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A SIGN OF THE PAST: THE UNTOLD STORY OF HUNGARY'S SYNAGOGUES AND THE MEMORY OF DISAPPEARED COMMUNITIES, 1945–2024

ABSTRACT

After the Second World War, the situation of synagogues in Hungary was unique compared to other countries in Central and Eastern Europe. While in Poland, Czechoslovakia or Germany a large number of synagogues were demolished, in Hungary – with the exception of a few cases – such destruction did not take place. Nevertheless, as a result of the demographic catastrophe caused by the Holocaust and the ensuing internal migration and emigration, most of the synagogues in the countryside were gradually abandoned and fell into disrepair. After the 1956 revolution, the National Association of Hungarian Israelites, for various reasons (such as economic considerations, political pressure, etc.), decided in the 1960s and 1970s to sell some 60–70 synagogues to the state or local companies. The authorities then used either the building or the land, intentionally or unintentionally erasing the memory of the once thriving Jewish community. Thus, the transfer of ownership of synagogues during the Kádár era became a widespread phenomenon and even a general policy in the interaction between the state and Jewish representatives. The problem of abandoned synagogues has been on the agenda in Hungary ever since, and various attempts have been made to address the issue over the past seven decades. Based on archival material and oral history interviews, this paper outlines the historical context in which the sale of synagogues took place and analyses how the policy of dealing with the material heritage of the former Jewish communities during the Kádár era and since has been shaped as an act of remembrance

KEYWORDS:

memory of the Holocaust, state socialism, Central Eastern Europe, memory politics, built heritage

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After the Second World War, as a result of the demographic catastrophe caused by the Holocaust and the ensuing internal and external migration, the vast majority of communities in rural Hungary gradually disappeared, and the buildings and properties of these communities (synagogues, schools, houses, cemeteries) were slowly abandoned and later fell into disrepair.[1] Compared to other countries in Central and Eastern Europe, however, Jewish life didn't vanish entirely, and synagogues had a special status: while in Poland,[2] Czechoslovakia[3] or Germany[4] a large number of synagogues were demolished, in Hungary – with only a few exceptions – no such destruction took place.

After the 1956 revolution and the dictatorial ecclesiastical and 'Jewish policies' of the Stalinist Rákosi era (1949–1953), the new administration led by General Secretary János Kádár showed some continuity with its predecessor but shifted away from these repressive methods towards administrative and surveillance techniques.[5] Accordingly, the status of the synagogues changed dramatically: for various reasons (dissolution of congregations, political pressure, financial hardship) an estimated 60–70 synagogues were sold by the National Association of Hungarian Israelites (MIOK) to municipalities and local companies throughout the country. The synagogues were sold according to local needs, and the new proprietors

1 András Kovács and Aletta Forrás-Bíró, *Zsidó élet Magyarországon: Eredmények, kihívások és célok a kommunista rendszer bukása óta* (London: Institute for Jewish Policy Research, 2011), pp. 7–8.
2 James E. Young, *The Texture of Memory: Holocaust Memorials and Meaning* (New Haven, CT: Yale Univ. Press, 2000); Michael Meng, *Shattered Spaces Encountering Jewish Ruins in Postwar Germany and Poland* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011); Carol Herselle Krinsky, *Europas Synagogen Architektur, Geschichte, Bedeutung* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstallt, 1988); Iwona Irwin-Zarecka, *Frames of Remembrance: The Dynamics of Collective Memory* (New Brunswick – London: Routledge, 1994).
3 Jacob Ari Labendz, 'Synagogues for sale: Jewish-State mutuality in the communist Czech lands, 1945–1970', *Jewish Culture and History*, 18 (2017), 54–78.
4 Meng, *Shattered Spaces Encountering Jewish Ruins in Postwar Germany and Poland*.
5 *Communism's Jewish Question*, ed. by András Kovács (Oldenbourg: De Gruyter, 2017), pp. 1–15.

used either the building or the land for different purposes (as storehouses for poison, fruit, or furniture; sports halls, cultural centres etc.), thus intentionally or unintentionally erasing the memory of the once-thriving Jewish communities. This radical change in the use of synagogue buildings was accompanied by the removal of their Jewish signs and symbols and the de-Judaization of these formerly sacred spaces. A synagogue is not a temple in the strict sense of the word: originally, the first and second sanctuaries in Jerusalem were called temples; after the destruction of the second temple in 70 AD, the synagogue as an institution became the centre of Jewish religious life. In the traditional sense, a synagogue is a place of not only worship and prayer, but also learning, teaching and community gathering – a place where the affairs of the community are discussed.[6] The former synagogue buildings were integrated (and thus disappeared) into the changing urban landscape as if they had never been there. Thus, the transfer of ownerships during the Kádár era became a widespread phenomenon and even a general policy of the interaction between the state and Jewish representatives. Still, the problem of abandoned synagogues has been on the agenda in Hungary ever since, and various attempts have been made to address the issue over the past seven decades.

The political transition of 1989 brought major changes in the lives of Jewish people and organizations in Hungary. The most important change in terms of leadership and organization was the dissolution of MIOK in 1990 and the establishment of MAZSIHISZ (Association of Jewish Communities in Hungary).[7] In the new democratic Hungary, however, the emergence of freedom of speech also allowed the anti-Semitic voices that had been restrained during the Kádár era. As the Jews' situation changed with the regime change, so too did attitudes towards the cultural heritage of Hungarian Jewry. The 1990s, especially the early part of the decade, was marked by an emerging interest in synagogues and an increased number of synagogue renovations. However, the new millennium did not bring a radical change in the situation of built heritage. In 2004, Hungary became one of ten Eastern European countries to join the European Union; this had a major impact on the social integration of Holocaust remembrance and the preservation of the built Jewish heritage because the latter was like a "soft condition" of EU membership.[8] Since 2010, with the establishment of Orbán's government, a new politics of memory has emerged

6 *The New Jewish Encyclopedia*, ed. by David Bridger and Samuel Wolk (New York: Berman House, 1976), p. 469; Lee Shai Weissbach, 'Buildings Fraught with Meaning: An Introduction to a Special Issue on Synagogue Architecture in Context', *Jewish History*, 25 (2011), 1–11 (pp. 1–2).

7 Viktória Bányai, and Szonja Ráhel Komoróczy, 'Magyarországi zsidó vallási szervezetek, intézmények emlékezetpolitikája', *Regio*, 24 (2016), 38–58 (p. 45).

8 Claus Leggewie (translated by Simon Garnett), 'Equally Criminal? Totalitarian Experience and European Memory', *IWM* <https://www.iwm.at/transit-online/equally-criminal-totalitarian-experience-and-european-memory> [accessed on 10 April 2024].

that is heavily based on the memory of the Horthy era and its revisionist ideas, within which the memory of the Holocaust hasn't been left untouched. Despite the erection of a contradictory monument (but never officially unveiled), the Hungarian government has attempted to present itself as supportive of Hungarian Jewry. Furthermore, the government has consistently denied any accusations of anti-Semitism, presenting itself as a "natural" ally of the Hungarian and European Jewish communities, which it claims are facing an "anti-Semitic challenge" from Islamic migrants. Concurrently, the government has established a new relationship with Hungarian Jewish communities that appears to favour the (ultra) orthodox Lubovitsch denomination and its organization, the Egységes Megyarországi Izraelita Hitközség (United Hungarian Jewish Community, EMIH).[9] This has resulted in financial support and the return of several synagogues with great symbolic value to the EMIH. However, it is not only the government's new modus operandi that has somehow affected the status of the synagogues, but also the radical dismantling of the preservation of the built heritage – both formally (as an institution) and in policy. Surprisingly, despite the aforementioned emergence of a new politics of memory and the dismantling of the politics of preservation, the status of synagogues in Hungary has remained largely unchanged over the past 14 years. The fate of many buildings remains undecided, and many are abandoned and desperate.

This also the reason why this paper goes through a historical overview with special focuses on the situation of the Jewish community and institutional conditions after the Second World War, specifically addressing the halakhic issues (religious law) of non-religious synagogue use and the change of ownership during this time. After the general section, case studies will be used to illustrate how local communities reacted to a complex set of challenges (how to maintain and use their buildings without the former communities, political pressure, laicisation), and the diversity and variety of responses to these historical circumstances. We present four case studies that cover four different aspects of the fate of synagogues during and after the period of state socialism.

Memory and space/place – the past and the spatial legacy of annihilated Jewry – are interdisciplinary fields that have already produced a considerable amount of literature. However, research on the post-war history of Hungarian Jewry, particularly in the context of the fate of deserted

[9] Canaan Lidor, 'In Hungary, Orthodox Jews fight over a Chabad bailout some see as a "Trojan horse"', *The Times of Israel*, August 2023 <https://www.timesofisrael.com/in-hungary-orthodox-jews-fight-over-chabad-bailout-some-see-as-a-trojan-horse> [accessed on 10 April 2024].

synagogues and religious buildings, is lacking.[10] Most studies have focused on the artistic and architectural value of these buildings as Jewish-Hungarian heritage, and the mapping of missing communities.[11] Some have discussed the challenges of abandoned synagogues for local and national representatives of Hungarian Jewry. However, there has been no study on the fate of these buildings in the context of Jewish and Holocaust memory over the long durée. This paper aims to fill a small gap in the research field. The following subsection examines the concepts of key authors who provide an interpretive framework for the later discussion of the case studies and the situation of Hungarian Jewry.

According to Aleida Assman, places also play an important role in memory, also because the memory of places is longer-lived than the memory of individuals, eras and cultures, which is short-term.[12] She distinguishes between several types of memory sites (*Gedächtnisorten*). One type is the *Generationenorte* (generational site/place),[13] which maintains a stable long-term link with family history or the history of a community, with a continuous chain of generations linked to a place. This creates a close link between people and a geographical place, shaping their way of life and their experiences, and imbuing the place with their traditions and history.[14] A further type of memory site is the *Gedenkorten* (memorial place), which are best understood in relation to "generational places". In contrast, memorial sites are characterised by discontinuity – by a marked difference between the past and the present. In memorial sites, a certain history is not continued but more or less violently interrupted.[15] The case studies in this article will provide examples of both types. There are some cases where the generational link between the community and the building is preserved, and there are other cases where it is broken permanently and the place functions as only a memory of the community. For generational places, the binding force is the chain of generations, while for memorial places it is the narrative that is restored and passed on.[16]

In his research, the French historian Pierre Nora says that sites are the bearers of memory. He has described places of memory as having

10 *Communism's Jewish Question*.
11 Viktor Cseh, *Zsidó Örökség – Vidéki zsidó hitközségek Magyarországon* (Budapest: MAZSIKE, 2021); Rudolf Klein, *Zsinagógák Magyarországon 1782–1918* (Budapest: TERC, 2011); Zsuzsanna Toronyi, 'Források a magyar zsidó kulturális örökségről 1945–1960', in *Zsidó közösségek öröksége*, ed. by Zsuzsanna Toronyi (Budapest: Magyar Zsidó Levéltár, 2010), pp. 7–27; Zsuzsanna Toronyi, 'Mivé lettek az egykori magyar zsidó imaházak? – Bútorraktár vívóterem, galéria... – zsinagógák a mai Magyarországon', *MúzeumCafé*, 4.2 <http://muzeumcafe.hu/hu/mive-lettek-az-egykori-magyar-zsido-imahazak> [accessed on 10 April 2024].
12 Aleida Assmann, *Erinnerungsräume. Formen und Wandlungen des kulturellen Gedächtnisses* (München: C.H. Beck Verlag, 1999), pp. 298–99.
13 Both translations exist because in German "Ort" refers not only to a physical place but a virtual or symbolic space.
14 Assmann, '*Erinnerungsräume*', p. 301.
15 Ibid., p. 309.
16 Ibid., pp. 337–38.

three characteristics: concrete, symbolic, functional. According to him, it is in these places that memory is represented and "places of memory [*lieux de mémoire*] can exist because memory no longer has a real milieu [*milieux de mémoire*]".[17] After the disappearance of the media of memory, it is the sites of memory that remind us today of significant moments in history. Pierre Nora, who basically studies French history and culture from this point of view, cites the French peasantry as an example of a lost community of memory, but in many ways this is also true of Hungarian rural Jews.[18] Synagogues can be places of memory in Hungary, where there is no longer a community, as our case studies will illustrate. After the Second World War, Europe as a whole was characterized by a concentration of places of remembrance (*Erinnerungsorte*). While the French historian Pierre Nora sees modernization, Aleida Assmann sees the dictatorial and violent rule of the Nazis and the mass exterminations they committed as the main driving forces behind the development of "places of memory"; however, these two concepts are obviously not identical. In the aftermath of the Holocaust, places of remembrance and sites of commemoration were established at sites of Nazi violence, such as ghettos. These sites had previously served as generational centres of Jewish tradition for centuries.[19]

Michael Meng's approach is another relevant perspective for our research and study as he comparatively researches the fate of the Jews. His concept is that the history of Jewish places (sites) is presented through the dynamics of "clearing Jewish rubble", "erasing the Jewish past", "restoring Jewish ruins", and "reconstructing the Jewish past", thus representing different time periods of Jewish properties from the Holocaust to the 2000s.[20] These methods can also be observed in the situation of synagogues in Hungary. Michael Meng presents a complex view of the history and built heritage of Jews in Central and Eastern Europe in the light of the politics of memory and architecture and urban planning, and the post-Holocaust situation of Jewish buildings.

Last but not least, this article uses case studies as a method of exploring meanings and meaning-making processes,[21] which is an interpretive and understanding method of research and "a methodological tool that also points towards generalization, combining empirical data collection with theory building".[22] Thus, in-depth knowledge of the fate, situation and role

17 Pierre Nora, *Realms of Memory* (Columbia: Columbia University Press, 1996–1998) (Hungarian version, 2010, p. 13.)
18 Ibid.
19 Assmann, *Erinnerungsräume*, p. 339.
20 Meng, *Shattered Spaces*, pp. 256–66.
21 Earl Babbie, *The Practice of Social Research* (Boston: Wadsworth, 2013), pp. 90–93.
22 Flóra Takács, 'Az esettanulmány mint módszertan a szociológiában', *Szociológiai Szemle*, 27 (2017), 126–32 (p. 127).

of particular cases, i.e., individual synagogues, contributes to the general picture of the situation of synagogues in Hungary. Processes, aspects and interpretations may emerge that can help us to understand what has happened and is happening to synagogues in Hungary beyond the fate of specific buildings. In the last part of the article, we present four case studies that cover four different aspects of the fate of synagogues during and after the period of state socialism and the developments in this regard since the political transition.

In addition to the usual sources used in historical texts (literature, public discourses, archival materials), our case studies also draw on interviews conducted by one of the authors. Two types of interviews can be distinguished. An 'expert' interview is one that involves interviewing people, such as local authority officials, architects, community leaders, local historians, etc., who have an influence on or specific information about the situation of a particular synagogue. An 'in-depth' interview involves members of the local Jewish community, the new owners of a building, new users, people living in the synagogue's neighbourhood, etc., i.e., people whose attitudes, opinions, and interpretations of a synagogue can help to understand its role.

HISTORICAL OVERVIEW – FROM 1945 UNTIL THE REGIME CHANGE

Hungary's wartime losses were 950,000–1,000,000 people, of which an estimated 569,507 were Jews (69% of the Jewish population of Hungary in 1944) who perished by violence, atrocities, forced labour, deportation, concentration camps, or the Arrow Cross terror, according to the World Jewish Congress.[23] Rural Jewry suffered by far the greatest losses: out of 216,507 people, only 47,124 survived the devastation of the Holocaust. In addition to the demographic catastrophe, the age composition of the survivors was also disproportionate. Furthermore, the number of people of Jewish origin who remained after the war was estimated at 220,000–260,000.[24]

Following the devastation caused by the Holocaust, the National Office of Hungarian Jews (MIOI) lost most of its members, and its organizational and religious framework was dissolved. Therefore, the MIOI faced immediate legal, religious and economic challenges in assisting survivors

23 A Zsidó Világkongresszus (Magyarországi Képviselete) statisztikai osztályának közleményei, ed. by Zsigmond Pál Pach (Budapest: 1947–1949); Zsigmond Pál Pach, 'A magyarországi zsidóság mai statisztikájának szembetűnő jelenségei', in *Maradék zsidóság. A magyarországi zsidóság 1945–1946-ban*, ed. by Imre Benoschofsky (Budapest: A Budai Izraelita Aggok és Árvák Menházegyesülete, 1946), pp. 22–33.

24 Tamás Stark, 'A magyar zsidóság a vészkorszakban és a második világháború után', *Regio*, 4 (1993), 140–50 (pp. 144–45).

and maintaining the remaining institutional staff: the status of displaced persons, the difficulties of repatriation and relief, and the loss of institutional and physical facilities for religious life and education. Of the 74 rabbis who worked in post-Trianon Hungary, only 14 returned home.[25] The vast majority of synagogues – another important institution of faith and community life – also suffered massive damage.[26] It is important to note that the possibility of maintaining Jewish religious life became increasingly difficult immediately after the German occupation of Hungary.[27] During the war, empty synagogues were often taken over by military troops and used as warehouses (for deported goods), horse stables, shelters, sometimes as ghetto sites, and sometimes also by the local population. After the war, some damaged buildings were demolished, as in the case of the synagogue in Balassagyarmat, which was blown up after the war. Sometimes demolition was carried out at the request of the city (e.g., Debrecen, Kaposvár) during the wartime clearance of ruins. In settlements where the community had been destroyed, such as Cece and Kisbér, where the National Office had no capacity, the synagogues were expropriated by the local population and used for public purposes. Not only synagogues suffered irreparable damage: their interiors (stalls, pews, benches, etc.) were also destroyed, or their furnishings were taken away by the local population. After the war, a nationwide survey of religious objects was carried out with the support of the community, which showed that there were hardly any communities in the country where religious objects, Torah scrolls and Chevra books had survived intact.

After 1945, it seemed that the struggle for restitution and for the Hungarian state to be held accountable might be successful; however, with the exception of the assistance provided by JOINT and other Jewish organizations, the Hungarian state did not meet the material rehabilitation demands and expectations of the Jewish people. The Hungarian state acted on symbolic legislation (discriminatory laws were repealed) but not on aid. Many Jews decided to leave the country within the framework of the Zionist movement and emigrate (*aliyah*) to Palestine. The main challenge was the Orthodox denomination, whose adherents were only able to maintain the strict conditions of existence and religious life required by Orthodoxy to a limited extent. As a result, a large number of emigrants came from this denomination.

25 Ernő Munkácsi, 'Hitközségek és templomok', ed. by Benoschofsky Imre, *Maradék zsidóság* (Budapest: A Budai Izraelita Aggok és Árvák Menházegyesülete, 1947), pp. 67–69.
26 Toronyi, 'Források a magyar zsidó kulturális örökségről', p. 19.
27 Viktória Bányai, 'The Impact of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee's Aid Strategy on the Lives of Jewish Families in Hungary, 1945–1949', in *Jewish and Romani. Families in the Holocaust and Its Aftermath*, ed. by Eliyana R. Adler and Kateřina Čapkova (New Jersey: Rutgers, 2021), pp. 115–26.

At first there was no agreement on the fate of the synagogues; the solution seemed to be for a government commission to transfer the synagogues, along with the other abandoned properties, to the newly created "Jewish Fund". However, this was rejected on the grounds that the Fund's task was not to provide denominational aid, while the synagogues were part of denominational affairs.[28] According to a government decree and Jewish religious law (Halacha), if properties were large enough, the local congregation had the right to decide their fate), but in reality the national organization was stronger and decided what would happen to synagogues. The general rule was that if a congregation consisted of 250 or more members who paid church taxes, it was free to decide the fate of its property. The proceeds of the sale could only be used for the revival and maintenance of religious life, the renovation of additional synagogues, and the purchase of torahs. If there were no survivors, the National Office was responsible for the properties. As a result, 24 out of 25 rural communities were given the right of free disposal. According to Ernő Munkácsi's report, the MIOI spent part of the subsidies from JOINT, the Hungarian branch of the International Committee of the Red Cross (Société de Secour), to ensure the operating conditions of the synagogues and repair them temporarily. After the Holocaust, the dissolution of the religious framework led to a number of religious and halakhic issues, such as the remarriage of widows and the sale of synagogues.

In the aftermath of the Holocaust, the changed demographic, political and social situation also created a need for the national rabbinical community to provide answers to emerging problems with religious (halakhic) legal significance that affected the Jewish community.[29] It was up to the rabbis to decide on the halakhic issues that arose; however, due to the great shortage of rabbis, the National Rabbinical Association (ORE) established a central Beth Din.[30] In their first proclamation, the members of the Beth Din emphasized that its halakhic answers would be based on the ancient law but would have to adapt to the challenges of the post-persecution period. One of the most pressing issues was how to deal with apostasies that occurred during and after the Second World War. ORE specified that if the formal framework of apostasy was not in place (there was no witness), the person was still considered part of the Jewish community. The situation

28 Borbála Klacsmann, 'Az Elhagyott Javak Kormánybiztossága és a holokauszt túlélőinek kárpótlása Magyarországon 1945–1948', in *Tanulmányok a holokausztról*, ed. by Randolph L. Braham (Budapest: Múlt és Jövő Alapítvány, 2018), IX, pp. 297–340.

29 Toronyi, 'Források a magyar zsidó kulturális örökségről 1945–1960'.

30 Jewish tribunal, a body that reviewed questions of religious law. Dr Ernő Róth, 'Központi Béth Din a rabbi nélküli hittestvéreink számára. Kényszerkitértek ügye', *Rabbiegyesület*, 6 (1947), 21–22.

of abandoned synagogues without a congregation and the regulation of religious law were also pressing issues.[31]

Since the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 AD, synagogues have been the centre of Jewish religious and community life. The interiors and exteriors of synagogue buildings have changed over the centuries according to the needs of the community, but their basic function as the main centre of community life has remained unchanged.[32] Throughout the 2,600-year history of the synagogue, not only its interior and exterior design but also its liturgy has changed, although its basic elements and functions have remained fundamentally the same.[33] The sanctity of the synagogue is given by the Torah it contains, so the synagogue space in the building is a "sacred space", but this sanctity cannot be understood in Christian terminology. In this sense, synagogues have always had a specific and symbolic value in the Jewish community. ORE's position on the post-war situation of synagogues was published by Dr Ernő Róth in the Bulletin of the National Rabbinical Association. On the basis of the Sulchan Aruch, ORE examined four questions concerning the sale of synagogues:[34] Can a synagogue be sold? Under what circumstances can it be sold? Who is competent to do this? What can the proceeds be used for? According to Ernő Róth's definition, a synagogue has a certain sanctity (rabbinic), although this sanctity can be changed according to the wishes of the rabbi or the community.[35] The disuse of a synagogue does not in itself mean that its sanctity ceases because a *michvah*[36] used to take place there. The above questions were further broken down into three sub-questions. How many synagogues does the community have? What is their occupancy rate? Who is the seller? ORE decided as follows on the questions raised: if the community owns a synagogue and prayers are held there regularly, it should not be sold unless it serves a higher sanctity,[37] in which case it is not the synagogue sold that becomes holy but its equivalent value. If the synagogue is not used for regular prayer, minyan, but there is a chance that this will change in the near future, the building cannot be sold. If the elders and the community decide to sell the synagogue, the money received can be used for profane purposes. Ernő Róth, following the guidance of the Talmud, believes that the community has the right to decide whether it needs

31 Dr Ernő Róth, 'Elárvult templomokról', *Rabbiegyesület*, 6 (1947), 31–37.
32 János Oláh, 'A zsinagógáról és szokásairól', *Yerusha online*, [n.d.] <https://yerushaonline.com/content/?v=di11pla34> [accessed on 17 May 2023].
33 Rudolf Klein, *Zsinagógák Magyarországon 1782–1918. Fejlődéstörténet, tipológia, és építészeti jelentőség* (Budapest: Terc Kiadó, 2011), pp. 40–41; Anikó Gazda, *Zsinagógák és zsidó közösségek Magyarországon. Térképek, rajzok, adatok* (Budapest: MTA Judaisztikai Kutatócsoport, 1991).
34 In the sixteenth century, Rabbi Joseph Karo compiled the major religious laws of Judaism into 4 volumes. (Shulchan Aruch means a set table).
35 Róth quotes a Talmudic passage: "The Temple is one of the most important institutions of Judaism; it is the substitute for the Holy Temple (I Megillah 29a)".
36 Holy blessing, the right path.
37 Buying Torah, helping those who study the holy teaching.

a synagogue as a place of worship or not. It follows that the community should have the right to decide, despite the dramatic decline in the number of worshippers. However, it should also be added that it is also necessary to supervise a higher national office since the local community is not directly interested in sales. This issue is incomprehensible in the context of synagogue sales since the late 1950s, when it was the MIO and BIH that decided the fate of synagogues, and in most cases only the national offices shared in the proceeds of the sales. Ernő Róth also mentions that leaving a former synagogue and moving to a smaller building is only allowed if the new building is ready to accommodate the community, otherwise the community may be left without a building.

As will be seen, the problems listed and detailed here were not considered normative by the community leadership in the 1950s. ORE lost its autonomy in 1950 due to centralization and denominational mergers, and it continued its activities as a religious department with diminishing influence as part of the MIOI.

With its 'autonomous' policy in the first half of the coalition period, which proved to be transitional, the Community had already demonstrated its intention to establish a supportive, even subordinate, relationship with the country's new political leadership, culminating, among other things, in the 1948 Agreement.

STATE SOCIALISM

Following the communist takeover in 1949, a new constitution was adopted in Hungary that established a new political system that separated the state from the church. While the constitution guaranteed freedom of conscience and religion to citizens, in practice this was not upheld. According to Soviet ideological policies, religion and churches were some of the main targets of communist politics.[38] This was due to indirect and direct repression of churches, including surveillance, blackmail, nationalization, and imprisonment of priests who opposed church policy, who were later recruited as agents. In May 1951, the Állami Egyházügyi Hivatal (State Office for Church Affairs, ÁEH) was established as the governmental body responsible for formulating and implementing policies regarding the Church and various Christian denominations. ÁEH operated under the direct supervision of the Council of Ministers.[39] Its responsibilities can be summarized as

38 Peter Kenez, 'The Hungarian Communist Party and the Catholic Church, 1945–1948', *The Journal of Modern History*, 75.4 (2003), 864–89 <https://doi.org/10.1086/383356>.

39 Bócz Edit Köpeczi, *Az Állami Egyházügyi Hivatal tevékenysége. Haszonélvezők és kárvallottak* (Budapest: Akadémia Kiadó, 2004).

follows: to ensure and monitor the agreements and conventions concluded between the state and the churches, and to control the religious activities and personnel of the churches. ÁEH's principal focus was on Christian churches. ÁEH collaborated with the internal affairs services to control church life, individuals and groups.[40] ÁEH was operational throughout the state socialist period, from its inception in 1951 until 1989.

During the period of state socialism, the position and political status of the Jewish "Church" differed significantly from that of Christian denominations. While the latter were the primary targets of church policy, the state authorities had a different relationship with the Jewish denomination, which was a small but sensitive issue in terms of size, number of believers, anti-Semitism, and the heritage of the Holocaust. For structural and historical reasons, Jewish religious communities were divided and differently exposed to the new political leadership of the country.[41]

The guidelines on religious law issued by ORE in the post-war years allowed the sale of synagogues with some restrictions, but these directives could be seen as a response to the hardships of the post-Holocaust situation; however, the new leadership of the community that had formed after the 1956 revolution did not consider it valid. In 1956 (shortly before the revolution), in a proposal sent to Lajos Heves, the President of MIOK, the rabbi Dr Henrik Fisch[42] expressed a perspective that was similar to other post-war opinions. Even though Henrik Fisch's proposals were never implemented, his individual point of view and arguments outlined a different strategy from the synagogue sales policy pursued after 1956 and, to some extent, the earlier decision of the Rabbinical Council. The proposal was written in connection with a specific case, namely the conversion of the synagogue in Csongrád[43]) into a cinema and the religious decision on the matter. The Rabbinical Council's earlier decision in this regard was summarised by Fisch as follows:

> The best course of action was not to sell the buildings but to terminate their operation by demolition and to sell the remaining building materials. In cases where there was state interest in the sale, the municipality could sell under three conditions: the building could not be sold to another denomination; it could not be used as a place of entertainment, such as a cinema or a theatre; it could be

40 András Jobbágy, 'Religious Policy and Dissent in Socialist Hungary: The Case of the Bokor Movement', *Journal of Church and State*, 58.3 (2016), 508–28 <https://www.jstor.org/stable/45176895> [accessed on 10 April 2024].
41 Állami Egyházügyi Hivatal TÜK iratok. A zsidó egyház. MNL XIX-21-d (20.d.); Az izraelita egyház operatív helyzetéről (1961. szeptember 4.) ÁBTL 3.1.5.o-17169.
42 A member of the Rabbinical Council and from 1959 chief rabbi of the Dohány Street Synagogue.
43 Close to Szeged, in which still – after Budapest – the second biggest Jewish community had been living.

> sold for cultural purposes (archives, library) or for storage, the latter only if the confessional character of the building was abolished.[44]

Henrik Fisch objected that the Department of Religious Affairs had merely copied a relevant passage from the *Sulchan Aruch*, which states that a building may be sold and the proceeds used for a profane purpose if the community and seven delegates from the community agree to the sale. However, Fisch said that this passage obviously applies to cases where there is a responsible congregation and community, which was not the case after the Holocaust (*vészkorszak*). It is important to underline that the Holocaust has never been openly referenced in connection with the sale of synagogues: "[...] In no way is our case dealt with in the Jewish code. There is no judge, no audience; they were murdered, exterminated", as Henrik Fisch stated.

As Fisch continued, he also evaluated the issue from a legal-philosophical point of view:

> According to the laws of the Jewish religion, I believe that we are not even heirs to these temples. Therefore, we are not religiously heirs, and we cannot imagine ourselves in the jurisdiction of the seven judges, much less in the jurisdiction of the slain masses. Our legal relationship with these churches was granted to us by the Hungarian state, and we are bound by it.

Referring also to the problematic nature of the profane use of space resulting from a particular sale, he concludes the paragraph with the following:

> Should we not think of not giving the bastards who lustfully participated in fascism the opportunity to complete their pleasure that they not only helped to exterminate the Jews but now can have fun in our sacred space, the temple?

Fisch's thoughts, quoted at length, stand in striking contrast to the *halachic* decisions of ORE. The rabbi used the progressive concept of normative inheritance, in line with Jewish tradition. Its ethical basis is that heirs do not have the right to dispose of heritage left by the deceased but that it should be preserved and maintained in memory of the deceased and for future generations. Buildings have value not because of

44 The following quotes are all taken from this document, HU HU HJA VI: MIOK Gazdasági Iratok B5.

their grandeur or their importance in architectural history but because of the unintentional legacy of the deceased. Although a synagogue has ceased to be a synagogue, its symbolism remains in part because of the community who built it and were destroyed, the former community.

The importance of the halachic question also stems from the fact that after 1956 the social structure of the Jewish community changed radically. A significant number of the young and middle generation of religious Jews left the country, thus the social background and support of Jewish organizations and religious communities, which were exclusively religious denominations, were significantly reduced. Since the majority of the remaining Hungarian Jews were not religious anyway, the rural Jewish communities virtually disappeared. This meant that even fewer synagogues were needed by the communities, and even more were taken out of religious use.[45]

CHANGE OF OWNERSHIP OF SYNAGOGUES DURING THE KÁDÁR ERA

After the 1956 revolution, in 1957 a new council was elected under the leadership of Endre Sós, who repeatedly raised the possibility of selling synagogues. For Sós, the issue of synagogues was a pragmatic one. The 1956 revolution plunged the Hungarian Jewry into a new demographic crisis, with some 20,000–30,000 Jews leaving the country – a significant increase compared to the period between 1945 and 1948. The drastic reduction in the number of believers threatened the survival of religious life in many places. Endre Sós justified the sale of synagogues in the countryside and in Budapest on the grounds of dwindling tax revenues and the generally poor financial situation of the community. To this end, MIOK and BIH drew up a list of synagogues, specifying their location, dimensions, and the price for which they were to be sold.[46] Not only was the revenue generated important, but the community also wanted to dispose of the buildings as they were in need of maintenance and preservation.[47] The latter aspect led to the sale of not only smaller synagogues but also larger, more-representative synagogues, preferably in better condition.[48] In many cases, the state itself, companies and municipalities applied to purchase or renovate synagogues.

45 András Kovács, *Kádár-rendszer és a zsidók* (Budapest: Corvina Kiadó, 2019), pp. 34–35.
46 MZSL – HU HU HJA III – 1964/672; MZSL – HU HU HJA VI – 1961/Vári.
47 "In MIOK, property sales play an important role in securing the future of the denomination. But every year it becomes more difficult to sell properties. We are confident that we will be able to sell the synagogues in Szolnok and Győr, which are unused and in need of major renovation. It has been revealed that the area in Szolnok where the synagogue is situated is to be razed as part of the municipality's new urban development plan. So, nobody wants to buy the synagogue. […]", MZSL – HU HU HJA III – 1964/725.
48 This is how the representative synagogues of the great synagogue architect Lipót Baumhorn (Dózsa György út, Gyöngyös, Cegléd, Esztergom) had been sold.

ÁEH supervised the sales, mediated between the parties and, at the request of Endre Sós, often sought buyers for individual buildings, as in the case of the synagogues on Bocskai Street, Rumbach Sebestyén Street and Dózsa György Street. It is evident that these sales were not without inherent difficulties.[49] The operating congregations tried to thwart the intentions of the central leadership, but they rarely succeeded, or sometimes only temporarily. When a request for the purchase of a particular synagogue was sent to ÁEH, it was passed on to the congregation, which in all cases complied. As Endre Sós, writing under the agent pseudonym 'Sipos', put it:

> I elected as the new president Ernő Gisztler, a city councillor, district secretary of KISOSZ and an anti-Zionist with progressive views. After the election, in agreement with the new council, we offered the large, old synagogue building to the town of Békéscsaba at a very moderate price. The smaller Orthodox church is sufficient for the small community. In two and a half years, we have sold about 15 synagogues: some to the state, some to the town, and some to the community. We always made sure that the interests of the state were taken into account. In several cases we had to fight hard to break the resistance of the communities.[50]

The synagogue sales took place mainly during the presidency of Endre Sós (1957–1966), but this does not mean that there were no later sales (one case study dates from 1974). The synagogues were sold below their market value; in order to resolve this legally, ÁEH and MIOK issued an internal decree in 1959 which, in addition to the MIOK architect, served to involve a state expert in the survey and valuation of properties.

To which Pál Veres, the chief foreman of ÁEH, replied as follows:

> The Jewish temples that are no longer in use are neglected; they have been completely ruined in the course of time, and their materials have become unusable. When the councils call for their restoration, the most they do is to ask for state aid for the restoration. Local parishes cling to their empty, abandoned churches. This situation is intolerable. Therefore, in 1959, the National Council of Hungarian Israelites passed a law allowing the National Office to

49 On several occasions, Endre Sós received anonymous letters trying to compromise him. One case was handled by ÁEH itself. In an internal memo, they summed up their position on Sós as follows: "However, it is our duty to protect faith leaders who are loyal to us from slanderers", MNL – ÁEH XIX-A-21-a 10/C M-6-39.

50 János Gadó, '"Új Elnöknek G.Ernőt Választottam Meg..."', *Szombat*, 1 (2001), 16–17.

> sell rural churches and use the money for public church purposes. This provision within the Church makes it possible to buy abandoned churches cheaply, because the Church considers the opinion of state experts when assessing the value of these buildings.[51]

Pál Veres's letter is illustrated by the sale of a small synagogue in the countryside in Abaújszántó. Initially, the MIOK architect set the price at 264,000 forints. However, an expert from BIK (Budapest Real Estate Company) valued the building at half the original price, i.e. 130,000 forints. The architect considered this price to be too low and indicated that the company had the option to sell the building for 143,000 Forints. Subsequently, a note from Pál Veres to Károly Olt, the head of ÁEH, attests that the company ultimately purchased the synagogue for 150,000 Forints. An ÁEH memorandum from 1959 indicated that synagogues could be utilized for cultural purposes. Nevertheless, in the majority of instances the synagogues were not utilized for this purpose, despite the justification for the purchase including a cultural purpose. A much more realistic picture is painted by the following memo from 1975:

> [...] The established practice is that the majority of the synagogues sold are purchased by government institutions and cooperatives. Either they are demolished or, in the case of monuments or historical buildings, they are used for cultic [*kultikus*] purposes (library, archive, museum, cultural centre, sports hall, etc.). The State Ecclesiastical Office ensures that the synagogues sold are used for purposes that do not offend the sensibilities of the faithful.[52]

Just as in the 1956 example, neither the Religious Affairs Department nor the community leadership showed any resistance to the undignified use of the synagogues; therefore, the state, councils and companies did not care how much the conversion of a synagogue into a sports hall, a warehouse or a temple offended the Jewish community.

51 MNL – ÁEH XIX-A-21-a 10/C M-8-4.
52 'Prés Alatt [Válogatás Az ÁEH Dokumentumaiból – 1974: Cenzúrázott Hitközségi Sajtó]', *Szombat (2000)*, 3–4.

FROM REGIME CHANGE UNTIL THE PRESENT

After the fall of communism, the renovation of synagogues accelerated: many in Budapest and in the countryside were renovated; there were direct state funds, but municipalities could also apply for public funds. In many places, charity events were organized, such as concerts for the renovation of synagogues. In addition, support from Hungarian-Americans was an important source of funding.

As the Jews' situation changed with the regime change, so did attitudes toward synagogues. The early part of the 1990s were marked by increased interest in synagogues and an increased number of synagogue renovations: both the renovation of disused synagogues and the search for their new function, and the renovation of synagogues in community use. Although synagogues received more attention as Jewish cultural life boomed, there was no planning, except to a certain extent for synagogues in religious use, while synagogues no longer in religious use only received appropriate treatment and function when local actors and foundations took up the project of doing so. The fate of many synagogues of architectural and artistic historical importance was not settled during this period either, and they continued to be destroyed or remained in unworthy use.

Before the change of regime, Hungarian Jewry was generally isolated from Western and Israeli influences, both religiously and organizationally. Also, relations with Israel, which had been determined by Soviet foreign policy, were revived.[53]

Meanwhile, in the new democratic Hungary, however, the emergence of freedom of speech also strengthened the anti-Semitic voices that had mostly been kept in check during the Kádár era. Although anti-Semitism was not openly tolerated, several politicians appeared in Hungarian public life who professed anti-Semitic beliefs and appealed to anti-Semitic sentiments. This led to the paradoxical situation that although Hungarian Jews were finally free to practice their religion after state socialism, they had to face a simultaneous rise in anti-Semitism.[54] The attitudes of the majority of society toward Jews are difficult to measure, but one aspect that has been studied is anti-Semitism. One piece of research from this era shows that xenophobia, including anti-Semitism, increased between 1990 and 1995 and that traditional prejudices such as anti-Semitism and Antigypsyism

53 Miklós Szalai, 'Zsidóság a rendszerváltásban, rendszerváltás a zsidóságban, *Szombat* (2000) <https://www.szombat.org/politika/zsidosag-a-rendszervaltasban-rendszervaltas-a-zsidosagban> [accessed on 17 May 2023].

54 Szalai, 'Zsidóság'; Randolph L. Braham, 'Magyarország: hadjárat a holokauszt történelmi emlékezete ellen', in *A holokauszt Magyarországon hetven év múltán. Történelem és emlékezet*, ed. by Randolph L. Braham and András Kovács (Budapest: Múlt és Jövő Alapítvány, 2015), pp. 229–78 (pp. 236–37).

have a strong social base in Hungary. The reasons for this are not fully understood, but the social tensions and emotions aroused by the transformation played an important role. In the mid-1990s, research saw a change in this trend. Researchers saw a correlation between political preference and anti-Semitism: traditionally left-wing voters were less likely to have anti-Jewish sentiments, while right-wing voters were most likely to agree with anti-Semitic political statements.[55] In András Kovács' research, we see similar trends for this period as in Fábián-Sík's research. Kovács puts the proportion of strongly anti-Semitic people at 10–15% in the 1990s.[56]

As Henrik Fisch pointed out decades earlier, this issue could escalate if far-right anti-Jewish groups started to use Jewish spaces. After the fall of communism, there were several cases in Hungary, such as the synagogues in Esztergom and Kecskemét, where far-right parties or music groups wanted to use former synagogues for events. In all cases, this was prevented by the objections of the local rabbi or the central Jewish community. But even in less-radical cases, the transformation and use of synagogue spaces is an act of reinterpretation that can lead to a clash between the use of secular and profane spaces.[57] The case studies that will be subsequently discussed provide examples of this.

At the same time, public spaces and forums were opened to talk about the Holocaust and commemorate its victims; however, compared to the modern Western canon of Holocaust remembrance that emerged in the 1980s and 1990s, Eastern Europe and Hungary "lagged behind".[58] It is important to note that places of commemoration for Holocaust victims are often synagogues or community cemeteries, and in many cases memorial plaques have been placed at these sites. Memorials were erected at different times after the regime change, but it is typical that the anniversaries of the Holocaust (1994, 2004, 2014) were marked by a revival of

55 Zoltán Fábián and Endre Sík, 'Előítéletesség és tekintélyelvűség', *Társadalmi Riport 1996*, ed. by Rudolf Andorka, Tamás Kolosi, and György Vukovich (Budapest: TÁRKI, Századvég, 1996), pp. 381–413.

56 András Kovács, 'Antisemitic prejudice and political antisemitism in present-day Hungary', *Journal For The Study of Antisemitism*, 4 (2012), 443–67.

57 'Lefújták az egykori zsinagógába tervezett Hungarica-koncertet', *ORIGO*, 15 November 2010 <https://www.origo.hu/itthon/20101115-nem-adhatott-koncertet-a-hungarica-a-kecskemeti-zsinagogaban.html> [accessed on 1 May 2023]; 'Nem engedik be a Jobbikot az egykori zsinagógába', *ORIGO*, 22 January 2010 <https://www.origo.hu/itthon/20100122-jobbik-lakossagi-forum-esztergom-korabbi-zsinagoga-helyszinvaltozas.html> [accessed on 1 May 2023]; 'Zsinagógában gyűlne a Jobbik', *Index.hu*, 30 January 2014 <https://index.hu/belfold/2014/01/30/jobbik_esztergomi_zsingagoga> [accessed on 1 May 2023]; Gergely Tóth, 'A Mi Hazánk a zalaegerszegi zsinagógában tartott volna kampányrendezvényt, a Mazsihisz tiltakozására a városvezetés visszavonta a bérleti szerződést', *Telex.hu*, 18 February 2022 <https://telex.hu/valasztas-2022/2022/02/18/a-mi-hazank-egykori-zsinagogaban-tart-kampanyrendezvenyt-a-mazsihisz-tiltakozik> [accessed on 1 May 2023].

58 Máté Zombory, *Traumatársadalom* (Budapest: Kijárat, 2019).

memorials and plaques.[59] Most of the memorials were unveiled in 2004, on the occasion of the 60th anniversary, thanks to increased political and media attention and academic research.[60]

The last two decades have seen some organizational changes in the Jewish community in Hungary as well. The Hungarian Orthodox Israelite Congregation (MOIH) became an independent historic church in 2012, but still within the framework of MAZSIHISZ; however, after a series of disagreements it left MAZSIHISZ and is now incorporated by the Chabad-Lubavitch movement.[61] The Chabad-Lubavitch movement has been present and growing since the regime change and has become a relevant religious and political actor. This movement was founded by Rabbi Baruch Oberlander in Hungary, who has Hungarian roots, but it has no historical antecedents in Hungary. Its organization was officially established in 2004, and in 2010 it became one of three registered Jewish communities under the name of the United Hungarian Israelite Congregation (EMIH). Its members see themselves as heirs to the earlier Status Quo Ante movement, and the group has established a growing number of synagogue congregations in both the capital and the countryside.[62]

The new millennium did not bring any radical change in the situation of synagogues. Synagogue renovations in recent decades have been funded mainly from two sources: EU grants and public funds, both of which increased in the 2000s. The state has always played a role in the renovation and management of synagogues, but in some periods it has been more pronounced. In the framework of the Holocaust Memorial Year 2014, the government decided to establish a synagogue renovation program, with a special focus on the renovation of three large synagogues in Hungary: the Miskolc, Szeged and Rumbach Street synagogues.[63] There have been several cases where EU and state funds were used together.

The state has always played a role in the renovation and management of synagogues. The protection and heritage management of synagogues has been complicated by the ever-changing system of heritage protection and legislation

59 The case of the exhibition (Elfeledett szomszédaink / Forgotten Neighbours) held in a former synagogue in Pápa eloquently demonstrated that, despite the great scholarly success and the number of visitors, the memory of the Holocaust has not been successfully integrated into the local memory. Gergely Miklós Nagy, 'Gyökértelen faként élt, amíg nem látta ezt a katartikus kiállítást', *24.hu*, 26 January 2020 <https://24.hu/belfold/2020/01/26/papa-onkormanyzat-zsido-kiallitas-zsinagoga-tarlat-gyekiczki-andras/?fbclid=IwZXh0bgNhZW0CMTEAAR3Bb-G6yZoihrPISUhHzRvVIjZQG1k1K_vCI4RqBmR8zMTrlHLZRLhigCk_aem_AWp_Rp1Na5rTc6Hvf_dsmBqacLsi9ZtxmCVsgDkmyv6L5e9jvWyYza4sjIY7aSWGU0Po-Pr6X12Ksm98YHiagWyYE> [accessed on 17 May 2023].

60 András Szécsényi, *Kőbe zárt emlékezet. Holokauszt emlékművek a Kárpát-medencében* (Budapest: Holocaust Dokumentációs Központ és Emlékgyűjtemény Közalapítvány, 2018), p. 9.

61 Bányai and Komoróczy, *Magyarországi zsidó*, p. 45.

62 Géza Komoróczy, *A zsidók története Magyarországon* (Budapest: Kalligram Kiadó, 2012), pp. 1086–87.

63 Miniszterelnökség, 'Megemlékezések – emlékezésformák, *2015-2019.kormány.hu*, 1 June 2015 <https://2015-2019.kormany.hu/hu/miniszterelnokseg/hirek/megemlekezesek-emlekezesformak> [accessed on 17 May 2023].

in recent decades.[64] After a series of changes in management in 2016, the government's background institution dealing with heritage management became inconvenient for the government, so it was finally abolished on 1 January 2017, citing bureaucracy reduction, and some of its tasks were transferred to the Prime Minister's Office, while the scientific work was partly carried out by the Hungarian Museum of Architecture and Monument Protection Documentation Centre (MPDC), which operates under the auspices of the Hungarian Academy of Arts. The collections, plans, and photographs of the former KÖH are kept at MPDC. Due to constant changes, it is not clear which institution to turn to in the case of monuments, what help to expect, and who is responsible in each specific case. Contrary to these developments, in 2023 the Hungarian Academy of Sciences (HAS) issued a document containing an opinion on the draft law "on the order of public construction investments", and a proposal for a "Hungarian architecture law", as well as a position paper on the protection of Hungarian monuments. In this, HAS proposed the creation of a unified central organization due to the fragmentation of tasks or loss of competences as a result of a series of restructuring processes.[65]

The tables below also show that most former synagogues are still in secular, non-cultural use, but the number of synagogues that have been reverted to religious use and those in cultural use has increased significantly in the decades since the regime change. In terms of synagogue renovation, EU funding has been a great help; in recent years since and in the context of the Holocaust Memorial Year 2014, there has been a revival of public attention and support. It is important, however, that renovations are accompanied by new functions as this will ensure that the condition of the buildings is maintained. The protection of synagogues is an area where there could be unity of action. Meanwhile, in recent years there has been a slow but steady increase in the number of synagogues listed as historical monuments. In 1994, 44 synagogues and prayer houses were protected, a small proportion compared to the 243 synagogues and prayer houses in Hungary at that time.[66] According to Zsuzsanna Toronyi's collection, 60 synagogues were protected in 2010.[67] This is 45% of the 132 synagogues in Hungary, and some

64 From 1992, the National Office for the Protection of Monuments and Sites was responsible for all Hungarian monuments; from 2001, this task fell under the auspices of the Cultural Heritage Protection Office (KÖH). In 2011, the tasks of the heritage protection and archaeological authorities of KÖH were transferred to government offices, with one designated district office in each county and two in Budapest, typically under the direction of political appointees who are loyal to the government. With the abolition of KÖH in 2012, the newly established Gyula Forster National Heritage Protection and Property Management Centre took over heritage registration and supervision. Pál Lővei, 'A műemlékvédelem', *Ars Hungarica*, 39.4 (2013), 469–77.

65 MTA – Műemléki Munkacsoport: Állásfoglalás a műemlékügyről (2023).

66 In his work, Anikó Gazda mentions 132 synagogues and 95 prayer houses (i.e., a total of 227 buildings) which were still standing at the time of the regime change (Gazda, *Zsinagógák*, pp. 13–14). András Román, on the other hand, also referring to Anikó Gazda, mentions a total of 243 synagogues and prayer houses.

67 Zsuzsanna Toronyi, 'Mivé lettek az egykori magyar zsidó imaházak? – Bútorraktár vívóterem, galéria… – zsinagógák a mai Magyarországon', *MúzeumCafé*, 4 (2010) <http://muzeumcafe.hu/hu/mive-lettek-az-egykori-magyar-zsido-imahazak/> [accessed on 17 May 2023].

experts say that more synagogues need to be protected. A more important question, however, is whether the protected synagogues are being treated in accordance with their special architectural and monumental significance. Many of the protected synagogues have been renovated in recent decades, but this is not the case for many of the listed synagogues.

1. Functions of synagogues in Hungary (Hanna Mezei's calculation)

	SURVEY OF ANIKÓ GAZDA 1980–1987	SURVEY OF THE HEBREW UNIVERSITY IN JERUSALEM 2018–2019
out of use	15.9% (21)	8.6% (14)
profane, cultural function	18.9% (25)	29.0% (47)
profane, non-cultural function	46.0% (61)	33.9% (55)
continued use in a religious function	18.0% (25)	24.0% (39)
use by other religion	–	3.7% (6)
memorial use	–	0.6% (1)

2. Spreadsheet: Current cultural function (47) – own calculation based on the survey of the Hebrew University in Jerusalem

museum	36% (17)
cultural centre	23% (11)
library	14% (7)
school	12% (6)
concert hall	8% (4)
village house	2% (1)
cinema	2% (1)

3. Current non-cultural function (55) – own calculation based on the survey of the Hebrew University in Jerusalem

economical use	45% (25)
residential house	36% (20)
other	18% (10)

CASE STUDIES

In the last section of this paper, we present four different case studies. The first presents an interesting continuing relationship between the local Jewish and non-Jewish inhabitants (Gentiles). The second case shows how intriguing the path of an abandoned synagogue can be in terms of its history of use, and how a new function can be confronted with the original function of the building. The third case shows how a synagogue is rebuilt on the initiative of citizens and communities, and how, independently of this, a non-local but local Jewish community is formed. The fourth and final case is about resistance and architectural modernism; how a community confronted the socialist state and religious leaders around a modernist synagogue.

CONTINUATION – JEWS AND GENTILES: KISKUNHALAS

The Jewish community in Kiskunhalas has a long history. The settlement of Jews began in the middle of the eighteenth century. The synagogue was built in 1861, followed by other community buildings: the rabbi's house, the school, the mikveh and the slaughterhouse. On 17 June 1944, people were packed into wagons at the railway station and transported to the Szeged ghetto. From there, the Jews of Kiskunhalas were sent in different directions: only a small number were sent to Auschwitz; the majority went to the Strasshof concentration and distribution camp, from where they were sent in small groups to various work camps.[68] According to the research of the local historian István Végső, 270–290 local Jewish people died in the Holocaust, including the victims of the labour service. The total number of survivors in Kiskunhalas was 442, which is very high compared to the number of Jews in rural Hungary.[69] The reorganization of the community began in the spring of 1945. After 1949, however, many religious Jewish families left the country.[70] In 1998, Sándor Reinhold, who had held the post since 1985, died and was succeeded by András Raáb, who was president of the community until his death in 2022. Before the Holocaust, Kiskunhalas was characterized by the separation of Jews and non-Jews, and mixed Christian-Jewish marriages were very rare. This segregation was reinforced during the decades of anti-religious socialism.[71] With the change

68 István Végső and Balázs Simko, *Zsidósors Kiskunhalason – kisvárosi út a holokauszthoz* (Budapest: L'Harmattan, 2007), pp. 178–80.
69 Ibid., p. 234.
70 Ibid., pp. 259–62.
71 Ibid., pp. 145–46.

of regime came a shift to reunite the non-Jewish residents of the town with the Jewish community and to extend the memory of the Holocaust beyond the synagogue walls

Since 1946, the community has organized an annual Holocaust memorial service, the first of which was held for the city's non-Jewish members with the presence of the city administration in the synagogue in 1991.[72] The main site of Holocaust commemoration is the synagogue and the plaque on the synagogue wall. In March 1949, a plaque commemorating the victims of the Holocaust in Kiskunhalas was unveiled on the wall of the synagogue, but this has also been combined on several occasions, for example in 1994, with a commemoration in front of the plaque at the railway station. This commemorates the workers killed at the station on 11 October 1944. The plaque, which can still be seen today, was unveiled in 1988. The victims listed are not from Kiskunhalas, but the plaque is an important part of local Holocaust remembrance.[73] The Holocaust commemoration is always held on the second Sunday in June, in memory of the local deportation. In addition to the local religious community, representatives of the local government and, since 2010, the pastor of the local Reformed Church and representatives of the Roma minority community are also present. Non-Jewish residents and Jews from Kiskunhalas also participate in these commemorations. There is no Holocaust memorial in the town, but the Second World War memorial also commemorates the victims of the Holocaust. In 1990, the local press began to write about the memorial, which had been planned for years by a local teacher but could only be realized after the change of regime in the liberating atmosphere of remembrance. The article written at the time said that the monument was a memorial to all the victims of the Second World War, including the Jewish victims. "And the Jewish community has promised financial support, as the plaque will of course also bear the names of the victims of the concentration camps", wrote Bács-Kiskun Megyei Népújság (local newspaper) at the time.[74] The unveiling took place on 1 November 1991, on All Souls' Day. Halasi Tükör (a local newspaper) reported that the monument was unveiled during an ecumenical service and that the president of the Jewish community spoke at the ceremony, along with representatives of other religions.[75] In his inaugural speech, the mayor commemorated those who had died for different reasons ("There were people who lived, loved, worked, became heroes, who were deported

72 Ágnes Fésüsné Bakos, 'A kiskunhalasi zsidók krónikája 1945–2001', in *Legyen Világosság (Emlékkönyv a Kiskunhalasi Izraelita Hitközség múltja és jelene)*, ed. by Aurél Szakál (Kiskunhalas, Kiskunhalasi Izraelita Hitközség – Thorma János Múzeum, 2011), p. 134.
73 István Végső, 'Tragédia 1944. október 11-én a kiskunhalasi vasútállomáson', in *Legyen Világosság* , p. 110.
74 'Emlékmű a II. világháború halasi áldozatainak', *Bács Kiskun Megyei Népújság*, 4 (1991), p. 1.
75 'Felavatták Halason a II. világháborús emlékművet', *Bács Kiskun Megyei Népújság*, 46 (1991), p. 3; 'Emlékmű avatás', Halasi Tükör, 5 (1991), p. 1.

and brutally murdered, who were victims of occupation and bombing") and called on the community to reconcile.[76] At the time, the intention of the city and the people who erected the memorial was clear and important: the city should also commemorate the victims of the Holocaust through a joint Second World War memorial. However, based on my interviews so far, no one except the local historian knew that the city's Second World War memorial included Jewish names and that the original intention was to commemorate the victims of the Holocaust. Thus, the memorial failed to fulfil its original purpose, which is a testimony to the fragmentation of memory that is typical of Hungary. Another form of remembrance in the city is the stumbling stones, five of which were laid in Kiskunhalas on 19 June 2007. They are the work of German artist Gunter Demnig, who inscribed the names of Holocaust victims, their birth and deportation dates and places of death on a copper plaque fixed to a concrete block. In Germany, there are tens of thousands of these stumbling stones, but in Hungary there are also many in several cities. The stumbling stones in Kiskunhalas were among the first in Hungary.[77]

In addition to religious services, the congregation organizes various cultural events in the community. Both of my community interviewees often mentioned the Jewish children's camp and their Jewish summer festival. The Jewish Summer Festival has been held since 2005[78] and the children's camp since 2011, both annually.[79] While the Jewish children's camp is a closed program, the Jewish Summer Festival is an open event (not only for Jews); according to the president of the Jewish community, usually 300-400 people come, not only from Kiskunhalas. In addition to these programs, the community sometimes organizes programs open to all interested people to celebrate the anniversary of the founding of Israel.

> The synagogue in Kiskunhalas, on the one hand, we are proud of it because it has a living community [...] So the synagogue in Kiskunhalas has remained a synagogue. And that is so good! I am so happy that this miracle happened here! So, on the other hand, there is a functioning community, a Jewish community. (Károly Palásti, local high school teacher)

From the community's point of view, the synagogue is a symbol of community unity, linked to the community that has been worshipping in this building for more than a century. In my conversations with

76 'Emlékművet avattunk', *Halasi Tükör*, p. 1.
77 'Botlatókövek', Mazsike, [n.d.] <https://mazsike.hu/projektek/botlatokovek/> [accessed on 17 May 2023]. Five people are commemorated, Ignác Schwarz, a parish magistrate, Áron Frank, a dentist, his wife, Borbála Holländer, Antal Grósz, a photographer, and László Winter, an actor.
78 István Végső, 'A Kiskunhalasi Izraelita Hitközség krónikája 2001–2011', in *Legyen Világosság*, p. 150.
79 Ibid.

the congregation, this is expressed repeatedly: the fact that the synagogue stands means that "we are still here", that the continuity of Judaism is ever-lasting.

An important moment of communal Jewish-non-Jewish unity occurred when, in January 1993, Sándor Reinhold, the president of the Jewish community, appealed to the citizens of Halas, as well as to Jews at home and abroad, to support financially the renovation of the synagogue, which was in a very poor state of repair.[80] Throughout the year, the president of the community used every opportunity to keep the renovation of the synagogue on the agenda.[81] After the work was completed, a plaque was erected in honour of the donors, and the inscription on the plaque gives an idea of who, in addition to those already mentioned, contributed to the renovation of the synagogue. A total of 30 donors are listed on the plaque. Those of Jewish origin are from Kiskunhalas, Budapest or abroad. Three of these five persons belonged to former or present important Jewish families of Kiskunhalas. Nine of the donors were definitely businessmen from Bács-Kiskun County, and three were probably local businessmen.

Local (non-Jewish) entrepreneurs and businesses make up about half or almost half of the donors. An interesting question is what could have motivated these entrepreneurs and other non-Jewish residents of Kishunhalas and the surrounding area to donate. Certainly, the aforementioned activities of the then-President and the serious local media coverage that the collection for the synagogue received may have played a role. In addition, the local and national significance of the building must have been a major motivation for many to support its renovation. It is also likely that the general mood after the change of regime contributed to the success of the fundraising campaign for the renovation of the synagogue in Kiskunhalas, as after years of state socialism people were keen to get involved in solving social issues and felt they 'should' be involved in achieving community goals.[82]

A significant change from the period of political transition is that although the community has had to renovate the synagogue since then, there has been no question of turning to the municipal community. The openness of the Jewish community and the joint commemoration of the Holocaust remained, but the fact that the Jewish community's concerns should be so much a matter for the wider community remained a unique case. The vestiges of the Jewish–non-Jewish distinction I mentioned earlier still linger in the minds of many – Jews and non-Jews alike.

80 Fésűsné, 'A Kiskunhalasi', p. 135.
81 Sándor Reinhold, 'A mártírünnepség szombaton nem lehetett', *Petőfi Népe*, 48 (1993), 7; Sándor Reinhold, 'A kiskunhalasi zsinagógáért', *Petőfi Népe*, 48 (1993), 7.
82 Ágnes Czakó and others, *Lakossági adományok és önkéntes munka* (Budapest: Nonprofit Kutatócsoport – Központi Statisztikai Hivatal, 1995), p. 30.

A related theoretical framework can be found in the concepts outlined in Indian-American anthropologist Arjun Appadurai's *The Creation of Locality*. Locality, in Appadurai's interpretation, is not really about spatiality or degrees, but rather about relationships and contexts; neighbourhoods, in his interpretation, are "tangible communities characterized by their reality, whether spatial or virtual, and their capacity for social reproduction".[83] The production of neighbourhood as a practice of power is used by Appadurai in a colonial context, but it can also be interpreted in the context of the Jews. This act has long defined, and continues to define, the relationship between Jews and non-Jews, as knowledge is preserved about who lived where, what shop was where. In a more peaceful setting, this model of neighbourhood can also be applied since, according to Appadurai's theory, neighbourhoods are always imagined in relation to something, always require context, cannot stand alone, so the term neighbourhood can be used to spatially describe the Jewish–non-Jewish relationship and to map possible sites of memory.[84]

I noticed a discrepancy between congregants and non-congregants as regards the openness of the synagogue. The Jewish community is open to visitors, and much of its programming is open to the non-Jewish population as it seeks to adapt to a changing world. In fact, the synagogue itself hosts programs that are not traditionally part of it – programs that would not be held in a synagogue, such as concerts and theatre performances. But many non-Jews still regard local Jews as a closed community. In this regard, András Raáb, former president of the community, said, "You have to open it up. So it shouldn't be a mystical thing that there's a synagogue there – oh I don't know what's there. Inside, outside, I don't know what they do. Because we're no different from other people. It's very well resolved there in the form of a conversation".

CULT-HISTORICAL CHALLENGES AND THE QUESTION OF IDOLTRY: TATA[85]

> John Knox, the Calvinists also smashed the statues because they could not bear them, because it offended their souls that they were so beautiful. The Jews, too, have always been great enemies of statues: but I do not belong to any of these categories; I think that hardly anything ennobles the taste more than the art of sculpture,

83 Arjun Appadurai, *The production of locality. In Modernity in Large* (Minneapolis, Public Worlds, 2009), p. 179.
84 Ibid., pp. 185–89.
85 This case study is built on the following publication: Lóránt Bódi, 'A tatai zsinagóga esete a kádári emlékezetpolitika tükrében', *Új Forrás*, 42 (2010), 45–56.

> and that the most beautiful monuments of sculpture are of great archaeological and aesthetic importance. (Ferenc Pulszky)[86]

Tata, a small town of 23,000 inhabitants about 60 km from Budapest, is a place where it is also difficult to find traces of the former Jewish population that once flourished and played an important role in the life of the town.[87] From the records of a famous philosophical rabbi, Izidor Goldberger (who also tragically died in the Holocaust), it is known that the presence of Jews in the settlement was uninterrupted from the so-called Árpád period (845–907) until the Second World War.[88] However, the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were a period of development and prosperity for Tata and its Jewish inhabitants, and it was during this period that the Romanesque-style synagogue was opened in 1861.[89]

During the Holocaust, in 1944, 650 Jews were deported to Auschwitz, of whom 10–20 returned home. The community disintegrated, although religious life did not cease completely. The synagogue was open on High Holidays, and the prayer house next to the synagogue was a small but busy place of Jewish worship. With the temporary help of the Reformed minister of Tata, the Talmud school was able to start. The cemetery and the synagogue were maintained by György Vámosi, the chairman of the community, and his son. At the end of the 1960s, Vámosi was forced to resign from the presidency due to illness, and a new president was appointed. The Romanesque synagogue has housed a museum since 1977 (it was in the process of being closed at the time of writing), soon after the building had been purchased by the County Council from the Central Jewish Community in 1976 (the community, which had dwindled to a few, had no legal control over the building). Then, contrary to the original plans (the site was to be used for an extension of the neighbouring hospital), the synagogue was rebuilt internally (the building was stripped of its denominational features, de-Judaized) and a museum was established under the name of the Museum of Greco-Roman Sculpture. The exhibits came from the sculpture collection of the Museum of Fine Arts, part of which was deposited in the new museum. The sculpture collection was founded in the second half of the nineteenth century on the initiative of Ferenc Pulszky in a late *philhellenic*[90] spirit – as we can read

86 Ferenc Pulszky (1814–1897) was a writer, politician and elected member of the Hungarian Diet. This quotation was delivered during a diet debate on the establishment and specific role of the Hungarian National Museum in 1872. Quoted by Edit Szentesi, 'A szobortörténeti másolatgyűjtemény a Magyar Nemzeti Múzeumban a 19. század utolsó harmadában', *Művészettörténeti Értesítő*, 55 (2006), 1–95.

87 László Gyüszi, 'A zsidóság helyzete a tatai Esterházy-uradalomban (XVIII–XIX. század)', in *Tata Barátainak Köre, Évkönyv* (Tata: FBK 1994), pp. 19–31.

88 Izidor Goldberger, *A tatatóvárosi zsidóság története* (Budapest: Neuwald, 1938), pp. 1–18.

89 Géza Körmendi, *Tata És Környéke* (Tata: Escort, 2007).

90 Péter György, *Múzeum, a Tanulóház* (Budapest: Szépművészeti Múzeum, 2013); Martin Vöhler, Stella Alekou, and Miltos Pechlivanos, *Concepts and Functions of Philhellenism: Aspects of a Transcultural Movement* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2021), pp. 1–9.

above –with educational and cultural aims (the first sculpture collections were founded in the first half of the nineteenth century) and due to the lack of original antique sculptures for the National Museum, which moved to its own building in 1831. After several decades of decay, it was moved in a dilapidated state to Tata and neighbouring Komárom as the property of the Museum of Fine Arts (at the same time, the so-called Renaissance pieces of the sculpture collection were moved to the synagogue in Kecskemét, which had been converted into the House of Technology).[91] The opening of the museum was achieved at considerable expense, with the restoration of the neglected building and the ruined collection.[92] The original pedagogical and educational function of the collection was reproduced in a new state-socialist context in an abandoned synagogue building.

In 1994, on the initiative of the mayor, Katalin Kerti, representing the liberal party of SZDSZ (Alliance of Free Democrats), a granite block was placed in the garden of the synagogue to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the deportations.[93] Ten years later, in 2004, almost 40 years after the opening of the museum, the synagogue building was completely renovated to commemorate the 60th anniversary of the deportations, and the tablets of stone were returned to their original place in the form of replicas with the help of Katalin Kerti and József Lendik, a Socialist municipal representative. At the same time, a group of six sculptures by the sculptor Mária Lugossy, entitled In Memory of the Martyrs of All Times, was inaugurated. The sculptures were placed in the garden of the synagogue (on the left side of the building), which was declared a memorial park. Particularly curious was the symbolic juxtaposition of the stylized tablets of the Law on the roof of the synagogue, proclaiming God's commandment against idolatry, and the presence of real 'idols' inside the building. The restored exterior of the synagogue building (the interior is still dominated by concrete slabs, blue paint and linoleum) and the replicas of ancient statues inside the building offer at the same time a curious historical-cultural parallel. Consider Hanukkah, the "Festival of Lights", which is linked to the Maccabean wars, in which the Jews had to convert under the Greek emperor Antiochus. Among other things, they desecrated the Temple Square in Jerusalem and established the cult of Zeus there, erecting an altar to Zeus and other statues inside the Temple. Hanukkah celebrates the victory of the Maccabees over their enemy ruler, the divine miracle and the subsequent religious 'revival'. The Maccabean wars are

91 Szentesi, 'A szobortörténeti', pp. 39–42.
92 In the 1980s the museum became, along with other museums and collections, a branch of the local Kuny Domonkos Museum.
93 Interview with Katalin Kerti, February 2010.

a powerful example of the conflict between the imposition of idols in temples and the strong Jewish prohibition against idolatry.

In 2010, an article by Lóránt Bódi appeared in the local cultural journal, *Új Forrás*, criticizing former director Endre Bíró and his insistence on placing the Greco-Roman sculptures in the synagogue for the first time as a 'desecrating act'.[94] The article sparked a public debate; a letter was sent by Sarolta Szatmári (1941–2018), cultural politician, also a former director of the museum and Bíró's wife, who criticized Bódi's position and defended the decision, saying: "As a medieval archaeologist, I defend and praise all architectural monuments, and I'm convinced that the existence and survival of buildings depends on their use. So any use is better than standing empty".[95] Bódi replied to the letter by referring to the historical controversy of the current situation, which dates back to the Maccabean Wars.[96]

In 2016, at a press conference, the Christian Democrat mayor of Tata, József Michl, and the director of the National Museum, László Báan, announced the future fate of the collections, which would be renovated and displayed in the Star Fort of Komárom (10 km from Tata); at the same time, the mayor also touched upon the reuse of the synagogue building: "It will house the Bible Exhibition, which will show the influence of the Bible on the world throughout history".[97] Finally, in the summer of 2016, the statues "came out" of the synagogue building. This process was filmed by the artistic duo Technica Schweiz, who had meanwhile taken over the space for an artistic intervention with the involvement of ceramic design students.[98] The duo set up a temporary porcelain factory to produce replicas of the sculptures, in reference both to one of Tata's most famous Jews, Mór Fischer, the founder and reviver of the Herend Porcelain Manufactory, and also to the didactic function of the former collection. Accompanied by a film, the artworks were exhibited in the synagogue in the summer of 2017 and have been shown in many other places since then. However, as the synagogue has been unoccupied for the past six years, various other plans have been made, but nothing has come of them, and the website of the Kuny Domonkos Museum still states that the "Former Synagogue Exhibition Room" ("Volt Zsinagóga Kiállítóhely") is closed and will remain so until a new permanent exhibition is completed.[99]

94 Bódi, 'A tatai zsinagóga', pp. 45–56.
95 Sarolta Szatmári, 'Reflexiók A tatai zsinagóga esete a kádári emlékezetpolitika tükrében című Bódi Lóránt tanulmányra', *Új Forrás*, 43 (2011), 106–08.
96 Lóránt Bódi, 'Válasz Szatmári Saroltának', *Új Forrás*, 43 (2011), p. 109–10.
97 Ágnes Ábrahám, 'Komáromba költözik a Görög-Római Szobormásolatok Kiállítása', *arhiv.tata.hu*, 18 November 2016 <https://arhiv.tata.hu/16110/komaromba_koltozik_a_gorog_romai_szobormasolatok_kiallitasa> [accessed on 30 April 2023].
98 László Gergelyand Péter Rákosi, *A kék terem / The Blue Room – A Tehnica Schweiz projektje* (Berlin: Archive Books, 2021).
99 <https://kunymuzeum.hu/en/former-synagogue-exhibition> [accessed on 30 April 2023]. Also numerous emails were sent by Lóránt Bódi to the museum director about the future plans for the synagogue building and the proposed exhibition, but no replies were received.

REVIVAL WITHOUT ROOTS: TOKAJ

The history of the Tokaj community goes back a long way. Jews first settled in Tokaj in the eighteenth century, but the settlement began to grow at the turn of the nineteenth century. The largest number of Jews (1,161) and the highest proportion of Jews in Tokaj was recorded in the 1880 census, when they made up 25.9% of the population.[100] Before the Holocaust, the Jewish community in Tokaj had an extensive infrastructure and institutional system. The community had a rabbi, a mashgiach, a cantor, a *mohel*, a *cheder* (primary school) with a teacher, a yeshiva, two kosher butchers, and a Passover bakery.[101] On 16 April 1944, the Jewish population of Tokaj was forced into a ghetto set up in the courtyard of the synagogue. The Jews of Zemplén region were gathered in the Sátoraljaújhely ghetto and deported from there to Auschwitz on 16 May.[102] Few survived the Holocaust, and although religious life was partially reorganized in the wave of emigration after 1956, most of Tokaj's Jews left the country. There are no exact figures on the number of those who were deported or those who escaped. Together with other local residents, István Zelenák, a local historian, compiled a list of the deceased, which was constantly expanded; according to an interview with a local historian, about 950 Tokaj Jews may have died in the Holocaust.[103] After 1945, the community had three presidents; the death of the last president, József Lőwy, in 1981 marked the end of religious life in Tokaj.[104]

In 1982, the synagogue was still intact but in a very dilapidated state; the interior decoration was still visible but is now lost. Nevertheless, after the synagogue was purchased by a farmers' cooperative in 1983, for reasons unknown they wanted to set up a bottling plant and convert the building accordingly. The condition of the building deteriorated and the interior decoration and furnishings were completely destroyed. In the 1980s there were occasional reports in the local press about the damage to the synagogue and its reuse; however, these concerned not the building's former cultural and social role or its Jewish past but its artistic and historical value, and there was no question of using the building as a memorial to the Jewish community of the past.[105]

János Májer, who had been chairman of the council since 1987, felt it was important to save the synagogue, and it was on his initiative that the synagogue was bought back from the local farmers' cooperative.

100 'Tokaj', Magyarország településeinek népszámlálási–etnikai adatbázisa, [n.d.] <https://mtatkki.ogyk.hu/nepszamlalas_adatok.php?ev=&ev2=&megye=&telepules=135&kod=&nemzetiseg=&felekezet=izraelita&tipus=mind&keyword=&page=50> [accessed on 17 May 2023].
101 Gábor Glück, *Itt éltek és a messzeségbe haltak…* (Magánkiadás, Tokaj, 2019), p. 16.
102 István Zelenák, *Tokaji zsidó emlékek* (Agroinform Kiadó, Tokaj, 2014), pp. 28–29.
103 Interview with István Zelenák.
104 Zelenák, *Tokaji*, p. 30.
105 Mihály Ráday, 'Többnyire hívők nélkül', *Népszabadság*, 56 (1998), 36; Zelenák, Tokaji, p. 54.

He then lobbied the President of the County Council for the renovation of the synagogue, and the County Council finally issued a grant for the restoration of the roof structure and conservation. In 1987, a state-owned company commissioned an architect to draw up plans for the restoration and use of the synagogue. János Máyer, the mayor, had already envisaged a cultural function for the building.[106] Work began in 1988. The renovation included restoration of the parapet, rebuilding of the concrete canopy that held the building together, and reconstruction of the steel donga roof. Pál Farkas, the architect and his colleagues found doors and windows from the synagogue in the nearby local farmers' cooperative in Szerencs and used them as models for the exterior restoration. In 1991, several events were held in the synagogue and the exterior reconstruction continued; also in this year, a fundraising campaign was organized to continue the restoration of the synagogue.[107]

On 4 September 1999, the synagogue was burnt down in an arson attack. The building was badly damaged and 90% of the new roof structure was destroyed.[108] At a subsequent general meeting, the Tokaj community voted to restore the synagogue.[109] Funding for the renovation was applied for under the PHARE Territorial Development Program 2002–2003, one of the pre-accession programs of the European Union. The renovation started in October 2005 and was completed in August 2006.[110] The work involved both external and internal renovation of the synagogue. The four-storey structure was completed, with the basement housing a mechanical room, cloakroom and water closet. The ground floor and women's gallery are used for events and conferences, while the attic is used for exhibitions.

After 1981, there was no religious life for decades; only Lajos Lőwy, the son of the president of the Jewish community, kept up the Jewish traditions and welcomed pilgrims until his death in 2011.[111] The situation changed in the early 2000s, when the former Hasidic prayer room was renovated and a Torah was purchased in 2003 thanks to money collected by the former Tokaj rabbi, Kálmán Berkovits, and his son, Mordche. The Orthodox Jewish Autonomous Community of Tokaj was also re-established under the leadership of the Berkovits family, with Miklós Kalmanovits as its president. Under the leadership of Mordechai Berkovits, the descendants of the Jewish community gather in Tokaj every year for a Sabbath. However, the permanent Jewish population of Tokaj has now disappeared.

106 János Májer, *Huszonhét év Tokajért. Szolgálatom története* (Bíbor Kiadó, Tokaj, 2019), pp. 55–56.
107 'Adományok a tokaji zsinagógára', *Kelet-Magyarország*, 48 (1991), 2.; Paula Volenszky, *Zsidó eseménytár 1992*.
108 'Kiégett a tokaji zsinagóga tetőszerkezete', *Észak-Magyarország*, 55 (1999), 1.
109 'A biztositó a tények mérlegelésére vár', *Észak-Magyarország*, 55 (1999), 1.
110 'Zsinagógafelújítás Tokajban', *Kultúrpont*, 10 May 2007 <http://kulturpont.hu/content.php?hle_id=13286> [accessed on 17 May 2023].
111 Zelenák, *Tokaji*, 135.

In the late 1980s, there were two Jewish families living in Tokaj, and today there are only three Jewish men living in the town.[112]

> Not everyone lives here. But he has agreed to be a member of this community, and if there is an event he can attend, he will of course come. So in Tokaj, those who live here, who live here, there are not ten of us. (Miklós Kalmanovits, leader of the community)

The community has established an association, the Tokaj-Hegyalja Jewish Heritage Association, which aims to preserve the Jewish traditions of the past and to create the conditions for religious life in Tokaj (prayer books, maintenance of prayer houses) and for the education and training of religious Jewish youth.[113] The president of the community pointed out that students from the Orthodox school in Budapest are regularly hosted for a weekend, usually twice a year. However, the involvement of the local non-Jewish community in these events is not common. I found one such example: in 2004, Miklós Kalmanovits, who had participated in the Holocaust commemoration at the local Tokaj grammar school, spoke on behalf of the association about the history of Tokaj Jewry.[114]

The synagogue's commemorative role was strengthened after the local government placed a plaque on its wall in 1994. The renovation of the synagogue and the ceremony surrounding the plaque brought the synagogue and the community's Jewish past back to the minds of the majority of Tokaj's population. In many towns the place of Holocaust remembrance is the cemetery, but in Tokaj the synagogue became the place of remembrance, and in 2014 a memorial with the names of the deceased was erected next to the synagogue, not in the cemetery. The place of collective memory is therefore the synagogue. The fact that, despite its new cultural function, it is still referred to as a synagogue by local residents and the local press shows how much the building's past is still in the minds of the people of Tokaj.

MODERNISATION AND RESISTANCE: ÚJBUDA

The problem of maintaining synagogues that were considered 'too big' for the size of the community was as much a problem in the capital as in rural communities. As mentioned earlier, MIOK and BIH deliberately sought to make up the financial shortfall in their budgets by selling representative

112 Interview with Gábor Glück, a local Jewish man.
113 'Tokaj-Hegyaljai Zsidó Hagyományőrző Egyesület', *Régi Sófár*, 28 May 2006 <https://regi.sofar.hu/weblink/tokaj-hegyaljai-zsido-hagyomanyorzo-egyesulet/> [accessed on 17 May 2023].
114 Interview with Miklós Kalmanovits.

synagogues in good condition.[115]At the same time, the community leaders clearly recognized the property needs of the newly established Kádár administration and acted accordingly.[116] A striking example of this was the change of ownership of the last representative modernist synagogue built during the authoritarian Horthy era in Hungary (two other examples are the synagogue in Dózsa György út and the temple in Rákoshegy), just two years before the first anti-Jewish law in 1936. However, the sale of the synagogue in Bocskai Street is noteworthy from another point of view: here, resistance to the central policy was expressed from several directions, mainly from the community (the central community also faced resistance when it sold the synagogue in Gyöngyös, the third largest temple in Hungary).

The synagogue of Bocskai út was built to eliminate the fragmented order of the large Jewish population of Lágymányos (four synagogues).[117] The architects of the synagogue were Ede Novák and István Hamburger (Hámor) Novák, who worked together for the first time.[118] It was planned from the beginning that the building would occupy a valuable central location in the district, so it was no coincidence that the land, which still belonged to the city, was given to the congregation only on condition that it would be used exclusively for the construction of a synagogue, and that if this did not happen or if the building was not used for a year, the land and its superstructure would revert to the city.[119] The synagogue building was inaugurated on 13 September 1936 in a grand ceremony attended by the capital's religious and secular leaders.[120] The construction of the synagogue was not only a prestigious achievement for the Jews of Buda, but also a professional success for the two architects.

This success was reinforced by the fact that *Tér és Forma*, one of the most important modern architecture magazines of the time, published an illustrated article on the building, praising its clear modern forms, its ribbed reinforced concrete structure, and the large interior space of the synagogue. The synagogue was built at the beginning of a wider urban program for South Buda (Lágymányos).[121] Contrary to the opinion of the architectural historian Ilona P. Brestyánszky, the building can hardly

115 As the deputy president Dr Géza Seifert summarized: "So far, the sale of the churches has covered the expenses necessary to maintain the life of faith. The sales are necessary because these synagogues are unused or oversized for religious needs, are in a constant state of disrepair, and would destroy our community [...]", MZSL – HU HU HJA II – 1964/1316.

116 MZSL – HU HU HJA III – 1962/1713, MZSL – HU HU HJA III – 1964/725, MZSL – HU HU HJA III – 1964/1316.

117 Tibor Barcza, 'A fôváros adta, az állam elvette', *Múlt és Jövő*, 4 (2001), 85–88.

118 Ede Novák is the better known of the two architects, having built several important apartment buildings, schools and villas, including the so-called Georgia Apartment House and the residential building on the Bauhaus model site in Napraforgó Street.

119 MZSL – HU HU HJA III – 1961/178/Pro memoria.

120 Speeches were given by the Deputy Mayor of Budapest, Károly Lamotter, the President of the Buda Community, Adolf Kriszhaber, the future Chief Rabbi of the synagogue, Imre Benesofsky, etc. 'The inauguration of the Jewish temple in Szentimreváros', *Pesti Hírlap*, 15 September 1936, p. 12.

121 'Új lágymányosi templom', *Tér és Forma*, 12 (1936), 354–56.

be called a prominent public building of the Hungarian Bauhaus, which could be more applied to the rabbi's house planned next to the synagogue and the later unrealized school complex.[122] The unadorned simplicity of the building, its block-like forms and the architectural techniques used do indeed associate it with similar formal features of Bauhaus buildings, but these prominent features are also stylistic features of not only Bauhaus but also more general modern architecture (e.g., New Building). The sacred character of the building was indicated by just a few external features: the tablets of the Law on the roof of the prayer house, the Stars of David on the pronouncedly rounded entrance windows (repeated on the window panes running vertically along the entire side of the building), and the Old Testament scenes on the large side windows.[123] The main hall of the synagogue had 644 seats on the ground floor and 306 seats on the upper floor.[124]

During the siege of Budapest in late 1944, the synagogue was used as a horse stable by the German army. After the war, despite the devastation of the Holocaust, the Lágymányos community was able to recover. In addition to the main hall, services were also held in the smaller foyer, to where the dwindling congregation had retreated. During the 1956 revolution, the building was damaged but soon restored with government help.[125]

The fate of the synagogue after the revolution of 1956 is well documented in a memorandum addressed to Károly Olt, president of ÁEH, and signed by the secretary of MIOK and the president, Endre Sós, on 23 July 1961.[126] The memo states that the issue of the synagogue's transfer to the local council had been on the agenda since 1957, mainly because "[...] the church is squeezed between the District Party House, the Council House, the Police Station and the Fire Station". However, District Council XI's request to purchase the building had to be turned down by BIH this time due to community protests, which also were repeated two years later, in 1959. According to historian Attila Novák, the community's rabbi, László Hochberger, protested the sale of the synagogue and quickly managed to enlist the support of the community.[127] The protest was joined by Dr Arhur Geyer, a rabbi from Old Buda, who gave an inflammatory speech in the synagogue on Dohány Street, questioning religious freedom. The central leadership, in agreement with the General Assembly, immediately responded to the dissident demonstrations by threatening to transfer the two rabbis, which led

122 Ilona P. Brestyánszky, *Budapest zsinagógái* (Budapest: Ciceró, 1998), pp. 143–44.
123 Barcza, 'A fôváros adta', pp. 85–88.
124 For comparison, the Dohány Street Synagogue is the second largest synagogue in the world and seats around 3,000 people.
125 MZSL VI. MIOK iratai, 1960, in *Zsidó közösségek öröksége*.
126 MZSL – HU HU HJA III – 1961/178/Pro memoria.
127 Attila Novák, '"...Lázítottak a templom eladás ellen"', *Szombat*, 5 April 2020 <https://www.szombat.org/tortenelem/lazitottak-a-templom-eladas-ellen> [accessed on 10 Aprils 2023].

to a protest by the community at the BIH General Assembly against this. Károly Olt, the head of ÁEH, saw the protests as an anti-state plot and gave Endre Sós, a religious community leader who was also acting as an agent, further authority to settle the matter. The protests did not stop, however, and spread to the rabbis. Eventually Hochberger was transferred, but this did not end the community's protest and he was later blamed by the state.

In accordance with the documents, the process that led to the alienation of the synagogue began in 1960. The Congregation asked for 4 million forints for the building because of its good condition and its huge dimensions (12,750 cubic meters), but the administrative department of the Council considered 2–2.5 million forints to be realistic; however, the parallel purchase of another building and the survival of local religious life should have been addressed before the building was sold. At a general meeting held on the 28 May 1961, the leaders and delegates of the community decided to accept the transfer of the ownership of the synagogue. It was clear from the document that their intention was to use the proceeds of the sale to finance the community. The memo concluded with a request to the President of ÁEH to press for the transfer to improve the financial situation of the Congregation and to avoid rejection of the offer, which would be a serious loss of prestige for the Presidency. In November of the same year, the congregation reached an agreement with the Trade Union of Commercial, Financial and Hospitality Workers (TUF)[128] and the transfer contract was drawn up, but there were objections to the removal of elements relating to religious worship (which also became a problem later).[129] In addition to the contractual objections, the Executive Committee of the Metropolitan Council did not agree to the transfer of land owned by the capital to the TUF, and the transfer of the property was blocked. On 23 December, the Municipality decided to take over the building and to compensate the community with 2.5 million HUF for giving up the building. The municipality also agreed to purchase an additional building for a prayer house.[130] The agreement specified that the conditions it set out could only be met if the purchase of a property for religious life was successful. It also specified that the Congregation would remove all signs of religious worship at its own expense only if the removal did not cause major damage to the building. The only problem was that the administration did not have the power to choose the location of the prayer room to ensure the continuity of religious life, since "[...] the location of the prayer room does not in any way

128 MZSL – HU HU HJA III – 1961/178/4625.
129 MZSL – HU HU HJA III – 1961/178/4264.
130 MZSL – HU HU HJA III – 1961/178/53.158/2/1961/III.

constitute an important public use, even if it is inseparable from the actual public use of the property at 6 Bocskai Street XI". Then it continued: "Paragraph 4§ -/2/ of the Government Decree provides an option if it can be classified as an economically important public facility and the facility cannot be otherwise or economically solved". The decision was that only the purchase of a private property was possible. In June 1962, having found a suitable building at 5 Károli Gáspár Square, District XI, BIH informed the President of the Council of their plans; the building was finally handed over on 31 March, and its operation as a synagogue ended.[131]

The building was extensively rebuilt and modernized and became the home of TIT Természettudományi Stúdió (*TIT Természettudományi Stúdió*).[132] TIT was established on the Soviet model, but its origins date back to 1841, when the first scientific society dedicated to the dissemination of knowledge was founded in Hungary. The press greeted the opening of the studio with great enthusiasm, describing the interior as a kind of sci-fi set, without mentioning the building's original function:

> It's like being on the set of a science fiction film. Comfortable leather chairs, wood panelling on the walls, multilingual interpreters in the lecture theatres, mini air conditioners under every seat. The well-equipped experimental laboratories are the envy of any university.[133]

In the meantime, as a result of the surrender of the Jewish symbols, the synagogue on Bocskai Street was de-Judaized. However, the building itself reflects the complex relationship between socialist and modern architecture as an "architectural chronology".[134] After the period of socialist realist architecture, which ended in the early 1950s, there was an opportunity to realise the architectural ideas of CIRPAC (Farkas Molnár, József Fischer, etc.), a group that was partly influenced by *Neue Bauen* and its social ideas.[135] However, the realization of the program of architectural modernism in the socialist context could only prove to be a utopian dream. Partly due to a lack of housing, and partly due to a lack of will and opportunity, socialist architecture adopted the functionalism and pragmatism of modern architecture, but not, or only partially, its architectural aesthetics.[136] Subsequently, the synagogue on Bocskai Street was converted

131 The Congregation's intention was approved by the Council, and the Congregation of Lágymányos is currently located there, "operating" under the name of Beit Shalom.
132 Society for Dissemination of Scientific Knowledge.
133 'Megnyílt a TIT Természettudományi Stúdiója', *Esti Hírlap*, 1969, p. 2; 'Több mint egy millió hallgató a budapesti TIT-rendezvényeken', *Magyar Hírlap*, 2 July 1969, p. 9; 'Felavatták a TIT Természettudományi Stúdióját', *Magyar Hírlap*, 206, 20 December 1969, p. 9.
134 Endre Prakfalvi, *Szocreál* (Budapest: Városháza, 1999).
135 Anna M. Eifert-Körnig, *Die kompromittierte Moderne. Staatliche Bauproduktion und oppositionelle Tendenzen in der Nachkriegsarchitektur Ungarns* (Budapest-Berlin: Új Művészet-Reimer 1994), p. 50.
136 Ibid., p. 51.

into a three-story building, breaking up the building's distinctive window panes as if to hide the building's subtle, clean modernist features with a kind of 'squaring' reductionism. This is a good example of what remains of the architectural modernism discussed above. At present, the only evidence of the building's former status as a synagogue is the menorah motifs on the fence that surrounds the site. However, the building served as the TIT's Natural Science Studio, a community and cultural centre, until 2020, when it was officially decided that the temple would be taken over and reopened as a synagogue by the Lubavitch denomination, EMIH. The building is currently under construction, but the original structures and styles of the synagogue are unrecoverable due to the severe alterations made to the building in the late 1960s.[137]

CONCLUSION

After the Second World War and the Holocaust, the demographic picture of Hungary changed dramatically. Under the impact of the Holocaust, many rural Jewish communities disappeared and the buildings and properties of these communities (synagogues, schools, houses, cemeteries) were slowly abandoned and later fell into disrepair. After the 1956 revolution in the new Kádár administration, the situation of the official leaders of Jewry was essentially characterized by the need to establish good relations with the state and the authorities. Endre Sós's "cultural Jew" (*kultúrzsidó*) programme defined Judaism as a culture that was both independent and part of Hungarian culture; furthermore, this programme also demonstrated complete dedication to the state, paradoxically expecting safety and stability from the very state that had previously deprived it of its rights. It was mainly during this period that many synagogues were sold by the National Association of Hungarian Israelites (MIOK) to local communities and companies throughout the country for various reasons (dissolution of congregations, political pressure, financial hardship).

The political changes of 1989 brought great shifts in the life of Hungarian Jewry and the situation of synagogues. In 2004, Hungary became one of ten Eastern European countries to join the European Union, which also had a major effect on Holocaust remembrance and its public and social presence as a "soft condition" of EU membership. In this context, joining to the EU also had an important effect on the preservation of built Jewish

137 Dániel Kovács, 'Nyolcvan év után visszakapja eredeti funkcióját Újbuda zsinagógája', *Építészfórum*, 13 October 2020 <https://epiteszforum.hu/nyolcvan-ev-utan-visszakapja-eredeti-funkciojat-ujbuda-zsinagogaja> [accessed on 10 April 2023].

heritage. The status, use and legal ownership of synagogues has been a topic of discussion in Hungary since the post-war period; over the past seven decades, there have been numerous attempts to address these issues by religious communities, civilians, and the state.

The case studies show the complexity and diversity of the situation of synagogues in Hungary. As we can see, the conditions and legal statuses of the synagogues vary greatly, so it may not even be possible to treat them in a uniform way. The distinctive nature of the situation of synagogues in Hungary cannot be adequately conveyed by a single factor; rather, it is a heterogeneous phenomenon that encompasses the sale of synagogues during the Kádár era – with all its consequences – the gradual destruction of the synagogue stock, and the remarkable renovation of some buildings, all occurring simultaneously. At present, however, community and public relations with former synagogues can be divided into four categories, resulting in different management practices: the local level (non-Jewish religious communities, cultural heritage and private initiatives, etc.); the state level, related to more historically valuable synagogues supported by state funds. Moreover, a significant number of synagogue buildings have been "re-Judaized" in recent years by the Lubovitch movement (Óbuda, Bocskai Street Synagogue, etc.). However, the ownership of former Jewish properties could still be confused: local Jewish communities, Jewish denominations (MAZSIHISZ, EMIH), different levels of local administration (counties, municipalities), private owners (companies, religious denominations, individuals, private foundations). Of course, as a fourth category, there is an even larger number of buildings that are still abandoned and neglected.

The relationship between the surviving Jewish community, its built heritage, and the non-Jewish population in each settlement is still strongly influenced by the past, local conditions and politics, but they can be connected through remembrance or a synagogue that is seen as a common asset. As we have already seen in the immediate aftermath of the war, synagogues (and cemeteries) became reminders of once-thriving Jewish communities, therefore the traumatic past of the Holocaust became deeply associated with these former temples, not only for the existing Jewish communities or people of Jewish heritage, but often for the general public as well; these buildings became unintended monuments to the missing Jewish community and the Holocaust. At present, however, the role of the synagogues is still unclear as it falls between preserving them as valuable buildings of cultural heritage and at the same time finding an appropriate function for them and/or reflecting on the fate of these former communities. More generally, it is unclear what role these buildings could play in Hungarian Holocaust remembrance and Hungarian cultural heritage in the future.

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1961/178/

4264

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53.158/2/1961/III

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1962/1713

1964

1316

672

725

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