

L'dor V'dor – From Generation to Generation

*"To be remembered by those who remain alive means not dying.
When I am here with my children, with my family,
I repeat - memory is more durable than monuments of stone."*¹

Zygmunt Rolat had conferred upon him the unprecedented award of Honorary Citizenship of the City of Częstochowa. This took place during the Fourth Reunion of the World Society of Częstochowa Jews and Their Descendants. An important part of that Reunion was the International Academic Conference on the topic *Identity and Stereotypes – Jews and Poles*. It was organised by the Institute of Political Science of the Jan Długosz Academy, with the participation of the World Society of Częstochowa Jews and Their Descendants.

"The aim of that conference was to show the processes in the evolution of stereotypes, which occur amongst successive generations of people born after World War II.

"The main issues related to:

- *traditions and stereotypes learned from the experiences of generations from before the Holocaust and from Holocaust survivors*
- *post-War Polish-Jewish relations and their impact on the image of mutual perception*
- *the impact of global processes of cultural change and the development of means for social communication in mutual understanding*
- *the construction of 'new bridges' between the generations of Jews and Poles born after the Holocaust*
- *the place of family history in the process of shaping attitudes towards other nations*
- *the national identity of a contemporary Pole and Jew, and*
- *Korczak's concept of an upbringing, with tolerance and respect for others who are different, in educational programs."*²

An important part of the conference was the participation of students, who presented their own school projects, which were aimed at learning about the history of Jews, including their culture and traditions, their contribution to the development of culture and science in Poland and their participation in the life of Częstochowa. The presentations also included the tragedy of the Holocaust and the post-War fate of the survivors.

Mayor of Częstochowa, Krzysztof Matyjaszczyk, then addressed conference participants with the following words:

¹ The words of Zygmunt Rolat in: C.K. Szymański, R. Stefaniak, *Zygmunt...*, op. cit., p. 181.

² C.K. Szymański, R. Stefaniak, *Zygmunt...*, op. cit., pp. 179–180.

"In pre-War Częstochowa, Poles and Jews were neighbours. They lived side by side. Together, they built this city and created its history. Little was said about this coexistence in the decades following the War. They were overshadowed by the tragic history of extermination, mutual accusations and, above all, unfair stereotypes.

"However, the time has come to settle these issues. This conference is another step in that direction. Previously, there were the 'Days of Remembrance', the Reunions of the World Society of Częstochowa Jews and the exhibition 'The Jews of Częstochowa: Coexistence - Holocaust - Remembrance'.

*"All these activities would not have been possible if it were not for people who, despite the painful experiences of the past, still identify with their 'small homeland' – Częstochowa – and with Poland, and who are proud of their roots. One such person is Zygmunt Rolat, Honorary Citizen of our city."*³

A unique event took place during the Fourth Reunion of the World Society of Częstochowa Jews and Their Descendants - a remembrance ceremony at the Jewish Cemetery. Reunion participants were especially pleased with the restoration of the mass grave of those killed by the Nazis on 4th January 1943. This work had been carried out by the city.⁴ At this ceremony, the significant words, spoken by the Mayor of Częstochowa, Krzysztof Matyjaszczyk, were:

*"With respect, I bow my head at the graves of all the generations of Częstochowa Jews resting in this cemetery and those buried in other cities, countries and in other continents. Częstochowa wants to remember you!"*⁵

Remembering, as mentioned by the Mayor, is crucial. In appreciation of the contribution of the Jewish community to the development and history of the city, the Częstochowa local government has, for years, worked together with both the local branch of the TSKŻ and with the World Society of Częstochowa Jews and Their Descendants, striving to keep alive, within the city's public space, the memory of the importance and presence of this community. Representatives of the authorities willingly support Jewish undertakings. They participate in official ceremonies organised by the Jewish community. They also accept invitations to less formal meetings. Publicly, they show respect for the achievements of the Jewish community and for the role it has played in shaping the city.

For the relationship between the Polish and Jewish communities of Częstochowa, it is extremely important to continue to remind the younger generation of Poland about the tragedy of the Holocaust. The best method of achieving this goal is, as always, historic and civic education. In many schools, which are run by the City of Częstochowa, numerous activities are devoted to the broad understanding of Jewish issues.

Students also participate in commemorating important, historical events related to the presence of the Jewish community in the history of Częstochowa. The various forms of

³ K. Matyjaszczyk, excerpt from speech during *Identity and Stereotypes – Jews and Poles and Poles* conference, author's archival copy.

⁴ For more, see: <https://www.czestochowajews.org/> (accessed: 2nd June 2020).

⁵ Archived video, authors' archive.

commemorating the history of Częstochowa Jews, by Częstochowa schools, deserve special attention. During the course of their school education, the youth of Częstochowa learn about the history, culture and traditions of Jews. They also learn about the contemporary State of Israel.

To achieve this, educational institutions work closely with the Social-Cultural Association of Jews in Częstochowa, as well as with the World Society of Częstochowa Jews and Their Descendants. In principle, over the course of their education, all Częstochowa school students visit the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum, thus consolidating their knowledge about the fate of the Polish and Jewish nations during the Holocaust. From 2016, they also visit the Częstochowa Jewish Museum⁶, where they learn about the history of Częstochowa.



Ceremony at the Częstochowa Jewish Cemetery, 2016

From left: Michael Schudrich, Zygmunt Rolat, Częstochowa Mayor Krzysztof Matyjaszczyk, Alon Goldman

Source: authors' archive

For almost twenty years, activities intended to preserve the memory of the Jewish community in Częstochowa have been supported, and have even been created, by the youth of the J. Malczewski Graphic Arts High School [“Plastyk”] in Częstochowa. It all began with an idea of school director, Anna Maciejowska, and her concept of *Inspired by Jewish Culture*. A school competition was held at that time which, later, grew into a national project, in which other graphic arts high schools in Poland participated. All this resulted in domestic and overseas exhibitions.

⁶ More about the activities of the museum will be further in this study.

“Plastyk” always eagerly and spectacularly took part in successive Reunions of Częstochowa Jews, for example, by building a sukkah⁷. Many other projects⁸ were organised, including competitions and exhibitions. Contacts were established with young people in Israel. The school’s students also contributed to the design and decor of the new rooms of the TSKŻ when, in 2007, it moved to ul. Dąbrowskiego.

However, “Plastyk” is not the only school interested in the Jewish history of its city. The Automotive and Construction Schools, Technical Schools, Catering Schools, the J. Kochanowski School, the R. Traugutt High School and the Norwid High School are among the most active. However, that list is not exhaustive.

For example, the Automotive and Construction Schools in Częstochowa, despite their narrow scope of curriculum, for years, provided education about Polish-Jewish relations. Projects were carried out (often together with other schools, e.g., the M. Kopernik High School), which concerned various aspects relating to the Jewish community. The young people learned of its history and of the everyday life in this community prior to World War II. At the conclusion of each project, summaries were prepared of the tasks completed and of the knowledge acquired. Similar initiatives were implemented in other schools where students learned about the history of Częstochowa Jews.

These types of activities were often supplemented by outdoor activities - visits to the Jewish cemetery, tours around the city in the footsteps of Jews and paying respects at memorial sites, e.g., lighting memorial candles. They were also accompanied by various types of art or photography competitions. In fact, each trip was documented photographically, which would turn into a smaller or larger school exhibition. This education was expanded further by trips following the traces of industrial plants built using Jewish capital, or by sightseeing in the city, seeing objects created at the initiative of Częstochowa Jews.

Similar programs were implemented in all schools in the city. It should be added that, during the implementation of these projects, the young people could always count on the support of the members of the Częstochowa TSKŻ and on members of the World Society of Częstochowa Jews and Their Descendants, who shared their knowledge and met with the Częstochowa youth to tell them about the history and customs of the Jewish community.⁹

It would be difficult to list all the Jewish-related initiatives in which Częstochowa youth participated. Certainly, one of the most important was the *MYouth Documenting History*

⁷ The Graphic Arts High School, under the direction of Anna Maciejowska, entered into the project “Tradition and the Present Day” of the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage, the result of which was “The Eight Gates of Jerusalem” – an artistic idea of the school’s teachers and students, in cooperation with the Israeli Arts and Science Academy in Jerusalem.

⁸ For example, the project “Cradles and Graves”, co-financed by the Ministry of Culture and Art. (It operated under this name until 1999. From November 1999 to October 2001, it was then called the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage. From 20th October 2001 until 31st October 2005. Later, it again became the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage). As part of this project, the young visual artists visited Jerusalem under the supervision of their teachers. The works, which were created during the trip to Israel, were displayed in the Gallery of Art on al. Najświętszej Maryi Panny 6 in Częstochowa. For more, see: <http://gazetacz.com.pl/mamy-sie-czym-pochwalic12752/> (dostęp: 2 czerwca 2020).

⁹ School students met with members of the “Children of the Holocaust” association - Jerzy Ślęzak and Ann Goldman, who is Deputy-Chair of the TSKŻ, with Zygmunt Rolat, Irit Amiel and Alon Goldman. They also had the opportunity to meet Rabbi Michael Schudrich, Ambassador Szewach Weiss, as well as many other important and interesting people who are linked with the Jewish heritage of our country. Based on school reports (elaborated by R. Stefaniak, published by the authors).

project¹⁰. The aim of this project was to honour those citizens of Częstochowa who, at the risk of their own lives and those of their families, aided Jewish families during the Holocaust. The students had the opportunity to learn of the experiences of those who survived thanks to the help which they received from Poles - Ada Frajman Ofir and Gabriel Horowitz.¹¹



Ada Ofir, with her family, during the unveiling of a plaque at Stary Rynek 24, 2016

Photograph: A. Goldman

Students from Częstochowa schools eagerly took part in such projects and also in various competitions¹² based upon Jewish themes, educational projects, academic¹³ and popular gathering, as well as in meetings with Jewish activists. It can be stated that Częstochowa schools have simply committed to promoting knowledge about Jewish culture and history, as well as the contributions of Jews to the development of Częstochowa throughout history.

¹⁰ This was a project initiated by the Jan Długosz Academy in Częstochowa (now the Jan Długosz University of Humanities and Natural Sciences) together with the World Society of Częstochowa Jews and Their Descendants. While carrying out this project, students had the opportunity to learn of the experiences of those who survived thanks to the help which they received from Poles. Among others, patrons of this project were Częstochowa Mayor, Krzysztof Matyjaszczyk, and President of the World Society of Częstochowa Jews and Their Descendants, Zygmunt Rolat.

¹¹ Based in school reports (elaborations owned by R. Stefaniak, published by the author).

¹² Among such competitions as *The History and Culture of Jews in Poland* (1995, 2008, 2010), Knowledge of Contemporary Israel Competition (2002), the historical competition *The History, Traditions and Culture of Częstochowa Jews* (2007), *Approaches to History* (2007), *Remembrance for the Future* (2004) – in which I LO came second in in Poland for its work *A Monograph of Fear*.

¹³ For example, in the International Academic Conference *Identity and Stereotypes – Jews and Poles*, which took place during the Fourth Reunion of the World Society of Częstochowa Jews and Their Descendants

The most active schools in terms of learning about Jewish history and culture also most actively work together with schools in Israel. Personal contacts are the best way to build bonds between nations. Zygmunt Rolat has correctly noticed that Jewish youth from Israel, coming to Poland and seeing only death camps built on Polish soil, could not leave our country with any positive impressions. By providing them with the opportunity to meet their Polish peers, we can change completely the perception of Poland by young Jews. For years, Zygmunt Rolat has worked on this for years, with no less energy and ingenuity coming from Alon Goldman.¹⁴

Alon Goldman is a second-generation Częstochowa Jews, born in Israel. Following his retirement, he often visited Poland and Częstochowa. For years, he has been happy to meet with high school and tertiary students in Częstochowa. During the meetings, Goldman talks about the fates of his family who were murdered by the Nazis during the war. He also introduces the young people to contemporary Israel and the state of Arab-Israeli relations. Through his efforts, direct contacts, between young people from Częstochowa and Israel, have intensified since 2011.

Although Częstochowa young people (e.g., students from “Plastyk”) had the opportunity to earlier meet their peers, for example during trips to Israel, in 2019 alone, thanks to Goldman, the building bridges education activities involved seven high schools in Częstochowa and six high schools in Israel. As part of this cooperative activity, nearly 800 young Jews come to Częstochowa. Not only did they have the opportunity to learn about the Jewish history of the city, but also to meet with their peers and take part in joint activities and fun.

These meetings enable the young people, from both countries, to get to know each other, as well as to learn much about multi-culturalism, to become acquainted with the customs and culture of both nations and to eliminate prejudices. The program continues to grow.¹⁵ In the future, it is envisaged that it will involve at least twice as many young people as before.



Work in the cemetery, 2018

Photograph: A. Goldman in www.czestochowajews.org

¹⁴ Chairman of the Association of Częstochowa Jews in Israel, Alon Goldman, who is also Vice-President of the World Society of Częstochowa Jews and Their Descendants, is particularly active in Częstochowa.

¹⁵ In fact, it was growing because, in 2020. The program was suspended due to the COVID epidemic. A special conference in this topic was to be held in June 2020. Unfortunately, due to the pandemic, it did not take place.

An extremely important of Alon Goldman's activity are his efforts to properly care for the Jewish Cemetery. Due to the, still unresolved question of the cemetery's ownership¹⁶ and despite the *ad hoc* actions of the municipal services (both in terms of periodic mowing and war memorial restoration, the cemetery¹⁷, generally remains neglected.

Alon Goldman's first challenge was to draw a plan of the cemetery, marking the positions of the *matzevot* and the burial places of specific people. Over the years, a similar task had been carried out by Wiesław Paszkowski.¹⁸ In 2012, the Częstochowa Museum published¹⁹ the first volume of an extensive inventory of the cemetery's graves, which was created by Wiesław Paszkowski. However, despite its accuracy, it did not cover all the graves and was not available online - something which Alon Goldman was striving for.

Between 2008 and 2016, high school students, from Jerusalem, worked on the cemetery as part of the "Gidonim" project.²⁰ Each year, these young people came to Częstochowa for a week and worked intensively at the cemetery. They were accompanied by Goldman, who was looking for sources of funding for this project. In 2018, Alon Goldman integrated the mapping data of historian Wiesław Paszkowski with the mapping which was created by the "Gidonim" project (<http://www.gidonim.com/>).

In 2019, a new website was created which gathered, into one place, databases relating to the map of the Cemetery. In addition, the "Gidonim" database was translated into English, so that information about the Częstochowa Jewish Cemetery was available, in two languages, to anyone interested around the world.²¹

¹⁶ Since the end of World War II, the Częstochowa Jewish *Gmina*, which officially no longer exists, was registered as the owner of the cemetery. Currently, the local *Gmina* in Katowice, which takes in the Częstochowa region, as well as the City of Częstochowa, did not want to take responsibility for the cemetery. For more, see: <https://www.czestochowajews.org/czestochowa-today/czestochowa-jewish-cemetery/jewish-cemetery--history/> (accessed: 2nd June 2020).

¹⁷ As part of the preparations for the Fourth Reunion of the World Society of Częstochowa Jews and Their Descendants, in October 2012, the Mayor of Częstochowa, Krzysztof Matyjaszczyk and the City of Częstochowa, restored the cemetery gate and the central monument. In 2016, the monuments on the mass graves of Jewish partisans and Jewish intellectuals, murdered by the Nazis, were restored. Earlier, the monument of the ŻOB fighters was also restored.

¹⁸ Honoured, among others, at the request of Alon Goldman, with a special distinction "Preserving Memory Award" in 2017, established in 1998 to honour non-Jewish Poles, who preserve, promote and care for Jewish heritage. The award was established by American lawyer Michael Traison. Over the years, over two hundred people have been honoured with this award for activities, ranging from cleaning Jewish cemeteries, running Jewish museums to carrying out school projects about Jewish history and remembrance of Jews. The award was also given to J. Mizgalski and A. Maciejowską. See: <http://jewish-heritage-europe.eu/2017/06/20/poland-preserving-memory-award-marks-20th-edition/%E2%80%9D> (accessed: 2nd June 2020).

¹⁹ A guide to the Częstochowa Jewish cemetery entitled *The Jewish Cemetery in Częstochowa*. The guide summarises the existing inventories: Polish – from the 1970s and 1980s, Benjamin Yaari's Israel groups from 1997 and the "Gidonim" projects – as well as the author's own work. There is also a map of the cemetery. The publication also contains information about the Jews who constituted the social and economic life of the city. There are biographical notes of well-known labourers, traders, weavers, shoemakers, merchants, jewellers, bakers, industrialists, social activists, tzaddikim and rabbis. The publication was sponsored by Z. Rolat.

²⁰ In the years 2008-2016, students from the Reut High School in Jerusalem conducted a mapping project, under the guidance of educator Dina Wiener, together with the Association of Częstochowa Jews in Israel. Their results have been published online: <http://www.gidonim.com/>. For more, see: <https://www.czestochowajews.org/czestochowa-today/czestochowa-jewish-cemetery/jewish-cemetery-history/> (Accessed: 2nd June 2020).

²¹ Anyone, who need help in locating the grave of their relatives, can contact Alon Goldman by email: czestochowajewsinisrael@gmail.com.

After completing inventory work in 2018, Alon Goldman took on another challenge – to clean up the cemetery. This would not be an easy task. For all the reasons mentioned earlier, neither the municipal services, nor the Katowice Jewish *Gmina*, nor the Foundation for the Restoration of the Częstochowa Jewish Cemetery (which was established during the Fourth Reunion) could cope with this endeavour. Alon Goldman, as usual, began with the logistics. The project began in June 2018.

Taking part in this project are the Matzevah Foundation, from the USA and led by Pastor Steven D. Reece, the Christian ADULLAM Foundation, from Częstochowa and led by Elżbieta Ferenc, students from various Częstochowa high schools and volunteers.²²



Alon Goldman and Pastor Steven D. Reece, 2019
Photograph: J. Sidorowicz in www.czystochowajews.org

At the end of the work in 2019, Alon Goldman said,

"I sincerely thank my dear friends from the Matzevah Foundation, Pastor Steven D. Reece and their Operations Manager in Poland, Przemek Panasiuk, without whom we could not have executed this and managed this project.

"I also thank our volunteers, Rachael Romero from Miami and Yolanda Czyżewska-Bragues from Hamilton in Ontario. I'm certain that, you also, will retain in your hearts these moment at the Częstochowa Jewish Cemetery.

²² For example, some Israeli high schools which visit Częstochowa, as part of their visit, go to the cemetery as volunteers, performing various cleaning work.

"I want to also thank the director of the Christian ADULLAM Foundation of Częstochowa, Elżbieta Ferenc, for her logistical support and assistance, Krzysztof Straus, who is always ready to help on any mission, Ryszard Welgryn and his children who, behind the scenes, calmly took care of us from the moment we arrived in Częstochowa, Izabela Sobańska-Klekowska, Chairwoman of the Częstochowa TSKŻ and city councillor Jolanta Urbańska, for her help and for the help of the volunteers²³ whom she organised. Finally, I would like to thank the Częstochowa City Council - especially Aleksander Wierny and Andrzej Szczerba.

"We leave with a great sense of satisfaction [...] However, the work is not yet finished and we will return next year".²⁴



Volunteers from the
Christian ADULLAM Foundation

Source:
www.czestochowajews.org

Unfortunately, in 2020, the Vice-president of the World Society of Częstochowa Jews and Their Descendants, Alon Goldman, announced that the cleaning of the Jewish cemetery, which was supposed to have taken place on 1st–5th June 2020, would have to be postponed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. For that same reason – the pandemic – the next Reunion of Częstochowa Jews, planned for 2020, would be cancelled.

At this point, let us return to the Fifth Reunion, which took place in 2016. It was then, at the initiative of the World Society of Częstochowa Jews and Their Descendants and the local residents of Częstochowa, with the great participation and support of the Mayor of Częstochowa, Krzysztof Matyjaszczyk that, in the Częstochowa Museum, the permanent exhibition, *The Jews of Częstochowa*, was officially opened.

The exhibition found its home in the beautifully restored building at ul. Katedralna 8, which was once within the heart of the Jewish district of the city. Due to the fact that this exhibition

²³ Among the volunteers were students from R. Traugutt II High School in Częstochowa, No.22 Elementary School in Częstochowa, W. Anders School in Częstochowa, the Elementary School in Kamieński Młyny, the Gastronomic School in Częstochowa. For more, see: <https://www.czestochowajews.org/cemetery-clean-up-underway/> (Accessed: 2nd June 2020).

²⁴ A. Goldman. Source: <https://www.czestochowajews.org/cemetery-clean-up-underway/> (Accessed: 2nd June 2020).

occupies an entire floor of the building, the exhibition is often referred to as [perhaps as an exaggeration] at the “Częstochowa Jewish Museum”.

The new version of the exhibition, which came to Częstochowa after having travelled around the world, was prepared by Professors Jerzy Mizgalski and Andrzej Desperak. The exhibition is a symbol of the strength of perseverance and resistance against all adversities of all the inhabitants of the city, regardless of nationality or religion. And, although part of it is devoted to the Holocaust, it is primarily intended to preserve the memory of the history of Polish Jews. It describes their lives, how happy or unhappy they were here, and how they built their everyday lives in Częstochowa.



The Official Opening of “The Jews of Częstochowa, 2016
Source: <http://zydzi.muzeumczestochowa.pl/multimedia/>

“The exhibition, ‘The Jews of Częstochowa’, in large part, presents segments, sent from Israel, the United States, Canada and Western Europe, of family ‘treasures’, often preserved at the risk of their lives – photographs of Jewish relatives, who were citizens of Częstochowa.

“Among the exhibits is the rich collection of photographs of the work of Prof. Perec Willenberg, which was donated by the professor’s son, Samuel Willenberg, a few months prior to his passing. The exhibition also features an original sculpture by Samuel Willenberg, from a series of works which evoke tragic scenes from the Treblinka death camp.

“Valuable exhibits are the copies of photographs of Częstochowa during the inter-War period, the German occupation and the first post-War years. They were donated by the daughter of well-known Jewish photographer Leib Kusznir.

“Staff of the Częstochowa State Archive have intensively searched the collected archival material concerning the Częstochowa Jewish community. As a result, the exhibition presents the then (partition period) legislative conditions under which the Jewish community in Częstochowa lived. Documents, posters and placards, from the inter-War and Nazi occupation, have been made available. They bring the visitor closer to the atmosphere of both multi-cultural Częstochowa and the days of Nazi occupation, full of its traumatic events.

“We also display material from the collection of the Częstochowa Museum and of antiquarian Zbigniew Biernacki.

“As emphasised by Zygmunt Rolat, during his visit to the exhibition, successive generations, born after the Holocaust, should not only learn about the Holocaust, but also about the lives of the many generations of Jews in Polish lands which, for centuries, were the place of Jewish traditions and the development of Jewish culture.”²⁵

Meanwhile, Zygmunt Rolat stated:

“The exhibition is one of the main legacies which we are able to leave to our future generations. It is almost a self-evident truth that, to understand who you really are, you need to understand where you come from. Through the exhibition, we commit ourselves to this truth, while preserving the history and memory of those who came before us and who can no longer tell their own story.”²⁶

This is perhaps best understood by TSKŻ activists who, for seventy years, have been guarding the memory of Częstochowa Jews. The last decade was also one of intensive work for the TSKŻ branch in Częstochowa. We have already mentioned the participation of its members in education projects carried out by Częstochowa schools. The TSKŻ was also actively involved in the organisation of subsequent Reunions of Częstochowa Jews. Its members regularly participated in commemorative ceremonies, reminding us of the history of Jewish community. They were also present during the cleaning activities of the cemetery.

The protest voice is also heard when there are acts of violation of Jewish dignity. It was no different when unknown perpetrators desecrated the cemetery gate with antisemitic graffiti²⁷ and, a few months later, they destroyed part of Rabbi Justman’s ohel.²⁸ These crimes reminded us of the need to restore the wall around the entire cemetery, but also of the presence of antisemitism.

²⁵ J. Mizgalski, source: <http://zydzi.muzeumczestochowa.pl/wystawa-zydzi-czestochowianie/> (accessed: 2nd June 2020).

²⁶ Z. Rolat, speech during the opening of the exhibition (audio recording, authors’ archive).

²⁷ December 2018.

²⁸ For more, see: <https://www.czestochowajews.org/vandalism-again-at-czestochowa-jewish-cemetery/> (accessed 2nd June 2020).

If the average Pole is asked whether he/she is antisemitic, like the vast majority, they will probably sincerely deny it.²⁹ For the average Jew, Poland is one of the most antisemitic countries in the world.³⁰ That, which Jews call “antisemitism”, Poles like to call hooligan excesses. Many Poles do not understand why the statement, “Jews talk too often about the Holocaust”, is a manifestation of antisemitism.

We like to talk about antisemitic incidents in other countries and about their relatively small number in Poland.³¹ We are surprised that we are perceived as a country of antisemites, since we had a Polish Pope³², who decisively fought against antisemitism, there are no crimes against Jews and no destruction of synagogues or physical violence against Jewish people. Antisemitism is a phenomenon that should be viewed also from an academic point of view and which should be fought against.³³

The authors, not having had the opportunity to resolve issues relating to history, stereotypes, attitudes and the mutual perception of all aspects relating to antisemitism by Poles and Jews, wish to share only a certain observation, being the result of research³⁴ into the attitudes, towards Jews, of the young generation of the Częstochowa residents. It is worth noting that, among Częstochowa youth, it is not difficult to hear a positive opinion about Jews. Even more

²⁹ A. Cała claims that antisemitism, without antisemites, consists of two elements. Firstly, antisemitism manifests itself at the level of social attitudes. Research indicates that a small number of people in Poland declare antisemitic views. Similarly, in Poland, “folk antisemitism”, to a small extent, contains a component of Christian anti-Judaism. A. Cała considers a person to be an antisemite as someone, who not only refrains from expressing negative judgments and prejudices, but also does not indicate any affirmative statements about Jews. That statement is the strongest argument justifying the thesis about antisemitism without antisemites. Secondly, manifestations of antisemitism occur in the sphere of public life. Here, A. Cała mentions antisemitic statements by politicians and the work of political groups in Poland which propagate antisemitic views. For more, see: A. Cała, *Autostereotyp i stereotypy narodowe*, [w:] I. Krzemiński (red.), *Czy Polacy są antysemitami?*, Warszawa 1996, pp. 226–228.

³⁰ The Jewish organisation, the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) published a report (dated 21st November 2019) on antisemitism in the world. It turned out that the ADL report indicates that the most antisemitic country in the world is ... Poland. For more, see: <https://wmeritum.pl/raport-adl-polska-najbardziej-antysemickim/299670> (accessed: 2nd June 2020).

³¹ Such data is published by the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights – this is the official report of the European Union on antisemitism – Poland is one of the last places where antisemitic incidences occur. In 2018, for example, according to the data, *“Germany recorded 1,504 such incidents, Great Britain - 1382 [...] and Poland - 73”*. The Fundamental Rights Agency is an EU agency established in 2007 and is based in Vienna. It advises EU institutions and national governments on issues relating to issues with respecting fundamental rights, such as discrimination, access to justice, racism and xenophobia, data protection, the rights of victims of crime and children’s right. For more, see: <https://www.tvp.info/39878103/raport-ue-w-polsce-spada-liczba-incydentow-antysemickich> (accessed: 2nd June 2020). Another report places us as one of the most antisemitic countries in Europe. For more, see: <https://oko.press/wielki--raport-unii-europejskiej-o-antysemityzmie-w-europie-zle-polsce-bardzo-zle/> (accessed: 2nd June 2020).

³² Chief Rabbi of Poland, Michael Schudrich, said recently about John Paul II: *“No one, in history, has done more to eliminate the scourge of antisemitism. No other pope had done more to heal the painful wounds, and no one in history has done more to eliminate the scourge of antisemitism.”* For more, see: <https://ekai.pl/naczelnym-rabin-rp-niech-pamiec-o-janie-pawle-ii-bedzie-dla-swiat-natchnieniem/> (accessed 2nd June 2020).

³³ The head of the Anti-Defamation League (ADL), Jonathan Greenblatt, compared antisemitism to a “virus”, for which there is no cure. He noted that the 2020 coronavirus pandemic contributed to the increased popularity of antisemitism conspiracy theories. *“Antisemitism is sometimes referred to as the oldest type of hatred. It never seems to go away. There is really no antidote or cure for it”* – said the head of the organisation to the Associated Press agency. For more, see: <https://wiadomosci.dziennik.pl/swiat/artykuly/7699883,incydenty-antysemityzm-usa-raport.html> (accessed: 2nd June 2020).

³⁴ Research was carried out in 2012, 2017 and 2019. Some of the results have been published. For more, see: C.K. Szymański, *Postrzeganie Żydów przez młodych Polaków na przykładzie częstochowskiej młodzieży maturalnej*, [in:] J. Mizgalski (ed.), M. Soja (ed.), *Tożsamość a...*, op. cit., pp. 223–251.

interesting is that, among respondents in 2012³⁵, 2017 and 2019, there was a clear tendency to have a better opinion about Jews following personal contact.

Only 3% of respondents, who declared in one of the questions that they derived their knowledge about Jews from their own experience, did not wish to have any more contact with Jews or did not want Jews to visit Poland! In Częstochowa, as we wrote earlier, people focus on personal contacts and youth exchanges. Częstochowa is known for this³⁶ and is even held up as a model for good, or even excellent, Polish-Jewish relations.³⁷

Nevertheless, there are instances such as those described above. The authors consider that nothing is given to us once and for all. Therefore, sensitivity to manifestations of antisemitism is not just a matter of goodwill but, above all, it is a duty. It was a lack of sensitivity to antisemitism that led to the greatest genocide in the history of mankind. So, while one can disagree with Jews, you cannot be insensitive to manifestations of antisemitism. The same applies to manifestations of racism or intolerance in general. Certainly, the fight against intolerance and antisemitism is well-served by people getting to know each other.

Such endeavours are made in Częstochowa with great success. The activists of the Częstochowa TSKŻ comprise a group, which is especially interested in making this process as broad as possible. Today, the Częstochowa branch of the TSKŻ brings together twenty-seven people and is one of the sixteen branches of the Social-Cultural Association of Jews in Poland, with its headquarters based in Warsaw. A total of 1,038 are [currently] members of all branches.³⁸ The officials of the local branch in Częstochowa are:

- Chairwoman: Izabela Sobańska-Klekowska,
- Vice-Chairman: Ryszard Welgryn³⁹
- Committee member: Dr Anna Goldman.

In 2019, the Association found a new home – in the same tenement, at ul. Katedralna, which houses the exhibition *The Jews of Częstochowa*. The principal task for the members is to continue working on preserving the memory of the life, history and culture of Częstochowa Jews.

The everyday life of the organisation is the joint celebrations of holidays, joint *Shabbat* events and staging Jewish-themed exhibitions during the *Nights of Culture* and the *Nights of Museums*. Working together with local organisations, especially with the Partnership for the Local Community – “The Old City – a New Life”, members of the Association take part in the

³⁵ In 2012, 2,646 matriculation students responded to a questionnaire. In 2017 and 2019, questionnaire surveys were also carried out, but using much smaller samples – 320 and 249 respectively (matriculation students).

³⁶ This is confirmed by the Israeli Ambassador Anna Azari, in her letter addressed to the organisers of the numerus conference, devoted to Jewish issues, held in Częstochowa: “*Today, Częstochowa is one of the most famous Polish cities in Israel. Israeli youth, coming to Poland, often visit your beautiful city. They visit monuments, apart from the sanctuary of Jasna Góra. These monuments are also significant and important for the history of Polish Jews. For many centuries, Częstochowa was an important centre of the Jewish religion, Jewish tradition and political thought [...]*”. For more, see: http://www.muzeumczestochowa.pl/wpcontent/uploads/2016/10/LIST_OD_AMBASADOR_IZRABELA_W_POLSCE_PANI_ANNY_AZARI.pdf (accessed: 2nd June 2020).

³⁷ This is very often done publicly by, for example, Szewach Weiss. Rabbi Michael Schudrich talks about this also.

³⁸ Based on data presented by chairwoman of the TSKŻ Częstochowa, Izabela Sobańska-Klekowska. Authors’ archive copy.

³⁹ Ryszard Welgryn died on 7th November 2020.

organisation of artistic workshops and theatre classes for children, which take place in the backyards of the Old City.



The 76th anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising is commemorated by the City of Częstochowa and the Częstochowa TSKŻ, 2019.

Photograph: J. Sidorowicz. Source: <http://www.czestochowajews.org>

Częstochowa Jews attach great importance to the commemoration of local events, such as the anniversary of the liquidation of the Częstochowa Ghetto (22nd September). With equal seriousness and esteem, they also commemorate the anniversaries of the outbreak of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising and Holocaust Remembrance Days. The Częstochowa TSKŻ also remember the anniversaries of the events of March '68. Meetings and other events, organised by the Association, are attended by teachers and students of Częstochowa schools, as well as by representatives of the local government⁴⁰. The activity of the TSKŻ does not go unnoticed. On 10th November 2018, the City of Częstochowa honoured the Częstochowa branch of the TSKŻ with the “Those Who Serve the City” award.

⁴⁰ One of the latest examples of how seriously the local authorities look upon Częstochowa Jewish community issues is the appointment of a special advisor, to the Mayor, on such issues. In accordance with an ordinance, issued by the Mayor of Częstochowa, dated 23rd July 2020, Jolanta Urbańska consults and analyses activities aimed at developing cooperation between the municipality and the Jewish community. This consists of preparing guidelines and coordinating activities carried out by the municipality in the area of protecting the cultural heritage of the Jewish community, inspiring projects aimed at strengthening contact between the local Jewish community and residents of the city, supporting all initiatives undertaken by the local and international Jewish community which are intended at cultivating the traditions and preserving the memory of Częstochowa Jews, and motivating young people to undertake activities which can build lasting relationships with the Jewish community. The Częstochowa City Council decided to name the memorial site, on ul. Kawia, after Samuel Willenberg.



The City of Częstochowa honours the Częstochowa branch of the TSKŻ, with the “Those Who Serve the City” award. The award and certificate were presented by the Mayor of Częstochowa, Krzysztof Matyjaszczyk, during the celebration held at the Częstochowa Philharmonic on 10th November 2018.

Photograph: archive of the Czeŝtochowa TSKŻ

In its current activities, the Częstochowa TSKŻ endeavours to open up to the local community. This is done, not only by Association members or representatives taking part in various events as speakers, but also by inviting Częstochowa residents to participate in events organised by the TSKŻ.

Częstochowa TSKŻ activists ensure that young people, from schools in Częstochowa, take part in its celebrations and meetings.⁴¹

Exhibitions and presentations, organised by the TSKŻ, are open to the public.⁴² The activity of the Association has definitely increased since its move to ul. Katedralna 8. The new premises has created new opportunities. Exhibitions could be organised, larger groups of visitors could be invited than before and Jewish holidays could be celebrated. This was the case, for example, when *Channukah* was celebrated on 15th December 2019.

*“Invited guests included representatives of the city authorities, communal organisations befriended by the TSKŻ, young people who could learn about the tradition and history of the holiday and children who could take part in a drawing competition. There was also no difficulty in arranging for a small treat consisting of ‘pączki, [donuts] and pancakes. Earlier, there was an emotional concert entitled ‘Jewish Themes in the Music of the World’. The soloist was Dawid Wójcik (aka Davidek), Director of the Teatr Otwarty [Open Theatre] in Gdańsk. A collective photograph was taken at the conclusion”.*⁴³

⁴¹ For example, at a meeting, organised in 2019 marking the anniversary of the events of March '68, young people of the No. 7 M. Kopernik High School, presented a prose and music montage. Prof. Mizgalski recalled the emigrations of his Jewish colleagues and talked about the prevailing social moods of that time. In addition, Deputy Mayor of the city, Ryszard Stefaniak, an historian by education, explained the political conditions which influenced what was happening in Poland in 1968. Over coffee and cake, all guests and participants continued discussing this political event, as well as the fate of individuals who had to leave Poland, often friends of the TSKŻ.

⁴² Recent exhibitions, which could be seen by everyone in Częstochowa: *The Jewish Cemetery in Photographs, Hassidim – Second edition, Project Tuwim, Jews in the Polish Army.*

⁴³ TSKŻ activities information based on report by Chairwoman of Częstochowa TSKŻ (copy in authors' archive).



Częstochowa TSKŻ celebrates the beginning of Hannukah 5780, 2019Philharmonic on 10th November 2018.

Photograph: archive of the Czeszochowa TSKŻ

The already-mentioned meetings with Jews from abroad were always a great experience for the Częstochowa Jewish community. It was no different when, first in 2018 and then in 2019, large groups of Israeli tour operators visited our city. They were accompanied by representatives of the World Society of Częstochowa Jews and Their Descendants - Zygmunt Rolat, Alan Silberstein and Alon Goldman. It was an opportunity for meetings, mutual conversations and the sharing of knowledge about Częstochowa and its history. This was to encourage the guides to bring groups of young Israelis here. This seems to have been successful, as such groups have already been to Częstochowa.

An important initiative, in which TSKŻ members took part, was the ceremony of installing a plaque, commemorating the tragedy of the workers in the HASAG-Warta slave labour camp in Częstochowa. This event took place in September 2019. It was also attended by participants in "Shabbaton"⁴⁴, which was organised in Piotrków Trybunalski. Some of them had Częstochowa roots. Others were descendants of HASAG-Warta prisoners, who came from Piotrków.

Amongst those gathered were also two survivors⁴⁵. Wojciech Kaczmarek, president of the Polaris real estate company, which developed the site, willingly agreed to the installation of the plaque, commemorating the victims of Nazi persecution, who had died in that place. Ryszard Welgryn, Vice-Chairman of the Częstochowa TSKŻ, arranged for the design of the plaque, which was officially unveiled in the presence of Alan Silberstein (one of the initiators of the idea), Chief Rabbi of Poland Michael Schudrich and Deputy Mayor of Częstochowa Andrzej Szewiński.

The brass plaque depicts three *matzevot*, with the inscription in three languages – Polish, Hebrew and English:

⁴⁴ "Shabbaton", in Piotrków Trybunalski, is a cyclical event which takes place as part of meetings of many cultures. The seventh "Shabbaton" took place during the 11th-15th September 2019. One of the event's highlights was the commemoration of the establishment, in Piotrków, of the first ghetto in German-occupied Europe.

⁴⁵ They were Robert Dessau, from the United States, and Sir Ben Helfgott, Great Britain.



T

he unveiling of the plaque
commemorating the Jews who suffered and died
in the HASAG-Warta German slave labour camp,
September 2019.

Photograph: J. Sidorowicz

Source: Częstochowa Jews website



"In memory of the Jews who suffered and died in the German forced labour camp at the HASAG-Warta ammunition factory, which was here in 1943–1945. At the bottom, in Yiddish, is a traditional memorial: 'Koved zeier ondenk' ('May their memory be honoured')."

Beneath the *matzevot* is the Wailing Wall of Jerusalem. Above them is a seven-branched menorah, the oldest symbol of the Jewish nation.⁴⁶ The event was widely reported in the local media, as are all the already-mentioned celebrations, meetings, Reunions and other initiatives. It can be said that every activity of Częstochowa Jews is well-received by journalists, who comment upon them and describe them extensively.

⁴⁶ A few years earlier, at the initiative of Zygmunt Rolat, a similar plaque was installed at the site of HASAG-Pelcery.

The world community of Częstochowa Jews is always informed about all the initiatives, holidays, commemorations and problems through the website of the World Society of Częstochowa Jews and Their Descendants, <https://www.czystochowajews.org/>⁴⁷, which was created, and is managed, by Andrew Rajcher a second-generation Częstochowa Jew, residing in Melbourne, Australia.

The local media accepts, with kindness and recognition, not only the activities of the TSKŻ, but also the enthusiastic initiatives of members of the World Society of Częstochowa Jews and Their Descendants. Thanks to the media, people such as Zygmunt Rolat or Alon Goldman are widely known in Częstochowa, as are their activities and achievements.

Unfortunately, 2020 was not a good year - for anyone - including the members of the Częstochowa TSKŻ. The COVID-19 pandemic deprived this community of the possibility of meetings with members of any Częstochowa *landsmannschaften*. A Reunion, scheduled for the autumn of 2020, was cancelled, as was the cemetery cleaning operation which is organised by Alon Goldman. Despite the coronavirus, an exhibition was presented to the residents of Częstochowa. It was entitled *An Image of Treblinka in the Eyes of Samuel Willenberg*.⁴⁸

When the pandemic finally ends and when meetings can happen, will it be possible for you to come to Częstochowa, to your “home”?

⁴⁷ Translator's note: The website was created, by Andrew Rajcher, following the World Society's First Reunion in 2004. Since that date, it has grown significantly. It now contains an extraordinary amount of historical information regarding the history of the Jewish community of Częstochowa. It also contains full and accurate English-language translations of all the Yizkor [memorial] Books relating to Częstochowa, Krzepice and Żarki. Since that time, Andrew Rajcher has continued to serve as its Webmaster.

⁴⁸ Treblinka became a mass grave of circa one million Jews, among them Jews from Częstochowa. Statistically, the life of a Treblinka prisoner lasted only a few hours. Robbed of everything which they had with them, the prisoners were immediately sent to their death. By their thousands, Jews and Roma were sent to the gas chambers. As a result of the rebellion, one of the few, who managed to escape from this hell on earth, was Samuel Willenberg. He personally experienced the fear, humiliation, violence and camp cruelty. His poignant sculptures, of an artist born in Częstochowa, bear witness to those times. The exhibition, marking the 100th anniversary of the Regaining of Independence, was prepared by the Institute of National Remembrance in Warsaw and was under the patronage of the President of Poland, Andrzej Duda. It was on display to Częstochowa residents for one month (from 18th September to 14th October 2020), in the Fine Arts Gallery of the Częstochowa Museum, at al. NMP 47.