



Museum and Historical Culture: How is Jewish History Included in the Museum Narrative of Lithuania?

Rūta Šermukšnytė

Faculty of History, Vilnius University, Lithuania, E-mail: ruta.sermuksnyte@if.vu.lt

Abstract

The aim of this article is to reveal the dynamics of the museum narrative of Jewish history in the contexts of Lithuanian historical culture in the period 1990–2020. Seeing the tensions between ethnocentric and polycentric, civic, civilizational models of identity in historical culture, the topic of Jewish history representation was chosen because of its complicated integration into the scheme of ethnocentric national narrative. The study shows that the museum representations of Jewish history are increasing in number and becoming more various in themes and forms. That was predetermined by the changes in the political conjuncture and public memory and by individual initiatives.

Rezumat

Scopul acestui articol este de a dezvălui dinamica narațiunii muzeale a istoriei evreiești în contextele culturii istorice lituaniene din perioada 1990–2020. Având în vedere tensiunile dintre modele de identitate etnocentrică și policentrică, civică și civilizațională în cultura istorică, tema reprezentării istoriei evreiești a fost aleasă datorită integrării sale complicate în schema narațiunii naționale etnocentrice. Studiul demonstrează că reprezentările muzeale ale istoriei evreilor cunosc o sporire constantă și devin mai variate ca teme și forme. Acest lucru a fost determinat de schimbările de conjunctură politică și memorie publică, dar și de inițiativele individuale.

Keywords: historical culture; Lithuanian museums in 1990 to 2020; museum representation; history of the Jews in Lithuania; Holocaust; shtetl

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Introduction

This article represents a research that analyzes the museum as a part of historical culture, which as a structure of power (because to represent means to form, to control, to embed a certain image) testifies about ourselves, our perceived past. According to the famous Dutch museologist Peter van Mensch, “[...] at the core of the theory of museology – the past is what we perceive as the past. It is a construction of the past that can be very distant from what the past really was. Museums are how we perceive the

present, how people in the past perceived the past before them.”¹. In the knowledge of a museum as a source about society's perception of the past, the category of *historical culture* becomes important. Lithuanian sociologist Zenonas Norkus names historical culture as a set of forms of representation of the historical past (which includes remembrance and actualization)². However, the historical culture is not a stagnant system of representation of the past. This, according to Fernando Sánchez Marcos, is rather a dynamic process of social dialogue in which interpretations of the past are disseminated, negotiated and debated. The public historical culture includes various narratives and points of view that struggle to establish themselves³. The research of Lithuanian scientists (primarily Alfredas Bumblauskas⁴, Alvydas Nikžentaitis⁵, Irena Šutinienė⁶, Vasilijus Safronovas⁷) reveals various tensions between ethnocentric and multicultural, civic, Eurointegration models of identity after the restoration of Lithuanian statehood in 1990. By capturing certain dynamics, there are certain questions

¹ Peter Van Mensch, 'Naujas mąstymas muzeologijos moksle', In: *Modernaus muziejaus veiklos gairės: Muziejinių studijos 3*, sud. A. Puškorius (Vilnius: Vilniaus universiteto leidykla, 2014), 23.

² Zenonas Norkus, 'Elektroninės istorinės kultūros link (Rec. Alfredas Bumblauskas, *Senosios Lietuvos istorija: 1009–1795*, Vilnius: R. Paknio leidykla, 2005.)', *Kultūros barai* 10 (2005), 81.

³ Fernando Sánchez Marcos, 'Historical Culture', http://www.culturahistorica.es/historical_culture.html, accessed December, 4, 2020.

⁴ For example, Alfredas Bumblauskas, 'Lietuvos didieji istoriniai pasakojimai ir Vilniaus paveldas', In: *Naujasis Vilniaus perskaitymas: didieji Lietuvos istoriniai pasakojimai ir daugiakultūris miesto paveldas*, sud. A. Bumblauskas, Š. Liekis, G. Potašenko (Vilnius: Vilniaus universiteto leidykla, 2009): 15–47.

⁵ For example, Alvydas Nikžentaitis, 'Atminties ir atminimo kultūrų modeliai: Lietuva, Lenkija, Rusija, Vokietija', In: *Nuo Basanavičiaus, Vytauto Didžiojo iki Molotovo ir Ribbentropo: atminties ir atminimo kultūrų transformacijos XX–XXI amžiuje*, sud. A. Nikžentaitis (Vilnius: Lietuvos istorijos instituto leidykla, 2011): 439–458.

⁶ For example, Irena Šutinienė, 'Lietuvos Didžiosios Kunigaikštystės paveldo reikšmės populiariosiose tautinio naratyvo interpretacijose', *Lietuvos istorijos studijos* 21 (2008): 102–120; Irena Šutinienė, 'Tautos istorijos pasakojimo simboliai Lietuvos gyventojų tautinėje vaizduotėje', In: *Nuo Basanavičiaus, Vytauto Didžiojo iki Molotovo ir Ribbentropo: atminties ir atminimo kultūrų transformacijos XX–XXI amžiuje*, sud. A. Nikžentaitis (Vilnius: Lietuvos istorijos instituto leidykla, 2011): 297–326.

⁷ For example, Vasilijus Safronovas, 'Lietuvos atminimo politikos tendencijos po 1990 metų', In: *Nuo Basanavičiaus, Vytauto Didžiojo iki Molotovo ir Ribbentropo: atminties ir atminimo kultūrų transformacijos XX–XXI amžiuje*, sud. A. Nikžentaitis (Vilnius: Lietuvos istorijos instituto leidykla, 2011): 337–378.

in Lithuanian historical culture: what is the role played by Lithuanian museums in these processes, what values are conveyed by Lithuanian museum narratives and what determines their certain choices? In order to answer these questions the history of the Lithuanian national minority – the Jews – in Lithuanian museums is used. The case of Jewish history was chosen because of its complicated integration into the ethnocentric national narrative. We followed the hypothesis that the possibly changed relationship of museum narratives with this topic, which cannot be inserted in an unambiguous scheme, can be interpreted as one of the indicators of the transformation of Lithuanian historical culture.

The aim of this article is to reveal the dynamics of the museum narrative of Jewish history in the contexts of Lithuanian historical culture. It includes the following questions: what connects history culture and a museum? (section of the 1st Article); what are the main trends in the change of Lithuanian historical culture after 1990? (Section 2); when and in which institutions should the beginning of the return of Lithuanian Jewish history to the culture of Lithuanian museums be recorded and what essential problems were encountered? (Section 3); should the popularity of the Jewish theme in Lithuanian museums be considered a sign of museum conformism or a change in public values? (Section 4); what are the traditional and innovative museum narratives of Lithuanian Jewish history? (Section 5). In order to answer these questions theoretical literature, existing historiography on Jewish museums and Lithuanian historical culture, interviews with Lithuanian museologists, museum creators and administrators, and analysis of the activities of Jewish museums in Lithuania are used. The chronological axis of the study is the period from the proclamation of Lithuania's independence in 1990 to 2020, although some of the discussed phenomena begin a little earlier.

1. What connects the historical culture and the museum?

According to the theorist of history Jörn Rüsen, the category of historical culture is defined by various forms, areas and strategies of historical memory. The different areas and strategies of research, artistic design, the struggle for political power, school and extracurricular

education, heritage protection, museums and other public historical remembrance (despite their differences) are seen as manifestations of the general relationship with the past to address the problems of orientation in time⁸. It can be the formation or validation of identity, the liberation from imposed patterns of behavior and self-definition, the search for new patterns of identity. Another German researcher, Hans Jürgen Pandel, talks about historical culture as an event culture (*Eventkultur*). Historical culture lives in the events that take place here and now, in the things that are being debated today, in the films that are being discussed today⁹. Thus, the historical culture originates from the need of societies to understand the present and the future through the interpretation of the past.

The museum (like any other form of historical culture) originates from the inherent need of man and societies to orient themselves in time, to have a certain orientational matrix that allows them to live meaningfully. According to historian Arthur Marwick, society in general has a need for history, and sophisticated societies have a need for many histories¹⁰. In order to meet this need, according to British museologist Gaynor Kavanagh, they accumulate dross and remnants of human activity and experience. It becomes means to reshape the past so that it makes sense in the present. There is no such thing as an all-encompassing memory, a "pure" knowledge of the past. It is therefore necessary to discover the people involved (priests, bards, historians, archivists, collectors, museologists, etc.) and institutions. However, people need history in different ways, resulting in different histories in museums and their different roles¹¹. However, the German museologist Friedrich Waidacher associates the accumulation and storage of objects with another universal human need – the desire to give a certain transcendence to the temporality of life, while preserving social memory to

⁸ More on historical culture, see Jörn Rüsen, *Historische Orientierung: über die Arbeit des Geschichtsbewusstseins, sich in der Zeit zurechtzufinden* (Köln, Weimar, Wien: Böhlau Verlag, 1994).

⁹ Hans-Jürgen Pandel, *Geschichtsdidaktik. Eine Theorie für Praxis* (Schwalbach: Wochenschau Verlag, 2013): 169–171.

¹⁰ Based on: Gaynor Kavanagh, *History Curatorship* (London: Leicester University Press, 1990), 4.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 4.

resist oblivion and extinction¹². Therefore the museum is to be considered an institutionalized form of storage and dissemination of social memory. The nature of the museum as an institution guarantees the organization, professionalism, continuity of its activities, guarantees the cultural rather than communicative nature of memory.

According to G. Kavanagh, museums usually reveal the narratives that prevail in a given space over a period of time. Therefore the stories told in museums are neither "pure" nor innocent. They are created using prevailing thought patterns, dominant ideologies, our beliefs about us, and the world around us¹³. According to P. van Mensch, "museums are not about others, museums are about ourselves"¹⁴. It is no coincidence, therefore, that the museum, as a form of historical culture, can be a space for the idealization, mystification, spread of nostalgia of the past, or a place for demythification, a critical, more objective approach. The emergence of museums is driven by changes in the historical culture. In particular, the various anniversaries encourage an increase in the number and diversity of museums. On the other hand, interest in museums in certain topics is stimulated by stories updated in certain media (TV, radio, cinema, historical publications, etc.) – museums adapt similar topics in their spaces or can look at them from a critical perspective. The whole network of forms, institutions and strategies of historical culture creates a relatively informed and susceptible to diverse things "consumer" of historical culture¹⁵.

At first glance, it may seem that the museum, as a form of historical culture, stands out by nothing. However, this is not the case. A museum, as a form of representation of the past, is unique because, unlike historiography, historical cinema, a history textbook, or historical drama, it communicates and interprets the past through museum exhibits. Therefore, we have to agree with G. Kavanagh, who says that the museum, as a way of

¹² See more Friedrich Waidacher, *Handbuch der Allgemeinen Museologie* (Wien, Köln, Weimar: Böhlau Verlag, 1999).

¹³ See Gaynor Kavanagh, *History Curatorship*, 5; Gaynor Kavanagh, 'Preface', In: *Making Histories in Museums*, Ed. G. Kavanagh (London and New York: Leicester University Press, 1999), xiii.

¹⁴ Peter Van Mensch, 'Naujas mąstymas muzeologijos moksle', 23.

¹⁵ See more Gaynor Kavanagh, *History Curatorship*, 7–10.

representing the past, cannot be replaced by anything¹⁶. Consequently, a necessary condition for museum narratives of history is the disposal of museum collections, in the selection of which a certain form of representation of the past is born – an exposition, exhibition, educational program, etc.

2. Dynamics of Lithuanian historical culture

Looking at Lithuanian museums as a part of Lithuanian historical culture, we see that they are influenced by several models of identity. One of them is the national narrative of history, which is closely connected with the establishment of the ideology of nationalism. It began to play a decisive role during the National Revival period and the restoration of statehood. It is characterized by: teleology, a mission of political orientation, a claim to objectivity (storytelling as truth rather than interpretation), operating in stark opposition, authoritarian thinking, monoperspectivity (a general, “inflexible” approach that prevents the integration of other perspectives on interpreting history). Defining the national narrative of Lithuanian history as an “ideal type”, it can be stated that this narrative is characterized by an ethnocentric approach to Lithuania's past in addition to the above-mentioned general features of “great” narratives (teleology, mission of political orientation, etc.). The preconditions for such a position are the concepts of ethnic and destiny-inclined nationality. When the Lithuanian nation is perceived ethnically, Lithuanian statehood and culture are seen as the result of the activities of ethnic Lithuanians. In addition, those who generate the ethnocentric approach believe that there is a “pure”, “true” Lithuanian nature, which consists of concrete, unchanging and only positive elements (asymmetric assessment of one's nation). This “set” of signs of national identity is considered innate and unchanging (the destiny-inclined concept of nationality). Another characteristic feature of the national narrative is monocentricity: vision of oneself as a central subject of history, an isolationist approach to Lithuania's past, the concept of Lithuania as a singularity. That is why there is the exploitation of the themes of the uniqueness and exclusivity of the Lithuanian path, and the lack of

¹⁶ *Ibidem*, 54.

synchronization of Lithuania with the history of Europe. Some Lithuanian historians criticize the national narrative for the immanent "spots" of pre-scientific pragmatism, which are manifested in the spread of various romanticized inventions. This "great" narrative of history is also criticized by scholars for its simplification, stereotyping, unambiguous assessments, and disregard for the "awkward" past, which is not introduced in a clear scheme.

J. Rüsen proposes three ways to overcome these problems¹⁷. First, monoperspectivity can be transformed into a multi-perspective and decentralized (polycentric) vision of the past. Secondly, the teleological nature of historical development must be broken by the concept of history as an interested view of the present into the past. Thirdly, instead of asymmetrical self-esteem and esteem towards others, there must be an understanding of *one's own* differences and differences of *others* as equals. Adherence to this path implies the integration of negative historical experiences (such as the disasters of the 20th-century in Europe) into a particular collective narrative. These coping strategies are visible in the texts of historical researchers and intellectuals in Lithuania. In particular, it was proposed and is still proposed to change the *ethnocentric* perception of history to *polycentric-multicultural-intercultural*, when the subject of history is considered not one ethnic group, but all ethnic groups living in a certain territory. In a word, the concepts of *nation*, *ethnicity* are supplemented by categories of *state*, *citizenship*, *region*. Changes towards polycentrism are also visible in the context of attitudes towards Lithuania, its neighbors and the whole of Europe. The isolationist perspective inherent in the national narrative, the negative conception of an external factor (such as the Polish) as a threat to nationality or statehood, has already been mentioned. These contradictions are refused when one looks at Lithuania from the point of view of *civilization-typology*, the pioneer of which in Lithuanian historiography is considered to be Edvardas Gudavičius¹⁸. The principle of

¹⁷ Jörn Rüsen, 'How to Overcome Ethnocentrism: Approaches to a Culture of Recognition by History in the Twenty-First Century', *History and Theory* 43, 4 (2004), 124–127.

¹⁸ See more Edvardas Gudavičius, 'Europa ir Lietuva kultūros ir civilizacijos tipologijų požiūriu', In: *Istoriografija ir atvira visuomenė=Geschichtswissenschaft und offene Gesellschaft* (Tarptautinės mokslinės konferencijos Vilniaus universiteto Istorijos fakultete medžiaga 1996 09 24–29), sud. U. Becher, A. Bumblauskas, J. Rüsenas (Vilnius: Vaga, 1998): 182–207.

historical reconstruction is recognized by those Lithuanian researchers who undertakes collective memory analysis. On the other hand, their penetration into interdisciplinary research on memory goes hand in hand with the abandonment of asymmetric *self-assessment and others-assessment*. This is evidenced by the search for the origins of certain images (Polish, Jewish, noble heritage) in today's Lithuanian society, tendencies of dialogue with foreign Lithuanian citizens or Lithuanian neighbors in solving Lithuanian history and heritage problems, and scientifically correct analysis of "neuralgical" history topics. Finally, Lithuanian historiography examines not only old, stereotypical images and deconstruction tasks, but also undertakes work of construction of new image. This image is a *Eurocentric* or *Eurointegration* conception of the history of the Lithuanian state and society, which can be derived from the above-mentioned *civilization-typological* approach of E. Gudavičius. This conception of Lithuanian history forms the identity of a Lithuanian as a European, a representative of Central Europe. In addition, the historical discourse on the consistent development of Lithuania, determined by Europeanization, must show the validity of the orientation of the Lithuanian state and society towards the West.

Although some of these alternative narratives (polycentric, civic, civilizational) are already visible in the National Revival period and the beginning of independence, their greater audibility and dissemination are associated with the 1992–1994 period. These changes were presupposed by a more ideologically neutral mindset, which is perceived as a refusal to believe "in its special social mission and in its voluntary moral responsibility for a part of society as a whole"¹⁹. According to the philosopher and sociologist Marius Povilas Šaulauskas, such mental changes in the minds of some Lithuanian intellectuals, which appeared as early as in 1992, are one of the milestones separating the old and new stages of social change in Lithuania. According to this scholar, shifts in the consciousness of intellectuals, together with the institutionalization of revolutionary ideas and the diminishing importance of social and political ideological systems

¹⁹ Marius Povilas Šaulauskas, 'Postkomunistinės revoliucijos želmenys: iš revoliucinio tarpsnio į postmodernią Lietuvą?', *Sociologija. Mintis ir veiksmai* 2 (1998), 78.

and other signs, show that *revolutionary* period of 1988–1992 was replaced by the *evolutionary* phase in 1992²⁰. It should be noted that the support of the Eurocentric or Eurointegration narrative in the official environment is associated with the period of 1993–1994 when Lithuania's foreign policy priorities to integrate into Euro-Atlantic structures: the European Union and NATO became clear²¹.

Seeing the tendencies of dialogue, reflection on sensitive topics, and overcoming stereotypes in the historical culture, one should ask: what role do Lithuanian museums play in these processes? To answer these questions, we will use the analysis of the representation of Jewish history in Lithuanian museums. The theme of Jewish history was chosen, presumably because of the complicated integration into the aforementioned national narrative scheme.

3. The "return" of Jewish history and culture to museums and the problem of separating their suffering

In 1949 after the closure of the Jewish Museum in Vilnius to commemorate the Holocaust, the museum representation of Jewish history ceased for almost four decades. The first manifestation of the museum representation of Lithuanian Jewish culture and history is considered to be the exhibition "Jewish Art in Lithuania in 18th – 20th centuries opened in Kaunas at M. Žilinskas Gallery in 1988 ", which was moved to Vilnius a couple of months later²². The next important step was the restoration of Vilnius Gaon Museum of Jewish History in Vilnius in 1989, which considers the museum founded by the Jewish Ancient Amateur Society in Vilnius, in 1913- as its predecessor. It is precisely with the name of this restored institution that most of the museum interpretation and communication activities of Jewish heritage at the beginning of independence must be associated. And this goes without saying, because the purpose of the museum is exclusively focused on Jewish culture and history, i. e. to collect,

²⁰ Ibidem, p. 78.

²¹ See Vasilijus Safronovas, 'Lietuvos atminimo politikos tendencijos po 1990 metų', 349–350.

²² *Lietuvos žydų dailė (XVIII–XX a.): Vilnius 1988 m. rugsėjis–lapkritis* (Vilnius: Lietuvos kultūros fondas, 1988).

preserve, research, restore, exhibit Lithuanian Jewish heritage, traditional and contemporary Jewish art, documents and objects related to the Holocaust. The restored museum faced a considerable problem – the lack of Lithuanian Jewish heritage. Part of it was recovered from Kaunas M. K. Čiurlionis Art Museum, which houses part of the collection of Jewish History and Ethnography Society, and other Lithuanian museums²³. Everything else has been and continues to be accumulated through active and passive (donations) ways of collecting. However, looking at this national minority as a unique singularity, are the aspects of its relationship with neighboring ethnic communities and the history of their coexistence in Lithuania not circumvented? Vilnius Gaon Museum of Jewish History also had and has expositions and exhibitions (Holocaust exposition, "The Saved Jewish Child Tells About the Shoah", "Jewish Life in Lithuania"), the themes of which revolve around the topical triad – tolerance, Judophobia and Holocaust. Such a teleological approach to Jewish history, when Jewish history is told as it was before and after the Holocaust, is not only characteristic of Lithuania²⁴, but is justified by its desire to fill the gap in the memory of the majority of Lithuanian citizens about the Lithuanian Jewish genocide. However, the case of Lithuania is interesting in that it is ethnically possible to separate the suffering of its citizens during the Second World War. Vilnius Gaon Museum of Jewish History focused on the Holocaust, whereas Museum of Genocide Victims (established a few years later in 1992) focuses exclusively on the suffering of ethnic Lithuanians and the struggle for resistance. Only at the end of the 2011 after criticism of the Museum of Genocide Victims, an exhibition space was opened in it for the the Nazi occupation and the Holocaust victims. It is considered to be the first attempt to combine these narratives²⁵.

²³ See more Roza Bieliauskienė, 'Muziejaus rinkiniai', In: *Žydų muziejus: almanachas* (Vilnius: VVGŽM, 2001): 21–25; Jokūbas Josadė, 'Mintys apie žydų muziejų', In: *Žydų muziejus: almanachas* (Vilnius: LVŽM, 1994): 18–22; Rachilė Kostanian, 'Valstybinio Vilniaus Gaono žydų muziejaus istorija', In: *Žydų muziejus: almanachas* (Vilnius: VVGŽM, 2001): 10–20.

²⁴ Tendencijos beyond borders of Lithuania: Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 'Inside the Museum: Curating between Hope and Despair: POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews', *East European Jewish Affairs* 45, 2–3 (2015): 215–235.

²⁵ It should be noted that after several decades of discussion about the name of the museum, it was renamed the "Museum of Occupations and Freedom Fights" on 2 May 2018. In order to

Teresė Birutė Burauskaitė, Director General of the Lithuanian Center for Genocide and Resistance Studies, stated that Lithuania had repeatedly been criticized for not paying enough attention to the memory of Jewish genocide victims in the institution which is named the Museum of Genocide Victims²⁶. Although the media was told that this is only the first step in the development of the Holocaust theme, the situation in this museum has not yet changed since then. On the other hand, it is doubtful whether one small exposition really shows that the suffering of the Jews has become *our own*.

The reasons for the separation of suffering lie not so much in the specifics of museum collections and their exhibitions as in the public history culture. The policy of integration into NATO and the European Union in Lithuania (as in other post-Soviet countries) determined not only political, economic and social reforms, but also the implementation of human rights, tolerance and multicultural values “from above”²⁷. This led to the spread of the Holocaust theme in history and memory politics and culture. However, this process of teaching about multiculturalism and the Holocaust has not been and is not unproblematic in Lithuania. As Christine Beresniova revealed in her monograph “Holocaust Education in Lithuania”, the new information about the Holocaust that has reached Lithuania does not lead to its integration into the established framework of the narrative²⁸. There are various reasons for this. Some researchers of memory emphasize the fact that the martyrological and victimized nature of the Lithuanian national narrative determines rejection or underestimation of the fact that part of the ethnic Lithuanians were not only Soviet and Nazi victims, but also Jewish executioners²⁹. The latter attitude manifested itself in the establishment of

emphasize not only the Soviet but also the Nazi occupation, to accentuate not only the victims but also the fighters.

²⁶ *Genocido aukų muziejuje Vilniuje atidaryta ekspozicija holokausto aukoms*, <https://www.diena.lt/naujienos/miesto-pulsas/genocido-auku-muziejuje-vilniuje-atidaryta-ekspozicija-holokausto-aukoms>, accessed December, 4, 2020.

²⁷ See more Christine Beresniova, *Holocaust Education in Lithuania. Community, Conflict, and the Making of Civil Society* (Lanham, Boulder, New York, London: Lexington Books, 2017).

²⁸ *Ibidem*

²⁹ See, for example, Vasilijus Safronovas, ‘Lietuvos atminimo politikos tendencijos po

the concept of two genocides – of Lithuanians and Jews – and this is shown not only by the list of memorable days, but also by the above-mentioned existence of different museum narratives. Another problem is that the international discourse on the Holocaust is based on the notion of "commonality" in the memory of the Holocaust, when the content of "commonality" includes only the experiences of Western societies. Representatives of the elites of Western societies, who believe that they have hegemonic positions to interpret the Holocaust "correctly", treat everything that does not fit into the framework of this interpretation as a nationalist, non-Western, and therefore non-progressive, non-modern approach³⁰. Some participants in the Lithuanian Holocaust education also took over such attitudes. This is shown by the statements of Vytautas Toleikis, the former director of the Foundation for Educational Change (which supported extremely important educational projects, including those connected with museums), such as "ignoring the Holocaust in Lithuania, as well as Lithuania's Jewish cultural heritage, one of the richest in Europe, would be incomprehensible in a modern world and would only show our provincialism"³¹.

4. Is multicultural narrative a sign conformism of museums or a change in public values?

The above-mentioned international or local talk about the Holocaust is based on the information, methodological, financial, etc. of the Open society Fund – Lithuania, the Foundation for Educational Change, the Eastern European Jewish Culture and History Research Center, foreign embassies and other institutions, led to a focus not only on this traumatic event but also on a more general issue – national minorities. Such a shift in attention from the Holocaust to other aspects of Jewish culture and history is to be welcomed, having in mind, however not Lithuanian, but Polish

1990 metų, 360–364.

³⁰ See more Christine Beresniova, *Holocaust Education in Lithuania. Community, Conflict, and the Making of Civil Society*.

³¹ Vytautas Toleikis, 'Lietuvos žydų tema – regionų muziejams ir mokyklai', *Lietuvos muziejai* 3 (2003), 19.

public opinion on Jewish museums. Some of them associate museums only with the cruel history of the Holocaust³².

The activities of the mentioned foundations, as well as the revision of the national narrative, liberal values, and the attitudes of the museum staff themselves were among the factors that led to the emergence of the museum project on intercultural themes – „Kėdainiai – the meeting place of nations“ (1999)³³. According to Rimantas Žirgulis, the director of the Kėdainiai Regional Museum and one of the initiators of this project – today's generation must be responsible for preserving the memory of those thousands of Lithuanian citizens who died. The favorable composition of the above-mentioned factors determined that Kėdainiai Regional Museum became one of the leaders in the dissemination of multicultural values in the culture of Lithuanian museums. However, in the opinion of R. Žirgulis, successful activities require not only good ideas, but also favorable soil. In Kėdainiai, it is a multicultural urban heritage (a city of six nations), an ethnic mixture of the city, which neutralize the narrowly patriotic narrative, a significant concentration of people from other parts of Lithuania, which determines the rather cosmopolitan attitudes of the local population.

Attention to national minorities has eventually become a sign of modernity, progress and political correctness of Lithuanian museums. Jewish history is proclaimed to be an integral part of local history, and the most unique, interesting, and simply available Jewish exhibits are sought and exhibited as metonymies of their rich, distinctive culture and history. For example, the staff of Joniškis History and Culture Museum Tomas Butautis, Daliutė Petruilienė begin their review text on the “days” of Lithuanian Jewish history in Joniškis with a declaration about the past of Joniškis Jewish community as an integral part of the overall history of the country, are proud to have a unique complex of two synagogues in Lithuania

³² See more Barriers and Drivers for Visitors with Children from the Aspiring Mainstream Segment, *POLIN Museum of the History of the Polish Jews* <https://www.ajm.org/site/assets/uploads/formidable/8/Barriers_Aspiring-Mainstream_MZajac.pdf>, accessed December, 4, 2020.

³³ Interview with Rimantas Žirgulis, Director of Kėdainiai Regional Museum on 30 October 2018.

in their town, deplors the focus on the Holocaust and therefore are sorry due to the focus on the Holocaust and therefore undeservedly forgotten fact that Lithuanian Jews made a significant contribution to the economic and cultural well-being of this country³⁴. It is true that sometimes the fact that the history of Lithuanian minorities is unconsciously perceived as the history of *others* is probably indicated by unintentionally slipped out formulations. For example, Regina Adomaitienė, a pedagogue-tour guide of the mentioned Kėdainiai Regional Museum, begins the points of contact between multicultural education and museums with the following introductory words: “Lithuania's aspiration to join the European Union and NATO encourages the creation of an open, democratic, multicultural society. It is no coincidence that the first task is to cultivate respect for the citizens of *other countries* (italics – R. Š.) without losing one’s own cultural identity”³⁵.

Thus, some cultural figures point out that Jewish history in local exhibitions is more a fashion-driven “inclusion” in Lithuanian history, rather than an integral and important part of the past, presupposed by polycentric thinking³⁶. Agreeing with these fears, however, it is also necessary to see a positive aspect: the changed attitude of part of the society. It is shaped, among other things, by other instances of history culture. Among the various historical cultural events that determine the visitor's attitudes (such as conferences, seminars, books) can be noted Jewish Culture Days in all Lithuania organized since 2004 by the Department of Cultural Heritage, together with the Lithuanian Jewish community, municipalities and museums. They combine various forms of presenting Jewish culture: excursions, lectures, book and film presentations, concerts, meetings with witnesses etc. In order to achieve directionality, gradually there was a move towards the thematic scenario

³⁴ Tomas Butautis, Daliutė Petruilienė, ‘Lietuvos žydų istorijos „dienos“ Joniškyje’, *Lietuvos muziejai* 4 (2003), 25.

³⁵ Regina Adomaitienė, ‘Multikultūrinis ugdymas ir muziejai’, *Muziejininkystės biuletenis* 1 (2002), 34.

³⁶ An interview with Sergejus Kanovičius, the author of the idea of the ‘Lost Shtetl’, and Milda Jakulyte-Vasil, the curator of the main exhibition of the museum on 2018 August 22; Interview with Rimantas Žirgulis, Director of Kėdainiai Regional Museum on 30 October 2018.

of the following various events: "Testimonies", "Music", "Art and Judaism", "Celebrations and Traditions", "Sabbath Dinner", "Culture of Jewish Daily Life", etc. Lithuanian museums that are adopting the principles of the new public management (the essential ones of which are visitor orientation, their involvement in museum activities, abandoning the hierarchical-authoritarian approach) are forced to react in one way or another to a member of Lithuanian society who encounters one or another diverse experience. An obvious example of this was provided by Irina Pocienė, a long-time museologist of the Vilnius Gaon Museum of Jewish History. After the publication of the scandalous book "*Mūsiškiai*" ("*Our People*") by Rūta Vanagaitė,³⁷ which superficially and stereotypically presents the history of the Holocaust in Lithuania, the museum received many visitors³⁸.

Influenced by the heated discussions about "Lithuanians as a Jewish-shooting nation", they wanted to find out what how it really happened. According to I. Pocienė, since then Vilnius Gaon Museum of Jewish History has been experiencing a "boom" of visitors, when a huge attention is felt to Jewish history and culture. 10 years ago, mostly foreigners visited this museum (the percentage of Lithuanian visitors was 80:20), and now the ratio of Lithuanian and foreign visitors has leveled off (50:50). Topics of the most interest to Lithuanian citizens include the upbringing of Jewish children, the relationship between men and women, healthy living according to the Torah, the commonality of Jewish and Christian traditions (such as Sabbath and Sunday), culinary heritage, and interesting personalities. They show the interest of the educated Lithuanian society in fundamental values, existential issues, the search for commonality or the simple desire to understand and experience cultural *otherness*³⁹. I. Pocienė notes that now to know the multicultural dimension of Lithuania has become the sign of "good tone".

Empirical research of Lithuanian metropolitan residents also provides us with information about the probably changing visitor of the

³⁷ Rūta Vanagaitė, *Mūsiškiai* (Vilnius: Alma littera, 2016).

³⁸ An interview with Irina Pocienė, Head of the Education and Visitor Information Department of the Vilnius Gaon Museum of Jewish History on 21 September 2018.

³⁹ An interview with Irina Pocienė, Head of the Education and Visitor Information Department of the Vilnius Gaon Museum of Jewish History on 21 September 2018; Interview with Rimantas Žirgulis, Director of Kėdainiai Regional Museum on 30 October 2018.

Lithuanian Museum. In them, we see the importance of the meanings of multiculturalism in the interpretations of citizens' hometowns, which are influenced not only by imagination but also by various sources of information (including certain museums). For example, Vilnius residents research shows that the memory of "Jewish" Vilnius in the memory of Vilnius residents is perceived and "own" communities, heritage and Holocaust memory – important for the city and for Lithuania. Kaunas residents lack multicultural interpretations of Kaunas, criticize the dominance of the national narrative in the narratives of their city⁴⁰. In his empirical research, Jurgita Verbickienė, a researcher of Jewish history, associates the elements of Jewish Vilnius with learning⁴¹, separating it "from the images of understanding, evaluation or feeling – otherwise" experience "that emerges by itself, gradually and through cognition"⁴². The historian criticizes the learned images for their static, banality, and possible superficiality. In our view, it is museum narratives, which include verbally expressed dates, events, personalities with specific objects, their multifaceted and sensual being, that have the potential to create personal spaces of experience and associative connections that last much longer in memory than "dry" disciplinary knowledge.

5. Trends in the spread of Jewish history and culture – from the traditional to the innovative narrative

The research conducted by Milda Jakulytė-Vasil shows a wide dissemination of Jewish history and culture in Lithuanian museums in

⁴⁰ See Irena Šutinienė, 'Komunikacinė atmintis Lietuvos didžiuosiuose miestuose', In: *Atminties daugiasluoksnisumas: miestas, valstybė, regionas*, sud. A. Nikžentaitis (Vilnius: Lietuvos istorijos instituto leidykla, 2013), 423.

⁴¹ Jurgita Šiaučiūnaitė-Verbickienė, 'Žydų paveldo recepcija šiandienos Lietuvos visuomenėje: Vilniaus atvejis', In: *Atminties kultūrų dialogai Ukrainos, Lietuvos, Baltarusijos (ULB) erdvėje*, sud. A. Nikžentaitis, M. Kopczyński (Vilnius: Lietuvos istorijos instituto leidykla, 2015), 343–344.

⁴² Jurgita Verbickienė, 'Žydų Vilnius Lietuvos istoriografijoje: vaizdinių kaita', In: *Tarptautinės mokslinės konferencijos „Vilniaus žydų intelektualinis gyvenimas iki Antrojo pasaulinio karo“ medžiaga. Vilnius, 2003 m. rugsėjo 16–17 d.*, sud. L. Lempertienė (Vilnius: Mokslo aidai, 2004), 26.

recent years⁴³. Attention is paid to this topic in national, republican and municipal museums. Only the accents change. In art museums (Lithuanian National Museum of Art, M. K. Čiurlionis Museum) priority is given to Jewish-related artistic phenomena, and social, cultural and political realities receive attention in state (Lithuanian National Museum), culture (Telšiai Samogitian “Alka”, Šiauliai “Aušra” museums, Lithuanian Folk Museum in Rumšiškės) and memorial museums (Kaunas 9thFort, Chiune Sugihara House).

The largest group of Lithuanian museums would require special attention – municipal museums, most of which are dedicated to local (city, area, region, district) history. As is well known, Jews in Lithuania before the Holocaust were an integral and abundant part of a city or town, naturally integrated into the process of forming the local landscape, culture, and finally the *genius loci*. After regaining independence, with greater focus on the exposures of local history and culture, there was a gradual return to the multicultural dimension of this past. What image of Jewish culture and history emerges in these museums? In 2004 J. Verbickienė stated that the predominant themes in the society and research of that period were the Holocaust and its trauma, anti-Semitism, interwar Jewish history, images and aspects of coexistence, and only not so long ago the interest in literature, art, everyday life and tradition, and heritage studies began⁴⁴. A study of the interpretation and communication activities of Lithuanian museum heritage shows that interwar Jews and the Holocaust are frequent and necessary topics in Lithuanian museums exhibiting Jewish history. This is due to the material available (museums make extensive use of photographs of Jews, their daily lives, festivities, extinct or altered buildings) and is likely to follow the aforementioned teleological model when this minority's history is treated how it existed before and after the Holocaust. R. Žirgulis mentions the insufficient cooperation between museums and historians as one of the

⁴³ See Милда Якулите-Васил, ‘Арт-юдаїка у музеях Литвы’, In: *Езупець. Вильнюс-Київ 26*. Ed. М. Кветкаускас, Л. Лемпертене (Центр досліджень історії та культури східноєвропейського єврейства: Дух і Літера, 2016): 289–298.

⁴⁴ Jurgita Šiaučiūnaitė-Verbickienė, ‘Judaikos rinkiniai savivaldybių muziejuose: virtuali paroda ir jos naudojimo galimybės’, *Lietuvos muziejų rinkiniai: IX mokslinė konferencija, skirta Lietuvos liaudies buities muziejaus 40-mečiui, etninis paveldas muziejuose 5* (2006), 58–59.

reasons for “sticking” to traditional, recurring themes. Despite the lack of qualified museum staff who can go deep into the topics of national minority history, as well as the time and resources, impetus to the updating of museum stories can be given by greater attention of historians to national minorities’ past and heritage, and cooperation of academic community with museums⁴⁵. This is confirmed by concrete examples. One of them is the exhibition “YIVO in Vilnius. The Beginning of the Legend”, in 2016, dedicated to the 90th anniversary of the founding of the Jewish Science Institute in Vilnius. It was prepared by representatives of the academic community: historian Lara Lempertiene and art critic Giedrė Jankevičiūtė. These curators emphasize the specific incentives for the emergence of this topic. The aim was to show the activities of YIVO, which is completely unknown in Lithuania, not so much as a part of Jewish history, but as a part of the history of Vilnius and Lithuania as a whole⁴⁶.

Interesting transformations can be seen in the largest and most famous Lithuanian ethnographic museum – the Lithuanian Folk Museum in Rumšiškės (founded in 1966), which presented the nation's identity for many decades based on peasant culture. The expositions supplemented during the times of independence show that the museum has admitted the heritage of towns, manors, technical and national minorities. According to Eligijus Juvencijus Morkūnas, a long-term employee of this museum, “the largest collection of objects related to Jewish culture in Lithuania was presented on the museum campus. These are residential trade houses from Tabariškės, Telšiai, Šiaulėnai, Kėdainiai, Musninkai and Žeimelis and a tea house from Šėduva (about 30% of all houses in the town)”⁴⁷. In 2014 the museum supplemented by an exposition of a Jewish apartment prepared for the Sabbath⁴⁸.

⁴⁵ An interview with Rimantas Žirgulis, Director of Kėdainiai Regional Museum on 30 October 2018

⁴⁶ Vienos iš Vilniaus legendų grįžimas. Paroda „YIVO Vilniuje. Legendos pradžia“. Vlado Kalpokaitės pokalbis su kuratorėmis Lara Lempertiene ir Giedre Jankevičiūte, *7 meno dienos* 7 (2016), 4.

⁴⁷ Eligijus Juvencijus Morkūnas, ‘Lietuvos liaudies buities muziejus: miestelis’, *Gimtasai kraštas* 3 (2010), 63, 65.

⁴⁸ Inga Levickaitė-Vaškevičienė, ‘Lietuvos liaudies buities muziejaus ekspozicijų kaita ir jų poveikis lankytojui’, *Liaudies kultūra* 2 (2016), 33.

However, the integration of Jewish history and culture into Lithuanian museum narratives does not in any way indicate that the small Jewish community living in Lithuania is integrated into its own documentation and representation activities. According to Daiva Citvarienė's research, Lithuanian museums, when presenting the topics of national minorities, follow the consultation model, which establishes the positions of "knowledge", power and exclusion of a certain community (in this case – sources and concerned). It also alludes to the regret of some members of the Jewish community that in exhibitions and events (organized without the Jewish community) Jews are portrayed "as a myth or a joke"⁴⁹. Even in Vilnius Gaon Museum of Jewish History, the identity of the Litvaks is represented without sufficient cooperation with the Litvak community itself⁵⁰.

Therefore, in the context of the emergence of new topics and the integration of communities into museums, the project "The Lost Shtetl" is relevant. It is being implemented by Šeduva Jewish Memorial Foundation from 2012 onwards, one of the activities of which is the creation of Šeduva Jewish Museum "The Lost Shtetl". According to Sergejus Kanovičius, the author of the idea of this museum and the project manager, the aim of the museum is to tell the history of the creation, development and disappearance of Lithuanian shtetlts by the example of the history of one shtetl (i. e. Šeduva). This story must reflect social, economic, religious relations, without avoiding the negative moments⁵¹. The mission of the museum is to appeal to emotions and interpret events, facts, stories of specific people to give meaning to the word *shtetl* and to overcome related stereotypes or knowledge gaps in Lithuanian society. At least at the stage of developing the concept of the museum, it seems that the future museum will be innovative not only in terms of the chosen theme, but also in other criteria.

⁴⁹ Daiva Citvarienė, 'Šiuolaikinis muziejus ir jo bendruomenės', *Menas ir publika /Acta Academiae Artium Vilnensis* 74 (2014), 40–42.

⁵⁰ An interview with Irina Pocienė, Head of the Education and Visitor Information Department the Vilnius Gaon Museum of Jewish History on 21 September 2018.

⁵¹ Here and henceforward the interview of 22 August 2018 with Sergejus Kanovičius, the author of the idea of the Museum "Lost Shtetl", and Milda Jakulytė-Vasil, the curator of its main exhibition, is used.

First, in the case of the future museum, both the founding, the origins, and the interested communities coincide. These are representatives of the Jewish community. The project is supported by the descendants of the Jewish descendants of Šeduva, the idea is being developed by S. Kanovičius, a writer of Jewish descent, in collaboration with the former inhabitants of the Šeduva shtetl or their descendants (their largest colony is concentrated in South African Republic). Secondly, avoiding telling the whole story about the Lithuanian shtetl in chronological order (which would mean the fragmentation typical of Lithuanian local museums), the museum will focus on its one section -the interwar period, thus revealing, among other things, shtetl's involvement in interwar Lithuanian modernization processes and related tensions between the traditions of Jewish life and the infiltrating innovations. This will create preconditions for overcoming the elements of static, "purity" and homogeneity of the represented culture. On the other hand, it is expected that the chronological boundaries of interwar Lithuania, as a "close", familiar history in terms of time, will presuppose the attractiveness, comprehensibility and recognizability of the museum's theme in today's society, which means enriching the Lithuanian memory with new aspects of Jewish (and not only) history. Thirdly, the creators of the museum emphasize that the essential object of their activity is not the accumulation and preservation of material heritage, but the recording of the collective, "living", oral memory about the life of the shtetl community. This is not related to the attention to exceptional, sacred personalities, events, phenomena (which are characteristic of the memory of Lithuanian society about Jewish history and culture), but to the attention to "ordinary" people, their daily lives and holidays, unique life stories. In order to convey these elements, visual expositions and narrative strategies will be used.

Conclusions

The analysis of the theoretical literature shows that the category of historical culture is defined by various forms, areas and strategies of historical memory. In this category – in addition to historiography, historical art, various forms of historical education, heritage protection, etc. – museums are also included. Museums emerge from the process of re-

evaluating former dress and remains as heritage values. By interpreting and communicating these museum values, various images that make the past meaningful are created in museum spaces: mythifying, evoking nostalgia and reminiscent of prevailing narratives, or demythifying, critical, objective.

From the perspective of historical culture, Lithuanian museums have been, and still are, affected by several models of identity. One of them is the model of national identity revived at the time of the Lithuanian National Awakening (since 1988) or, more precisely, an ethnocentric approach to Lithuania's past, when the Lithuanian nation is perceived from the ethnical point of view and Lithuanian statehood and culture are seen as the result of ethnic Lithuanians' activities. However, between 1992 and 1994, an aspiration was felt to move from the ethnocentric national memory towards alternative (polycentric, civic, or civilizational) models of identity. In that case, not one specific ethnic group is considered as the subject of history, but all the ethnic groups living in a certain territory, while the categories of state, public spirit, and civilization are emphasized alongside the concepts of nation and ethnicity. The prevailing ethnocentric approach in the

Lithuanian historical culture did not prevent the holding of the first exhibition on the theme of Jews in Mykolas Žilinskas Art Gallery in Kaunas in 1988 and the opening of the Jewish Museum – the Vilnius Gaon Museum of Jewish History – in Vilnius in 1989. Most of the museum interpretations of the Jewish heritage and its communication activities at the beginning of Independence were associated with that institution. The main problem of the restored museum has been the shortage of the Lithuanian Jewish heritage. It was dealt with by recovering Jewish heritage from other Lithuanian museums and is now being dealt with through active and passive ways of collection. Another problem of museum representation of Jewish history in Lithuania can be seen in the separation of the Jewish trauma – the Holocaust – from the sufferings of ethnic Lithuanians experienced during the Second World War. That was reflected in the specificity of the exposition of the Museum of Genocide Victims, established in 1992, which was only minimally adjusted in 2011.

The focus on Jewish history and culture is eventually becoming a sign of modernity, progress, and political correctness in Lithuanian

museums. Jewish history is proclaimed to be an integral part of local history, and the most unique, interesting, or simply available Jewish exhibits are sought and exhibited as metonymies for its rich, distinctive culture and history. That should be seen as a sign of the museums' adjustment to the political context (one of them being the processes of integration into the NATO and the European Union, which led to the top-down inculcation of certain values). On the other hand, the increasing attention of museums to the multicultural dimension of Lithuanian history can also be interpreted as an indicator of their adaptation to the changing values of society in which the meanings of multiculturalism are important.

The traditional museum representation of Jewish history usually includes the interwar Jewish and the Holocaust themes. That is predetermined by the available material as well as possibly the vital teleological model of treating the history of the said minority as what it was before and after the Holocaust. One of the reasons for „locking in“ on those traditional, recurring themes may be the lack of cooperation between museums and historians. Yet, in recent years, museum representations of Jewish history have become more diverse. One of the upcoming innovative museums is the project „The Lost Shtetl“, run by the public institution „Šeduva Jewish Memorial Foundation“. It is original due to the theme of the shtetl which has never received individual attention as well as to the recording of the collective, „living“, oral memory of the life of the shtetl community.

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