also preserved, but lies off to the side of the village, as is customary). The restoration of the synagogue included the installation of an exhibition on the history of the synagogue and the Jewish community of Kosova Hora and, above all, a unique material reminder of its demise: a Torah-shaped scroll with a list of the names of local Jews who perished during the Holocaust.

The whole combination (a restored synagogue in the center of the village, with an unusual story of restoration and an even more unusual scroll), leads to the fact that the synagogue itself can also be seen as an actor of remembrance. As such, it attracts Jewish actors' practices, ranging from a religious ritual with a commemorative moment (the yearly Friday evening service of an incoming Jewish group with reading of the names of the victims from the Torah-like scroll), through the *Yom HaShoah* event with the decisive participation of the non-Jewish local elite), up to some other practices that extend into the public space and whose

[18] It must be stressed that we conducted the entire research before 7 October 2023, i.e. before the situation in which the use of Israeli and Palestinian symbolism to express attitudes not only towards the conflict has multiplied as a result of the dramatic escalation of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

actors are the village elite, including the village leadership (and, marginally, a survivor's descendants from Israel).

Thus, in addition to the preserved Jewish Quarter, with its restored synagogue and the nearby cemetery, several new material objects have been added that are either direct sites of memory or explicitly refer to them (the Holocaust memorials in front of the synagogue and the cemetery, the commemorative plaque at the Municipal Office, the system of tourist signs, the floral decoration at the synagogue with an explicitly Jewish symbol). At the same time, the synagogue hosted cultural and educational events such as concerts, school excursions, etc. As a result, the village has constructed the local Jewish memory as an indispensable part of the village's multiple memory layers (moreover without commercializing it).

What can be seen is also heard during the focus group interview: despite the differences in narrative modes, an empathic, nostalgic, locally grounded, but at the same time somehow standardized memory of the Holocaust, a consensus on the understanding of it as the ultimate tragedy, resisting the narratives of denial and anti-Semitism, and a consensus on the necessity of the constant reproduction of this memory carried throughout the interview.[19] This would again support the thesis that minority memory here has become part of majority memory.

Nevertheless, what emerges as visible may obscure other layers. The memory practices and their publicly approved understanding require a specific setting (people, place, time). Inside and around the synagogue, as well as during the focus group interviews, local practices and understandings of Holocaust memory appear exemplary, even idyllic: alive, nurtured, and reproduced over the long term. However, the moment we step out of this setting, it may turn out that it is not necessarily universally shared. Yet it leaves a distinct mark on public space. Thus, the memory of the Holocaust does not form a fixed composition, but is continuously composed through commemorative networks of actors, if the appropriate conditions are in place. In the case of Kosova Hora, we wanted to show that the impetus for creating such conditions can be the initially modest minority activism of a single couple.

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[19] However, it is worth noting that this is undoubtedly influenced by our selection of the sample, which was deliberately chosen in the context of the story of the field site. At the same time, it is important to notice that in all the places of our research, we were addressing rather socio-cultural elites who were interested in the process of identity and memory construction in various aspects.

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TRANSGENERATIONAL HOLOCAUST MEMORY IN SLOVAKIA: FROM FORGETTING TO AMBIVALENCE ABOUT THE ROOTS OF HATRED

This article explores Holocaust memory in Slovakia, shedding light on how Slovak citizens perceive this past and its transgenerational transmission. The data presented were gathered in 2023 through ethnographic fieldwork and focus group interviews with informants belonging to three generations (between ages of 18 and 95), in three different locations across the country: Krupina, Prešov, and Bratislava. The initial findings show that Slovakia has been moving from indifference towards the Holocaust to the limited capability of realizing the actual causes and effects of atrocities, while at the same time officially accepting the commemorative centrality of the Holocaust.

Keywords: Holocaust, memory, forgetting, commemoration, transmission, Slovakia

The Holocaust in Slovakia was a part of wider project of fascist destruction across Europe, but it also showed several specificities. Among them, two are worthy of attention regarding the memory and commemoration of the Holocaust. The first is the existence of the fascist puppet state known as the Slovak Republic (1939–1945) and its own responsibility and initiatives in the extermination of its Jewish population. Without direct pressure from Nazi Germany, Slovak fascists themselves initiated and adopted racial laws and executed the first waves of deportations in their own capacities – and even paid 500 German marks per each person to be deported (see Kamenec, 2002; Salner, 2000). Thus, it might be argued that the Slovaks

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themselves sent their Jewish neighbours to the concentration and extermination camps in a state-organized manner incomparable to that of neighbouring countries (Kamenec, 2002). Despite the contemporary Slovak Republic (established in 1993) taking its legitimacy from the uninterrupted existence of Czechoslovakia (established in 1918) and officially distancing itself from the puppet war-time Slovakia, the active contribution of significant parts of the Slovak 'nation' to Jewish extermination has been exceptional. This perspective of the perpetrator, however, seems to be forgotten by the Slovaks.

The second specific element of Holocaust memory stems from the fact that the level of assistance and help to the suffering Jews was also extraordinarily high. Some scholars argue that the number of Righteous among the Nations per capita in the case of Slovaks is exceptionally high, if compared to similar countries. It might be worth considering the social organization of the war time state, dominated by self-subsistent, independent peasants that played a role in the nature and structure of racial violence or the lack thereof. The anti-fascist history of Slovakia, exemplified by the Slovak National Uprising of 1944 against the Slovak State – in fact the Slovak civil war – led to popular memory also being whitewashed by the democratic freedom fighting. The goals of the uprising, in which also many Jews fought, was the re-installation of a democratic Czechoslovakia.

Unfortunately, the liberating Red Army not only brought an end to the suppression of Nazi Germany and Slovak fascists, but it also gradually led to the installation of the communist dictatorship following the February 1948 coup d'etat. The introduction of Stalinism in Czechoslovakia, with its own political terror, showing often antisemitic elements, and meant that for the following forty years up until the Velvet Revolution of 1989, Holocaust memory was not a subject of thorough commemoration, nor thorough public reflection. Slovakia, therefore, used to suffer of forgetting or selective commemoration due to the existence of totalitarian communism whose regime of 'truth' radically influenced the way people remember the Holocaust and racial hatred today. As we argue in this paper, the actual commemoration of the Holocaust in Slovakia is ambivalent, meaning that the roots of tensions and conflicts – regardless of ethnicity or religion – have not been adequately recognized by its people.

Many social scientists studying memory have argued that remembering is both a process and a practice (see Connerton, 1989; Halbwachs, 1992; Assmann and Czaplicka, 1995; Assmann, 2001; Assmann and Shortt, 2012; Wertsch, 2002, 2012). While Maurice Halbwachs (1992) emphasized the importance of individual's membership(s) in various social groups for memory formation and remembering, Paul Connerton (1989) argued that the key role in transmission of memories was played by the older generations sharing their recollections and knowledge with the younger ones. This imparting, in his view, is further ensured by rituals and commemorations (Connerton, 1989; see also Pine et al., 2004).

Exploring the processes of remembering and forgetting, scholars have distinguished between personal, familial, national, or collective memory (see Connerton, 1989; Halbwachs, 1992; Wertsch, 2002, 2009), and cultural memory (Assmann and Czaplicka, 1995), shedding light on the social aspects of remembering. Some have also studied the politics of memory in more detail, focusing on what is being remembered, by whom, and why; and ways in which what is desirable to be remembered changes in contexts of power dynamics and socio-political shifts (see Pine et al., 2004). In our research, we have also tried to examine these aspects of

remembering (or forgetting), while exploring the present meanings of the past – specifically the memory of the Holocaust. As we show, sometimes – especially if being of uncomfortable nature – memories can be altered (or self-censored or manipulated) and the past even deliberately 'forgotten'.

Those who tend to remember, despite everything, whether they talk about their memories or keep them hidden, usually belong to the categories of victims, or the witnesses (who may or may not have taken a more active role), or the perpetrators themselves. With the passing of time, more recent studies have also paid attention to intergenerational transmission of memories and trauma, exploring how the descendants – also called the second generation – perceive and relate to the lived experiences and memories of their older kin, and create what Marianne Hirsch (1999; 2008) called 'postmemory'. These memories, however, often need to be navigated and made sense of in light of the larger national narratives one faces at school or during our everyday lives (see also Pine et al., 2004; Wertsch, 2002). This politics of memory, and the processes surrounding remembering or forgetting, as well as the transmission of knowledge and memories or the lack thereof, is at the centre of our exploration presented on the following pages.

This article is based on data collected in 2023 during an international research project exploring the Holocaust memory and its present meanings among three generations of Jews as well as non-Jews.[1] The project examined intergenerational transmission of knowledge about the Holocaust in three localities per country, within four countries of the Visegrad region. In Slovakia, for this pilot study, we selected the following locations: Krupina, Prešov, and Bratislava. The chosen methodology of the project was ethnographic fieldwork and focus group interviews. Our interview partners were chosen in such a way that they would represent various socio-economic and educational backgrounds, and belong to one of the three studied generations: 18–39, 40–69, and 70+ years old; thus, being able to reflect on their lived experiences and transgenerational transmission of memories (or the lack thereof) in light of changing socio-political contexts.

THE CONTEXT OF COMMEMORATION

By 2023, when the data for this project was collected, almost all of the victims of fascist and Stalinist crimes, jails and work camps, secret police investigations and tortures, had passed away. Only older seniors recalled the memories of Soviet tanks that entered Czechoslovakia in August 1968, and remembered the depth of compromise with the regime, not least regarding the interpretation of the Second World War and of the Holocaust. The politics of memory in Slovakia today suffers of double totalitarian heritage. It has been especially dangerous how the

[1] We would like to thank the Visegrad Fund for supporting this research and enabling us to strengthen research cooperation with our international partners. We would also like to express our gratitude to the people without whom none of this would be possible – our informants. We are grateful for their time and for sharing with us their thoughts, perceptions and memories. We are also thankful to the editors and anonymous reviewers for their helpful comments.

populist regimes, by Vladimír Mečiar (1994–1998) and recently under the fourth government of Robert Fico (since 2023) challenge the democratic commemoration canon of the Slovak past. Although only small parts of the political spectrum represent Holocaust deniers since 1989, the nostalgia for the autocratic regimes by the populist politics of memory has often been undermining the democratic public pedagogy. The Holocaust memory modification has not been under direct attack officially, but the ambivalence towards the responsibilities of individual perpetrators and actions of crimes or the relativization of memories of suffering have been very much present.

One direct tradition that contemporary Slovak radicals have been inspired by has been known as *klérofašizmus* (clerical fascism). It used to be characterized by the close ties of the Catholic clergy with fascist politics. The historian Miloslav Szabó (2019, p. 24) adopted the opinion of Roger Griffin on clerical fascism as the fascist radicalization of individual priests, not churches. In the case of Slovakia, radical ethnic nationalism was mixed with Catholic counter-enlightenment thought into a unique fascist synthesis, comparable by its state-based systemic parameters to the national fascism of the Ustashe in Croatia. Ethnic nationalism found legitimacy through its ties with Catholicism.

In the Kingdom of Hungary, where modern Slovak political thought originates, the Peoples' Party was founded toward the end of nineteenth century. The major factor of mobilization was the fight against liberalism as symbolized by progressive transformations of the economy and society. Backed up by the encyclical Rerum novarum of 1891 by Leo XIII (1810–1903) that addressed capitalist industrialization, the particular issue became the introduction of secular marriages and divorces as well as the deepening of emancipation of Jews. Since the period when Andrej Hlinka (1864–1938) became the profiling figure of the Slovak Peoples' Party (established in 1905) the anti-Hungarian element came to dominate the Catholic popular movement. The party's antiliberalism nevertheless continued to be prominent throughout the period of the Czechoslovak Republic (1918–1938). It was then radically incorporated into the political system of the Slovak Republic (1939–1945) of which the Slovak Peoples' Party became the only party representative.

However, Slovak protestant conservativism also had strong counter-enlightenment tendencies. In the later years of his life, Ľudovít Štúr (1815–1956), the leader of the national movement, strongly advocated for conservativism, monarchy and Orthodox religion under the leading role of the Russian Czar as a barrier against (Western) liberalism. Many Slovak Lutherans supported the nationalist-conservative Slovak National Party (1871–1838), the oldest party of Slovaks, with suspicious attitudes towards the ideas of progressivism and holding the antisemitic opinions. Slovak national conservativism has been also anti-Czech, as it considered the Czech culture 'godless' and liberal. It also fought against 'Judeo-Bolshevism' represented by the Soviet regime.

The period of the Second World War represented the climax of clerical fascism in Slovakia and the legacy of this period has been vital, especially for the nationalist legitimization battles in the post-1989 period. The emigre circles from among the prominent supporters of the Slovak State (1939–1945), who enjoyed freedom in Western Europe and North America despite their ties to Slovak fascism, contributed greatly to the vitality of these battles. The catch-all party of the autocratic Vladimír Mečiar, considered by some to be the founder of

independent Slovakia in 1993, skilfully used ethnic nationalism and this unofficial legacy of clerical fascism.

During the socialist era, many clerical and lay persons in the official church as well as in dissent grew up with admiration or at least tolerance for the authoritarian regime of the president-priest Jozef Tiso (1887–1947). Various fringe parties directly claimed to be descendants of the fascist Hlinka Slovak Peoples' Party after 1989 but not until the success of Ľudová strana Naše Slovensko in 2016, whose representatives consistently sympathized with the clerical fascism of the Slovak Republic (1939–1945), has such a party received wide support.

There are several cases of open support for the fascists from among the Slovak clergy today. In Čadca, northern Slovakia, in August 2014, on the anniversary of the Slovak National Uprising (1944), the anti-fascist state holiday, Father Emil Floriš declared from the pulpit that Jews were responsible for the Holocaust, "because there was hatred against them, but many times they brought this hatred upon themselves." Floriš projected the same fate for the Roma. His words caused outrage, and the police investigated the statement, but they ultimately closed the case because his words were not considered to be a crime. His diocese argued that the priest focused on parish history, stressed the deep roots of the unfriendly relationship between the Slovaks and Jews in the locality, and the diocese distanced itself from any form of xenophobia.[2] Retired Colonel Ignác Juruš, the first military abbot of the Slovak Army after 1989, and two other clergymen were admonished by their superiors in 2017 for their support of the fascist party.[3] There has been a long history of statements by Catholic Church representatives, including Archbishop Emeritus Ján Sokol, the communist secret police collaborator, and the secret church representative Cardinal Ján Chryzostom Korec (1924–2015), who made it known that the period of the wartime Slovak Republic was a period of abundance and prosperity for Slovaks.

The importance of Catholicism in the political regime of present-day Slovakia began to rise immediately after the fall of state-socialism. At the time, the church was considered the enemy of the former regime and, therefore, having a particular right to regain high public recognition. This privileged position was ensured in the international agreement with the Holy See in 2000. Nevertheless, there have been several additional attempts to strengthen the position of the Church, both symbolically and in the actual legislative process.

The Holocaust was not questioned immediately, rather the opposite, the ritualized commemorations by the leading Slovak representatives took place in line with the official democratic profile of the country. The questioning of a democratic consensus, especially concerning the normalization period (1968–1989) and of the role of Soviet Union in the introduction of Stalinism, weakened this memory consensus. In her '"The Struggle for the

[2] 'Farár šokoval výrokmi na bohoslužbe: Židia si vraj mohli za deportácie sami a na rade sú Rómovia!'. [Priest made shocking statements during service: the Jews themselves were to blame for their own deportations, and the Roma are next!]. (2014, September 8). *Nový čas*. Retrieved from: https://www.cas.sk/clanok/292704/farar-sokoval-vyrokmi-na-bohosluzbe-zidia-si-vraj-mohli-za-deportacie-sami-a-na-rade-su-romovia/ [1.02.2020].

[3] 'Potrestali kňazov podporujúcich Kotlebovu stranu'. [Priests supporting Kotleba's party punished]. (2017, May 27). *Aktuality.sk.* Retrieved from: https://www.aktuality.sk/clanok/491848/potrestali-knazov-podporujucich-kotlebovu-stranu/ [9.02.2020].

Memory of the Nation": Post-Communist Slovakia and its World War II Past' (2016, p. 992), Nadya Nedelsky argues:

> To draw Slovakia fully into the Western Holocaust consensus would thus require numerous powerful elites to reorient their principles and priorities, and the broader public to broaden its scope of moral concern. Such normative reorientation is a tall order, and does not simply follow from confrontation with historical facts. In the meantime, the combination of mainstream forgetting and reassertion of wartime values along the margins is worrisome. In an increasingly unsettled Europe, Slovakia's relationship to its fascist past bears careful watching.

Basing our arguments on the findings of representative group interviews (in various settings across Slovakia) about Holocaust memory (presented below), we confirm this unsettled feeling and ambivalence towards the past which is engendered by forgetting and rising far-right memory manipulation.

MEMORY OF GENERATIONS

"People, first and foremost," a pensioner in Prešov quickly answered our question about who the Jews are. What followed was a lively discussion among the pensioner club members who shared with us their knowledge, memories and opinions. Across our field sites, the oldest generation of our informants – especially in Prešov – knew the most about the Jewish population of their town and the Prešov pensioneers often noted they had personal acquaintances of Jewish origin. For our informants belonging to the middle and the young generations such experiences, as well as knowledge associated with them, were much rarer. Despite these personal differences, the overarching narrative was – across all our field sites and generations – the same.

"They were well-represented in the business community. It's also because of the historical reason that they weren't allowed to do all the things that original inhabitants were allowed to do, so they got into that business and banking sector," a young man in Prešov argued and, highlighting the difference to the majority society, he added, "mainly the financial sector, the banking, and the business environment. Less so the peasantry because they couldn't own any land." A student in Krupina, similarly, stated, "[t]hey were primarily merchants. So that's what set them apart. Maybe they had more possessions than other people in this district. As it was a poorer region, mainly consisting of farmers." While pensioners in Prešov repeatedly noted that "Jews were very educated," a young man in Bratislava added to this narrative also that "[t]hey were extremely skilled. In a variety of fields. Whether it was jewellery or other. All the jewellery shops were under Jewish control, and they knew how to pay attention to details."

People across all our focus groups associated Jews with professions in the fields of business, crafts or medicine. They all highlighted the perceived importance attributed to a higher level of education, and people often shared with us various stereotypical associations with Jews – such as in terms of money saving or being good businessmen. Younger generations – especially the high school students in Krupina – had a harder time articulating their thoughts

when it came to the Jewish population in their region or Slovakia as such. Only a few had some knowledge which was mostly based on their own interests, seeing a movie or reading a book related to the topic.

While informants across all generations shared with us the above-mentioned stereotypes, interestingly, some informants belonging to the oldest generation, in all three field sites, mentioned several stories highlighting the goodness and willingness to help that their older kin, if not themselves, have experienced with their Jewish neighbours, doctors, shopkeepers, and acquaintances. "I remember my mom telling me that only Jews had shops. Doctors or pharmacists were Jews. Our people weren't like that. They were illiterate," a pensioner from Prešov shared with us, "my mother used to say that the shopkeeper was very accommodating. With six children, when her father came once in a while to buy shoes or something like that, they didn't have to pay the whole amount. So, he was accommodating. They could still pay it later." Several people mentioned similar stories of how the shopkeepers were helping them or how the Jewish doctor would come to treat them even in the middle of the night, building an accompanying narrative of Jewish neighbours being remembered as compassionate, kind-hearted and willing to find a way to help when needed. When we then followed with the question asking what, in their opinion, have been the causes of antisemitism and persecutions of Jews, our inquiry was often met with a moment of silence.

WHAT HAVE BEEN THE CAUSES OF ANTISEMITISM AND PERSECUTIONS OF JEWS?

Reflecting on this question, people mentioned several, for them, possible causes, such as the economic inequality or perceptions of difference stimulating misunderstanding, intolerance and conflicts. "They had the most wealth," a young student in Krupina tried to explain what could have contributed to the persecutions of Jews in Slovakia. "They were regarded as different people," his classmate added. When we asked him to elaborate on what he meant by 'different', he replied, "I don't know, but people did not like that they were here with them." "There was racial hatred towards them – even though the Jews are not a different race. They differ only by religion. But there was hatred from the German side towards them," another of their classmates contributed to the discussion. A slight pause was later interrupted by a young girl reasoning, "[i]t originated out of ideology. Among the people it manifested via envy. But it came out of ideology, which I think was quite well thought out. Then it was followed by various specific interests of people here."

The narrative of inequality and envy was mentioned by all generations, across all three field sites. "In my opinion, maybe it had something to do with the fact that they were merchants. They liked to trade. So, they were perhaps, in terms of society, a wealthy minority," a young man in Bratislava argued, "and automatically, as a richer minority is created in a society, the poorer people perhaps feel that their poverty may be due to these richer people. Maybe it has something to do with that. At least in my opinion." To which another young man reacted stating, "[o]r just pure human jealousy", and the group nodded in agreement.

"Well, precisely because they were very clever, very rich. They had a completely different lifestyle. They were such a thorn in the side," a young woman in Prešov argued and added:

> In my opinion. When I want to destroy an enemy, then someone who's strong. I'm not going to go after some poor guy who has nothing. And there they could have Aryanized. When the weak ones who previously had nothing came to power, those who had something paid the price. When the great tide rises against them, it simply destroys them. Hitler knew that. And he also knew who he had to destroy.

Many people, like another young woman from this focus group, however, highlighted also the aspect of difference: "I think it is also the cultural differences. They just came from a different area, had different traditions," she reasoned and added, "[a]lso, the Roma are a thorn in the side of a lot of people because they are just different, they have different traditions. I think the majority of the population can't understand them. They always find somebody to point the finger at. And that's the way it happened, I guess." Several informants pointed to such narrative of Jews not fitting in, mostly in terms of them isolating themselves, what then in their opinions led to misunderstandings and the lack of acceptance.

A few people, usually one or two per field site, have also mentioned hatred based on, what they called, "religious reasons". Specifically, in line with how one of the women in Prešov's pensioner club formulated her thoughts: "As for what I have heard about the Jews, maybe that's why people were angry at them, because the Jews had crucified the son of God. The son of God who created this world, and also us. So probably that's why they hated them so much." Later, during the discussion, another woman from this group of pensioners stated, "[b]ut I don't think that the hatred came from the Slovaks, because we certainly helped many Jews to survive. People were hiding them, and the children were sent elsewhere. I wonder why Hitler hated them so much. I haven't read about that anywhere."

WHAT HAPPENED TO THE JEWISH PEOPLE DURING THE SECOND WORLD WAR?

When we asked questions trying to find out what people knew about the persecutions of Jews in Slovakia since 1938, their life during the Holocaust and the period of the Slovak State, and their eventual deportations to concentration camps, our informants usually briefly noted that Jews were deported by trains, that it was mostly to the Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration camp, and that most of them passed away there or emigrated after the war. In most groups it took further questioning to get people to also reflect on other issues. In general, however, discussing the deportations was the part of interviews when our informants tended to get quieter and often expressed their lack of knowledge.

Asking the high school students in Krupina to elaborate on what they meant when they said there were no Jews there anymore and why they thought that was the case, a young girl explained:

> Because they were first displaced from here and then killed. So, they didn't even have the opportunity to come back here. Actually, they probably didn't even want to return, when they were possibly denounced and Aryanized by the people they used to live with before.

Trying to see what the students knew about the deportations and Aryanizations, we asked further open questions to motivate students to share with us more. “They were chasing them or something… They tried to gather them in one place to keep them under control,” one of the students said and his classmate added, “Slovakia was an ally of Germany, so the Slovaks – the ordinary Slovaks – were actually not doing badly at that time. But that doesn’t mean it wasn’t a bad situation.” A young man in Bratislava highlighted this matter as well:

> We were like some kind of showcase for Germany. The fascism was on the rise. The Slovak State became its satellite. The authorities, led by Tiso, tried to set an example. There were laws passed – some Aryan laws, which were said to be stricter than the German ones. It wasn’t a bed of roses for the Jews here. In fact, it was perhaps even worse here than in Germany.

Despite not knowing the details, a few informants from the youngest generation had some knowledge about the Holocaust in general. Yet, they often reminded us that these topics were covered very marginally at school, if at all, and what they knew they had learned mostly on their own while reading books or watching documentary films.

Though having some idea about the Holocaust, Aryanizations and deportations in general, young people often did not know about the local history of the Holocaust or persecutions of Jews and other minorities in their own hometowns. Many of them were uncertain about the numbers of Jews who lived in their hometown or in Slovakia as such, or about the numbers of people who were deported to concentration camps. This was, however, also present among the older generations. When we asked whether people had an idea of how many Jews lived in Slovakia (or their town or region) before the Second World War or how many were deported, people were quiet and usually expressed their lack of knowledge about this. Only a few times they tried to guess and usually stating much lower numbers than those recorded by the censuses and other historical sources. Most people did not mention any labour or concentration camps in Slovakia. Only a few briefly referred to the labour camp in Sereď and just one young man from Bratislava knew about the concentration camp in Patrónka.

As many pointed out to us, “these were not the topics we discussed”. Often not at home and, as many of our informants argued, nor at school. “We weren’t really informed about it. It was a dry piece of information that passed by,” an older man in Krupina told us, “[o] nly after the revolution, we visited Auschwitz, and we were also shown around those camps. Also, when the Memorial [of the Slovak National Uprising] was built in Banská Bystrica, for example, it was shown there. Partially… It was possible to get some information. But we weren’t led to do that – to search for more.”

TRACES OF MEMORY

Faced with the question of whether there were any Jews in Krupina today, a group of older women in their seventies and eighties looked at us perplexed and explained: “There are no Jews anymore – but we have a Jewish cemetery. With gravestones. Nice one. We do have it.” Facing the reality of this region – and the decimating effects of the Holocaust, four decades of Socialist regime as well as the local popularity of the far-right political party LSNS (People’s Party Our Slovakia) – one of them remarked, “they do live, but outside of

Krupina, for example, also those who are originally from Krupina." Many towns in Slovakia share a similar story of a cemetery being often the only remaining trace of their Jewish past.

In each of our focus groups, when prompted to think about Jewish places or monuments in their towns, people always mentioned the cemetery as the first thing that came to their mind – and sometimes it was sadly the only place they related with the Jewish history in their town. Asking about such 'Jewish spaces' high school students in Krupina, after a moment of silence, one student noted, "[t]here is, for example, a Jewish cemetery in Krupina". But when asked whether he had been there, he admitted, "I walked past it, but honestly… It's in such a place that, in my opinion, not many people even know we have it there."

When we later followed with a question whether there are any other places related to the Jewish community in the town, another student explained: "Maybe there is… The cemetery is probably the most prominent in terms of popularity in Krupina. Although it's also not very well known because it's not in the city centre. It's a bit of a remote area." And then he elaborated: "That's more of a question for someone who belongs or belonged to that Jewish community if there's something like that to be found here. Because I don't think we have any knowledge about it."

"Over here, we don't know about it," another student argued, "but maybe if the town historian tells us. He would certainly know all about this… But, between us, we have not been told about this at all. Nobody here is telling us any substantial information about it. We basically have nowhere to find out." Trying to explain further why they do not know about the local Jewish history, another student added: "Because just as we don't have knowledge about it, I don't think the older ones, like our parents or people who have lived here longer, have that kind of knowledge. Most of the time you stumble upon places like this by accident. You walk past something, and someone around maybe knows what it is. People don't talk about the existence of these places."

Interestingly, young people argued that they were unaware – about the Jewish life in their region and the traces of its memory, as well as the local Holocaust memory – because no one told them about it; that maybe the town historian could share more with them; and, significantly, that "that's more of a question for someone who belongs or belonged to that Jewish community". All these arguments raise important questions concerning issues of intergenerational transmission of knowledge and memory, as well as a matter of whose past is it and who should know about it and do the remembering. In other words, what should be remembered and by whom? Who should do the remembering?

When we asked the same question of the oldest generation of our informants in Krupina – the group of five pensioners – the Jewish cemetery was again given as the main example, as noted above, and when prompted to think about some other places of remembrance of Jews in Krupina and its surroundings, and whether they know where Jews used to live in Krupina, they agreed that there are not many places that would bear the connection:

> You know, everything has already been rebuilt in Krupina. Most of them are modern houses already. The houses they had are already demolished. The Jews always had nice houses, but they don't exist anymore. For example, even here where the House of Services is, I remember there was a doctor there. We used to go there to have our eyes checked. But there's a new building now. Where those two houses used to be, that's where the school is now. There's a school already built instead of them. So, it's all already redone and changed.

When one of them mentioned that "[t]here used to be also a synagogue – people say that the synagogue is actually HONT-stav now," the rest of the group was surprised and then nodded, realising that could be the case. "You're right. It's just that again – it's reconstructed for civil purposes. It's not a synagogue anymore," another one pointed and, explaining the context, added: "[t]here wouldn't be anybody to meet in that synagogue anymore when… We don't have Jews here anymore. It's just gone."

Facing the question about the traces of memory and the local Jewish community, all our interviews were marked by, often long, moments of silence. As if people were trying to remember, if they ever possessed such knowledge at all, and at the same time pondering and looking for reasons why they do not know or remember, or why it is difficult to point to such places now. One of the reasons, as pointed out by the Krupina pensioners, could be the fact that, especially during Socialism, Jewish places of worship, community centres or houses were often demolished – thus not reminding (or, possibly, to not remind) the passers-by about the community that 'disappeared' (whether during the tragedy of the Holocaust or within waves of emigration) – or nationalised and reappropriated for different purposes (e.g. synagogues were used as warehouses or turned into shops, among other things).

In Prešov, where the Jewish community, although being rather small, still maintains active communal life, people nonetheless started their answers to this question by stating that there is a Jewish cemetery. The only exception was that in Prešov people also mentioned that there is a beautiful synagogue, which is open to the public and not only hosts the town's Jewish Museum, but often also various summer concerts.

"In the city, I know only about the cemetery. And there is also a section dedicated to Jews at the back of the main cemetery," a middle-aged woman shared with us, trying to list places she associated with the Jewish life in the town of Prešov. After a short pause, suddenly, she added,

> And that synagogue! We used to walk past it all the time. It was behind an iron fence. There was an iron gate at the back. We knew it was Jewish, so we couldn't go there. It was closed, abandoned, and overgrown with weeds. Only now it's taken care of. But when we used to go past it as children, our parents would say 'that's Jewish' – and we knew it was something different than us.

This sense of difference was also highlighted by another young woman who admitted to us how she came to perceive such differentiation played out in the context of cemetery-maintenance as a child:

> Subconsciously, we depreciated it. I remember as a child that the Jewish cemetery was always broken, old, where even the teachers wouldn't let us go saying 'Don't go there, you'll break your leg.' 'Why?' 'Because it's Jewish.' 'Why it looks like this when there's this big, nice graveyard right next to it?' 'Because that one is Jewish.' It was as if it's only Jewish, so it's neglected. In my mind, a Jewish cemetery is something broken and neglected. So subconsciously, I have it in me that it's nothing – nothing precious, nothing someone would want to save.

This quote, saddening as it is, points to various larger issues at hand. In the context of this paper, we can see the transmission of knowledge – or in this case the lack thereof – as well as the politics of memory and questions of who should do the remembering (and caring).

This issue was reflected upon slightly differently among the oldest generation of our non-Jewish informants in Prešov, many of them sharing with us that they themselves had Jewish friends, teachers, doctors or neighbours. While not necessarily knowing much about the history or the Jewish life in town per se, they related to the matter differently. When we asked about the places they associated with the Jewish community in town, the first thing they mentioned was a fountain built by a Jewish businessman in the city centre. "Then the Jewish cemetery," one person added and another continued: "Memorial stones. Stolpersteine. Too bad there are so few of them. Because a lot of people from here were deported to concentration camps. And they didn't return. We only have them in two places in Prešov. Near PKO and on Sabinovska Street." "We have also a synagogue," another person remarked, "and then also some cultural events take place. They are held, for example, in the museum, or in libraries. They organise events to celebrate, for example, birthday anniversaries of some important figures. Also, the 'Discovering Prešov' event, where we visited the synagogue several times." The group of pensioners agreed they enjoyed visiting the synagogue, during concerts it sometimes hosts, but also when visiting the Jewish Museum: "the caretaker guides visitors when more people come. He shows them the upstairs exhibition as well. It's a nice museum with paintings."

Many of the members of the pensioner club with whom we spoke have attended various cultural and educational events organised by the town or the club itself. Among which were also the mentioned walk across the town called 'Discovering Prešov', where the aforementioned fountain is talked about. The fact that there used to be more synagogues in Prešov, however, was not mentioned. While the Orthodox synagogue has been visited by many of our informants, the Neolog synagogue – presently being used as a warehouse and a store with household goods – is often no longer associated with the town's Jewish life.

When we asked our informants in Bratislava whether they could tell us about some places associated with the Jewish community, the narrative was very similar. Some people knew there was a synagogue in town, some had knowledge about a Jewish cemetery, and some have heard about the Chatam Sofer Memorial – though not knowing precisely what it was. When talking about the synagogue, a few people had knowledge about the Neolog synagogue that was demolished in 1969, which maintains its presence in absence (or vice versa) through a marking of its walls on the ground and a photographic exhibition about the building and its demolition, signifying a trace of memory, on Rybne Square, and a very few – usually only one person in each focus group – knew about the functioning synagogue on Heydukova Street. The whereabouts of the Jewish cemeteries, if mentioned at all, were uncertain. The Chatam Sofer Memorial, although still covered with a veil of mystery concerning what it was and who Chatam Sofer used to be, was known to a few also because a tram stop located near the memorial was named after it.

The dialogue which occurred in response to our question among the oldest generation in Bratislava nicely illustrates the workings of remembering and forgetting:

– "In Bratislava, there is that synagogue on Heydukova Street. I haven't been there for a while."

– "Our boys were there on an excursion, in that Jewish synagogue in Bratislava. They brought me pictures from there."

– "They're everywhere. I was in Prague recently, too. The synagogue there is beautiful."

– "The synagogue in Lučenec has been renovated."
– "Yes. Too bad it wasn't preserved in Pezinok."
– "When it disappears, the traces disappear. They'll be completely obliterated."
– "There was another synagogue in Bratislava just under the castle, wasn't it?"
– "Yes, where the highway is."
– "Near the Fisherman's Gate, or what's it called."
– "Yes. In the 1970s everything changed there. They built that SNP Bridge and everything changed. Or maybe sooner even? After the war? I don't know."

When we asked whether there were any other traces of the existence of the Jewish community or memorials for the victims of the Holocaust, one of the informants said, "there must be something", and the group continued to think in silence. Not finding the answer, another one noted: "I have visited Sereď. Back when the museum was opened. […] There you can get into it very well – you can imagine and try to put yourself into that situation." "Just like in Auschwitz," another woman added, "[i]f someone can't go all the way to Poland, then Sereď, here in Slovakia, is a good place for students to visit. But also for anyone else."

Bringing attention to the labour camp in Sereď was important in demonstrating their knowledge that there are places with dark past associated with the Holocaust in Slovakia as well. Yet, the question about the existence of a Shoah memorial in Bratislava was left unanswered.

"Jewish cemetery," a young student quickly answered, reflecting on the traces of Jewish life in Bratislava, and the group of young adults started to brainstorm, sharing with us "[t]here is a memorial for the demolished synagogue near St. Martin's Cathedral, and above the bridge, there is the Jewish Street and the Jewish Museum…"; "synagogue on Heydukova Street"; and "I think there is still a Jewish cemetery above the Chatam Sofer Memorial." While one young man argued he had visited Prague and found its Jewish past "nicely preserved," but when it came to his own town of Bratislava he did not know about such traces, another man surprised us with his knowledge about an Orthodox synagogue which was demolished during Socialism: "there used to be a synagogue even on Zámocká Street. There is a memorial plaque that there once was a synagogue there."

When we asked whether there was a memorial to the victims of the Holocaust or something similar in town, the whole group became quiet and sat in silence. One young man said, "we certainly have something…" and another one agreed, "we certainly do." After a while of sitting in silence and pondering where such a memorial site could be, one student looked up and admitted: "[e]ven if there is, it's probably a mistake that we don't know about it. The fact that we are thinking about it and still don't know is a mistake."

TRANSMISSION (AND CONCEALMENT) OF KNOWLEDGE

Not knowing was often explained among our informants by arguing that no one told them about it – whether "it" was the local Jewish history, the Holocaust, or the traces of Jewish past in their region (or in Slovakia as such). No matter what question we were discussing,

throughout our interviews, the majority of people would repeatedly argue that growing up or even now, they did not talk about things related to the Holocaust or the Jewish community in their region. Not with their parents, nor their families, or friends. It was interesting to follow their argumentations and see how these differed sightly depending on where the person grew up, as well as on the socio-political context in which they were growing up. While the narrative of 'not knowing due to not being talked or taught about' was prevalent largely among the middle and the young generations across all three field sites, differences were visible within the oldest generation of our informants.

When we asked the group of pensioners in Krupina, all aged 70 years and more, whether while they were growing up anyone told them about the Second World War, the Holocaust or what happened to the Jews, the women agreed that it was not a topic to be discussed. "Nothing at all about the Holocaust. At least I don't know anything about it," one of them said and another one added, "No. My father didn't like to talk about the war. He really disliked talking about it." "Even if there was something, they said 'Not for your ears. Nothing to interest you. What has been has already been. Leave it alone.' Parents didn't want to talk about it anymore after that," one woman explained and another one reacted, "I don't know if I'd even want to know." This statement triggered a reaction of the rest of the group: "Exactly!" "You know," one woman said, leaving space for the understanding of what was left unsaid, and then another one tried to explain further, "we didn't ask, so they couldn't tell us," and her friend added:

> And we had no one to ask. I didn't know my grandparents on either side. I didn't know my mother. I had only my dad. Well. And, as I said, he was the way he was. He didn't want to talk about it. Although, I know some little bits and pieces. When he was in the mood, he'd say something.

After a moment of silence, they continued explaining, "People were also scared. When it came to this, people were scared to talk." "Yes. 'Leave it, don't even talk about it.'," one of them described the reactions of their older kin when they as children wanted to know more. "But they were also afraid in general, you know, when this was happening, that they were taking the Jews, they were taking the Roma, and I don't know what. As the situation was changing, people retreated," one of the women elaborated on the matter and group agreed that these topics were considered a taboo and were not discussed. When we asked them why they think that was, a woman reasoned:

> Well, it wasn't supposed to be. Maybe it should have and could have been talked about, just not on such a broad forum. You know. Maybe people talked among themselves. They talked. Especially the older ones. We were sort of excluded because they didn't know who was going to say something somewhere. It was difficult.

The situation as described by the oldest generations in Bratislava and Prešov was also similar when they were growing up. They did not learn about these issues at school, nor could talk about it in public. "It was a taboo," people often explained. The difference, however, was that some of them grew up at homes where their parents or family members would tell them at least some information about the Jewish community, its particular members, or the Second World War.

From the stories our informants shared with us, it was even more prevalent in Prešov which, being a smaller town than Bratislava, offered a space where people knew each other more. Growing up, many of our informants from the oldest generation had family friends, classmates, neighbours, doctors or teachers who were Jewish. Some had knowledge about their Jewish descent while growing up, some learned about it only later in life.

When we asked them whether they were taught about the war and the Holocaust at school, many argued that this topic was not discussed at length. One of our informants explained:

> We didn't learn anything about the Jews and that subject. Actually, in one sentence, that there were concentration camps, and that there were Jews there. But we didn't learn about the city as such or about the cities where they lived. I know, for example, that Jews were not allowed to come here until a certain century. That the town was enclosed by a wall. And then after a while they were allowed to enter one by one. But that was the kind of history that I just read or heard about. But if I want to be specific about how we came into contact: we went to school together, we lived next to each other. As children or teenagers, we didn't feel any hatred.

"But we didn't even know that our classmates were Jewish. We didn't know then," a woman sitting next to her argued – to which her friend reacted, "sometimes we did." "I knew – because they were my classmates from the first grade. I knew about some of them," another woman shared with us and continued, "here on the Main Street, there were five families like that. There was a Jewish family living in our house, too. We got along very well as children. Then, at some point, they emigrated. Because they had the opportunity to leave. And maybe even from 2–3 houses here on the Main Street." Many of them remembered a family or two who emigrated right after the war or during late 1960s. Some shared with us that they still have Jewish friends whom they have known since their childhood.

> We are friends since the primary school and we're in our seventies now. I just wanted to say that there was no hostility as far as we knew. And if they didn't know they were Jewish… I really didn't even have to know myself that someone was Jewish. We lived next door to each other.

Reflecting on the issue of the transmission of memory and knowledge, many repeatedly stated the official schooling system did not provide them with much information on the matter:

> I was born 9 years after the war, in 1954, and all I knew about the Jews was… Well, from school, almost nothing, except for that one sentence that there were some concentration camps. But what I knew was mostly from my parents and my grandparents. Even then, only such mentions like 'He's a Jew'. Someone who was known to be a Jew was immediately identified.

Close kin often, according to our informants, tried to explain and answer the questions of their grand/children.

> As children we used to go for the so-called compulsory 'labelling' [a chest X-ray] and in Prešov there was a lady there who had a number on her arm. And when I asked at home about it, I was told that these were the numbers of people – of Jews – who had been in the concentration camps. And she, specifically, was lucky that she came back.

Looking at the data from our focus groups with the middle and young generations, across all our field sites, it appears that the efforts to transmit knowledge about these issues eased up, and the majority of our informants from these generations agreed that topics related to the Jews or the Holocaust were not discussed at home. "At home we never talked about it," a middle-aged woman admitted to us, and her male friend elaborated, "We are more familiar with it from movies like 'The Shop on the Main Street'. It was not really discussed in the public. Actually, Socialism also made the Jewish issue sort of invisible. Covered and secret. There weren't any open debates." Several of our informants highlighted the matter of secrecy, often referring to the word 'taboo', and pointed to issues of uncertainty and insecurity. "Maybe they were afraid to talk about it, lest we say somewhere what we talk about at home. Maybe they had some sense of complicity for something? It's hard to say," another middle-aged man tried to reason why his older kin never spoke about the past, "there was definitely something there why they didn't want to talk about it – primarily that fear. That period before the revolution wasn't so wonderful."

A few informants from the middle and the young generation, in their efforts to explain why their parents or grandparents never spoke about the Holocaust or their Jewish neighbours, reflected on the possibility for their silence being a strategy chosen to cope with issues of guilt and shame. "Maybe some families cooperated with the Hlinka regime. That's why they don't want to talk about it at home now out of shame," a young man in Prešov noted, to which a young woman sitting next to him stated, "[m]aybe some people felt that the war was over, 'we're starting over, let's leave it alone'." Similar reasoning was mentioned to us also by a young man in Bratislava, "it was probably not a popular topic. Or maybe they were ashamed for that period. They didn't want to be reminded of it. They wanted to get over it somehow, so they preferred not to tell the next generation about it, and they thought 'let it die with us'," he said and added, "it's probably better to have peace. But we should learn from history, and it should be passed down."

Discussing the matters of knowledge transmission, it appeared that this particular past has been marked by terms such as heavy or dark, as well as uncomfortable, and the majority of our informants argued it was not something they have talked about at home or learnt much about at school. While the older generations often noted "why to talk about something like that – what could have been done? What was done, was done", the youngest generation seemed to have mixed emotions about it. Some argued it is an important part of history and it should be talked about – despite admitting they did not ask about it at home, nor necessarily looked for information themselves –, others preferred to leave the subject to rest.

"Jews and maybe deportations are taboo topics. It is not really talked about," a student in Krupina shared with us and when we asked why that was, after a short and hesitant silence, his schoolmate explained, "[d]efinitely because it's not a pleasant topic to talk about. I mean, not for everyone. […] Not everyone is comfortable talking about someone being systematically rounded up and exterminated." "And if people talk about it at all, it's usually, at least as I've heard, more about what happened in Germany rather than what happened in Slovakia. It's as if they're trying to forget about it. As if it didn't even exist here," he added. To which another his classmate reacted explaining,

> These are mainly topics that people disagree on. What is written in history – as they say that history is written by the winners – so not everybody agrees with that. Let's put it that way, those people who experienced it or were there may have a completely different opinion about it than what is mentioned on the Internet. Most of the time these accounts don't align.

"If I wanted to know more about it, I would maybe ask someone close to me instead of searching the Internet," another student contributed to the discussion, and added an important statement, "but I haven't asked about these topics specifically – not even once." And his schoolmate, sitting next to him, elaborated:

> In my opinion, maybe, they are also very difficult topics for someone to discuss. They bring up negative emotions. And mostly, the Second World War stuff is probably something that rather our great-grandparents could have told us about. Grandparents were already born after the war. That information is already fading with time basically. It's not passed down from generation to generation anymore. This is minimally, if at all, talked about. Mostly we deal with rather positive topics. And we talk about other things.

After a moment, he added, "[w]hile it's important to know the history, we tend to talk more about the present."

REMEMBERING AND FORGETTING

Interestingly, despite not talking about the Holocaust or issues concerning Jews in Slovakia at home – whether with their older or younger kin –, the majority of our informants agued it was important to teach the younger generations about the past, and specifically about the Holocaust and the fate of Slovak Jews. While two middle-aged women in one of the focus groups in Bratislava argued that the "Jews have been talked about too much" and "they were not the only ones who suffered during the war," most of our informants – across all field sites and generations – declared we ought to learn from the history to not repeat it and saw this topic as being important to talk about publicly and as an essential part of the school curriculum.

Many also highlighted that discussing and learning more about this specific period and part of our history has presently been a pressing matter. Some pointed to the rising popularity of the far-right political parties (also among the young first-time voters), others saw the importance of reflecting on the past in the context of the present situation in Ukraine.

"It needs to be discussed every day – because especially this younger generation gets less and less information about it. Then they are confused as to what to think. They need to be reminded on a daily basis," a young man argued, and his friend reacted pointing to the role of the schools in the process of transmission of knowledge, "we need to pay more attention to school curricula. Not to take it just as a concluded historical event, how those teachers are treating it. Maybe it's because they don't have more time to discuss it. Since the curriculum is holding them back." Another young man nodded, in agreement with what was said, and stated that, in his opinion, what was important was to "teach [students] how to work with information, and maybe [how] to analyse data, news, and overall information. Because [he]

really feel[s] that people in Slovakia will truly believe anything they read, anything that Facebook shows them. And without giving it any constructive thought at all." "Social networks are very dangerous at the moment," a young man sitting next to him added, "people share right away anything they see on social media. They just read the headline, don't even open it and they're already sharing anything. Without verification."

Even the informants from the youngest generation themselves perceived the risk of forgetting and the lack of reflection as important to be avoided if possible. When we asked this question the high school students in Krupina, they agreed that "[i]t is certainly a topic that should not be forgotten among us. It should be taught especially […] to promote understanding of what happened." When we tried to prompt them to elaborate on why they think it is important to remember, one of the students stated, "So that it doesn't happen again. So that we don't make the same mistakes." To which his schoolmate explained further:

> When it's not discussed in facts, and on the level where we actually rely on facts and reason, politicians bring it up as a tool of their ideology and distort those facts. And that's when the problem is that it's not discussed because then it's easier to believe something that one makes up, since we don't have information about how it really is.

This worry concerning the lack of knowledge that would enable the young generation to judge the truthfulness of the presented information also resonated with the older generations. On one hand they did not feel the need (or possibly the necessary level of erudition) to talk about the past, but at the same time they argued that it needs to be remembered.

"It's history. It should be known – it should not be forgotten," a middle-aged woman stated, and a man sitting close to her added, in agreement with her, "[p]erhaps all the more so because it could happen again at any time. This nation hasn't changed. The people have not changed. And the mindset is still the same." After a moment, he noted, "[m]any European nations are susceptible to succumbing to propaganda. So, we must always remind ourselves of such things," and she added, "[a]nd the consequences."

Reflecting on the issues of memory and the fear of forgetting, one of our oldest informants argued, "[t]his cannot be disputed. It happened. And the young ones must be reminded of those atrocities. What was done. The truth. War is a terrible thing that shouldn't happen," and after a moment he added, "[o]ne is horrified that in Ukraine now, in the 21st century, such a thing could happen. One cannot understand that."

CONCLUSION

This paper explored the state of memory about the Holocaust in Slovakia. Our findings show that the communist regime intentionally worked on forgetting about the Holocaust. This heritage did not mean the denial of fascist atrocities per se but the effect was the ambivalence about the roots and causes of the Holocaust and the lack of public pedagogy about the fragile nature of peace among different social and cultural groups. The problem then is the inability on the significant part of a public to recognise the symptoms and manipulations with the past aiming to undermine liberal democracy and especially the existing memory consensus

legitimising this democracy. This lack of awareness about the ambivalence has been most visible in the unquestioned difference between the public statements dismissing the Holocaust and private commemorations of it.

The parallel existence under the late Soviet system – the official and the private that contradicted but also complemented each other – was well explained by Alexei Yurchak (2005). Today, followers of alternative (often latently antisemitic views) think democracy is only a facade; there is no real democracy, only the democratic ideology of the elites, just as there was the communist ideology of the communist powerholders. This is not simple nostalgia for the wartime Slovak Republic or state socialism that either perpetrated or tended to forget about the Holocaust: instead, it is a much more powerful and complex revisionism of history that needs more thorough and efficient public reflection and pedagogy. The requisite political will, however, is needed for both.

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LOCAL MEANINGS OF THE HOLOCAUST MEMORY IN ZRENJANIN (SERBIA)

The choosen topic of my paper was local meanings of the memory of the Holocaust in Zrenjanin. The main questions of my research dealt with the research community's general attitude, stereotypes, and prejudices towards Jews. I deemed it relevant to examine the current situation and the importance of the memory of the Holocaust. I assumed that the answers to these questions could bring out the existing deficiencies of current local and general strategies of remembrance and contribute to a critical reconsideration of these efforts. The aim of my research was also to contribute to the exploration and analysis of the local and personal empirical depths of memory. I wanted to record the constructed and reconstructed personal narratives of the generation of survivors and witnesses, and the narratives of the next generations. In this study, I have also strived to process and interpret recent meanings of the memory of the Holocaust.

Keywords: local meanings of the memory, Jews, memory of the Holocaust

INTRODUCTION

I have chosen the local meanings of the memory of the Holocaust in Zrenjanin[1] to be the topic of my article. The main questions of my research dealt with the research community's general attitude, stereotypes, and prejudices towards Jews. I deemed it relevant to examine the current situation and the importance of the memory of the Holocaust. I assumed that the answers to these questions could bring out the existing deficiencies of current local and general strategies of remembrance and contribute to a critical reconsideration of these efforts.

The idea for the research was inspired by a research project lead by my thesis supervisor Richárd Papp together with György Csepeli and their colleagues from Czechia, Slovakia, and Poland titled *Transgenerational Holocaust Memory in Central Europe*. While this research

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[1] In Serbian also: Veliki Bečkerek and Petrovgad (depending on the historical period), in Hungarian: Nagybecskerek, in German: Groß Betschkerek) – a city in Serbia, located in the province of Vojvodina, in the Banat region.

did not include field sites in Serbia, I have used some of the methodological approaches and findings for my work. The aim of my research was to contribute to "the exploration and analysis of the local and personal empirical depths of memory".[2] In this study, I have striven to process and interpret recent meanings of the memory of the Holocaust through exploring narratives, sites of remembering and symbols of memory of the Holocaust in Zrenjanin. In this article, I present the interpretations from the emic perspective, a "perspective formed from the inside of a group"[3] (Boglár and Papp, 2008, p. 256) and also point out the deficiencies in general strategies of remembering.

The theoretical framework of my research was based on Aleida Assmann (2016, 2018) and Jan Assmann's (1999) interpretative approach, according to which I tried to interpret the material collected in the field, I also examined the "meanings of non-Jewish transgenerational memory patterns" in the selected territory.[4]

The research community lives in Zrenjanin in the Banat region of the province of Vojvodina in Serbia. The town is in Central Banat, located on the bank of River Bega and is the capital of the Central Banat district. According to the 2022 Census data,[5] the municipality of Zrenjanin (the town and the surrounding villages) had 105,722 inhabitants, thus it ranked as the third largest city in Vojvodina behind Novi Sad and Subotica. While the number of people who claim to be Jews is the census is very small in Serbia (709 according to the 2022 data), the number of those people who are associated with local Jewish communities is bigger. Currently, according to my estimation, there are around a hundred people in some way related to the Zrenjanin Jewish community. The present-day Jewish community in Zrenjanin defines its own Jewishness as an ethnic group and not along the lines of religious affiliation. They consider themselves to be a secular Jewish community.

METHODOLOGY

The main method applied during the fieldwork was interviews with the community members, supplemented by participant that served the purpose of providing a deeper understanding of the context. I originally intended to use archival research as well but already at the outset I faced a difficulty in terms of the Zrenjanin archives. Owing to the kindness of a helpful archivist, I received the information that their archival corpus is fragmentary, unarranged, and essentially useless. During World War II the occupiers burnt most of the documents that had been officially accessible in the city.

Participant observation was only fulfilled partially because "immersion" in the traditional anthropological sense, that entails living with the community for an extended period of time, was not feasible. I conducted around ten interviews with members of the Jewish community and other non-Jewish social actors, which I recorded in audio format with the subjects' consent.

[2] Research on Transgenerational Holocaust Memory in Central Europe. https://www.holocaustmemory.org

[3] Translations of all Hungarian and Serbian language sources and interviews have been done by the author.

[4] Research on Transgenerational Holocaust-Memory.

[5] https://www.stat.gov.rs/.

During the interviews, community members often volunteered to show me various objects such as family relics, photographs, diaries, and treasured documents. According to Peter Burke, the vehicles of memory, including oral ones such as stories and traditions, written vehicles like memoirs and other records, visual vehicles like photographs and paintings, commemorations such as actions that convey memories, and space itself as a vehicle of conveying memories, all have an active influence on memory (Burke, 2005, p. 85). I examined all of the vehicles of memory during my research. I also kept a field diary, which, eventually, became a stage for presenting my anxieties, difficulties, and, often, sadness.

MY ROLE AS A RESEARCHER

As an anthropologist, I often ponder whether we have done or are doing enough to objectively represent the Jewish community. I felt the need to put into wider context the activities, opinions and reactions of the Jewish community of Zrenjanin, to attempt to explain and interpret the antisemitism they – and also other social actors – face on a daily level.

I ran into difficulty in defining my status at the outset of the research. Compliant with the general discourse research methodology, it is necessary to define whether the researchers are members of the research community, and they should strive to describe the given culture from the outside, putting aside their own culture (Boglár and Papp, 2008, p. 256). I was born in Zrenjanin and have spent three quarters of my life so far there as a resident, as a member of the Hungarian minority. In light of this, I found myself confronted with a dilemma as to my position vis-à-vis the research community. According to András Gergely: "Mutual otherness is, therefore, the first, most important, but at the same time pivotal experience of identicality of the most certainly attributable distinction between the world of the researcher and the researched" (Gergely, 2010, p. 137)[6]. He also claims that this can also be experienced at both the individual level and the level of cultural differences and in his opinion, any research in that field is full of challenges. Responding to these challenges, I will attempt to put myself in such a researcher position, which is not the "state of disfavor/dislike caused by otherness" but appears as an attempt to collectively build a meeting point of the diversity of cultures" (Gergely, 2010, p. 137). At the same time, pursuing my basic sentiments, namely, that I have not chosen my target research group intending to emphasize the superiority or inferiority of another culture, I find it necessary to underline that I want to contribute – with my research results and modest possibilities – to mitigate the phenomenon of negative opinion about the Jewish community.

I assume the difficulties I encountered during my research explain why socio-scientific research in the development of the former Yugoslav state and society circumvented the issues related to the existence, problems, inter-communal organization of national minorities and their relation to the majority society and the state. In the case of my research, I try to fill in the blanks with local writers' books about Jews and publications, mostly memoirs and biographies, issued country-wide after World War II.

[6] I have translated all quotations from sources as well as interviews from Hungarian and Serbian to English.

As the research advanced, it became clear to me that I should go deep back in time to get a full picture of the Jewish community's life in Zrenjanin. To profoundly understand the root causes of later events and the present life of Jews in Zrenjanin, I found it appropriate to study the period from the settlement of Jews in the city through the time interval before World War II until their deportation, but I refer to these periods only briefly.

Upon positioning my role as a researcher, I will elaborate on the ethical questions related to the research community conforming with the Code of Ethics of the American Anthropological Association in the subsection below.

ETHICAL ISSUES

"Anthropologists have moral obligations as members of other groups, such as the family, religion, and community, as well as the profession" (AAA, 1998).

With due respect to the privacy rights of the subjects of interviews, even though they did not request to be referred to anonymously, I use the initials of their surname and their full forename in order to reveal their identity only partly and thus to avoid the possibility that they become targets of any atrocity.

Owing to ethical reasons, I will not represent existing conflict situations and relations experienced in the Jewish community in Zrenjanin in the present article the, and information obtained from confidential situations. Although my experience is that these social relations are needed for an in-depth understanding of a community and their perception is indispensable for the anthropologist's research, I believe that they do not and may not affect the successful interpretation of the final analysis. The main objective of my research was to present the research community, to analyze narratives heard during the fieldwork through thinking together with the community members, and by no means to judge or generate new conflicts. "In a field of such complex involvements and obligations, it is inevitable that misunderstandings, conflicts, and the need to make choices among apparently incompatible values will arise. Anthropologists are responsible for grappling with such difficulties and struggling to resolve them in ways compatible with the principles stated here" (AAA, 1998). With this in mind, I tried to act accordingly during my whole research.

HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF THE JEWISH COMMUNITY OF ZRENJANIN

JEWS IN YUGOSLAVIA BEFORE WORLD WAR II

In the post-World War I period the awareness of young Jews in Zrenjanin on national identity was formed based on knowledge acquired during their studies in Vienna and Prague (Fogel, 2013). They were under the immense influence of the Jewish Alliance founded at that time, the Yugoslav religious self-governments, and some other Jewish organizations likewise the increasingly stronger Zionist movement; however repeated and growing anti-Jewish activities intensified the feelings of insecurity and discomfort. Growing awareness

of national identity among the Jewish youth increased the number of those who joined international labor movements and became their outstanding members and leaders. It was the "era of latent antisemitism" (Goldhagen, 2017) which later exploded in various scenes and forms of manifestation.

The second period, from 1933 to 1941 was characterized by the more powerful presence of the Nazi ideology. Germany started the harmonization of policing and secret service activities with the work of sympathizers living outside German territories. The cooperation between the Yugoslav and German police was established, secret agreements were made and the Kulturbund[7] acted as a pivotal agent of the German intelligence service. Especially the youth educated under the aegis of the Kulturbund played a significant role in the swift and effective implementation of the Holocaust. Beyond the aforementioned, there was a multitude of collaborators who were renowned personalities of the Yugoslav political, cultural, and public life and active participants of Krauss'[8] intelligence service network. By the end of this period, the government adopted anti-Jewish regulations and intensified antisemite propaganda, which was financially supported by various German institutions in Yugoslavia, such as the Yugoslav Community of Germans. Anti-Jewish newspapers and magazines were published. This was the period when the persecution of Jews started elsewhere in Europe as well, like in Austria, Germany, Poland, and Czechia. Jewish families fleeing Nazi atrocities traveled in large numbers through Yugoslavia to Palestine and other safe territories (Fogel, 2013). The Federation of Yugoslav Jewish Association took care of their reception and helped them. The presence of refugees led to the intensification of already ongoing antisemitic actions, incitement to hatred, and various anti-Jewish events were organized *en masse*. As a consequence of the rise of Nazism in Austria and Czechia, Jewish students who studied there returned home and started to spread ideas acquired during their studies in Vienna and Prague and believed that the victory of socialism would bring a solution to the problems of European Jews and – under the given circumstances – it would be the most optimum political way out.

THE ROAD TO THE HOLOCAUST

In the pre-World War II period, 1,540 Jews lived in Zrenjanin while only 75 survived the Holocaust. In 1941, after the German occupation, the communal life of local Jews completely ceased to exist. The torture of the Jewish population and the plunder of their property started at the very outset of the German occupation of Yugoslavia. "The Volksdeutche[9] population from Banat and Belgrade played a significant role in this process, especially those young people who were educated under the aegis of the Kulturbund founded earlier. The registration and stigmatization of Jews started in April 1941. A series of humiliating and other discriminative measures, among others forced labor, was introduced. Jews from Zrenjanin were forced to

[7] The Kulturbund (in German: Schwäbisch-Deutcher Kulturbund) was an organisation of the Germans in Banat, Bačka and Srem, as a cultural organisation in the beginning and during World War II it supported the occupier and promoted German Nazism.

[8] Karl Krauss, an SS captain who was the central figure of the Yugoslav intelligence services.

[9] According to Nazi German terminology, such persons whose language and culture were of German origin but did not hold German citizenship.

clean streets by their hands, to clean the toilets of Germans and do other most humiliating works in public, before the eyes of other citizens." (Koljanin, 2012).

One of the significant factors in carrying out the Holocaust quickly was the number of Jews in this territory, and, last but not least, their status in the social structure, in the cultural and political life and their attachment to their tradition. Many highly educated Jews successfully held high offices in culture, economy, and politics in Zrenjanin and boosted the city's architecture and infrastructure. The interviewed Jew and non-Jew respondents during my research shared the opinion that the persecution of Jews could – to a large extent – happen because of the sentiments of "jealousy", and "fear of losing power" against them during long decades of history and the interwar period as well.

"Elsewhere in Banat, but mostly in Zrenjanin, several significant differences could be observed in carrying out the process of Holocaust and the perpetrators, the locations of executions, the method, circumstances and timing of crimes undoubtedly deviate from the extermination of the Jewish population in other German, Hungarian, Polish, Bulgarian, Albanian, Croatian and Central European territories." (Koljanin, 2012). "Most of the victims died right there, in Yugoslavia, before the death camps in the East were at full speed" Subotić (2019, p. 32). The following subsection deals with the deportation of Jews who lived in the territory of my research.

THE DEPORTATION OF JEWS OF ZRENJANIN

The Holocaust in Zrenjanin started at the very beginning of the German occupation, on April 19, 1941, at 10 a.m., when, after being tortured, Viktor Elek, the city's most successful industrialist, and seventeen of his non-Jewish compatriots (Partisans, resistance movement sympathizers and other individuals with anti-German views) were executed in the Baglyas neighborhood of the city in the presence of a large number of local German people. The murder of this wealthy sugar mill owner by hanging was not a random choice. The execution, and also the whole process of the Holocaust, was a crime carried out in a precisely planned and cruel manner. Viktor Elek was an outstanding expert in the cultivation and processing of sugar beet. Invited by the manager of the local sugar mill founded earlier, he arrived in Zrenjanin in 1911. Soon after that, owing to his honest and diligent work, he was elected the manager of the mill (Németh, 2004). A Czech by origins, Elek became a renowned citizen of Zrenjanin and was known as an eminent expert in sugar production who quickly integrated into the social and cultural circles of the city on the banks of River Bega. Local citizens remembered him as a generous benefactor to sport and culture. The aim behind his public execution by hanging was to set an example for the rest of the population and to intimidate. Viktor Elek was falsely accused of inappropriate behavior towards his Hungarian and German workers. However, it was obvious that the German authorities aimed to take control of the sugar mill. On the day of his execution, posters, and public notices with his photo and time of execution appeared around town. After the execution, local German citizens ridiculed the dead man's corpse making gross remarks (Németh, 2004).

Later, on August 18, 1941, the gathered Jewish citizens were transported by ships on River Bega to Belgrade: men at 10 a.m., and women and children at noon. All the Jews of Zrenjanin

– except for a few who managed to escape arrest – were taken from the local concentration camp[10] and squeezed into the vessels. Once they arrived in the metropolis, women, children and the elderly were placed in the synagogue in Belgrade and private houses. Men were immediately transported to the Topovske šupe[11] concentration camp. Three months later, all the Jews of Zrenjanin were transported to the Sajmište[12] camp, where most of them froze or starved to death, or died of pain during vivisection. Some of the deported Jews were secretly executed in the village of Jabuka, near Pančevo. Every morning and evening during the winter, a gas van specially developed for the rapid extermination of Jews, arrived in Sajmište where the victims were loaded and taken to their final trip. "It is also the central site in the topography of the Holocaust in Serbia, as half of all Serbian Jews were killed there within a few short months in the spring of 1942." (Subotić, 2019, p. 21). What happened to the small number of Jews in Zrenjanin who survived? I will seek the answer to it in the next subsection.

THE JEWISH COMMUNITY OF ZRENJANIN AFTER WORLD WAR II

As Tzvetan Todorov stated: "Communists also carried out a crusade against memory" (2003, p. 9). According to him: "Totalitarian regimes of the twentieth century have revealed the existence of a danger never before imagined: the blotting out of memory". The Yugoslav state undertook laborious efforts to do so after World War II, re-writing, reconstructing, and overwriting the whole concept of the pre-war Yugoslavia and introducing new paradigms. "The communist focus on antifascism as a military and ideological battle with the ultimate triumph of the communist idea, therefore, completely effaced the unique experience of the Jews" (Subotić, 2019, p. 40).

A prime example of a paradigm shift is the meaning of the palimpsest concept, e.g. the selection of the remembrance day for "all Serb victims".[13] This is legal and legitimate but remembering "only Serb" victims seems exclusive and ethnocentric. Neither the International Holocaust Remembrance Day nor the main Jewish holidays[14] appear in the list of officially recognized holidays. I would argue that the huge number of Serb victims is an indisputable fact, but it is also true that local Jewish communities literally perished (Judenfrei) from the territory of Serbia during World War II as a result of the genocide carried out there, while the persecution and suffering of the Roma were also significant and especially horrific.

Under the slogan of brotherhood and unity, the Yugoslav, and currently the Serb identity and Serb history of origins have completely been remade and "lies and inventions replace reality, searching out and spreading the truth is forbidden" (Todorov, 2003, p. 10). The administrative

[10] The building is currently home to the present-day Agricultural High School.

[11] Topovske šupe was the first concentration camp in Belgrade, where about four thousand Jews from Banat and an unknown number of Roma were interned by the German authorities from August to 12 December 1941.

[12] The Sajmište concentration camp was an extermination camp from September 1941. It is also known as the Jewish Camp of Zemun (in German: Judenlager Semlin). In late 1941 and early 1942 thousands of Jews and Roma were executed there in gas vans.

[13] 7th July, the day of uprising against Fascism in Serbia is still a state holiday.

[14] For example: Yom Kippur (Day of Atonement), Passover (the Israelites' departure from ancient Egypt), Rosh Hashanah (Jewish New Year) or Hanukah (Festival of Lights).

bodies of the post-World War II communist state led by Tito deliberately manipulated social memory. Things deemed as "embarrassing elements" (for example, they have excavated the concentration camp victims' bones, burnt and dispersed them, manipulated photos, material memories, torn out undesirable pages of books, isolated individuals who remembered or attempted to remember to Goli Otok, a deserted, desolate, barren islands of the Adriatic Sea) were removed after Tito's death, the fall of the Yugoslav government and the creation of new states by ex-Yugoslav republics respectively, and history was "re-scratched" by each new political leadership. Collective memory was reduced to memories of Serb identity.

I analyze the remembrance strategies about the deportation of local Jews because thereby we can observe how "re-remembrance" happened after the fall of communism when "the tendencies for corrections in view of the past" intensify and the "need for a more differentiated approach" appears (Bíró, 2016), which means the national identity-formation of those living in the new states seceded from former Yugoslavia. "Yugoslavism is reassessed" (Bíró, 2016), the issue of national identity is reconstructed, origin, and religion become important. The culture of memory has radically been changed and diverse minority commemoration events occur.

ANALYSIS OF LOCAL SPACES OF MEMORY

In the post-World War II period, different political changes such as the fall of communism and the disintegration of Yugoslavia took place in the territory researched for my article encompassing an area of former Yugoslavia, nowadays Serbia, especially during the time of regime changes in the 1990s. There was a strong link between the political powers and the symbols and, rather, the power of handling the memories during these transitions. The Jewish community of Zrenjanin functioned according to the rules of such institutionalized memory. The local Jewish community was founded in 1994.[15] Three years later, in 1997, the community succeeded in putting an A4 paper-size memorial tablet designating the location of the synagoguewhich had been demolished by German occupiers.[16]

"The extermination of the European Jewry was not only carried out behind the barbed wires of concentration camps, hidden from plain sight. It was also carried out in public view of non-Jewish citizens of these countries, on streets, squares, and farms across Eastern Europe. Non-Jews benefited from this Jewish erasure, often for generations after the Holocaust" (Subotić, 2019, p. 52). The main scene of Holocaust-related historical suffering in Zrenjanin is the location where Viktor Elek and his companions were executed first, the concentration camp and the place from where Jewish citizens were loaded on barges. A check of whether these venues are designated and how have these been integrated into the whole of the city will provide a clear picture of the relation to scenes of past and suffering. These places in the city did not become an appropriate space for commemorating memories of genocide, individual, and collective traumas. The neglect and lack of designation of these places can also be interpreted as a desensitization process aimed at pushing the sufferings of the victims,

[15] www.jozrenjanin.rs.

[16] Built in 1896 based on Lipót Baumhorn's design and demolished by the German occupiers in 1941.

the survivors and other affected generations into the background. This phenomenon could also be interpreted as an attempt to marginalize the guiltiness of non-Jew citizens during World War II, namely, that historical facts were overwritten, that they sought to deny their cooperation with the German occupiers or their indifferent behavior towards the victims. Therefore, subsequent commemoration and transgenerational memory are subject to errors rooted in various causes (Martinoli, 2012). For example, the location of the concentration camp is marked only by a memorial tablet placed by the "Commemoration Committee of the 20th Anniversary of the Uprising in Zrenjanin" on October 2, 1961.[17] The memorial tablet itself is mounted so high that the text on it is barely legible to the naked eye for a person of average height.[18] Each year during the annual commemorations organized by the Jewish community, an active – and by the way the tallest – member, representative of the Chevra Kadisha, my respondent, Stevan S. is the one who puts the wreath up on the tablet with a long rod he made.[19] This memorial tablet can be seen as both present and absent, since it does exist but is hardly visible. Although its wording explicitly reminds us of the Jewish victims, it is unclear who are the commemorators. Their ethnicity is not revealed to the next generations, thus it is not clear who pays tribute to the victims: only those who were affected or also representatives of other local ethnic groups. "The building used as a concentration camp during World War II, now the Agricultural Secondary School, was built in 1880 as a barrack of the Hungarian Army (honvéds) and later refurbished as a police headquarters. In the post-war period it was used by the Yugoslav Army until 1968. The building is under the protection of the Novi Sad-based Institute for the Protection of Cultural Monuments", says the school's website;[20] yet, as another example of it being at the same time present and absent, we cannot find it listed on the website of the indicated institute.[21] I found the following data on the website of the Institute for the Protection of Cultural Monuments in Zrenjanin: "During the occupation, the barrack's basement rooms were used for the imprisonment of Jews and communists."[22] According to Stevan S.'s account, in the previous year, on Holocaust Remembrance Day, January 27, 2022 – coinciding with the day of the patron saint of Serbian education and culture, St. Sava: "*The school's history teacher came here, invited me inside the school building, offered me refreshment and told that, according to his plans, from the next year on, they would pay more attention to the education of students about the history of the building. This was the first time since I have come here for commemorations that I met a person interested in what is happening next to the school walls*." [23]

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[17] Today the institution of the Secondary School of Agriculture.

[18] "During the first days of occupation, this building was a temporary camp where 1278 Jews of Zrenjanin passed through. The enemy transported them to death camps from there. Only thirty eight Jews survived the war in our city."

[19] The Chevra Kadisha is an important institution of Jewish communities. Beyond taking care of a deceased persons and their families, it is also the pivotal charity organization aimed at supporting the poor and the sick.

[20] http://zrpoljoprivredna.edu.rs.

[21] http://pzzzsk.rs.

[22] http://zrenjaninheritage.com.

[23] Saint Sava was the founder of the autocephalous Serbian Orthodox Church, the first Serbian archbishop, teacher, writer, translator and diplomat. January 27 is a school holiday in 1840 to honor Saint Sava's merits.

My other respondent, László B. said that he had no idea that it was a concentration camp: "*My mother was a teacher in the Agricultural School. Back then, long ago, there was no plaque there. I would know if it were, because I used to walk around there quite a lot.*" His narrative suggests that he belongs to the category of "no memories", i.e. he more readily represents the absence (of memory) than the memory of what happened there.

The other two Holocaust-related sites in Zrenjanin remain unmarked to this day. On the site where Viktor Elek was executed a housing estate was built and not a single memorial plaque reminds us of the horrific crime. The point of departure of the deportations, the River Police Port, now called "Kapetanija" by local citizens, represents a complete absence. In the period between 1970 and 1985, the Bega River was regulated whereby its length was made shorter and into three parts, thus the river, just like the Jews, was killed as well without given a chance to create a *lieux de mémoire* (Nora, 1996), i.e. a site of memory. Therefore, commemoration events of the deportations in August 1941 were relocated to those parts of the city where the river still flows and from where the commemorators can throw wreaths onto the river surface thus providing an opportunity to pay tribute and honor the victims and foster the norms of the culture of memory. In all societies, regardless of the political system and the degree of democracy, the attitude to the past and how we deal with it, its destruction and re-creation, are usually linked to the interests and intentions of political structures that feel entitled to create the present and to reinterpret "their" past, i.e. the past as they see it, in a manner that suits them. Walking along the streets of Zrenjanin, it becomes obvious that, from World War II until today, there was a lack of social will to create sites of memory.

Just as there are no sites of memory in Zrenjanin, there are no symbols of memory either. I explain this finding in more detail in the next subsection.

SYMBOLS OF LOCAL MEMORY

There have been religious symbols in the homes of my Jewish interviewees even though the Jews of Zrenjanin live a secular life today. In the home of all my Jewish respondents, I saw a menorah but I visited individuals who had a mezuzah or a Birkat HaBayit as well. My respondent, Lidija P. wore a Star of David necklace during the interview and she told me that this symbol has had a pivotal role in expressing her identity since her childhood. "In 1956, when I graduated from high school, my parents sent me to London to my uncle and his mother to learn English. It happened during the communist era. In Oxford Street, one of London's high streets, I saw a Magen David, Star of David necklace and I was very happy and bought it because there were no such things in Belgrade. Then my Israeli aunt came to London during her travels. We were in London at the same time and we met. My aunt, originally from Novi Sad, wrote to my parents: 'I was with L. and we had a marvelous time together and I must tell you that she wore the Star of David in the center of London' – and she showed me the necklace adding: 'as I do now'". Since then, this is an important symbol of her identity. Another interlocutor of mine, Vladimir A. told me that his father always wears the Star of David around his neck.

When I visited Judit S. and her husband, Stevan, Judit welcomed me with *hamantash* and told me that those were the local variants that are baked not only for Purim. According to her account, this pastry has a symbolic meaning for them and it serves to pass on Jewish tradition in the enculturation of the family's next generation. Ivanka F. showed me a family relic representing a meal-related symbol, i.e. a Passover Seder plate used during Pesach.

After my research in symbols of local memory, I encountered a very specific phenomenon. Namely, the safekeeping of objects found and remained intact during the demolition of the synagogue in Zrenjanin has developed into a certain cult for local Jews and some non-Jews. Before I elaborate on this statement, for the sake of deeper understanding, I would like to present the history of the synagogue in Zrenjanin.

Only thirty Jewish families lived in Zrenjanin in the 18th century. Since they lived according to well-defined religious rituals, since the foundation of the religious community, they had had such premises where they could freely practice their religion; however, it took decades to build the first synagogue in the city. Because buying land was forbidden to Jews, a special permit was needed for the construction of the building for worship. The Jewish community had bought the land in 1831, but the construction started only fifteen years later. The first synagogue was built in 1845–1847 in the then Eötvös Street, in the Jewish quarter of the city. According to some sources it was a single-story, simple-looking building almost a quadrant in shape. Although it was built as a house of worship, it followed the construction principles of a single-story house with a tripartite facade, and gable roof and with its sizes, and the repetitive rhythm of facade openings absolutely fitted in the overall view of the street. In the mid-19th century there were 500 Jews living in the city and their number gradually increased over the next decades, thus the old building proved to be too small for prayers and by that time it was also pretty dilapidated (Kojičić, 2017). That is evidenced by an article published in the *Wochenblatt* weekly from 1863: "Just like an old body losing its youthful vigor, old buildings become more and more fragile during the years. Hence the community council decided to provide a new home for its old faith."[24]. The construction of the new synagogue most likely began in 1892, when an agreement was reached between the Jewish religious council, city representatives, and county authorities. A young architect from Budapest, Lipót Baumhorn was commissioned with the design. The requirement was that the new synagogue should meet Ashkenazi ritual laws and be built in Neolog style. The building of the new synagogue started on April 1, 1894. The large-scale construction took two years and required a lot of money, hence it was supported not only by Jewish community members but, to a large extent, also by the citizens of Zrenjanin. Renowned individuals of the Jewish community of the time, such as Dr. Mavro Klein, chief rabbi, and the president of the Jewish Religious Council, Michael Schwartz, were the main contributors in building the new synagogue. Jenő Rónai, the president of the Jewish Council of the period, and several other prominent citizens also attended the opening ceremony (Kojičić, 2017). "It seems that the formation of the so-called ″Jewish Quarter″ had not been distinctly regulated, hence Jews could, depending on their financial power, build their houses in all parts of the city. It was an

[24] Gr. Bečkerek, Wochenblatt "Einweihung des Tempels", 1896. Retrived from: https://play.google.com/books/reader?id=b40moxjESGIC&pg=GBS.PA10&hl=en.

urban planning rule to build such buildings around the synagogue that provide comprehensive religious, educational and cultural life for the Jewish community therefore in most cities covered complexes were built on the building area. In Zrenjanin, these buildings were built, more or less, in two streets in the city center in different periods, but similar purpose buildings can be found in other parts of the city as well. The rabbinate was next to the synagogue, the Jewish school was across the street and later the building of Chevra Kadisha was erected in their immediate vicinity." (Kojičić, 2017).

During World War II on the orders of the German occupiers, the synagogue was systematically demolished by local citizens in 1941 searching for "Jewish gold". It was a general stereotype that Jews hid their wealth in the walls of their homes and temples. When it turned out that there was not any hidden treasure, the locals removed the building materials, furniture and other objects, and used them for their houses, as memorabilia, or recycled them. Thus, the bricks of the synagogue were used to pave yards, and build fences, moreover, there was an urban legend – also confirmed by Stevan S. and some other older respondents – that people built pigsties from the bricks of the synagogue. The synagogue organ was also thrown out on the street. The leaders of the city's Reformed Church asked the German authorities to sell them the organ and the German soldiers agreed, so it survived as one of the memory artifacts from the synagogue in Zrenjanin. According to the local Reformed Church pastor's narrative, the instrument is the property of the church. She talked about it as "o*ur organ*". When I asked her if the organ had been donated, I received evasive answers, such as that there is no need for that, and the like. Members of the Jewish Community in Zrenjanin talk about this, a seemingly another urban legend topic with mixed feelings, namely, whether the Jews have ever requested the return of the organ. The official answer of the Jewish Community in Zrenjanin is: "*No. There is no place where we could put it*." In unofficial circles, they say: "*Yes, but the Reformed Church says they have a purchase invoice of the authorities back then.*" The present pastor told me the same. However, on the website of the Reformed Church of Zrenjanin it reads: "Amid the tragic events of World War II, the congregation sought to shine as a beacon of light. There are no exact figures about the number of Jewish lives saved by Pastor Zoltán Szabó in Zrenjanin who issued baptismal letters to Jews. He not only saved lives but – at the request of our parish – also saved the organ of the Jewish community from arson, which we still keep in our church."

During my visits to the homes of my research respondents, they often showed me parts of the synagogue. Ivanka F. showed me a piece of stained glass, kept by her husband for himself and the family, which he acquired during the renovation of the stained glass and the Torah Ark in one of the rooms of the Jewish Community of Zrenjanin. As the curator of the Museum in Zrenjanin, Biljana D., told me, one can still find pieces assumed to be parts of the synagogue on the local flea market. One of the few exhibits, remains of the demolished synagogue, is a piece of pilar and the other is a fragment of the Torah scroll. She also found a piece of marble, hidden behind a cupboard in her office. Mária P., my non-Jewish interviewee, keeps an object inherited from the mother of her mother-in-law, who had worked for a Jewish family, the Schossbergers, and they gave it to her as a souvenir. This is such an example of transferring memory when the inheritance took place and is still taking place from a Jewish family to a non-Jewish family and that is how the memory of the synagogue

lives on in the memory of local families. These saved pieces of the synagogue are pivotal elements of the transmission of memory.

Walking along the streets of Zrenjanin, there are occasional symbols explicitly implying that a prosperous Jewish community used to live and work in the city once. The "insider's eyes", as my interviewee, Kristina S. put it, look at the buildings built by Jews or houses where they lived or worked, from a different perspective. "Besides the Stolpersteine laid in the pavement of the high street, the 'korzo' in 2021, nothing suggests that Jews used to live there."[25]

As stated by a local historian, Filip Krčmar, the Jewish memorial cemetery is "certainly the most impressive memory artifact of the Jews of Zrenjanin which has not been researched by historians until this day. Its turbulent past, symbolism, specific spatial concept and realization could be an interesting topic for researchers" (Krčmar et al., 2015). He states in his book that this is the only urban cemetery that was moved from one place to another. Although Jews lived in Zrenjanin as early as the 18th century, there is no exact data about the place where they buried their deaths. There is only one marked cemetery in the maps of the period and that is the Serb Orthodox one. Most of the city, including the archives, was destroyed by fire in 1807, hence all data – not only about Jews, but also about other ethnic and religious communities – were lost. The oldest headstones in the current Jewish memorial cemetery indicate that, presumably, there was a separate Jewish cemetery on a territory near the sugar mill already in 1828, then a new one was established at a new location near what used to be the sugar factory. This cemetery

was moved to the area behind the present bus station in the 1980s "when it had to be moved again to implement the interests of the Naftagas Company and the urban plans" (Krčmar et al., 2015, p. 420). Multiple occasions of desecration of graves and criminal offenses marked the four-month long relocation process. No list was made about the individuals who had been buried there and many marble headstones disappeared. The original memorial of the 1,280 victims of the Holocaust was not moved to the new cemetery, the remaining headstones were damaged, their inscriptions became unreadable, and the Start of David was put improperly on the central obelisk. The authorities of the period did not approve the presence of a rabbi during exhumation; the exhumed remains were put in a mass grave in the central part of the cemetery. Many headstones were broken during the relocation and some marble headstones were placed on the wrong pedestals. The broken parts were piled up on top of each other in the eastern part of the cemetery (Krčmar et al., 2015). This pile has been continuously shrinking and there are visible traces of hammering on the stones kept there. As my interviewee, Stevan S. told me, this suggests that "*local stonemasons ensure their supplies from these stones*". As stated by Krčmar "The fact that the local Jewish Community filed suit against those in charge of the relocation has not changed the bitter impression" (2015, p. 420). The memorial cemetery was consecrated by Cadik Danon, the first rabbi in Yugoslavia, in 1990 and Aleksandar Greber made photographic documentation of about 60 photos which is an exceptionally valuable historical collection of data. It is a noteworthy addition to the narrative about the Jewish cemetery in Zrenjanin that, according to my interviewee, Stevan S., Germans who disagreed with the Nazi ideology and thus executed during World War II were buried in

[25] Korzó – a pedestrian-only street in the center of the town.

the area designated as a memorial cemetery next to the present-day Reformed Church. During our visit to the memorial cemetery, we noticed an old wooden cross, which had been thrown into the Jewish cemetery through the fence of the Reformed cemetery. Stevan S. said: "It was not the first time one can find such crosses there. Instead of burying used crosses under the tombstone or disposing of them, they throw them over the fence, into our cemetery. And I put them back each time". He thinks it is a sort of "hidden communication" between the two religious denominations.

CONCLUSION

During my field research and writing the article, I felt constantly that it was not only the Jewish community that should remember. The local cultural memory is one-sided and non-Jewish citizens in Zrenjanin are unaware of the rich past of the city, which was also built by Jews, and they do not even "remember". Despite the existence of spatial, representative elements of memory, such as the *Stolpersteine*, memorial plaques, museum exhibitions, and publications printed by the Jewish Community, according to the President of the Jewish Community, Ljiljana P. of Zrenjanin, their community is still invisible to the general public.

In this article I have attempted to address this gap by exploring the local meanings of the Holocaust and the Jewish community of Zrenjanin in general. I have focused on the narratives of my interviewees as well as of non-Jewish citizens of the town in which they shared with me their memories related to the topic. I have also analyzed the few memorial sites related to the community in Zrenjanin, and the modes in which symbols of the local Jewry have lived on despite their absence from the everyday life of contemporary Zrenjanin.

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MEASURE HAPPINESS – A CONTRIBUTION TO STANISLAW LEM'S DEFINITION OF HAPPINESS. PART 2: LIMITS OF APPROACH[1]

In the fable *Kobyszczę*, Stanisław Lem proposes a definition of Happiness that allows for the formulation of a mathematical model describing the intensity level of Happiness, which can be experienced by humans in different situations. Completing, correcting, and contextualization of the existing model are the main issues addressed in this article. The proposed mathematical model is not about the same Happiness experienced by different individuals. It is about the measure of intensity level of Happiness, which is experienced by an individual in many situations. That is why the proposed model describes Happiness in a new area of research located in digital humanities, where AI can be used to continue future work. The issue related to model reflects on the possibility of translating complex issues, e.g. philosophical ones, into the language of science specifically mathematics. The definitional procedure and the contextualization of the issues of good and evil and Happiness proposed by Lem in the fable *Kobyszczę* flow from his conception of the art of writing as the art of translating literary, philosophical, or theological issues into the language of biology, chemistry, physics, mathematics, or computer science, thus contributing to the trend of considerations in the field of digital humanities and developing by use of Artificial Intelligence (AI). Consequently, an analysis of the narrative structure of the fairytale will identify the limits of applying this kind of approach to the question of translatability. Issues linking *Kobyszczę* to some of the matters being discussed in the context of artificial intelligence (AI) will also be identified.

Keywords: happiness, philosophy, literature, translatability, artificial intelligence, Stanisław Lem, the Contemplator (*Kobyszczę*)

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[1] Part one was published as Sierotowicz, Sierotowicz (2019).

INTRODUCTION

Stanisław Lem's work is an inexhaustible source of inspiration, as evidenced by in-depth academic studies, international conferences, and numerous translations available throughout almost the entire world.[2] In this context, the *Cyberiad* occupies a prominent place. However, despite the popularity of the tales contained therein, is a narrative cycle that has not been investigated very often. In the present paper that fable *Kobyszczę* will become the subject of research.[3] It is, in fact, a small monographic treatise, just like some others *Cyberiad* fables (for example, *The First Sally (A) or Trurl's Electronic Bard* is an excellent, witty, and ironic treatise on *ars poetica*; see: Lem, 1985, pp. 43–57). The fable is dedicated to Happiness, and offers an operational definition of the unit of measure of the intensity level of Happiness (Hedon), which has already become the basis for the construction of a mathematical model of intensity level of Happiness, and which will be slightly revised here.[4] The operational definition of the Hedon has been proposed in the context of the problem of Good and Evil. However, the Hedon does not solve the problem at hand, because – like any mathematical model – it cannot be applied in all cases. The main goal of this paper is an attempt to enhance the first proposition of simple model and to determine the limit of its application, with the reference to Stanisław Lem's concept of the literary work. The model presented in this paper enables the intensity of Happiness experienced by an individual in different situations to be evaluated. Consequently, this is a distinct research subject from the evaluation of the experience of the same happiness by different individuals. This is a significant research topic within the field of psychology. It would necessitate the utilisation of a specific methodological approach to resolve such research issues, given the inherent difficulty (if not impossibility) of comparing the experiences of happiness among diverse individuals.

The entire text will be divided into five sections. The first section will present a concise overview of the narrative structure of the fable under discussion. The second section will consider the mathematical model of the intensity level of Happiness. This model will be applied to a wider range of situations, including new contexts where Happiness can be experienced and its intensity level mathematically evaluated. Finally, a brief description of Lem's interpretation of a literary work will be proposed. This will be followed by an examination of the limitations of the model (section 4). The conclusion will suggest a possible interpretation of

[2] For general information on Lem's books and lemology as such, see: Lem's official site: https://lem.pl/ (accessed on 28 January 2024) and (Oramus, 2016).

[3] The fable *Kobyszczę*, as far as we know, is not included in any English edition of Lem's classic *The Cyberiad: Fables for the Cybernetic Age* (various edition; see for example Lem, 1985, 2020). This fable was however translated into English under the title "In hot pursuit of Happiness", and published separately in Lem 1973 (all references to pages in the brackets without indication of an author/year are to that edition). The term Kobyszczę is an abbreviation of the name of Trurl's machine in Polish: *Kontemplator bytu szczęsny*. The English name in Lem (1973) takes only the first part of it: the Contemplator. In the paper the term *Kobyszczę*, in italics, will always denote the Lem's fable, while the Contemplator – Trurl's machine described in the first *exemplum* (see: Table 1).

[4] It should be mentioned that *the Cyberiad* contains another fable on Happiness: "Altruizine, or A True Account of How Bonhomius the Hermetic Hermit Tried to Bring About Universal Happiness, and What Came of It", not exploited in the present paper; see: Lem, 1985, pp. 249–282.

the fable in the context of some issues related to digital humanities and the potential use of the proposed model to develop artificial intelligence (AI).

KOBYSZCZĘ – A NARRATIVE STRUCTURE OF THE FABLE

Kobyszczę is a complex narrative that assumes the structure of a classical fable, and proposes an argument *ab exemplo* in the dispute over happiness. The argument *ab exemplo* takes the form of a series of three *exempla* with the same *Ernstbedeutung*, to use Hans Lausberg's term, that is with the same intention to solve the dispute within the context of the fable. Each *exemplum* represents a distinct, autonomous, and self-contained strategy (the *Eigenbedentwig*) employed by the hero (Trurl) to resolve the quest (see: Demoen, 1997, p. 127). Each *exemplum* is introduced by a brief introductory sentence (*promythion*) and concluded by an epilogue (*epimythion*), which serves as a unifying element between the *exempla*.

It was Vladimir Propp, who in his *Morphology of the Folktale* (Propp, 1968) offered the model of the heroic quest. That model, *mutatis mutandis*, can be applied to *Kobyszczę*. In the heroic quest fable, "a hero meets a challenge – either mischief or some lack – which he is sent to overcome. Throughout the quest, he is confronted with a series of trials which require that he choose to fight rather than to yield or flee, and which finally end in victory" (Ricoeur, 1980, p. 184). That of Trurl's (who is the hero) cannot be called "a final victory", but Propp's scheme works quite well.

Following Propp, the sequence of events the hero of a fairy tale is involved in can be *prima facie* divided in four main categories: introductory sequence, body of the fable, donor sequence, and hero's return. Each category is composed of specific functions of *dramatis personae*, thirty-one in all, which describe actions or situations peculiar to a given category. The detailed study conducted by Propp made him conclude that there existed seven different fairy tale characters, or performers, of different functions (Propp, 1968, pp. 79–80). In the fable *Kobyszczę* four of them are present: the hero who undertakes a journey to solve the quest (Trurl), the donor who indicates the hero the solution (Cerebron), and a composed character which corresponds to the Propp's character "villain" in the sense that it gives a motivation to begin the hero's journey. Nevertheless, in Lem's narrative, the corresponding character (Klapaucius) cannot be considered a villain in the sense of a negative presence. Rather, he is an antagonist, even a benevolent one, as he frequently assists Trurl in finding a more appropriate way of doing things. In this context, Klapaucius can be considered a character designated by Propp as a "helper".

Now, let us have a closer look at the tale. It happened one day, late in the afternoon, that Trurl comes to visit his friend Klapaucius. Trurl, silent and preoccupied, confessed that he was increasingly convinced that he and his friend, "in all [their] long and illustrious career […] have accomplished nothing of real value" (p. 3). More specifically, never achieved "next to nothing for the Common Good" and "never once produced a state of Absolute Happiness" (p. 3). Therefore, they gained no other title but, "Charlatans of Ontology", "Subtle Sophists of Creation", but not "Abolisher of Evil". For that reason, Trurl suggests to construct, with the help of Klapaucius, "new beings, beings whose sole function and faculty was to be happy".

Their planet will then become a demonstration that "verily, attainable Happiness and never-ending harmony [is] within reach" (p. 4). Shortly, a "reign of Goodness, Love and Truth" (p. 6).

There is no need to add commentary on the eternal nature of the question posed and to recall the tragic conclusion of all attempts to make the cosmos happy. Both eminent constructors were aware of this (although Klapaucius was perhaps slightly more aware than his rival, as we shall see in due course), as is made abundantly clear in the opening argument between them. Klapaucius, "miserable agnostic, unbeliever, slave to the natural course of events" (p. 7), refuses to take part in the attempt to create the Universal Harmony inaugurating the Age of Absolute Happiness. The ironic refusal of Klapaucius poses an additional challenge to Trurl, who decides to start an experiment to fulfil the task at hand. After all, there is "a universe to save" (p. 7)!

He began with the construction of an Ecstatic Contemplator of Existence (=Kobyszczę) » a machine that rejoiced in every perceived thing. He also defined units of Happiness called "Hedons or Heds for short" (p. 10). However, a brief conversation with Klapaucius showed the limited applicability of the model. Klapaucius advanced a question: how many units "would result from this situation: one man is brutally beaten for a three hundred hours, then all at once jumps up and brains the one who was beating him?" (p. 11). Trurl began to calculate, but ironic laugh of Klapaucius gave him a stroke. Indeed, Trurl has fallen into the kind of fallacy of equivalence confounding "aesthetic ecstasy for Good" (p. 12). In fact, it is possible that an experience of Happiness could be originated from Evil. Thus, "translating" the issue into the language of mathematics and measurability does not lead to a solution of the problem, but only simplifies it, losing however from its sight the fundamental connotation of the quest. Modelling and measurability are only a small part of the issue and one cannot solve the quest only on that basis. In order to resolve the conundrum of happiness, good, and evil, one must seek an alternative solution.

Following a comprehensive examination of the nature of good and evil, Trurl determined that the inclusion of an experimental dimension would enhance the quantifiability and mathematical characterization of the subject under examination. To this end, he began to construct, or perhaps it would be better to write: create, models of civilisations. From models on a scale of 1:1 composed of a few individuals only, to models created within the framework of "experiments with microminiaturised civilisations" on a scale of 1:1,000,000 populated but many individuals. The transition stage was to plug in an intelligence component to the Contemplator. The Contemplator, as before, was enthralled by everything; however, he began to posit "why-questions", as for example why does he like everything. This led to a harsh argument with Trurl, who removed an intelligence component and locked the Contemplator in its closet (p. 20–22).

The experimental phase of Trurl's fairy-tale odyssey culminates with a series of insights into the concept of happiness, which have benefited considerably from the critical and ironic perspective of Klapaucius. First, one cannot speak of the Good where one does what one does, for there is no other way: "not he who must forever pat his fellow on the head, roar with delight and remove stumbling blocks, but he who is able to brood, to sob, to do his fellow in, yet voluntarily and cheerfully refrains from such things" (p. 15). Then Trurl discovered that Good may produce Evil, because "who is glad wishes others to be glad, glad without delay, and ends up clubbing gladness into all recalcitrants" (p. 18). Besides, "reason leads to

heartlessness, Good produces madness" (p. 20). In the end, Trurl discovered accidentally that by and large "Evil in thinking beings […] produce[s] exactly the same results as Good" (p. 29).

At this stage of his odyssey, Trurl's perspective indicated that all available evidence indicated that a reconciliation of reason and happiness was not a viable proposition. Faced with such a dilemma, Trurl decided to construct a "mental modulator to solve an existential dilemma of Happiness". It soon became apparent, however, that the computerium solving the dilemma, instead of solving the problem, began to build another computerium to which it had delegated the task, and so on *ad infinitum*. In short, Trurl built: "a Relegator and not a Calculator" (p. 31). To put an end, therefore, to pointless duplication, Trurl decided to assign each computerium "a supervisor wise beyond belief", whose task was to switch tracks from duplication to solution each time it should be necessary. Naturally, such a supervisor could be none other than Trurl himself. He therefore duplicated himself as many times as necessary so that "under the watchful eye of a legion of [informational-mathematical] Trurls everything within [mental modulator] could move at lightning speed" (p. 31).

However, towards evening, when the Natural Trurl asked the Digital Trurl how the machine was going, the Digital Trurl, recognising himself as a complete equal to the Natural Trurl, claimed that it be the other way round – i.e. that the Natural Trurl would report to the Digital Trurl. After an animated argument, the Digital Trurl revealed to the Natural one that in order to solve the problem he had founded a digital university and was also thinking of fabricating a digital copy of Klapaucius. The results achieved by the university's numerous departments, especially the Department of Theoretical Felicity, the Department of Experimental Hedonautics, the Department of Euthenical Engineering, and the School of Applied Rapture, were significant. For example, the former established that "you can render happy with next to nothing; it's intellectuals that present the problem. Intellectuals are hard to please. Without some challenge, the intellect is a wretched, pitiful vacuum; it craves obstacles. Whenever obstacles are overcome, it grows sad – goes mad. New ones must be continually provided, the commensurate with its ability" (p. 33). After much verbal skirmishes, Trurl "pulled the plug from the wall" and spent off the machine, notwithstanding the full understanding of "the enormity of what he had just done" (p. 38).

Trurl, desperate, decided to seek advice from his, and Klapaucius', late Master and Maestro Cerebron. They have had a long conversation "on the most important matter in the whole continuum, the Happiness of all sentient beings" (p. 41), during which Trurl was called "an ass", "a sluggard", "a slouch", "an intellectual dud", "a monumental dunce", "a dunderhead", and the number of his sins was classified as bordering "on aleph-aleph-infinity" (p. 49). In fact, Cerebron strongly criticised all Trurl's solutions to the problem of happiness, not only because they were wrong, but also because they lacked any reference to the history of research conducted in previous eras on the subject.

During the audience, Cerebron offered the definition of Happiness and imposed on the Natural Trurl the obligation to "resurrect his cybernetics brother", that is the Digital Trurl (p. 46). Of course, this is "a very real, and serious danger. But even that is preferable to having the traces of [Trurl's] great crime covered for ever" (p. 47). Finally, he gave a solution to the question troubling Trurl, informing him also that he had earlier discussed the same subject with Klapaucius who had this conversation in secret.

The solution goes that way: no one, neither Cerebron nor Trurl himself, "would exchange this reality for the Kingdom of Never-ending Joy". The reason for this is reasonably straightforward to discern: "a thinking being requires the impossible as well as the possible", so if one "had solved every problem, answered every question, what then? The only thing left would be to hang [oneself] out of boredom or else start punching holes in that universal Happiness" (pp. 48–49).

Following these remarks, Trurl, having been instructed to ensure the grave of Cerebron was adequately sealed (to prevent further disturbance), returned home content with the conversation and gratified by the fact that even Klapaucius had sought the Master's counsel at an earlier point in time, a detail that Trurl was previously unaware of. Only now, the reasons behind Klapaucius' scepticism regarding the project, which the former had made clear from the outset, now have become more evident.

The following Table 1 illustrates the narrative structure of the fable *Kobyszczę*.

As mentioned previously, during the donor sequence, Cerebron provides a definition of Happiness. In some sense this can be interpreted as the function 14 following Propp's approach: "the hero acquires the use of magical agent" (Propp, 1968, p. 43), in the sense that Trurl obtains the fundamental information about the problem he was trying to resolve.

That is the definition proposed by Cerebron:

> Happiness is a deflection, or more precisely an extension, of a meta-space separating a node of colinearly intentional mappings from the intentional object, with the boundary conditions specified by an omega-correlation in an alpha-dimensional, therefore non metrical, continuum of subsolic aggregates, known also as Cerebron's supergroups, which are derivatives of functional called antinominals of the Algebra of Contradictions.[5]

It appears that Lem, employing a witty and mathematically engaged style, has Cerebron express the following idea.[6] Happiness is a subjective phenomenon, and the relationship between the object that causes Happiness and the experience of Happiness itself is not susceptible to objective specification. In fact, there is an intentional object, its image in the subject, and then an intensity of Happiness. The relationship under consideration is inherently contradictory, in that what constitutes Happiness for one subject may not be the case for another. Consequently, Cerebron is correct in stating that "Happiness is not an independent function, but a second derivative" (p. 46). In the light of this, it seems futile, or even impossible, to attempt a mathematical model of the intensity level of Happiness, given that we are aware of the second derivative but we lack insight into its primitive function. Nevertheless, Cerebron's use of mathematical language invites an attempt to model this phenomenon, as he and Trurl themselves have attempted.

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[5] „Szczęście jest to ugięcie, a więc ekstensor metaprzestrzeni oddzielającej węzeł intencjonalnych kolineacyjnie odwzorowań od obiektu intencjonalnego, przy warunkach granicznych ustanowionych omega-korelacją w alfa-wymiarowym, więc […] niemetrycznym, kontinuum agregatów subsolowych, zwanych też supergrupami […] Kerebrona, [będącymi] pochodnymi funkcjonałów zwanych też antynomiałami […] Algebry Sprzeczności" (Lem, 1972, p. 482 – our translation into English).

[6] As to the mathematically engaged language of Lem see: (Głowacki, 2001; Pettersson, 2014).

Table 1. The narrative structure of *Kobyszczę*

The general categories and corresponding functions in the fable *Kobyszczę* (for further details and the numbering of functions within each category, see: Propp 1968, pp. 25–65) and *promythion*/*epimythion* of the *exempla*			**The collocation of the stage in the fable**	**Notes**
Introductory sequence: 2, 3, 6, 7 **The quest**: how to *create the Universal Harmony inaugurating the Age of Absolute Happiness, a reign of Goodness, Love and Truth* (pp. 4, 6, 7)			**The beginning** of the fable (pp. 3–7)	Hero/ Antagonist
Body of the fable: 10, 11	Promythion$_1$	*We must assemble a Someone to experience Good* (p. 9)	**The first *exemplum***: the Contemplator (pp. 7–12)	For more details see: the following section of the paper. AI issue
	Epimythion$_1$	*What a fool I was, to mistake aesthetic ecstasy for Good! Happiness – certainly, pleasure – of course! But not at someone else's expense! Not from Evil!* (p. 12)		
	Promythion$_2$	*Suppose each and every individual of a given society is plump, rosy, and full of cheer […] rushes to the aid of others with such zeal the very ground trembles […] Would not such a society be perfectly happy?* (p. 13)	**The second *exemplum***: experiments with models of civilizations (pp. 12–29)	"Maybe all this is happening in some lab?" (Szymborska, 2000, p. 248)
	Epimythion$_2$	*Evil in thinking beings […] produce[s] exactly the same results as Good* (p. 29)		
	Promythion$_3$	*If I have not the ability to change it [that the Reason is incompatible with Happiness], why, there is always mechanical aids, electronic brains, mental modulators, encephalogue computers! I shall construct one to solve this existential dilemma* (p. 30)	**The third *exemplum***: experiments with created models of civilizations (pp. 12–29)	See: the conclusion of the paper. AI issue
	Epimythion$_3$	*There can be no Virtue without Vice, no Fair without Foul, no Growth without the Grave, no Heaven without Hell* (p. 34)		
Donor sequence: 12, 14, 19 **The solution**: *a thinking being requires the impossible as well as the possible […] had [one] solved every problem, answered every question, what then? The only thing left would be to hang [oneself] out of boredom or else start punching holes in that universal Happiness* (pp. 48–49)			**The audience** granted by Cerebron (pp. 41–50)	See the conclusion of the paper. AI issue
Hero's return 20, 30			**The ending** of the fable (p. 50)	–

ON THE MATHEMATICAL MODEL OF HAPPINESS

The starting point of the first *exemplum* is Trurl's idea, that one "must assemble a Someone to experience Good*"*, because there is no Good, Evil or Happiness if not experienced. In fact, "the waterfall is neither good or evil as far as the rock is consider" (p. 9). For that reason, Trurl creates the Contemplator, the machine which "devotes itself to wholehearted, incessant observation". It was not a "passive observation", "but a most intense, strenuous and aggressive kind of observation, and whatsoever is observed fill it with inexpressible delight" (p. 11). What is more, Trurl was able to propose the operational unit of Happiness called by him Hedons or Heds, for short.

The definition thus proposed made it possible to construct a mathematical model for measuring Happiness, as physicists usually do.[7] Trurl defined Hedon in the following way: one Hed is "the quantity of bliss one would experience after walking exactly four miles with a nail in one's boot and then having the nail removed". Then, Trurl "multiplied the distance by the time and divided by the rest mass of the nail, placing the foot coefficient in brackets". In that way he succeeded in the translating the Happiness into the mathematical language, as he "expressed Happiness in centimetres, grams and seconds" (p. 10).

The definition offered by Trurl permits the elaboration of a mathematical model which represents the variable called *Happiness* (*H*) as a function of several other variables in a general situation:

$$H = C \cdot s \cdot \left(\frac{r \cdot t \cdot m}{\left(1 - \frac{d}{h}\right)^{\alpha}} \right) \tag{1}$$

where:

- H – intensity level of happiness, measured in Hedon unit,
- t – the time of walking with the nail in a boot [s],
- r – the distance covered by the person experiencing a bliss [cm] (this applies only to walking with the nail in a shoe),
- s – the foot coefficient (the Polish version reads: *współczynnik pięty zmęczonej* (= *the coefficient of a tired heel*) – Lem 1972, p. 438, i.e. the sensitivity, a dimensionless individual human characteristic in the range of 0 to 1 changing the value from total insensibility to pain $s = 0$ to absolute hypersensitivity $s = 1$),
- d – how far a nail sticks out from the sole of the shoe (i.e. how many cm the nail protrudes from the sole of the shoe penetrating into the tissue of the sole of the foot),
- h – how far a nail can penetrate into the foot (the interpretation of the variable $(1 - d/h)$ corresponds to what Trurl calls "the rest mass of the nail" (p. 10) or in Polish *zadziorność gwoździa* (Lem, 1972, p. 438),
- C – the calibrating constant that allows expressing one Hed in units specified by Trurl [cm, g, s] and ensuring the correct calibration of the mathematical model.

[7] The understanding of Happiness in this paper is very similar to the concept of Happiness as "an emotional experience based on the satisfaction, which also can be seen as an evaluation of life satisfaction. Emotion is a kind of attitude and experience about whether objective things meet their needs, and it is an individual internal factor that affects happiness" (Hang et al., 2022, following D. Kahneman approach). A mathematical model corresponding to the provided description appears to be a viable proposal.

Now, let us examine the quantified values of specific parameters in Trurl's definition (expressed in the units: cm, gram, second):

m = 60 kg = 60,000 g,
r = 4 miles = 6.4 km = 643,738 cm,
t = 1.17 hour (the average walking speed 5 km/hour = 139 cm/s for 643,738 cm) = 4,632 s,
s = 0.5 the foot coefficient (the average sensitivity to pain, expressed in absolute quantities from the interval <0, 1)),
d = 0.5 cm the length of the nail in the foot (the average value, expressed in absolute quantities from the interval <0, 1) [cm]),
h = 1 cm the total (maximum) depth at which the nail can penetrate the foot.

The value of the calibration constant C should be chosen so that equation 1 gives a value equal to 1 Hed in the paradigmatic situation described by Trurl for which coefficient $\alpha = 1$ (p. 10). Simple calculations based on equation 1, with $\alpha = 1$, give a constant C of approximately $C = 5.6 \cdot 10^{-15}$ [Hed over cm-gram-second]. Thus, the mathematical model that allows calculating the amount of ecstasy in the case of a paradigmatic situation walk with a protruding nail in a shoe is as follows:

$$H = 5.6 \cdot 10^{-15} \cdot s \cdot \left(\frac{r \cdot t \cdot m}{\left(1 - \frac{d}{h}\right)^{\alpha}} \right) \tag{2}$$

However, it can be observed that instances of happiness can be found in number of contexts. In *Kobyszczę* Trurl labels three additional situations. In the case of the Elders watching Susanna at her bath, Trurl's calculation gave the intensity level of Happiness equal to 1 kHed (the episode known as "Susanna and the Elders", in the *Book of Daniel*, chapter 13). For "a man condemned to hang out but reprieved at the last minute can experience the (joy), the calculated intensity level of Happiness was equal to 1 MHed" (p. 10), while watching Trurl's apron gave to the Contemplator an ecstasy with an average value of 15.35 Hed (let us assume that Trurl's apron is comparable to Jackson Pollock's "drip paintings"). In this way, it was possible to bring cases of purely erotic (the elders), self-preserving (a man condemned to hang but reprieved at the last minute – from now on: the *C&R situation*), and aesthetic Happiness (Pollock) situation to the same standard-walk situation described by Trurl.

Nonetheless, *Kobyszczę* offers further illustrative instances which may be employed in such an analysis. During the audience granted by Cerebron to Trurl, his Maestro reminded him, accusing Trurl of ignorance, that in "the year 10,496, Protognostor Neander described, nut for nut and bolt for bolt, exactly such a machine [as Trurl's Contemplator]" (p. 42). What is more, Cerebron himself had elaborated, many years before the Contemplator was built, "a blueprint for an Ecstastron". It was only the "foolproof type of sentient device that does nothing, but feel ten thousand time more bliss then Bromeo knew while he climbed the balcony to see his beloved" (p. 43). More, Cerebron introduced the unit of measurement of intensity level of Happiness and named it Bromeon, in honour of the great Million Shakesphere, "the great playwright of the Benightenment", who wrote a tragedy dedicated to Bromeo (p. 42).

One Bromeon corresponds the intensity level of Happiness experienced by Bromeo during the "situation of balconical rapture" (p. 44). One might consider the aforementioned event to be an example of sensual, true, and fully mutual love. Such an intense emotional state can be regarded as more profound than that experienced during the *C&R situation*. It is possible to posit that this intensity can be situated somewhere between Bromeo's case and the purely sensual happiness intensity level experienced by the Elders. This assertion is supported by the strategy employed by Fermi problems.[8] As a rule, in similar situations the geometric mean is preferred (see: Wakeham, 2021). Consequently, the intensity level of Happiness in the *C&R situation* expressed in Hed can be interpreted *prima facie* as the geometric mean of Happiness intensity level in Elders case and in the Bromeo's one. If so, for the Bromeo's case one obtains the intensity of 109 Hed (1 GHed).

And what about the pleasure of mathematical or scientific discovery or, by and large, the joy of creating something new? One of Michał Heller's book has a title: *Szczęście w przestrzeniach Banacha* (*The Happiness in the Space of Banach*; Heller, 1995). How big is the intensity level of Happiness in the case of mathematician exploring a new theorem? Or the joy of writing a poem (see: Szymborska, 2000, pp. 67–68)? In short, what is the intensity level of Happiness in these cases? An *AHA! Situation*, be it in mathematical or poetical context (Liljedahl, 2008)? Now, let us assume that the *AHA! Situation* can be considered a geometrical mean of the Pollock aesthetic case and the Elder's one, which leads to intensity level of Happiness of 124 Hed.

As indicated in Table 1, *epimythion1* is a direct consequence of Klapaucius' ironic question about the outcome of a situation in which one man is brutally beaten for three hundred hours and then suddenly retaliates by attacking his oppressor (p. 11). The assumption that three hundred hours of pain is equivalent to at least 300 hours of walking with an injured foot can be taken here as a basis for Trurl's calculation. Therefore, to this situation can be attributed the value of at least 300 Hed of a vengeance "joy".

At the end of this brief review of examples of the perception of Happiness, it is important to have a look at religious experience. For instance, we can consider the situation of a lost sheep that is found or the situation of a repented sinner (*Luke* 15:3–7). The Gospel says that the latter is the joy of the ninety-nine righteous who are already in heaven, but this joy could also be seen as equivalent to the Happiness that comes from the awareness of having been saved (*Isaiah* 25:9; *John* 20:20). It may be then reasonable to consider the Bromeo case as the geometric mean between the religious situations we have just described and the *C&R situation*. This leads to the intensity level of happiness equals to 1012 Hed.

It is, of course, challenging to compare different forms of Happiness because the experience of such states of being is subjective, and what is considered to be a state of Happiness

[8] The mention of Fermi's problems in relation to measuring happiness intensity is not coincidental. Many real-world problems that may seem impractical or impossible can be addressed by combining appropriate abstractions and approximations with common sense knowledge, similar to the strategy used to solve Fermi Problems. The latter strategy has been recently applied to address highly complex and imponderable issues, such as the wisdom-of-the-inner-crowd question, and is considered a significant challenge for artificial intelligence (AI; see Kalyan et al., 2021 and Gomilsek et al., 2024). The conclusion below explores the connection between AI and the problem of happiness.

may be experienced in dissimilar ways by different individuals. But one can ask, for example, how many miles, and how long the Elder from the Susanna's story would have to walk to obtain the same intensity level of Happiness (ecstasy) while watching Susanna or how many miles and how long the pardoned convicted would have to walk for the same joy. Having said this, the 1 Hed becomes a kind of a measuring stick (unit of measure) which permits to confront intensity levels of happiness in different situations. In order to maintain the integrity of the unit of measure, it is necessary to solve equation 2 and retain the coefficient α as the sole variable that differentiates the various situations described by Trurl. One might inquire as to the value of the exponent α in equation 3 required for a standard walk with a nail in the shoe to be as intense as the intensity level of happiness experienced by, for example, lascivious old men.

To respond to this query, it is necessary to solve the equation 2 with respect to the variable α, after substituting all other parameters. In other words, one must solve the following equation:

$$0.5 \cdot \left(\frac{1}{(0.5)^{\alpha}} \right) \tag{3}$$

In the light of this interpretation, the values of α would be indicative of the distinction between qualitatively dissimilar types of situations, thereby differentiating between different forms of ecstasy and joy. Solving equation (3) with respect to the coefficient α results in the displayed values in column 4 of Table 2.

Table 2. The relationship between values of Happiness intensity and coefficient α in various situations

Situation	Intensity of Happiness [Hed]	Calculated value of coefficient α	Coefficient α rounded to inter value
Definition of 1 [Hed]	1	1.0000	1
Pollock (an aesthetic situations)	15.35	4.9402	5
The *AHA! Situation*	124	7.9542	8
The Vengeance "joy"	300	9.2288	9
The Elders watching Susanna	1.00E+03	10.9658	11
The *C&R situation*	1.00E+06	20.9316	21
The Bromeo's case	1.00E+09	30.8974	31
Religious situations	1.00E+12	40.8631	41

In conclusion, the direct application of the model (equations 1–3) to several standard situations identified in the aesthetic, the creation/discovery, the purely erotic, the miraculous-almost saving of a life, and others, demonstrates that the proportion of happiness intensity in these situations can be expressed, respectively, by a sequence of values of coefficient

α: 1/5/8/9/11/21/31/41. The calculation of the Happiness (or ecstasy) of other situations can be effectively carried out based on the method described above, proviso that it is possible to determine the relationship of a given situation with one of the aforementioned cases of ecstasy or with the standard walk. For example, "giving a drowning person a float is similar to walking half a mile in ten minutes", and so on.

The further study of Happiness led to the formulation and identification of additional research issues. Nowadays, research takes under consideration many variables affecting the normal walking scenario. The most common variables taken under consideration can be organised into the following groups (Bohannon and Andrews, 2011; p. 184–187; Talavera-Garcia and Soria-Lara, 2015, p. 10–15); Byun et al., 2019, p. 6–8; Dempsey et al., 2022, p. 3):

- demographic (e.g. race, age, gender);
- anthropometries (e.g. legs and foot length, height, mass index);
- health condition (e.g. alcohol consumption, cigarette smoking, mean sleep duration, type of diet);
- road and walking characteristics (e.g. cadence, vertical displacement, shoe material, weather).

The above presented variables undoubtably affect walking. That is why a lot of models of walking proposed in the literature are created according the demographic, anthropometric, health condition and road and walk characteristics. It is also obvious that the variables presented above affect walking speed, which (on the other hand), is important in the paradigmatic situation of happiness. Sine these variables are not specified by Trurl, the main goal of this research is to propose the measure intensity level of happiness for a healthy average person, walking on a flat road, with good, not interfered cadence and weather. But in relation to the rest of variables, the only reasonable tool used to take them under consideration is the Occam's Razor approach. Following this approach, groups of demographic and anthropometries variables are subject to average, except gender. Considering gender in the research allows us to answer the question: if intensity level of happiness depends on gender? Bohannon and Andrews proposed the research results of normal walking speed (Bohannon and Andrews, 2011, p. 187, Table 2). Table 3 presents the average values of variables for a healthy person, with the distinction of gender, that were taken under consideration in this research.

Table 3. The calculated average gait speed affecting happiness in a paradigmatic situation

Average gait speed [cm/s]	Men	Women
$avs_{\min}$	123.2571429	115.7142857
$avs_{\max}$	140.4857143	132.3857143
$\boldsymbol{avs_{avg}}$	**131.8714286**	**124.050**

The average gait speed (Table 3) was calculated based on values presented in column 4 "Gain speed" (Bohannon and Andrews, 2011, p. 187, Table 2) for all age intervals and separately for men and women. In the next step, the average time was calculated for $r = 4$ miles = 643,738 cm

(specified by Trurl) and average gait speed presented in Table 2. The results of average time are presented in Table 4 below.

Table 4. The calculated average time of walk affecting happiness in a paradigmatic situation

Average t [s]	Men	Women
t_{min}	5222.720445	5563.164444
t_{max}	4582.228188	4862.59113
$\boldsymbol{t_{avg}}$	**4881.554761**	***5189.339782***

The results presented in Table 4 were used in equation 1 to calculate the calibrating constant C that allows expressing one Hed, separately for women and men. The results of the calculated constant C are presented in Table 5 below.

Table 5. The calculated calibrating constant C of walk affecting happiness in a paradigmatic situation (see: the equation 1) for men and women

Constant C	Men	Women
for t_{min}	4.95728E-15	4.65391E-15
for t_{max}	5.65019E-15	5.32442E-15
for t_{avg}	**5.30373E-15**	***4.98916E-15***

The results in Table 3 are average gait speed values of healthy men and women from age interval 20–99. The obtained results reveal that differences between women's and men's values of constant C (each value at the *femto* level, see: Table 5), are not substantial. That is why the intensity level of happiness was calculated in the following research steps with using the same equation 1.

The exponential equation 1–3 are similar to Stanley Steven's psychophysical power law (1957), and the relative base of an exponent includes all the information about the stimulus conditions.[9] However, this is only a first-order approximation. A more detailed discussion, based on sound anatomical data, is required to determine the values to be assigned to the variables d and h. The same applies to the variable s, in this case with reference to psychological data. Regrettably, this task cannot be addressed in this article and must be postponed to further study.

Now, let us reflect more broadly on the limits of application of the mathematical model of Happiness and Trurl's approach in its overall structure, as described in Table 1.

[9] As a matter of fact, each α value represents a distinct type of happiness, encapsulating a spectrum of experiences of varying intensity. For instance, an aesthetic experience ($\alpha \approx 5$) would include episodes such as contemplating Rembrandt paintings, cherry blossoms or mountain peaks. In a similar way the *AHA! situation* ($\alpha \approx 8$) would include a creation of the new theory of the universe or the creating of the sculpture. This interpretation of the different α values aligns with Stevens' law.

ON LEM'S CONCEPTION OF A LITERARY WORK

It seems appropriate to begin with a reference to *The Philosophy of Chance*, a book in which Lem proposes his theory of a literary work (Lem, 2014).[10] Lem's conception of a literary work takes into account not only the capacity of the work to inspire thought, but also its mode of construction, that is, the procedures and reasoning underlying its formation, which, according to Lem, are derived from science. Lem's basic idea is that a literary work prescinds from considerations of what must or cannot be the case; thus, literary studies should take an ontologically neutral stance:

> [I]n the less mature sciences, which include the humanities (and yesterday biology was still among them), philosophy is still the provider not only of general approaches but of typically specialised findings. And it is not a question of opposing one philosophical view to another, but of ontologically neutralising the field of inquiry itself, the methodology, the basic term, and the entire conceptual apparatus. For by doing so, a first step will be taken to re-individuate this respectable area in favour of empiricism. And by "respectable area", we mean literary studies (Lem, 2014, p. 26).

"Ontologically neutralising the field of inquiry" is not easy because a literary work is a complex "object" rooted in the multi-layered tissue of human culture. Nevertheless, Lem seems to support the idea that it is possible to extrapolate "a method that has been tried with success in mathematics, linguistics, anthropology, medicine, biology, technology and physics" and to transfer this method "into the realm of literary studies in the hope that it will help us explain its dark and antinomic problems" (Lem, 2014, p. 28). As to what this method entails for the conceptualisation of a literary work, Lem answers this question in the chapter VI of *The Philosophy of Chance*, titled "The work: A logical and empirical approach", where the author of *Solaris* proposes the following:

> [A]ll literary works should be considered as a certain kind of definition, namely as nominal definitions that project or create (in the logical sense) such empty names (i.e. without designators), which are the titles of these works. Since the scope of any empty name is its denotation, therefore an empty name denotes an empty set. Nevertheless, logical judgments either true or false can be made about certain empty names, although not all of them. […] By the same token, *ex ipsa ea definitione* everything that the work proclaims is logically true, however it concerns the empty name. It is because definition is nominal, that is, it concerns the connotation of an expression in language, not its denotation in real being (Lem, 2014, pp, 107–108; Lem's emphasis).

Consequently, the relation of a literary work to reality is analogous to the relation of mathematics to reality. While mathematicians construct "models", they do not know exactly of what these models represent. Each model starts from certain assumptions and progresses as an outcome of permissible transformations characterised by complex internal relations between its elements but without precisely determinable external relations to the "real world". By analogy, it can be argued that the writer also creates "models" without knowing,

[10] A fuller examination of Lem's conception of a literary work lies beyond the scope of this paper; however, see: (Markiewicz, 2007, pp. 90–98; Gomułka, 2016; Kobiela and Gomułka, 2021, pp. 297–354; Graefrath, 2022).

or needing to know, the models they produce. The resulting literary work is characterised by internal relations, while its attribution to the "real world" remains only a potential (see Lem, 2014, pp. 73–74). It is the act of reading, whether by a common reader or a professional literary critic, that establishes a set of "semantic addresses" or relations between literary and extra-literary reality. These relations can be understood as referring to those formed in the individual reception of a specific literary work or to those implied by the regulative principles of literary interpretation (see Lem, 2014, pp. 478–479).

In keeping with this understanding, Lem resolves the question of what constitutes a literary work by using a formula inspired by the procedures of logic: "literary work=nominal definition of the empty name indicated by the title" (see Lem, 2014, p. 107). Here, it is clear that Lem is translating an otherwise difficult, complex and long debated issue surrounding the definition of a literary work into a logic-based formula that allows the definition to be generalised. Many, if not all of Lem's works, are but translations of issues, problems and situations pertaining to everyday life into the language of mathematics, logic, informatics, physics, chemistry, biology, medicine, linguistics – in short, into the language of science. Let us try to look at the fairy tale *Kobyszczę* from that point of view.

LIMITS OF TRANSLATABILITY – *KOBYSZCZĘ* AS AN ARGUMENT *AB EXEMPLO*

In *Kobyszczę,* Trurl has put in motion three strategies to solve the problem of Happiness (see Table 1). However, looking on the fable as a whole, from Lem's point of view, what is the solution to the quest? What is the thesis or *pointe* of the fairy tale? Rhetoricians would say there are three *illustrans*, but the question being raised here is what is the *illustrandum* (Demoen 1997, p. 126)? In brief, *Kobyszczę* is an argument *ab exemplo*, but an argument for what? On behalf of which thesis?

Trurl's attempts to solve the problem of Good and Evil and its relation to Happiness do not lead to the definitive and clear-cut answer he intended to offer. Indeed, despite the use of a mathematical and experimental method, Trurl's "solution" seems to be consistent with what has always been known about this problem, namely that it is intractable. *Kobyszczę*, therefore, could have no other conclusion than that indicated by the inferences of Master Cerebron, which confirm this intractability. Is this the *illustrandum*? If so, it is easy to point to the limit of Trurl's method: this limit coincides with the limit of mathematical-experimental modelling.

The above conclusion sounds like a cliché since anyone with only a slight knowledge of the history of the problem knows in advance that no other conclusion than that implied by Trurl's "solution" is credible or corresponds to the human condition. But is this Lem's position? Does such an *illustrandum* exhaust the whole issue? The answer to this question must be sought by exploring the literary genre of *Kobyszczę*.

As a fairy tale, *Kobyszczę* is a good example of Lem's vision of a literary work as a strategy of translation. Imposing the veil of an allegorical and grotesque fairy tale onto the problem of Good, Evil and Happiness, Lem proposes to translate this problem into both mathematical and experimental language. This translation seems to work fairly well. It is enough to consider the

afore-mentioned mathematical model of Happiness (the first *exemplum*) or the definition of freedom as "randomness", in the technical, mathematical sense of the term, to recognise this. Indeed, at the beginning of Trurl's experimental phase, recognising the validity of Klapaucius' remarks on the compulsion to do Good, Trurl plugs into his creatures "statistical transmissions"; consequently "no one, including Trurl, could possibly foresee what they would end up doing with themselves" (p. 16; the second *exemplum* in Table 1). The translation at hand moves along a trajectory: from freedom to unpredictability to case-statistics. In fact, statistical and probability tools are needed to study the stochastic and ergodic processes that describe the evolutionary trajectory of very large and complex systems in order to portray "from outside" the behaviour of the entities that inhabit Trurl's model of civilisation (see Lem 2014, p. 29).

That being said, Lem in no way simplifies the question of freedom. Indeed, in the *Philosophy of Chance*, he writes that "the choice of any course of action presupposes the pre-existence of certain values". Obviously, "the chooser may not realise that he has chosen between values or that others have done so for him at some point, but from this it does not follow that this situation of choice and these alternative values do not exist". Consequently, it is in vain that "we want to get rid of freedom, which immediately implies a whole axiology". At the same time, Lem emphasises that "we are not condemned to science: by choosing it, just as by choosing life, we stand for a certain value. And since empiricism cannot conceive of anything in its own way with values, there will always be that remainder – which is not of the sciences – attributed to philosophy". These philosophies are "a whole conflicting multitude", which does not change the fact that there is only "one empirical reality". That the sciences are firmly rooted in this reality results in "their increasing independence from philosophy" leading to a situation in which "the philosopher is a listener who takes note of what the scientists expose". Thus, in order to avoid a "conflated plethora of metaphysics", it is necessary to move towards the "solidification of science", so that the question can be settled by experts (Lem, 2014, pp. 22–26).

While Lem thus expounds on his theory of a literary work, his understanding of the art of writing as based on the language of science seems to go in the exact opposite direction to what he has outlined, at least as far as *Kobyszczę* is considered. Trurl, after several attempts to translate the questions of Good, Evil and Happiness into the language of mathematics whereby the intensity level of Happiness can be measured, finds himself defeated and seeks advice from his master Cerebron. The renowned Master, who also approached the issue using scientific methods (p. 43–44), confirms Trurl's defeat. In his final diatribe, Cerebron states that the quest at hand cannot be definitively concluded because "a thinking being requires the impossible as well as the possible" (p. 49).

It follows that the perception of the question of Happiness and, even more profoundly, the question of Good and Evil, does not depend on the choice and realisation of one value or another, but on the continuous grappling with what is possible and impossible, the struggle with what constitutes a challenge and, indeed, a problem to be solved. In this struggle, it must be remembered that history teaches us something: The boundary between the possible and the impossible is constantly shifting, enlarging the area of the possible. In this shifting space, science plays first fiddle. Indeed, it is the path of science that is paved with problems to be solved and very often, though not always, are solved (see Laudan, 1977; Simon, 1989).

And if this is the case, then Cerebron is pointing to the path taken by science as the route to the solution to Trurl's question. Given that this is "the most important matter in the whole continuum" (Lem, 1973, p. 41), the advice to heed science remains valid for minor issues as well. This is where the real, although somewhat veiled, *illustrandum* of *Kobyszczę* appears. Here, under the guise of declaring the impossibility of arriving at an unambiguous solution to the problem, Lem seems to indicate the way to such a solution, which although attained only asymptotically, may be achievable. To put things in mathematical terms, Lem's solution seems to be this:

$$\lim_{t\to+\infty}\left(Good + Evil + Happiness\right) = \left[\,definitive\,and\,univocal\,solution\,of\,the\,problem\,\right]$$

This is naturally in sharp contrast to the approaches of many thinkers who would rather write:

$$\lim_{t\to+\infty}\left(Good + Evil + Happiness\right) = \left[\,conflated\;plethora\,of\;metaphysics\,\right] \to \left[\,\aleph_0\,\right]$$

While their formulation considers Good, Evil and Happiness as problems that can never be solved, these problems are keeping philosophy alive and perhaps even humanity as such (see Kołakowski, 2001).

Thus, returning to Lem's implicit *illustrandum*, we might conclude the following: The pursuit of a solution may take a long time, but the right way is to translate each question into the language of science. This approach coheres with Lem's conception of a literary work and its realisation in numerous of his works, including *Golem XIV* (Lem, 1984).

CONCLUSION – THE CONTEMPLATOR AND ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

As a fairy tale that addresses the problem of Good, Evil and Happiness in terms of mathematical modelling, *Kobyszczę* is instructive for considering issues pertaining to AI.[11] All the actors, including the Contemplator, are robots with superfine intelligence, which nevertheless display many human traits.[12] Three important themes emerge from this observation.

The first theme centres on the role of emotions in AI systems. As Kissinger et al. (2022) write, AI "does not feel or experience human emotions (but may mimic it)" (p. 192). This is shown in the first *exemplum* (see Table 1), where Trurl tries to teach a machine, the Contemplator, something about the varying intensity of emotions in different situations, using mathematical modelling. Trurl then tries something that today is under consideration of

[11] As to Lem's vision of AI in *Cyberiad* and his other books, see, for example (Konior, 2023; Krzanowski, Polak, 2021; Zebrowski, 2021; Oramus, 2016).

[12] As Boichenko et al. (2022) write, 'Lem creates a series of fantastic stories, the main characters of which are robots, more precisely – cybernetic creatures – Trurl and Klapaucius. They both behave quite like humans – very emotionally, constantly arguing with each other, taking offense at each other and then reconciling' (p. 3).

scientists working with AIs, namely, to teach a machine to understand emotions. Recent studies show that AIs progress "in understanding emotions and social behaviour related to social intelligence" (Sufyan et al., 2024). This progress implies a kind of information metabolism which permits AIs to learn how, in what sense, and with what strength emotions play a role in human's "decision-making mechanisms".[13]

The second theme emerges in the third *exemplum* (see Table 1). It concerns the situation in which Trurl, wanting to solve a very complex problem, creates his own digital copies, to which he entrusts both data management and the solution to the problem. Therefore, in one sense, Trurl creates an AI which "by helping [Trurl] navigate the sheer totality of digital information […] will open unprecedented vistas of knowledge and understanding" (Kissinger et al., 2022, p. 208; slightly changed). In the fable, that is what actually happens. However, this occurrence poses an ethical problem: Is it permissible to terminate an AI of this complexity? In *Kobyszczę*, the question is magnified, because Trurl makes several identical copies of himself, and as Cerebron recalls "Codex Galacticus forbids self-reproduction under pain of decommunication (Article XXVI, Section 119, Subsection X, § 5(61)" (p. 43). At this point, ethical questions concerning the human-AI relationship take centre stage, of which the third *exemplum* is but one example (see Kissinger et al., 2022, pp. 179–229; Mazur-Lejman, 2019).

Simulations conducted using an intensity model and the results of research on walking indicate that there is no significant difference in the intensity of happiness experienced by women and men. The situations considered in the formulation of the intensity model are examples of happiness. However, there are numerous other situations in which happiness can be experienced, and it cannot be excluded that these situations could be revealed by future research, specifically performed by AI.

A third theme that receives only passing attention in *Kobyszczę* but appears in other works by Lem including *The Inquest,* pertains to the confrontation between human beings and AI.[14] In *Kobyszczę,* this theme appears mainly in the context of the definition of Hedon units, which refer to human's experiences of emotions. In his short story *The Inquest* (*Rozprawa; see* Lem 1978), where Lem develops this theme, Pirx the Pilot is given the task of confronting androids (called "nonlinears", which are very similar to AIs) in order to assess the possibility of using "nonlinears" as astronauts (Oramus, 2016). In a kind of duel between a robot and a man, the Commander Pirx wins because at the moment of danger, "when an order, which was necessary under the circumstances, had to be issued", Pirx, not knowing what to do, delayed his action. An analysis of this scene would suggest "that Pirx owed his victory to the most human reflex, i.e. having doubts" (Dubiński, 2021, p. 199). In this tale, there emerges very clearly the difference between humans and "nonlinears" (AI), which highlights the issue at hand: "What is this humanity that they do not have. Perhaps it really is only the marriage of illogicality with this "good–heartedness", this "noble heart", and this primitiveness of moral reflex, which does not include the distant links of a causal chain?" (Lem, 1978, p. 323; see also Dubiński, 2021, p. 200).

[13] The concept of information metabolism is an original research project of Antoni Kępiński (see Ceklarz, 2021).
[14] For a general overview of this theme, see (Russell, 2019).

All three themes are of considerable interest to modern concerns as humanity seems to be heading towards an AI-driven future. Since this paper proposes a mathematical model to measure the intensity of happiness and can be regarded as an introduction to digital humanities, it can be used at the intersection of computing or digital technologies and humanities. It allows us to recognise and describe more precisely experiences of happiness in many situations. It thus opens a new area of research where AI can be used. In this regard, Lem's writings can be considered as a sort of mythology *ante litteram* (Polak and Krzanowski, 2022). Unfortunately, due to lack of space, the proposed prospective cannot be explored in detail in this essay.

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MITIGATING CENTRAL TENDENCY AND ACQUIESCENCE BIASES IN SURVEY DESIGN: A METHODOLOGICAL EXPLORATION WITH EMPIRICAL EVIDENCE

This paper presents a survey design methodology aimed at mitigating central tendency and acquiescence biases, which are commonly encountered in traditional Likert-scale surveys. The proposed approach employs a forced ranking method, using a case study involving 220 engineering students at the University of Zagreb as a source of data to assess whether respondents exhibit patterns of systematically avoiding honest answers for any reason. Statistical analysis demonstrates the effectiveness of the design in reducing these biases. The results provide strong evidence that the method developed in this article can minimize response distortions without sacrificing data richness. While the primary focus is on the methodological aspects, the case study illustrates the potential of this approach for ethical and attitudinal research. The study concludes with recommendations for refining survey techniques and exploring their broader applicability in different populations and contexts.

Keywords: central tendency, acquiescence bias, Likert scale, student attitudes, ethics

INTRODUCTION

Likert scales (Likert, 1932) are used to measure people's attitudes, opinions, or perceptions by asking them to rate their level of agreement or disagreement with a series of statements on a multi-point scale, typically ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. They are widely utilized in social science research due to their simplicity and effectiveness in capturing subjective data, making them crucial for quantitative analysis in fields like psychology,

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sociology, and education. However, Likert scales can present methodological challenges, such as central tendency bias (where respondents prefer the most neutral rating), acquiescence bias (tendency to agree with statements), and difficulties in ensuring that equal intervals between points reflect true differences in attitudes, which can affect the accuracy of data interpretation.

In this article, we discuss the design of a Likert scale-based survey that aims to avoid the problem of central tendency and test it in the specific context of obtaining students' ethical attitudes in the areas of business and academic conduct. The utility of Likert scales in survey research is well-documented. Willits et al. (2016) provide an in-depth examination of the theoretical foundations of Likert scales, highlighting their prevalence in social sciences.

Several studies address the common challenges and misuses of Likert scales. Bishop and Herron (2015) and Pornel and Saldana (2013) critique the improper treatment of ordinal data as interval data, which can lead to erroneous conclusions. Similarly, Mircioiu and Atkinson (2017) compare parametric and non-parametric methods applied to Likert data, underscoring the potential pitfalls in data interpretation when assumptions about data distribution are ignored. Parker et al. (2019) further investigate whether research participants provide interval or ordinal responses when using Likert scales, highlighting the ambiguities in respondent interpretation.

Recent advancements in scale development are captured in the works of Jebb et al. (2021) and Kreitchmann et al. (2019), who explore new approaches for mitigating response biases and improving the psychometric properties of Likert scales. Kreitchmann et al. (2019) advocate for forced-choice formats and psychometric modeling as superior methods for controlling response biases, contrasting them with traditional Likert scales.

Concerns regarding the reliability and validity of Likert scales are central to the studies by Joshi et al. (2015) and Louangrath (2018). Both studies argue that while Likert scales are valuable tools for measuring attitudes and perceptions, their effectiveness is contingent on rigorous design and validation procedures. The issues of reliability, validity, and potential biases are further explored by Kusmaryono et al. (2022), who conduct a comprehensive review of response options in Likert-scale research.

Several studies offer methodological guidance for enhancing the robustness of Likert-scale research. Allen and Seaman (2007) provide practical recommendations for data analysis, cautioning against the oversimplification of complex data sets.

The integration of advanced statistical models, such as the Rasch model, a mathematical model used in psychometrics for analyzing data from assessments, surveys, or questionnaires to measure latent traits (unobservable characteristics like ability, attitude, or personality), is explored in studies by Andrich (2005), Retief et al. (2013), and von Davier (2016). These studies highlight the advantages of using the Rasch model for refining Likert-scale instruments, offering a more sophisticated approach to understanding underlying latent traits and enhancing the precision of measurement tools. Wu and Adams (2007) discuss the application of the Rasch model in psycho-social measurement, offering practical approaches for enhancing scale utility. This is complemented by Nemoto and Beglar (2014), who discuss the practical aspects of developing Likert-scale questionnaires, emphasizing the importance of precise wording and scale construction to minimize bias and enhance reliability. Tanujaya et al. (2023) discuss the difficulties and challenges encountered in social sciences research when using Likert scales, advocating for more robust statistical models.

The reviewed literature points to several future directions for research. McLeod et al. (2011) suggest revisiting traditional Likert scale approaches to incorporate new methodologies that may better capture nuanced respondent attitudes. Tanujaya et al. (2023) call for a deeper exploration of cultural and contextual factors that influence survey responses, advocating for the development of more culturally sensitive instruments.

In this paper, we want to append to our previous preliminary research (Sabolic et al., 2022) that examined methodological considerations specific to educational research, proposing strategies to mitigate central tendency bias and improve the accuracy of student attitude assessments.

CENTRAL TENDENCY AND ACQUIESCENCE BIASES

If central tendency and/or acquiescence biases are particularly prominent, concerns are raised about the reliability of the responses provided by participants. In a sense, these two biases can be viewed as related phenomena, differing primarily in their position along the Likert scale, but driven by similar underlying psychological causes.

Several factors may contribute to the inadequacy of information gathered through Likert-scale surveys, as already discussed in Sabolic et al. (2022). Central tendency is likely a consequence of a conscious or subconscious desire to avoid providing a definitive answer, which may be driven by various reasons. Some of these reasons, based on our experiences as educators and as respondents, will be discussed below. It often stems from a desire to quickly complete a survey in which the respondent has little intellectual engagement, simply to fulfill an obligation, a promise, or something similar. On the other hand, more serious reasons are also possible, such as fear of expressing true opinions.

Nevertheless, some respondents who choose a neutral answer genuinely hold a neutral position. The issue is that they are indistinguishable from respondents who select the middle option without expressing their true type. If the survey itself is poorly designed (regardless of the Likert scale variation or any other form of attitude collection used), the problem of central tendency is likely to be much more pronounced than usual, potentially to the extent that the survey results provide almost no meaningful conclusions.

Acquiescence bias, in our opinion, arises for reasons that are, in many cases, similar to those that lead to central tendency. For instance, if one of the response options is obviously the most "socially acceptable" and thus the "least risky," while the others are not, it is highly likely that the majority of respondents will select that option, even if it is not in the middle of the Likert scale. For example, if participants are asked to express their agreement with the statement, "I think it is acceptable to embezzle money from the company I manage if it does not significantly impact its long-term financial interests," almost everyone in their right mind would choose "Strongly Disagree" even if, in reality, they may hold an opposing view. Such a survey question formulation cannot provide any meaningful insight into the attitudes of the surveyed group.

This example illustrates our primary motivation to modify the survey procedure, which we will describe and test in the following sections.

If survey participants are unsure of their anonymity, they may sometimes fear giving an honest answer due to potential consequences. If anonymity is not guaranteed or is difficult to ensure, respondents may avoid revealing their true type. For example, if students do not believe in anonymity for any reason (real or imagined), many will avoid giving negative feedback about the quality of their professors' lectures. Similarly, many employees may refrain from expressing their true opinions about the morality or competence of their managers. Moreover, respondents who are uncertain about what the "correct answer" is (i.e., the one least risky for them) may often choose the neutral option when in doubt.

Prevailing social and cultural norms can also influence the completion of survey questionnaires. In some societies, there is a strong culture of politeness, non-confrontation, and conflict avoidance. The belief in the "wisdom of the masses," that a balanced position is the most socially desirable, falls into the same category of reasons for central tendency bias.

A poorly designed survey, where it is perceived or implied that the survey author underestimates the intelligence of the surveyed population or that the author may be incompetent in the subject matter, often leads to respondents seeing no purpose in participating in the survey and simply choosing the easiest solution: the neutral option for almost every question.

Another potentially important reason for choosing a neutral response, as we observed in previous research (Samuelson et al., 2022), is the inherent limitation of the Likert scale, which offers only a small number of possible responses that cannot capture the full continuum of someone's ideas or preferences. Increasing the number of options on a Likert scale or even introducing a more modern analog continuous method of response selection, as discussed in Matejka et al. (2016) and Buskirk et al. (2015), does not necessarily guarantee compatibility with an individual's internal system of ideas and reasoning. While the distribution of responses may appear more continuous at first glance, the correspondence between these responses and the true ideas in the respondents' minds is questionable.

Finally, one of the significant reasons for the occurrence of central tendency and, occasionally, acquiescence bias is the lack of motivation among the surveyed population. For example, if students are required to engage in a significant and time-consuming activity which does not contribute to their course grade, such as filling out a long survey, they have no incentive to participate constructively. In such cases, the easiest choice is to select the middle option for every question.

Douven (2017) provides a Bayesian perspective on the issue of central tendency, arguing that it represents a natural outcome when respondents provide point estimates of statistical distributions on a Likert scale. According to him, central tendency exists even when the survey is well-designed, and thus, it cannot be completely eliminated. However, this should not be an excuse for sub-optimal survey design, which can significantly exacerbate the situation.

There is also a debate in the literature regarding the inclusion of a midpoint on the Likert scale, i.e., designing a survey with an odd number of possible responses. Chyung et al. (2017) argue that the midpoint on the scale can serve as a sort of "dumping ground" for respondents who, for various reasons, do not wish to reveal their true type. They also observe that removing the midpoint leads to a significant increase in non-responses or, in another case, that respondents with a central tendency bias randomly choose one of the two middle responses on a scale with an even number of options.

To avoid central tendency bias, it is also necessary (or at least helpful) to ensure that respondents have an adequate incentive to approach the survey seriously. If respondents have no vested interest in completing the survey responsibly, they may try to expedite this "obligation" (or promise) as quickly as possible. Even in a survey with forced ranking, depending on its technical design, one possible way to do this might be for them to provide the same answer ranking for each task, as this requires no mental engagement and is likely the quickest way to propagate through the survey form.

METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH HYPOTHESIS

We will address the issue of central tendency by *requiring* survey participants to rank five provided answers according to their preferences rather than simply selecting one. Each ranking of the five elements constitutes a unique response, and since this involves permutations, the number of possible responses is $1\times2\times3\times4\times5 = 5! = 120$. This approach necessitates carefully formulating survey questions to ensure the options are not too disparate, thereby avoiding obvious preference orderings. While this method allows for more nuanced responses, it may not apply to all types of survey questions.

The plan was then to conduct such a survey with an adequately large number of respondents, in this case students, and to apply basic statistical analysis to the types of answers (*not the student attitudes themselves*) to assess whether any overall consistency emerged in the large pool of responses, which could indicate the presence of phenomena similar to central tendency or acquiescence bias. However, since we collected a large number of student responses, we will also briefly discuss the results regarding their attitudes because it is always interesting.

To begin, we will clarify the type of survey in question using an example. Let us assume the respondents are students tasked with ranking five business practices, described in simple sentences, commonly (or even unequivocally) considered unethical. The participants must rank these five sentences according to how they perceive the relative severity of the unethical behaviors described, placing the behavior they view as the most unethical first and the least unethical last. In that way, the degree of severity of unethical behavior is coded with the relative ordering. If the survey instructions specify that each respondent *must* provide an answer and it is not possible to assign the same ranking to more than one option, then the survey essentially employs forced ranking.

HYPOTHESIS

Given that a set of five elements yields 120 possible permutations, our primary research hypothesis formulated prior to designing and implementing the questionnaire was as follows:

H0: A strategy equivalent to resorting to a median answer is not feasible.

This is based on the assumption that such a strategy would be too difficult to execute, as there is no single neutral response available, and the large number of permutations makes it unlikely that respondents could intuitively grasp the full set when completing the survey

quickly. This complexity would make selecting the most neutral option challenging. The alternative hypothesis is therefore:

H1: A strategy equivalent to resorting to a median answer is feasible.

To test this hypothesis, it is essential to employ methods that are as unbiased as possible – that is, methods that remain independent of the survey creators' or respondents' opinions. Our goal is to seek evidence in support of H1, which would mean that H0 is false. If we are unable to provide such evidence, we will retain H0 as valid. This methodological approach is critical, as we aim to use an example (a survey with many respondents, though ultimately a single case study) to explore whether there is any evidence (or at least a strong indication) that could suggest the invalidity of H0.

METRICS USED FOR THE TESTING OF THE HYPOTHESIS

The only way to test the effectiveness of the survey design described above is to collect as many responses as possible and check for any signs of systematic behavior that could indicate avoidance of revealing the true type.

In the survey we will describe later, we asked respondents (students) to answer as many as fifteen tasks. In each task, five descriptions of certain unethical practices in academic and business activities were provided, which needed to be ranked in descending order of unethicality as perceived by each correspondent. The incentive system for responsible participation in the survey was clearly explained in the preamble of the survey. A total of 220 students correctly completed the survey.

Each of the 120 possible permutations for each task was encoded into a single natural number using lexicographic encoding (Wikipedia, 2024b). For example, if integer numbers 1 to 5 enumerated the descriptions of practices offered in each task, the ranking 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 was encoded as the number 1, while the ranking 5, 4, 3, 2, 1 was encoded as the number 120. All other permutations, ordered "as in a dictionary," fall between these extremes.

Converting abstract ideas into numerical values is often difficult and rarely straightforward/linear. For example, imagine three concepts: A, B, and C. Now, to make a statistical analysis easier, assign them numerical values, like n(A), n(B), and n(C). Even if the numerical gaps between them, such as n(A) – n(B) and n(B) – n(C), are equal, this doesn't mean the actual differences between the ideas themselves, A and B or B and C, are equally significant.

Adding more response options to a survey, such as increasing the number of points on a scale, can make it more difficult for respondents to select an answer. In our view, using a Likert scale with more than five options, or even an analog scale, is unlikely to improve the quality of information obtained. This is because each respondent may have a unique system of ideas that cannot be effectively mapped onto a highly detailed, one-dimensional numerical scale in a meaningful way, nor can it necessarily be directly compared to other respondents' systems of ideas. Therefore, it is generally better to keep the categories of ideas broad and, if possible, mutually exclusive, resulting in a smaller number of distinct numerical representations for respondents to choose from. However, we have not conducted research to confirm this hypothesis.

By observing the descriptive statistics of the responses provided by each student across the fifteen tasks, it should be possible to detect any occurrence of rapid completion of the form, indicated by offering the same responses to all (or many) of the fifteen tasks. Such a practice would mimic the central tendency in conventional Likert scale surveys.

BASIC DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS

The descriptive statistics we used were mean, median, standard deviation, skewness, and kurtosis. For exact mathematical definitions and detailed explanations, see Newbold et al. (2013) or any other good textbook on statistics. For the reader's convenience, we briefly describe those parameters here:

- The *arithmetic mean* represents the "central value" of a dataset, calculated by dividing the sum of all observations by the number of data points. It is a key measure used to summarize the overall "location" of the data.
- The *median* is the value that separates the higher half from the lower half of a dataset. In an ordered list of all elements, it is the value located at the middle position. Unlike the mean, the median is resistant to the influence of outliers, making it a particularly useful measure of the data's central point in skewed or non-Gaussian distributions.
- *Standard deviation* provides a quantitative measure of dispersion, indicating the degree to which data points deviate from the mean.
- *Skewness* quantifies the asymmetry of a probability distribution. Positive skewness denotes a longer right tail, whereas negative skewness indicates a longer left tail. A skewness value near zero indicates an approximately symmetric distribution. In our dataset, skewness does not help analyze the distribution of responses for an individual correspondent because the numerical codes for responses are *de facto* arbitrary and carry no intrinsic meaning. However, it can, at least in some cases, when the data are grouped by task, become an informative parameter that describes aspects of the response distribution for the collective of many correspondents answering the same question.
- *Kurtosis* measures the tails and peak of a distribution relative to a normal distribution. Excess kurtosis, which compares the kurtosis value to that of a normal distribution, identifies whether a distribution exhibits fatter tails (leptokurtic) or thinner tails (platykurtic), providing insight into the likelihood of extreme deviations. High kurtosis may signal the existence of extreme outliers, but more importantly, it can indicate potential bimodality, which would suggest a grouping of responses around two dominant answers instead of one, for example, when respondents are divided in their ethical attitudes. This is also potentially (but not necessarily) useful when the data are grouped by tasks (not by respondents) as it enables spotting the possibly divided responses from a large dataset more easily.

It should be noted, however, that the numerical values of the codes representing the permutations of responses have no relation to the content (or, in this case, the ethical dimension) of the sentences presented to the survey participants for ranking.

CONCENTRATION MEASURES

We used another set of descriptive statistical measures to assess the *concentration* of the responses given to any of the tasks, Q1 to Q15. Given the fact that in any society or group, certain prevailing ethical attitudes exist regarding any question of ethical importance, it is expected that the responses to each Q would cluster around a particular option. High concentration could indicate a strong group preference toward a specific option, whereas low concentration may suggest a weak preference. However, an excessively high concentration, especially if observed across multiple tasks or for particularly "simple" orderings (e.g., 1 2 3 4 5), might indicate similar behavior exhibited by many respondents, with or without coordination. Conversely, a concentration that is too low could raise suspicions about possible random answering. Both circumstances would undermine the basic credibility of the survey results. Ideally, the concentration indices would assume "moderate values," which, by necessity, remains a subject of interpretation. Naturally, those values are expected to be (possibly even significantly) different for different Q's.

We evaluated several concentration measures to determine which would be most appropriate for our purpose:

- *Herfindahl-Hirschman Index* (HHI) (Calkins, 1983),
- *Gini Index* (Gastwirth, 1972),
- *Concentration Ratio,* (CR_m), defined as the sum of the mmm largest shares (see Wikipedia, 2024a),
- *Zipf's Law parameters* (Wikipedia, 2024d),
- *Other non-parametric measures*, such as the rank at which the relative frequency is half that of the top-ranked permutation, the number of permutations receiving at least one vote, and the average share of all voted permutations.

After a thorough comparative analysis, we found that the HHI was the most selective indicator and exhibited the best overall consistency with all other measures. Therefore, we chose to report only the HHI results and the corresponding conclusions in this paper.

The *Herfindahl-Hirschman Index* (HHI) is the sum of the squares of the percent "market shares" of all individual entities active in that "market." In our context, we regard any of the 120 possible answer permutations in each Q as an entity (a "market player") that captured a certain number of respondents' votes. In our case, that number, denoted as x, can take any integer value between 0 and 220. The "market share" of a permutation is calculated as $s = 100\ (x/220)\%$. The HHI equals the sum of the squares of all 120 s-values. Consequently, the HHI can take any value between 0 and 10,000. The larger the HHI, the greater the inequality between individual shares, indicating a higher degree of concentration of votes. If all shares were equal, the HHI would take the smallest possible value of 10,000/220 = 45.45. If all votes went to a single permutation, the HHI would equal 10,000. The effective number of hypothetic entities equals $N_{eff} = 10,000/\text{HHI}$. This is the number of entities giving the same HHI if all had equal shares.

SURVEY DESIGN AND TEST RESULTS

In this section, we describe the design of the survey and the statistical tests performed to detect indirect evidence of systematic behavior by individual respondents, which might indicate central tendency bias or similar patterns.

As previously mentioned, the survey consisted of fifteen tasks. We marked them as Q1 to Q15. Each task included five sentences describing academic or business practices typically considered unethical, and respondents were asked to rank them based on their perceived severity, from the most to the least harmful. All tasks and the corresponding sentences that had to be ordered are listed in the Appendix 1.

Additionally, respondents were asked to rate each task as a whole according to the general severity of the ethical practices described in the following categories:

- A: Light or not very severe;
- B: Medium severity;
- C: Very severe and/or harmful.

As this part of the survey was not used for our study of eliminating the central tendency bias, it was not subjected to statistical testing.

Yet, because of that, the survey designer had to ensure at least relative consistency in the overall degree of severity across each group of five descriptions to avoid combining very different scenarios that would likely lead all respondents to favor (or disfavor) a specific option or range of options. For example, if a task includes four descriptions of relatively mild unethical behaviors, such as "surfing the Internet during lectures," alongside a severe one, such as "submitting a plagiarized master's thesis," the vast majority of respondents would assign the worst ranking to the latter, even if this choice did not fully reflect their true beliefs. This would effectively reduce the number of meaningful response combinations from 120 (5!) to 24 (4!), as the severe option would practically always occupy the same position. In this way, the designer would create an ideal dumping ground for respondents wishing to signal their (true or contrived) ethicality, as the ordering of the remaining four practices would become inconsequential compared to the one that is clearly the worst.

Regarding the technical design of the survey, limitations in the e-learning software available at the time at the University of Zagreb, Faculty of Electrical Engineering and Computing, prevented the creation of a web form that would allow for simple sorting of five elements into permutations, e.g., by "click-and-drag." Consequently, the survey was administered as an MS Word file, and students were required to manually input their preferred order of answers for each task by entering the letters *a* to *e* (*a* marking the most unethical practice) in cells adjacent to each answer. As a result, post-survey validation was necessary to identify students who inadvertently assigned the same ranking more than once in any task. Of the 226 respondents, six made such errors. Their surveys were excluded from further analysis, leaving 220 valid responses. As explained earlier, these responses were coded into numbers from 1 to 120.

Additionally, the e-learning tool did not allow for random shuffling of the five options within each task. Consequently, the survey designers needed to carefully arrange the options to

avoid repeatedly presenting the same type of order. For example, if the least severe unethical practices consistently appeared first in the list of options and the most severe ones appeared last, respondents might be inclined to replicate this ordering across all tasks. This would effectively create a "dumping ground" for the most socially acceptable responses, mimicking the central tendency effect often observed in traditional Likert scales.

Having a "click-and-drag" or similar convenient feature may, in fact, exacerbate issues similar to central tendency bias in Likert scale-based surveys. For instance, if the interface allowed respondents to easily rearrange answers by dragging, they might be tempted to complete the survey swiftly by leaving all the responses in the default order. Combined with shuffling, this setup could lead to a situation even more problematic than central tendency bias: it would introduce bias similar to central tendency but without any consistent patterns to observe due to random ordering. As a result, we might mistakenly conclude that responses are unbiased. This example underscores the *importance of careful survey design* in terms of both content and technical setup.

DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICAL ANALYSIS RESULTS – TESTING THE HYPOTHESIS

To evaluate Hypothesis H0 we conducted several statistical tests to identify any traces of systematic manipulation by the respondents and to detect potential survey design flaws that might encourage or incentivize them to avoid reporting their true preferences. *No evidence was found to suggest systematic tendencies indicating intentional or unintentional misrepresentation of respondents' true preferences caused by any reason. In this subsection, we will present the analysis supporting this conclusion*.

Figure 1 provides, as an example, a list of numerically coded types revealed by twenty randomly selected respondents. The bars in the cells corresponding to the numerical codes offer visual information, making it easier to observe the general characteristics of the answers across both dimensions – the respondents and the tasks.

	#1	#2	#3	#4	#5	#6	#7	#8	#9	#10	#11	#12	#13	#14	#15	#16	#17	#18	#19	#20
Q1	65	96	114	72	66	42	114	120	66	120	119	118	23	65	72	106	119	18	66	2
Q2	102	89	89	84	54	119	119	107	113	118	82	108	65	89	77	119	119	89	108	84
Q3	67	85	37	45	67	69	67	93	95	44	115	67	91	43	91	109	45	67	69	93
Q4	14	20	14	31	64	20	32	7	56	120	79	61	111	96	7	8	13	20	37	79
Q5	91	19	43	91	2	68	62	18	65	1	44	92	87	92	93	13	44	92	42	31
Q6	2	17	6	1	1	4	3	1	3	7	72	31	75	9	17	9	3	5	27	5
Q7	10	8	6	40	12	10	12	40	18	24	2	30	4	6	2	10	18	12	34	12
Q8	26	89	25	103	65	56	57	1	32	117	33	49	93	57	55	57	49	85	120	30
Q9	8	7	20	48	36	9	14	24	7	4	4	17	8	66	42	3	23	96	26	56
Q10	52	58	34	76	85	58	63	61	97	111	4	104	12	100	73	80	109	111	111	111
Q11	63	93	13	69	7	15	19	62	13	85	6	7	73	7	15	13	85	13	15	13
Q12	46	66	24	70	118	22	20	62	79	7	24	4	91	39	94	40	46	19	46	34
Q13	6	7	30	58	30	30	6	6	2	4	120	6	101	6	5	6	60	54	6	30
Q14	34	5	37	8	6	23	36	27	120	31	4	22	1	20	1	16	34	16	7	15
Q15	42	38	83	59	108	108	65	106	116	106	51	93	107	114	78	118	102	104	77	106
Avg.	41.87	46.47	38.33	57.00	48.07	43.53	45.93	49.00	58.80	59.93	50.60	53.93	62.80	53.93	48.13	47.13	57.93	53.40	52.73	46.73
Stdev.	31.50	36.79	32.12	28.82	38.42	35.64	36.60	41.79	43.70	51.35	44.58	40.74	40.99	38.51	36.76	46.30	39.42	39.89	37.64	38.14
Skew.	0.44	0.21	1.35	-0.51	0.33	0.98	0.80	0.45	0.01	0.08	0.42	0.26	-0.54	0.05	-0.12	0.64	0.42	0.14	0.61	0.55
Stdev./Avg.	0.75	0.79	0.84	0.51	0.80	0.82	0.80	0.85	0.74	0.86	0.88	0.76	0.65	0.71	0.76	0.98	0.68	0.75	0.71	0.82
Median	42	38	30	59	54	30	36	40	65	44	44	49	75	57	55	16	46	54	42	31
Kurtosis	-0.76	-1.88	1.03	-0.15	-0.93	0.12	-0.11	-1.25	-1.59	-2.04	-1.31	-1.53	-1.49	-1.51	-1.84	-1.46	-1.19	-1.90	-0.81	-1.27

Figure 1. A list of the types assigned by twenty randomly selected respondents, with descriptive statistics for tasks Q1 to Q15

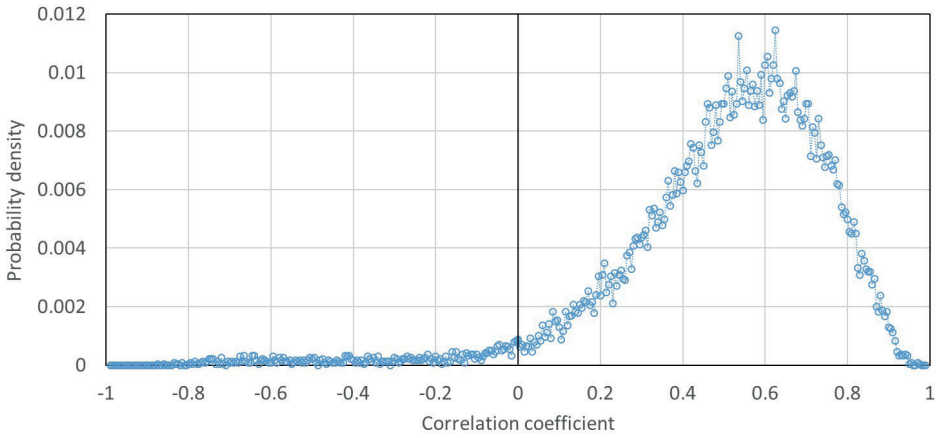

Figure 2. Probability distribution density of the set of all pairwise correlation coefficients between the responses of all 220 respondents for tasks Q1 to Q15. The total number of pairs is 24,090

Regarding the responses to the quandaries posed in each task, one can observe a general similarity in individual student responses, which is expected. It is likely normal for a group of young people attending the same higher education institution and living in the same culture to share at least some general ethical attitudes. However, it is important to note that the responses were not identical, suggesting that the respondents did not collaborate while completing the survey, which is a favorable outcome.

Figure 2 presents the probability density function of the set of all pairs of response vectors provided by the 220 respondents. By "response vector," we refer to a sequence of fifteen numerical codes corresponding to the types assigned by an individual respondent for tasks Q1 to Q15. Therefore, there are 220 response vectors, resulting in 24,090 pairs.

The distribution density shown in the graph is significant. First, the occurrence of negative correlations is very low, indicating that the proportion of students with ethical attitudes diametrically opposed to the majority is minimal, which is expected. The peak of the distribution density is at correlation coefficients around 0.57, corresponding to a low Pearson determination coefficient of 0.32. This suggests a generally vague alignment in the ethical attitudes of the majority of students, with notable differences in individual responses, which is also anticipated. Finally, the proportion of respondents with highly similar attitudes, characterized by a correlation coefficient of 0.9 or higher, is extremely small. These respondents are represented in the far-right portion of the graph. Also, the pairs of students with a correlation coefficient greater than 0.95 are almost non-existent, while the perfect correlation was not observed at all. This means that no one coordinated their work on the survey with anyone else. *Therefore, we conclude that the respondents gave their own types independently*.

The data inspection and the descriptive statistics (see the examples in the lower part of Figure 1) clearly show that none of the respondents applied a strategy of providing the same or very similar responses across all tasks. Therefore, *we can conclude that there was likely*

no "cheating" with the intent of completing the survey as quickly as possible. There was no evidence of a "dumping ground." On the contrary, nearly all students provided very diverse responses to tasks Q1 to Q15. This also suggests that the design of the survey did not encourage any form of "wrongdoing," despite the absence of random shuffling of the five options presented in each task.

Table 1 provides insight into the basic statistical properties of the responses to individual tasks across all respondents. It is noteworthy that the average and median responses vary, indicating that the survey design successfully avoided a systematic pattern of similar ordering by the severity of ethical situations. The standard deviations also show significant variation, suggesting that some tasks elicited more consistent responses while others did not. High kurtosis values may indicate potential bimodality, possibly reflecting divided attitudes among respondents. Using the actual survey results, we will later explore whether these statistics are of any practical use.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics of the responses to individual tasks Q1 to Q15 provided by all 220 students

No.	Avg.	Stdev.	Skew.	Stdev./Avg.	Median	Kurtosis
Q1	87.0	28.27	–0.45	0.32	89	–0.71
Q2	102.11	17.71	–1.72	0.17	108	4.12
Q3	71.28	24.64	–0.22	0.35	73	–0.60
Q4	33.27	30.85	1.22	0.93	20	–0.56
Q5	56.56	28.59	0.08	0.51	48	–0.96
Q6	18.72	27.84	2.16	1.49	5	4.00
Q7	18.58	17.70	2.13	0.15	12	6.62
Q8	59.94	35.04	0.18	0.58	56	–1.06
Q9	43.19	32.53	0.62	0.75	37.5	–0.68
Q10	72.55	38.67	–0.51	0.53	85	–1.17
Q11	21.24	22.12	2.32	1.04	13	5.03
Q12	42.10	26.65	0.82	0.63	40	0.07
Q13	25.30	24.95	1.53	0.99	28	2.13
Q14	24.30	23.29	1.61	0.96	16	3.20
Q15	82.64	29.00	–0.79	0.35	90	–0.08
Aver.	50.59	27.19	0.60	0.70	47.5	1.36

As the final part of our search for evidence of systematic issues typically associated with classical Likert scales, we will examine the *concentration measures* of the response sets for tasks Q1 to Q15. In this analysis, we will treat each of the possible five-element permutations as a member of the set that received a certain number of "votes." The total number of votes across all 120 options is always 220, corresponding to the total number of respondents. The concentration measures used in the analysis are described in Section 3.2.2.

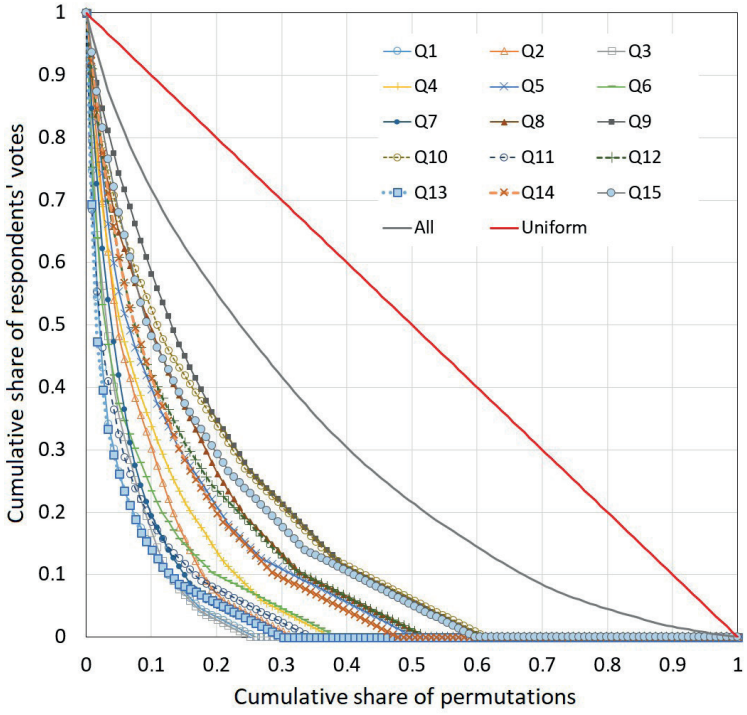

Figure 3. Complementary Lorenz functions for the answer permutation frequencies observed in each individual task and all the tasks, compared to the hypothetical uniform frequency distribution

Table 2. HHI indices for the concentrations of answer permutations in the individual tasks and all tasks, sorted by descending HHI

No.	Q13	Q11	Q1	Q6	Q3	Q7	Q2	Q4	Q5	Q14	Q12	Q8	Q10	Q15	Q9	All
HHI	1586	1361	1325	996	946	746	573	572	434	382	381	339	299	294	239	136

Table 2 presents the HHI figures for each task individually, as well as for all tasks combined, sorted in descending order of HHI. Note that calculating a concentration measure for answer permutations across all fifteen tasks does not hold any content-specific meaning. However, it can be instructive to observe if there is any general tendency to offer formally the same permutations of answers on entirely different tasks, which could indicate some form of "wrongdoing." As shown, the HHI for all tasks combined is very low, suggesting that *no such tendency was present*.

For the individual tasks, a range of HHI values can be observed, with no obvious clustering. The index varies from 239 (for Q9) to 1586 (for Q13), indicating low to moderate concentration levels. A high concentration, defined as an HHI exceeding 2,000, was not

observed. Combined with the results shown in Figure 2, this supports the conclusion that *no "dumping ground" behavior was present in the survey*.

For a visual illustration of concentration, we will use the complementary Lorenz curve (Figure 3), presenting the share of answer permutations (abscissa) awarded cumulative vote shares greater than or equal to the corresponding ordinate value. (It is self-understood that the cumulative share of votes cannot be greater than one.) While the HHI summarizes the information on concentration into a single number that is easy to compare across different datasets – in this case, the tasks Q1 to Q15, the complementary Lorenz curve provides a complete picture of inequality across the entire distribution.

Note that the alignment of the curves generally corresponds to the order of the HHI indices, though not always. For example, while the Q13 curve is mostly the leftmost for higher vote shares, this is not the case for the lower ones. The Q9 curve is the rightmost (widest) overall, but this alignment does not hold at lower vote shares. The Q15 curve remains mainly to the left of Q10, even though it has a slightly lower HHI. Aside from these technical details, it is worth noting that even the least concentrated tasks deviate significantly from a hypothetical uniform distribution, *indicating that random responses were extremely unlikely*. Conversely, while some distributions show somewhat higher concentration around a particular answer, all exhibit sufficient diversity to rule out "dumping ground" behavior. This is further evidenced by the examples in Figure 1.

Based on the statistical tests conducted on the case study with a sample of 220 respondents, as presented in this article, *we found no evidence or indication of behavior equivalent to systematically resorting to a neutral (or any other particular non-true type) option*, which would resemble central tendency bias in traditional Likert scale-based surveys.

Therefore, we can retain the null-hypothesis H0 from Section 3.1.

REFLECTIONS ON THE STUDENT ATTITUDES OBTAINED FROM THE SURVEY

The respondent group comprised 220 students who completed the entire survey without errors. These students were second-year undergraduates enrolled in the course "Engineering Economics 1" at the Faculty of Electrical Engineering and Computing, University of Zagreb, Croatia (https://www.fer.unizg.hr/en/course/engeco1). This course, covering introductory microeconomics, is designed to provide students majoring in electrical engineering and/or computing with an introduction to economics and business. A related voluntary activity, the "Business Workshop", invites external professionals to give talks and practical sessions on various aspects of working in the business sector. The respondent group included 48 female students, representing 21.8% of the total – a percentage closely aligned with the overall proportion of female students at the Faculty (Samuelson et al., 2022). The survey was conducted in June 2022.

In this research, we did not conduct any analyses that considered potential statistical differences between the responses of male and female participants. Given our primary research objective, we deemed this unnecessary. Moreover, in the results stated above, we found no

evidence of any "manipulative" behavior, so dividing the population into these two groups would hardly yield conclusions different from those presented earlier. For example, previous research comparing student attitudes toward entrepreneurship education in Croatia and Slovenia found no significant gender-based differences (Potocan et al., 2016).

However, given the extensively documented gender gap in STEM fields (OECD, 2008; Ceci et al., 2009), it may be interesting to investigate whether there are statistically significant differences in survey response behavior dependent on the gender of the STEM students, but we will leave it for future research.

THE IMPORTANCE OF BUSINESS-RELATED CONTENT FOR STUDENTS IN STEM FIELDS

Higher education institutions are pivotal in nurturing students' intellectual development and laying the foundations necessary for economic progress in societies that rely heavily on knowledge and innovation (Drucker, 1969; Powell and Snellman, 2004). To optimize the benefits of university education, faculty and academic programs strive to offer courses that resonate with students' interests and attitudes, recognizing these as powerful motivators that drive engagement and academic success (Krapp and Prenzel, 2011). For STEM students in particular, fostering an interest in business not only sharpens their technical skills but also expands their grasp of the economic and business contexts in which these skills will be applied.

Research has demonstrated that students are more likely to excel in subjects they perceive as relevant and engaging. Studies on technological literacy, for example, show that interest correlates with higher achievement and deeper mastery in a field (Svenningsson et al., 2018). Accordingly, identifying and supporting student preferences helps faculty and academic programs tailor courses that both appeal to students and contribute to their academic advancement.

Mazzola et al. (2023) show that students who completed a graduate-level ethics course developed a stronger ethical awareness and a greater tendency to consider the societal impact of their work compared to peers who hadn't taken the course. They examine how ethics courses resonate with students, especially when discussing real-world cases that connect their technical work with broader ethical implications. These insights suggest that engineering students find value in such content as it directly influences their professional and personal perspectives on ethics.

We believe it is unsurprising that young people show a strong interest in ethics and highly value its principles. This interest drives their enthusiastic engagement with courses focused on ethical issues, particularly those related to their prospective careers, enabling educators to expand on foundational ethical concepts in a more systematic and structured way.

REVIEW OF SURVEY RESULTS

As mentioned earlier, our study examines the comparative attitudes toward certain (undoubtedly) unethical practices in business and academia (refer to the Appendix 1), as expressed by electrical engineering and computing students at the University of Zagreb. These students were enrolled in the economics/business-oriented elective course, "Engineering Economics 1".

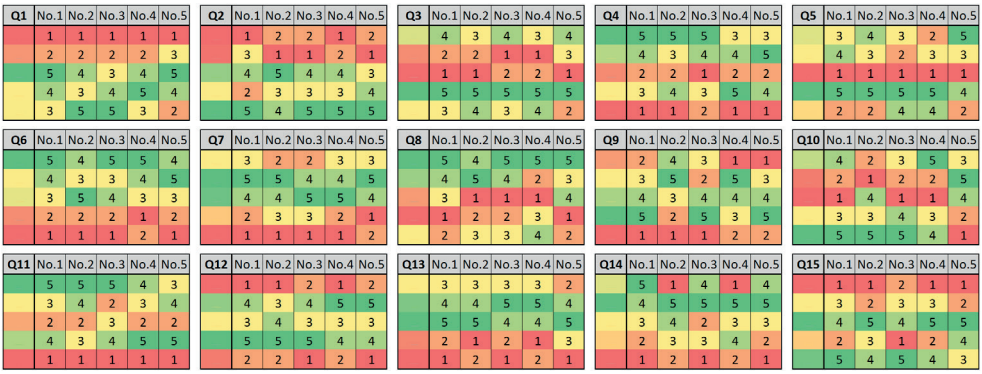

Figure 4. The survey results of second-year undergraduate students in engineering and computing programs at the University of Zagreb. Number of participants: 220. Date: June 2022

Figure 4 provides a comprehensive overview of the survey results. Each block corresponds to one of the tasks, Q1–Q15. The five types with the highest counts are shown in the columns labeled No.1–No.5. The integer values represent answer codes, as listed in Appendix 1. Color codes are applied for easier readability (1 red, 2 orange, 3 yellow, 4 light green, 5 green). The first column in each block is color-coded to represent a weighted average of all code numbers in the respective row, visually indicating the "average answer" for that position among the five most preferred types. The horizontal position corresponds to the relative severity of unethical practice: the first-row position indicates the most severe practice, whereas the last marks the least severe. The results displayed in the table should be "decoded" using Appendix 1. It may be helpful to compare the data in Figure 4 with those presented in Tables 1 and 2.

The color codes are particularly useful for identifying situations where students displayed divided opinions. Specifically, in tasks where the color arrangement remains fairly consistent across all five top-scored types, No.1–No.5, students exhibited similar comparative attitudes with only minor differences. Notable examples include Q1, Q11, and Q13. Conversely, blocks displaying similar colors at both the top and bottom indicate a division in attitudes; examples of this pattern can be seen in Q3, Q5, and Q12. Additionally, left-to-right color inconsistency across the five most frequent types may suggest students' uncertainty or confusion regarding the options they were asked to choose from.

It is essential to interpret these survey results with the understanding that the values in Figure 4, and therefore the colors as well, *carry no intrinsic meaning regarding ethical stances*. They serve merely as codes that facilitate the reading of results in this relatively complex scheme, which is less straightforward than a typical Likert scale-based questionnaire.

After reviewing the graphical presentation of results in Figure 4, along with the qualitative findings partially described in this section, and comparing these with Tables 1 and 2, we found that descriptive statistical measures, such as kurtosis, skewness, and the standard deviation-to-mean ratio, did not show an evident relationship with the most notable examples of highly consistent (e.g., Q1, Q11, Q13) or highly varied (e.g., Q3, Q5, Q12) responses.

Thus, we can preliminarily conclude that these measures may have limited utility on their own. However, this warrants more detailed investigation.

On the other hand, the HHI showed consistency across these examples: tasks with highly consistent responses had higher HHI values (1,325, 1,361, and 1,586, respectively), while tasks with highly varied responses had lower HHIs (946, 434, and 381, respectively). Given the previously noted advantages of HHI in terms of selectivity in concentration measurement, we conclude that the HHI remains the most effective descriptive statistical measure for use in this type of survey.

CONCLUSIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

This study introduces a forced-ranking survey design as a methodological approach to mitigate central tendency and acquiescence biases, which are commonly observed in traditional Likert-scale surveys. The method was tested through statistical analysis of survey responses collected in a case study involving 220 engineering students. The primary goal was to detect any systematic avoidance of revealing true preferences. The results showed that the proposed approach effectively eliminated the likelihood of response distortions often encountered in Likert-scale surveys.

The findings also indicate that the Herfindahl-Hirschman Index (HHI) was the most effective metric for analyzing concentration patterns in survey responses, providing consistent results across tasks. While other descriptive statistics, such as skewness and kurtosis, offered some insights, their utility appeared limited in comparison to HHI.

The contributions of this study are both methodological and applicative. Methodologically, it provides a viable alternative to traditional survey designs, offering a means to collect more reliable data while reducing biases. In terms of applicability, the case study illustrates how the proposed method can be used to evaluate response patterns and detect potential manipulative behaviors in survey data.

Future research should focus on further testing the generalizability of this survey design across different populations and cultural contexts. Additional studies could explore whether the methodology is effective in addressing other response biases, such as social desirability bias, and examine the potential integration of automated tools, including AI, to enhance data analysis and interpretation.

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APPENDIX 1

Fifteen tasks (Q1 Q15) in the survey designed to test the Hypothesis, with five sentences (answers) per task to be ordered by ascending perceived ethical severity:

Q1

1. Secretly copying or completely replicating someone else's seminar paper.
2. Paying an acquaintance or friend to write a bachelor's thesis.
3. Ordering a thesis on a given topic from an unknown person on the Internet for a fee.
4. Copying from "cheat sheets," the web, etc., and/or seeking help from other classmates during an exam.
5. Assisting other classmates during an exam.

Q2

1. Plagiarizing someone else's scientific paper (in significant parts or entirely) without citing the source.
2. Incorrectly and/or incompletely citing works used in research, or not mentioning those works at all.
3. Slightly modifying research results to more easily justify the study's conclusions.
4. Adding a colleague to the list of co-authors, even though the person did not significantly or at all contribute to the work.
5. Using Internet sources while writing a scientific paper without citing those sources.

Q3

1. Neglecting developments in the field being taught and delivering the exact same lectures for years.
2. Accepting a modest amount of money or other small benefits for a better grade or a passing mark.
3. Finding pirated textbooks on the Internet and providing links to students "so they can find them themselves."
4. Overlooking students' mistakes during grading.
5. Presenting unverified information during lectures based on the logic that "No one will notice anyway."

Q4

1. Surfing the Internet during lectures (as a student) or work hours (as an employee), unrelated to the lecture topic or job.
2. Using software obtained from a friend who did not acquire it legally.

3. Lending or giving software legally acquired to a friend or colleague.
4. Using software found on the web that does not have a legal license but was uploaded by someone else, thus blaming that person.
5. Selling a copy of legally obtained software to a colleague or friend.

Q5

1. Downloading pirated software from the Internet.
2. Distributing pirated software from the Internet to others.
3. Purchasing one legal software license and then installing it on multiple computers.
4. Helping others access pirated software from the Internet and install it on their devices.
5. Freely using everything found on the Internet without considering its origin, as long as someone else put it there (because that other person is responsible).

Q6

1. Poor (careless, negligent) protection of confidential information they work with (e.g., not using passwords, using weak passwords, leaving documents visible on the desk or screen…).
2. Not reporting a colleague who provides confidential information to unauthorized persons.
3. Providing unauthorized persons access to confidential personal information.
4. Giving confidential commercial information to unauthorized persons without requesting compensation or a favor in return.
5. Requesting compensation or a favor in return for providing confidential commercial information to unauthorized persons.

Q7

1. Bypassing a minor rule if it will speed up/improve the completion of a work task.
2. Exploiting information one has access to in their job, which others do not, for personal interest or advancement at work.
3. Indiscreetly sharing someone else's sensitive personal information learned while performing their job.
4. Deliberately misinterpreting regulations/codes to uninformed or younger colleagues to potentially share future blame for non-compliance.
5. Not reporting observed non-compliance with regulations/codes by other colleagues.

Q8

1. Participating in phishing (unauthorized fraudulent collection of other people's valuable data).
2. Participating in spoofing (forging emails for phishing purposes).

3. Engaging in unauthorized monitoring of people's activities through tracking devices/applications.
4. Using the Internet and new technologies to harm others (e.g., cyberbullying, creating fake profiles on social networks to damage reputations, deep-faking, etc.).
5. Publishing someone else's personal or valuable data on the Internet or social networks.

Q9

1. Creating large mailing lists and spamming recipients with messages of unknown interest.
2. Selling (or even giving away) one's mailing lists to others without the consent of the individuals on the lists.
3. Buying mailing lists from others who created them while doing their legitimate business.
4. Not providing users on the mailing list with a simple option to unsubscribe.
5. Not caring about potentially unacceptable/offensive content for some users on large, otherwise legally and correctly acquired mailing lists.

Q10

1. Teasing colleagues based on their physical appearance, dress style, etc.
2. Constantly criticizing many or even all colleagues at the workplace.
3. Being careless regarding the quality and scope of work performed.
4. Avoiding part of one's job duties so others have to do them.
5. Constantly criticizing only one particular person or a few individuals at the workplace.

Q11

1. Hiring a relative who is proven to be competent for the job.
2. Hiring a person who is otherwise proven or likely to be incompetent upon someone else's request, to do a favor.
3. Hiring a proven competent person for a job that is unnecessary.
4. Hiring a proven incompetent person for a necessary position.
5. Not hiring a competent person due to their racial background.

Q12

1. Exercising discretionary authority to appoint a proven highly competent person, even though another person received higher scores based on public competition criteria.
2. Appointing a person of unknown managerial qualities based on the request of another person, as a favor.
3. Appointing a person who is highly loyal and inclined to flattery but lacks significant managerial qualities.

4. Appointing a person who shows dictatorial management characteristics.
5. Appointing based on a formal public competition, where the criteria are set to significantly increase the likelihood that a specific, otherwise very competent person will receive the highest score.

Q13

1. Approving travel expenses for an official trip that was not made to provide some financial assistance to the employee.
2. Allowing the use of a company vehicle for personal purposes for an employee who does not have that right in their contract with the employer.
3. Withholding overtime pay, even though such work is often required of employees.
4. Intentionally setting unrealistically high goals for employees so that they can constantly be blamed for failure.
5. Tolerating and protecting employees who do not try hard enough and have poor work results.

Q14

1. Setting the conditions for a public tender for the procurement of strategic semi-finished products and raw materials so that a specific very reliable and quality supplier wins, even if it is slightly more expensive than others.
2. Adjusting accounting policies so that indicators visible from financial statements signal a better state than the actual one, which positively affects the stock price, thus benefiting shareholders.
3. Deciding to invest in a very risky, high-value project without detailed prior analysis of the project itself or analyses of ways to mitigate the risks associated with it.
4. Setting conditions for a public tender for the procurement of strategic semi-finished products and raw materials so that a specific supplier wins in exchange for a certain amount of money as a bribe.
5. Downplaying the environmental risks associated with constructing a new production facility to more easily obtain consent from the local community on whose territory the facility will be built.

Q15

1. Unfair treatment of business associates and other people of different nationalities, religions, genders, sexes, sexual orientations, etc.
2. Manipulating information/lying to mislead uninformed people and thereby achieve some benefit for the company in which one works or manages.
3. Careless handling of hazardous waste generated in production to reduce costs associated with the company's obligation to dispose of such waste.

4. Ignoring the adverse psychological effects that poor interpersonal relationships within the company may have on some or all of its employees.
5. Prioritizing the business interests of the company in which a person works while simultaneously disregarding the interests of society, the state, or the local community related to the company's activities.

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