



# Case study: lost identity and the New Synagogue in Częstochowa

## Architecture of the houses of prayer as contemporary places of non-memory in culturally homogeneous cities

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### Introduction

Sharon Macdonald – one of the most important researchers of memory – describes modern Europe as “Memoryland”: a space that obsessively focuses on forms of commemoration such as monuments, museums and traditions<sup>1</sup>. In opposition to this tendency, many heritage sites in Poland, especially Jewish ones, remain in the position of non-memory locations. This means that these are spaces that should become an important point on the historical map of cities, as these places have a supra-individual meaning. However, they “constitute socially significant gaps”<sup>2</sup> in collective memory, a “blank spot”<sup>3</sup> that does not function in the social discourse. The title New Synagogue in Częstochowa is also such a place, because it is not completely “erased” from the history of the city. We are able to find basic information about the building in several books, on the Internet, and the photos have been preserved on old postcards. Nevertheless, it functions as a secret form of memorial scarcity. It is invisible, unremembered, and available: as “being-non-being”<sup>4</sup>.

In this article, I will present the issues of the New Synagogue in Częstochowa as a place of non-memory and the lost multicultural identity in a city that became homogeneous after World War II: both in the denominational and cultural dimension. In the first part of the essay, I will describe the forgotten history and architecture of the synagogue. This building – although it used to be one of the most representative and monumental buildings in the city – has not yet been

1. A photograph of the New Synagogue in Częstochowa, [in:] Z. Biernacki, *Ziemia częstochowska na dawnej pocztówce = The Częstochowa Land's Old Postcards*, Opole 2007



<sup>1</sup> Sh. Macdonald, *Europe as a Memoryland*, “Herito” 2013, No. 4, p. 31.

<sup>2</sup> P. Kwiatkowski, *Spółeczne tworzenie niepamięci*, [in:] *Etniczność, pamięć, asymilacja. Wokół problemów zachowania tożsamości mniejszości narodowych i etnicznych w Polsce*, Ed. L. M. Nijakowski, Warszawa 2009, p. 91.

<sup>3</sup> P. Nora, *Comment écrire l'histoire de France*, [in:] *Les Lieux de mémoire*, Ed. *idem*, Paris 1994, p. 2226.

<sup>4</sup> R. Sendyka, *Niepamięć albo o sytuowaniu wiedzy o formach pamiętania*, “Teksty Drugie” 2016, No. 6, p. 255.





<sup>5</sup> See **A. Erll**, *Kultura pamięci. Wprowadzenie*, Transl. A. Teperek, Warszawa 2018.

<sup>6</sup> **I. Hodder**, *Entangled: an Archaeology of the Relationships between Humans and Things*, Malden 2013, p. 89.

<sup>7</sup> Many publications have been devoted to the subject of the Jewish community in Częstochowa (including: *Życie codzienne w Częstochowie w XIX i XX w.*, Sc. Ed. **R. Szwed**, **W. Palus**, Częstochowa 1999; *Żydzi Częstochowianie. Współistnienie, Holocaust, pamięć = The Jews of Częstochowa. Coexistence, Holocaust, Memory*, Ed. **J. Mizgalski**, Częstochowa 2004; *idem*, *Tożsamość polityczna polskich Żydów w XIX i XX w. na przykładzie Częstochowy*, Częstochowa 2008; *Żydzi częstochowscy. Słownik biograficzny*, Ed. **J. Sętowski**, Częstochowa 2020). Despite this, there has been no research on the fate of the New Synagogue in Częstochowa so far. Its existence was mentioned by "name" along with the date of its creation in the books: **E. Bergman**, **J. Jagielski**, *Zachowane synagogi i domy modlitwy w Polsce. Katalog*, Warszawa 1996; **C. H. Krinsky**, *Synagogues of Europe: Architecture, History, Meaning*, New York 1996; **M. K. Piechotek**, *Bramy Nieba. Bóżnice murowane na ziemiach dawnej Rzeczypospolitej*, Warszawa 1999. However, no description or analysis of the object was made in any of the publications. The only article fully devoted to the synagogue is the text of the local historian **W. Paszkowski**: *Niezrealizowany projekt Nowej Synagogi w Częstochowie*, "Rocznik Muzeum Częstochowskiego" Vol. 15 (2015). However, it is a study dealing with the issue of the Moorish and unrealized version of the project, and the whole paper is only six pages long. My research is the first one that concerns the entire history and architecture of the synagogue, especially the completed, classicist project. Based on them, this article was written, and a book will be published soon.

explored, and its commemoration includes only a small plaque and mentions of the name of the synagogue in several books. The research on this building – in the field of art history and memory studies – that I have been conducting for six years, as well as sociological research intuitions and observation of the local community have become a source of research questions that prompted me to take up this topic. The modern city and its dimensionality forces researchers, readers and residents to follow an interdisciplinary analytical perspective, which I hope to present in the article.

I use the knowledge gained in the framework of: an archival query conducted by me mainly in archives in Łódź, Częstochowa and Warsaw, informal interviews (conducted in person, by phone and by e-mail) with descendants of Częstochowa Jews (conducted in 2021 and 2022) and a survey I conducted in 2016 on 496 inhabitants of Częstochowa (results published as part of the social project "GETTO. Częstochowskie dziedzictwo"). Due to the length of the article and the fact that a detailed description of the research methodology will be published in the book I am writing, I do not cite detailed research here, but it is the empirical basis of the analysis. This article takes the form of a contributory opening of the discussion in an extremely wide research area.

As a result, later in this article I will analyze the "position" of heritage and its relationship to identity. This perspective of analysis is an attempt to depart from the methodology most widespread in the history of art, like iconography, iconology, or analysis within the framework of semiotic theory. In my research and in this article, I try to combine the methods of anthropology, memory studies<sup>5</sup> and sociology of the city: paying attention not only to buildings, but also its impact on the life of the community and wider urban contexts.

Starting from the beginning: the synagogue in Częstochowa was built in 1899–1909, as a result of numerous and complex events. The building is "entangled"<sup>6</sup> in the broad context of social, industrial and religious changes, which resulted in the construction of one of the most interesting synagogues in Poland. The architecture and history of this structure remains an unexplored area so far<sup>7</sup>. The research problem that the New Synagogue in Częstochowa has become, not only challenges me to analyze the spatial arrangement and social contexts of the construction, but also the issue of memory and its perception by the modern inhabitants of the city.

The article is an attempt to answer key research questions, including: Is the New Synagogue in Częstochowa a place of non-memory? What are the reasons for the positioning of the New Synagogue as a place of non-memory? What influence does the material heritage of Częstochowa Jews have on the construction of the post-war identity of Częstochowa residents?

## Case report: The New Synagogue in Częstochowa

The 19th c. is a time of significant cultural changes. The total number of Częstochowa inhabitants increased, including Jews (1/3 of the population in 1914)<sup>8</sup>. The immediate cause of the lively construction activity was the development of industry in the city and in the region, and the launch – in 1846 – of the Warsaw–Vienna railway, which connected Częstochowa with the most important industrial centers in the country and opened the way to trade with Russia. The hitherto merchant and artisanal Częstochowa was transformed into a modern city, in which, from the 1880s, numerous factories were built. As a result, Częstochowa became the fourth – after Warsaw, Łódź and Lublin – the largest city in the Russian partition<sup>9</sup>.

In Jewish architecture, the development of construction was influenced by the creation of an independent Jewish community (in 1798<sup>10</sup>). With time, local entrepreneurs became its members. Thanks to this, the commune had representatives who could be founders of new buildings for the constantly growing community. However, they were assimilated and did not strive to emphasize the separateness of the community, which was not always consistent with the beliefs of all members.

This led to the modernization of a part of the Jewish community, which resulted in the construction of the unpreserved building of the New Synagogue in Częstochowa. The development began in the second half of the 19th century<sup>11</sup>. There was a dispute between the promoters of change, maskilim, and Hasidim and individuals who do not support the Haskalah; a reform movement based on the principles of the development of education, education and enlightenment modeled on the German Jews<sup>12</sup>. Such a significant quarrel in the community led to efforts to build a synagogue in which newer liturgical practices and space organization were allowed. Among them, there are changes in the way of calling the faithful to bimah; using brass plaques, translating Chumesh into German, or changing the burial place from the old cemetery in Kucelin (settlement in Częstochowa) to the new one<sup>13</sup>.

The history of the New Synagogue can be divided into three key stages: two projects and the implementation. The first design, in the Moorish style, was completely different from the one that came into being. The application for the possibility of implementing the project was submitted in July 1887 – on the initiative of Markus Gradsztajn, Markus Majer Hening, Leopold Aluezer Kohn and Herman Hierszlik Wiernik – at the Construction Department of the Piotrków Governorate in Piotrków (Poland)<sup>14</sup>. The first synagogue project was carried out around 1896 by Stefan Lemene<sup>15</sup>.

A New Synagogue was to be built on a square that was privately owned by investors. The plot was located in the center of the city, so



<sup>8</sup> See Z. Rozanow, E. Smulikowska, *Stare i Nowe Miasto, Częstochówka i przedmieścia*, Warszawa 1995, p. XV.

<sup>9</sup> See *ibidem*, p. XVI.

<sup>10</sup> See J. Mizgalski, J. Spyra, *Wprowadzenie*, [in:] *Dzieje ludności żydowskiej w regionie częstochowskim w XIX i pierwszej połowie XX w.*, Ed. *idem*, Częstochowa 2017, p. 7.

<sup>11</sup> See K. Matyjaszek, *Produkcja przestrzeni żydowskiej w dawnej i współczesnej Polsce*, Kraków 2019, p. 128.

<sup>12</sup> See M. i K. Piechotka, *op. cit.*, Warszawa 1999, p. 424.

<sup>13</sup> See W. Paszkowski, *op. cit.*, p. 128.

<sup>14</sup> See National Archive in Łódź, fonds: Rząd Gubernialny Piotrkowski, sig. 7570.

<sup>15</sup> See *ibidem*, sig. 6774.



<sup>16</sup> See National Archive in Częstochowa, fonds: 8/1, Akta miasta Częstochowy z lat 1759–1948, sig. 8885.

<sup>17</sup> See *ibidem*, fonds: 8/60, Starostwo Powiatowe Częstochowskie z lat 191[7]–1939, sig. 366, 20.

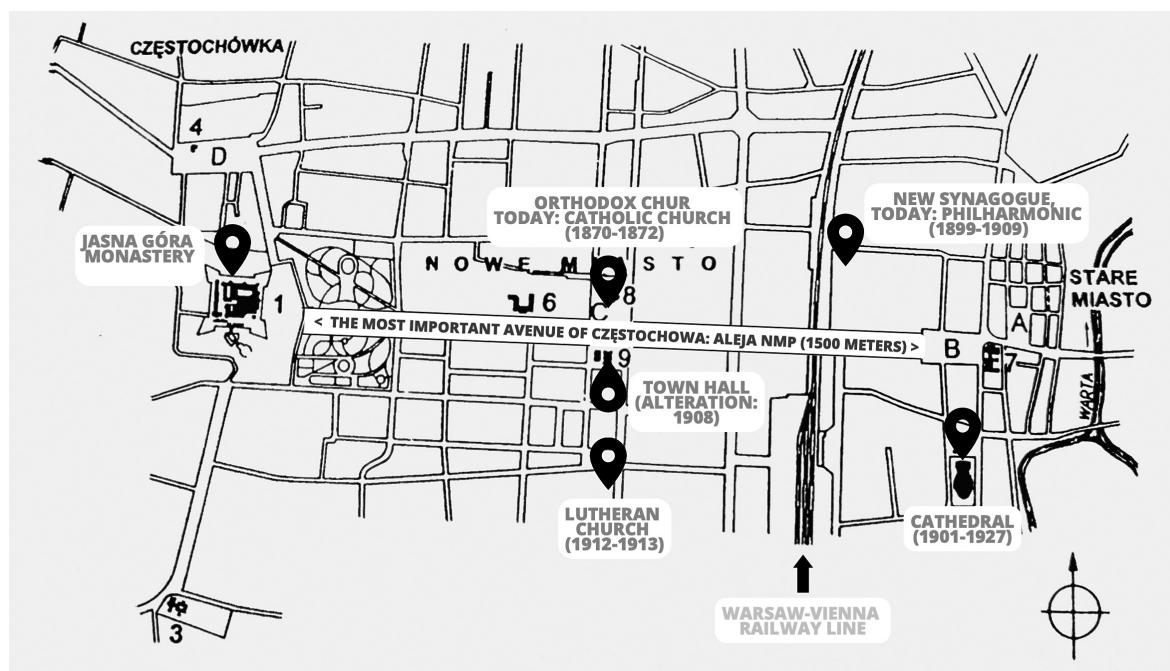
<sup>18</sup> Street (avenue) in Częstochowa, which is the main, representative communication artery of the city center. It was established at the beginning of the 19th c. as a road connecting Częstochowa and Nowa Częstochowa. The avenue ends at the Jasna Góra monastery.

<sup>19</sup> The Shrine of Our Lady of Częstochowa (Jasna Góra) is the most important building in Częstochowa. The church and the Pauline Order's Monastery are situated on a hill at the end of the main axis of the city: Najświętsza Maria Panna Avenue. The Sanctuary Tower remained the tallest building in the city for many years. To this day, the sanctuary is visible on many access roads to the city and "dominates" the city center.

the location was very attractive; just like the monumental building in the form of a three-nave, two-story synagogue with galleries, designed on a rectangular plan, with a separate western part. However, for unknown reasons, the location (still in the city center) and the entire style were completely changed.

The now defunct New Synagogue in Częstochowa was finally built according to the second project, and in 1899 or 1900–1909<sup>16</sup> in the classicist style [Fig. 1]. It was carried out according to – today unknown – a project different from the first idea for a synagogue by an architect associated with Łódź Gustaw Landau-Gutenteger<sup>17</sup>. Only schematic layouts of the plot where the synagogue was located have survived, as well as archival photographs. For several years I have been working on the reconstruction of the synagogue plan. Thanks to research, it was possible to establish such facts as: the house of prayer was oriented, about 60 meters long, made of stone and brick, mostly in lime mortar, plastered and with a basement, was built on a rectangular plan, with a form similar to the transept in the east and with a separate western part in the form of a vestibule resembling a west-work. Divided into three aisles. The architect left a facade wider than the body of the building, with the form of an avant-corps (columnar portico) on the axis. Above the propylaeum, the avant-corps turned into a tower with an original, square roof resembling a dome.

Most importantly, it was also one of the tallest buildings in the city, about 150 m from the main communication artery – Najświętsza Maria Panna Avenue<sup>18</sup>. The building was visible both from the Avenue but also from the town hall tower, or for passengers seated in trains passing right next to the synagogue: especially since from this point the trains slow down as they approach the main station. It can be indicated that the Warsaw–Vienna railway was then considered a certain “pride” of the city. This means that the New Synagogue in Częstochowa was built in one of the most important points: being perfectly visible to people walking along the most important street of the city. Moreover, the orientation of all these buildings around the main axis of the city indicates unusual competition, but also accepted pluralism. The local authorities did not forbid the construction of churches of individual denominations in the center of Częstochowa. However, the believers themselves (Catholics, Lutherans, Jews, Orthodox) strove for their buildings to be the most monumental, original and visible. Moreover, temples of all four denominations were built at a similar time: at the turn of the 19th and 20th c. [Fig. 2]. As a result, the New Synagogue “competed spatially” with the most important buildings in the city: the Jasna Góra church<sup>19</sup>, the town hall, the Orthodox church on the market square (opposite the town hall [Fig. 2]), the Lutheran church and a slightly distant (450 m from the beginning of NMP Avenue, 950 m from the synagogue, 1.5 km from the town hall), but monumental, neo-gothic cathedral.



2. Map of the center of Częstochowa with the location of Jasna Góra, the New Synagogue, Lutheran Church, Cathedral and the Church of St. Cyril and Methodius. Own study

Interestingly, the construction of the synagogue ended in a year when one of the most important events of the Częstochowa industry took place: the Industrial and Agricultural Exhibition (in Polish: Wystawa Przemysłowo-Rolnicza). This event, which was visited by over 600 thousand people<sup>20</sup> – which does matter as most of the guests traveled into the city by train – possibly watching the building from their windows. This event is considered to be the largest presentation of the achievements of the economy before the World War I. This could have been an additional incentive to complete construction this year. This can only be treated as a guess, but it is certain that the visitors to the Exhibition must have seen the building of the synagogue many times, dominating the railway embankment and other buildings in the area.

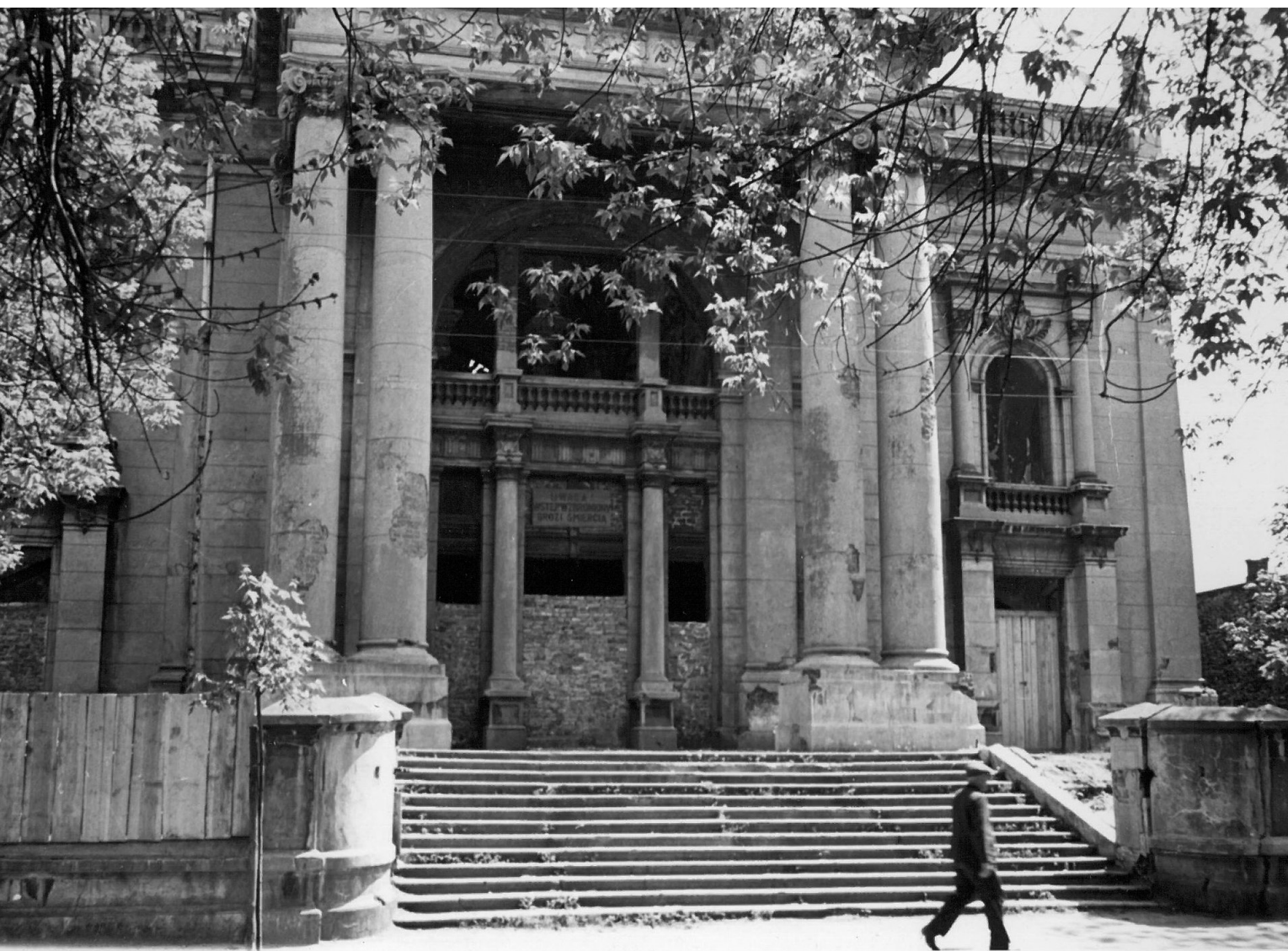
The history of the New Synagogue – despite numerous changes to the project – was not long. It was looted and burned down by the Germans on Christmas Day 1939<sup>21</sup>, and its walls remained unattended until the mid-1950s. In the archival photographs, we can see that the walls of the building did not collapse during the fire. The exterior decorations of the I have also been preserved, such as: crowning balustrades, pilasters, columns and the entire portico with the inscription under the tympanum in Hebrew [Fig. 3].

In the 1960s, the Częstochowa Philharmonic was built on the site of the synagogue. Today, little remains of the temple. However, the contemporary building has no connection with the New Synagogue.

<sup>20</sup> See M. Pomada, C. Miłoś, *Wybrane obiekty industrialne Częstochowy na tle historycznego rozwoju budownictwa przemysłowego*, [in:] *Budownictwo i architektura Częstochowy w wybranych problemach badawczych pracowników naukowych Wydziału Budownictwa Politechniki Częstochowskiej*, Ed. A. Repelewicz, Częstochowa 2016, p. 37.

<sup>21</sup> See W. Paszkowski, *op. cit.*, p. 131.





3. The I of the synagogue with a bricked-up entrance and an inscription in Polish, "Attention! No trespassing. Threats of death", after World War II, before December 1957. Photo: Archives of the Częstochowa Philharmonic (not published so far)

The photos show that the I – at least in part – and side walls were incorporated into the newly constructed building. On the basis of the plan from 1958 and the spatial development from July 2007, it can be stated that the body of the New Synagogue was built up with the walls of the emerging Philharmonic, which seems to be noticeable in the general plan of the newly erected building. In a descriptive way, it can be said that a “sarcophagus” of the concert hall under construction has been placed on the preserved walls of the synagogue.

Today there is a commemorative plaque next to the Philharmonic, and at the exhibition “Częstochowa Jews” at the Częstochowa Museum, we can find its model. However, there are no full studies of the topic or exhibitions where you could see materials from the State Archives. Few Częstochowa residents remember that one of the most interesting synagogues in Poland once stood on the site of the Philharmonic. This was confirmed by a survey I conducted in 2016 – which I mentioned at the beginning of the article. When asked “Do you know where the so-called The New Synagogue and what building stands in its place?”. 227 out of 496 respondents (46%) answered “no”<sup>22</sup>. It seems that this is a very high percentage, considering that some of the participants of the study were observers of the “GETTO. Częstochowskie dziedzictwo” website, where the research was promoted, and earlier there was an educational campaign on Jewish architecture in the city. It should be noted that the building is located in the city center – a place where the inhabitants of Częstochowa often come (due to the location of most public and cultural buildings: banks, restaurants, cinemas, libraries, offices, etc.) and theoretically: there is a plaque next to the Philharmonic informative.



<sup>22</sup> The results were published on the fan-page *GETTO. Częstochowskie dziedzictwo* in 2016: <https://www.facebook.com/getto.czystochowskiedziedzictwo/photos/811144369020319> (access date: 27.06.2022).

<sup>23</sup> See **P. Możdżyński**, *Tożsamościowe troski: (mikro)historie odnalezione i wyobrażone*, [in:] *Obecność, brak, ślady. Doświadczenie żydowskie po 1989 roku = Presence, Absence, Traces* [exhibition cat.], July 2016 – March 2017, Museum of the History of Polish Jews “Polin” in Warsaw, Ed. **E. Chomicka, A. Dwernicka**, Warszawa 2017, pp. 101–102.

<sup>24</sup> **Ch. Taylor**, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity*, Cambridge 1989.

<sup>25</sup> **C. B. Macpherson**, *The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism*, Oxford 1962.

### **“Places of non-memory” on the example of the New Synagogue in Częstochowa as a dimension of the lost identity of Poles**

Observing the practices of remembering and the theoretical classification of the place of non-memory, it can be indicated that the methods of commemoration are the result of various concepts of collective and personal identity<sup>23</sup>. In this work I would like to put forward the thesis that the social interpretation and perception of the New Synagogue in Częstochowa – like many objects belonging to the Jewish heritage – is permanently connected with the identity of the inhabitants of Częstochowa, sense of place and looking at it in a broader context: Poles as a community.

The belief that there is a relationship between material objects (such as buildings) and identity has been known in science for years. At this point, I can mention the names of 20th c. researchers such as Charles Taylor<sup>24</sup> or Crawford Brough Macpherson, who use the concept of possessions individualism, according to which identity is produced and manifested in material objects<sup>25</sup>.





<sup>26</sup> Sh. Macdonald, *op. cit.*, p. 33.

<sup>27</sup> Each regime of power limits the discourses of memory, as described in more detail by M. Foucault (in the book *L'Archéologie du savoir*, Paris 1969). Nevertheless, in this article I focus on the case study of Częstochowa in specific Polish conditions.

<sup>28</sup> Central Archives of Modern Records in Warsaw, fonds: Ministerstwa Administracji Publicznej, nr 199, sig. 943.

Nowadays, the debate on the political, social and moral function of museums, institutions and monuments in the process of remembering plays an important role. It should be noted, however, that in the context of the analysis of non-memory sites, identity and sense of place are still treated as less important than historical circumstances or events. However, I think that it is precisely it that significantly influences the nature and scope of (dis)commemoration, and history and the way of remembering it is one of its sources.

As a result of these assumptions, objects such as the New Synagogue can confirm the thesis of Sharon Macdonald about the lack of uniformity and omnipresence of patterns of remembering despite their undeniable existence in Europe<sup>26</sup>. It is important because in Poland there are attempts to commemorate, but strategies have changed over the years, and many topics – especially related to the Holocaust – are difficult to discuss due to political reasons and traumas in individual communities.

Poland seems to be special in this context for two reasons. For years, it was a country with a real socialist regime that restricted and censored some remembrance efforts. Moreover, in Poland there was a shortage of funds for the reconstruction of buildings, especially such as “nobody’s” synagogues<sup>27</sup>. It is related to the law on “abandoned property”, because in Częstochowa building was handed over to the Symphony Orchestra – as confirmed by the documents from the Central Archives of Modern Records in Warsaw<sup>28</sup> – without any remuneration for the Jewish community, or meeting their demand for the possibility of building a small museum in this area.

Looking at the broader context of the country’s politics in general: one of the basic processes of Sovietization was an attempt to destroy the collective memory in terms of knowledge about the complex past of our country, its culture and the specific multiculturalism of this area. It should be noted that the policy towards the collective memory of Poles was aimed at presenting the nation as homogeneous: without emphasizing the individualism and independence of ethnic or religious communities such as the Jewish community.

On the other hand, Poland is a country of Holocaust victims, from which a significant part of the victims “disappeared”: murdered or by migrating. This distinguishes Poland primarily from Germany, which is in the social consciousness of Europe, and the Germans themselves as the nation of perpetrators of the events of the World War II. As a result, in Poland – in contrast to Germany, which is territorially and culturally close to us – commemoration is not related to compensation and settlement. At the same time, the Jewish community is not large enough to become a strong initiator of activities for non-memory sites such as the New Synagogue. The problem of this small number is very visible in Częstochowa. It is especially emphasized in social projects aimed at caring for material heritage, such as “Osiem Bram Jerozolimy” (The Eight Gates of Jerusalem) or “GET-

TO. Częstochowskie dziedzictwo” (The GETTO. Częstochowa’s Heritage), with which I was associated for years as its coordinator. The activists of these initiatives were and are mainly people interested in culture and history, but largely not belonging to, or even having no knowledge of, the Jewish community and Judaism. The situation is similar in many other projects in Poland, i.a. in the Wrocław initiative of the Urban Memory Foundation “Miejsca Pamięci i Zapominania” (Places of Remembering and Forgetting), at which I am currently working. These projects show that in the local community, especially in Częstochowa, there is no longer a Jewish community that could care for the heritage that we often call “Jewish”. At this point, it should be written that there are undeniable descendants and Jews who support local activities, but most of them live in other countries: unable to fully participate in the protection of material objects in the city. As a result of the lack of existence of a “naturally” responsible subject, it becomes an “urban heritage” (that is: in practice “nobody’s” because the object becomes public), which means that to some extent nobody; at the next stages, it is a processual transformation into the form of a non-memory place.

In Częstochowa – as in many cities of the globalized world – there is no conceptually homogenized local environment that would adopt a uniform approach to the protection of material heritage, as well as uniform strategies for remembering and “updating the past”<sup>29</sup>. The individual experiences of the city’s inhabitants are also extremely different, which affect their attitude to the New Synagogue. This means that several small entities (e.g. descendants of Częstochowa Jews living abroad, small associations like Towarzystwo Społeczno-Kulturalne Żydów w Polsce [Social and Cultural Association of Jews in Poland]) work to commemorate the synagogue, but these activities are dispersed. They do not have a real and wide impact on knowledge, awareness and, above all, the sense of attachment to the place among the inhabitants of Częstochowa.

As Sharon Macdonald writes in her 2019 article, the material remains of the past may not only be considered legacy, but terrify the local community: violating the present in a way that worries individuals today<sup>30</sup>. I make a hypothesis that such challenges are also faced by the Częstochowa community. Most importantly, this applies not only to the problem of anti-Semitism, which undeniably, as numerous studies show, still exists in Europe and Poland itself. This includes oblivion in line with the earlier definition of non-memory places. As a result, describing and defining the specific conditions of remembering of the New Synagogue in Częstochowa is problematic due to the “hidden” and scattered nature of the causes of forgetfulness.

In this context, Polish researcher associated with the Jagiellonian University, Roma Sendyka, proposed another important concept that became one of the main theoretical foundations for this essay.



<sup>29</sup> Sh. Macdonald, *op. cit.*, p. 34.

<sup>30</sup> *Eadem*, *Heritage Traces, Differences, and Futures: New Research Approaches to Heritage and Society*, [in:] *Heritage and Society*, Ed. R. Kusek, J. Purchla, Kraków 2019, p. 26.



<sup>31</sup> R. Sendyka, *Miejsce/ nie-miejsce pamięci*, [in:] *eadem [et al.], Nie-miejsca pamięci. Elementarz*, Kraków 2017. In Polish, the researcher uses the term “nie-miejsca pamięci”.

<sup>32</sup> The term “Kresy” (“Borderlands”) is used in this text in quotation marks to emphasize the reluctance to mark this area as a clearly defined peripheral space of otherness. This is related to beliefs similar to those presented by B. Bakuła (*Kolonialne i postkolonialne aspekty polskiego dyskursu kresoznawczego*, “Teksty Drugie” 2006, No. 6) or E. W. Said (*Orientalizm*, Transl. M. Wyrwas-Wiśniewska, Poznań 2005).

<sup>33</sup> D. Beauvois, *Trójkąt ukraiński. Szlachta, carat i lud na Wołyniu, Podolu i Kijowszczyźnie 1793–1914*, Transl. K. Rutkowski, Lublin 2005, p. 813.

The “non-places of memory”<sup>31</sup>, seem to best describe the situation of the New Synagogue. It is a place of incomplete commemoration, but not complete oblivion. The very commemoration and the presence of the New Synagogue as a building, but also a symbol of the Jewish community, seem to violate the status quo of the community living in Częstochowa, which often wants to defend this status quo, which leads to tensions and conflict. An example is the information collected during the interviews I conducted with local activists and descendants of Częstochowa Jews. This includes disputes over the commemoration of Jewish heritage, and at the same time conflicts related to the removal of items from pre-war synagogues abroad – despite the fact that in Częstochowa there is no one to use them.

The inhabitants of Częstochowa not only do not remember the New Synagogue, but also do not have the competence to remember it. They are deprived of the multicultural and multireligious identity, a part of which was Jewish or Orthodox heritage and culture until the Second World War. Importantly, the memory of Jewish spaces in Częstochowa is not part of the media and scientific discourse.

In history, we have many examples of renewing the memory of specific places – often not related to Jewish architecture, such as Kresy<sup>32</sup> (Polish *lieu de mémoire*) or Nowa Huta in Kraków. These examples, however, are separate from the theme of the New Synagogue. It is worth pointing out that they are related to the theory of building the myth, about which French historian Daniel Beauvois writes<sup>33</sup>. According to him the myth that lives to this day is the result of a combination of two elements: the Arcadian and the catastrophic. In the case of the history of the Częstochowa memory, the catastrophic story proved to be too unattractive to keep that memory alive. The arcadian elements, on the other hand, are lacking in this context. Thus, there are no assumptions that would help restore the memory so far and prompt the research community to study this issue extensively.

## Conclusions – homogenic identity in Poland and hierarchical pluralism

The history and the position of the New Synagogue in Częstochowa as a place of non-memory indicates the challenges faced by the local community, but also says a lot about the identity of Poles and Częstochowa residents. The topic of Częstochowa Jews (without discussing the subject of architecture and the New Synagogue) seems to be somewhat debated, and the term “identity” is often taken as a catch-phrase. However, as the New Synagogue and the literature on the subject show: the identity and self-identification of Poles has not been fully explored. New research discourses can change a lot: expand our knowledge on topics that are necessary for understand-





4. The Philharmonic in Częstochowa built on the site of the New Synagogue. Photo: W. Morawska



<sup>34</sup> See M. Sikorska, *Praktyki rodzinne i rodzicielskie we współczesnej Polsce – rekonstrukcja codzienności*, Warszawa 2019.

ing Polish society and supporting the protection of tangible and intangible heritage.

At the moment, however, there are several conclusions that are also challenges for buildings such as the Częstochowa synagogue. As numerous polls show, the identity of Poles has a strong relationship with the nation which, despite the departure of many representatives of the young generation from religious practice, is based on the model of Christian values<sup>34</sup>.

Historical events in Poland have contributed to what I call “the forgetting of multicultural identity” for its homogeneity: the belief (not necessarily negative) that the average Pole is not only, but has been for centuries, a white Catholic. This was deepened both by the Holocaust, numerous displacements, and the economic backwardness of the country, which moved Poland away from Central Europe (including Germany: for centuries relatively culturally and socially close). Creating collective memory is a task carried out primarily by the local intelligentsia, which – to a large extent – was exterminated by the Germans, and then by the Soviets and the communist security apparatus. This process was completed by the migration from Częstochowa and the influx of people who had no connection with the city and its history.

I put forward the thesis about the existence of the phenomenon of “lost identity” under which Poles are not able to fully care for the heritage that is in the urban space. This is due to the lack of a sense of connection with this heritage, which is clearly shown in the language that emphasizes the category of “Other” (“Stranger”). We are not talking about urban or historical heritage, but about Jewish, Kashubian, Roma and Lemko heritage.

This context may be supplemented by the phenomenon of hierarchical pluralism. This term is used, inter alia, by Agnieszka Pasięka, who conducts ethnographic research in a remote, rural and mountainous area in southern Poland, near Slovakia and on the border with Ukraine: in the so-called the most religiously diverse region of Poland. During the interviews, the respondents tell stories about the disappearance of Jewish communities, Ruthenian and Lemko identities, Ukrainian and Polish nationalist discourses, as well as migration, resettlement and deportation. Pasięka therefore analyzes the religious pluralism practiced in the predominantly Catholic country. In this case, the hierarchy of meanings and the dominance of one of the religions/cultures is easy to identify. However, the case of Częstochowa is different. In Częstochowa, one image of culture and religion prevails, which results from the process of forgetting the former diversity of urban space. As a result, hierarchical pluralism is “silent”: well disguised and difficult to analyze.

Returning for a moment to the topic of the New Synagogue. The building in its place, the Częstochowa Philharmonic, is to be a continuation of the idea of a testimony to the history of architecture and

the Jewish community in this city. Bronisław Huberman, a Jewish violinist from Częstochowa, was adopted as the patron of the Philharmonic. Some of the walls belonging to the New Synagogue have become elements of the new building, while at the entrance to the Philharmonic there is a plate informing about the synagogue, written in four languages: English, Polish, Hebrew and Yiddish.

City authorities, as well as people interested in this building, made a lot of effort to ensure that the New Synagogue would not be forgotten. But it's undeniable: hardly anyone remembers this object. I put forward the thesis that in order to build the memory of the New Synagogue, not only should monuments be erected, but also in a processual way to show what the "lost identity" is, and as a result: build an emotional connection with material objects that are remnants of the city's former life. The New Synagogue in Częstochowa was an object representing the multicultural and multi-religious identity of inhabitants. It was built by a reformed part of the community: by assimilated Jews, local benefactors and entrepreneurs, in a classicist style, which did not indicate its "different" character from the rest of the architecture (as opposed to the Moorish style in the first project). The building was to become a representative, monumental and eye-catching object, but at the same time it was to indicate that Jews are equal citizens of Częstochowa: "including" their synagogue in the urban landscape.

Finally, I would like to add that taking up the subject of writing about a non-existent work results not only from the belief that it is of high artistic importance, but also that it is not representative for the analysis of synagogue architecture in general; a small number of them preserved after World War II. This is related to the thesis of Michel Foucault that for history discontinuity is a peculiarly natural phenomenon<sup>35</sup>, in which some processes end and others begin; not being a coherent "memory of a thousand-year-old community"<sup>36</sup>. As Eleonora Bergman and Jan Jagielski write, "What has survived is accidental [...]. None of the magnificent wooden synagogues exists, neither does any of the large-city 19th-century synagogues exist"<sup>37</sup>, including the synagogue in Częstochowa.

When talking about the New Synagogue, we find ourselves on the border of corresponding areas: society, artistic and religious trends, works of art, and above all: memory and identity.

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#### Słowa kluczowe

architektura synagogałna, pamięć, planowanie urbanistyczne, wielokulturowość miasta, architektura żydowska, architektura Częstochowy, przywiązanie do miejsca

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#### Keywords

synagogue architecture, memory, urban planning, multiculturalism of the city, Jewish architecture, architecture of Częstochowa, place attachment



<sup>35</sup> M. Foucault, *Archeologia wiedzy*, Transl. A. Siemek, Introd. J. Topolski, Warszawa 1977, p. 33.

<sup>36</sup> K. Matyjaszek, *op. cit.*, p. 12.

<sup>37</sup> E. Bergman, J. Jagielski, *Zachowane synagogi i domy modlitwy w Polsce. Katalog*, Warszawa 1996, p. 8.



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### Summary

**WIKTORIA MORAWSKA (Polish Academy of Sciences) / Lost identity and difficult heritage on the example of the New Synagogue in Czeszochowa. The post-war transformation of Polish society into a homogeneous construct and the issue of non-memory of the Jewish community**

The aim of the article is to show the social context of synagogue architecture on the example of the hitherto unexplored New Synagogue in Czeszochowa. The analysis is an attempt to show the relationship between the location of the monument in the urban structure and the experiences of the minority, the history of the community and the Jewish community in the city. Due to the nature of the topic, the analysis was based on the research of archival materials, which is the basic method of work within the art history discipline. In addition to the study of the inventory materials and the object itself, the content of the article refers to the theses of the most important researchers of synagogue architecture and town planning in Poland. An important context of the work were ethnographic and memory-related themes, which are an attempt to present the topic of synagogue architecture in a wider, social context. The greatest value of the paper is the original, so far unprecedented attempt to implement an interdisciplinary perspective in the analysis of synagogues. Moreover, the article deals with the subject of the New Synagogue in Czeszochowa, which has not been subject to any systematic study so far. This article was written as part of over six years of research that I am conducting on this subject (research mainly in the context of the architecture of the New Synagogue in Czeszochowa).