

Final Report

Anastasia Felcher,
PhD Candidate in Management and Development of Cultural Heritage
IMT School for Advanced Studies Lucca

Visegrad Scholarship at the Vera & Donald Blinken Open Society Archives

Research Project:

‘The Holocaust in Transition’. Treatment of the Matter and Jewish Cultural Heritage on (post)Soviet Space

Research Background:

The research conducted at the Open Society Archives and library, on the one hand, has a separate value for providing enough material for an academic publication. On the other hand, it has been intentionally designed along the lines of a broader research, my PhD dissertation. The main argument of the latter is close correlation between treatment of difficult past and selective heritage management. I trace this precise correlation with the help of comparative study of Jewish heritage interpretation in post-1991 Moldova, Ukraine and Belarus.

Relevance of OSA resources:

The holdings of the Open Society Archives and library have been relevant and informative for the late Cold War, perestroika-related years and the early years of independence at all three countries in focus. While the 2000s and 2010s are relatively easy to reconstruct due to availability of on-line resources (mainly news) and informants for interviews, the late 1980s and early 1990s represent a challenge in this matter. The fact that material from all three countries, as well as from Russia, is concentrated at the OSA, which enabled a comparative perspective for my research, was also of high value.

Methodology:

The core aim of the project was to contextualize the discourse and practice of Jewish and non-Jewish cultural heritage (mis)management and (non)protection in perestroika years and early independent Moldova, Ukraine and Belarus (as well as Russia – in dependence to availability of sources) in correlation to the politics of memory in the region. Initially I have planned to work with the reports based upon monitoring of Soviet bloc newspapers and other media by the Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Research Institute, as well as reports by the Foreign Broadcast Information Service on the Soviet Union (1985-1990).

However, almost immediately upon arrival to the OSA I have discovered a previously overlooked selection of sources contained within the Subject Files of Oksana Antic (HU OSA 300-5-30). The files were primarily devoted to multiple aspects of religion(s) and churches in the Soviet Union and beyond, interaction between the state and religious institutions, as well as individuals who practiced any forms of religious life or propagated anti-religious propaganda and education. I have included these subject files into the body of sources I worked with while in Budapest.

I have also been introduced to another highly valuable material: the informal press from the late Soviet Union and independent Moldova, Ukraine, Belarus and Russia (HU OSA 300-85-19). Significant part of this press held at the OSA Library special collection is represented by the press published by various Jewish organizations, which has a special value for my project since it has documented in details the activities of these organizations in late 1980s-early 1990s. Such endeavors as commemoration of previously neglected victims of the Holocaust, establishment of new institutions for Jewish social life and musealization of local Jewish history were among these activities. Not only were these organizations and academic quasi-institutions involved in making the memory of the Holocaust public, they have also brought core contribution to elaboration of

appropriate forms of this commemoration, to creation of Jewish memorial landscape on post-Soviet space and, last but not the least, have introduced the basics of academic (but not only) discourse on Jewish burial and architectural landscape of the former Soviet Union as pieces of heritage.

Thus my initial concern to focus on top-down recognition (or rather absence of it) of the Holocaust by the central Soviet media in perestroika and beyond gave place to focus on the two-part structure of the research, which, to my belief, develops the topic ‘the Holocaust in transition’ and ‘Jewish heritage management’ in a more sophisticated way:

1) *Grass-roots activity and discourse-building by the Jewish-related actors*

2) *Revision of the Soviet approach towards architectural heritage and conceptualizing ‘national heritage’ canon instead.*

These matters have been traced within the framework of late 1980s to late 1990s in the Soviet Union and its transformation into early independent Ukraine, Belarus, Moldova and Russia. The research has also benefited from consulting the newspaper clippings, news agency releases and media monitoring materials held at the OSA for such broad topics as ‘glasnosti’, ‘perestroika’, ‘religious renaissance’, ‘antisemitism’, ‘Pamyati’, ‘Rukh’, ‘WWII’ and celebration of 50th anniversary of its end, ‘memory of the victims of Stalinist regime’ and other topics. This has been done in order to contextualize the correlation between informational environment at the end of the Cold War (and beyond) and behavior of local actors on the matters in focus of the project.

The source base, apart from the library holdings (including the newspapers by several local branches of Council of Nationalities ‘Rukh’ from Ukraine, etc.), contained files held within such collections as the Open Media Research Institute (HU OSA 205), Analytic Research Department (HU OSA 300-5), Monitoring Units (HU OSA 300-81) and Soviet Red Archives (HU OSA 300-80), see appendix for indication of exact boxes).

Apart from working through the informal press I have revised the OSA archival holdings for the national standpoint of addressing the WWII in late Soviet years and in early independent Moldova, Ukraine and Belarus, as well as (to some extent) in Russia. It was of core importance for the project to trace attempts of incorporation of the Holocaust in the national-oriented discourse of the WWII by Jewish and non-Jewish media.

Findings:

The core findings of the two-month research at the OSA and library may be divided according to the two-part structure mentioned above:

1) *Grass-roots activity and discourse-building by the Jewish-related actors.*

Among major concerns of the Jewish organizations and representative bodies in the (post)Soviet space in the late 1980s–1990s has been the establishment of community-related infrastructure as well as encouragement of Jewish education (Jewish educational organizations [kindergartens, schools]; Hebrew and Yiddish courses, infrastructure for religious education, etc.). Such initiatives, together with engaging in public commemoration of the Holocaust victims, as well as the spread of network of Jewish organizations and open religious practice are counted as indicators of the “Jewish renaissance” in the former USSR.

After having received the possibility to ‘practice’ Jewish culture and tradition openly, multiple grass-roots actors across the (former) Soviet space have started being engaged in activities related to Jewish material (tangible), as well as non-material (intangible) culture. The latter presupposed attempts of reviving Yiddish as a language of communication, as well as academic Jewish studies. It must be emphasized that even sporadic development of academic Jewish studies, that included ethnographic expeditions to the former Pale of Settlement, has significantly

contributed to the development of a detailed corpus of knowledge about Jewish tangible heritage in the area. Consequently, this has contributed to the discourse of what objects count as tangible Jewish heritage. On the one hand, within academic discourse, as limited as the latter has been in terms of spread and influence, sacred spaces, such as Jewish cemeteries and former synagogues, have received special attention and have unquestionably been treated as Jewish heritage worth if not restoring then at least being concerned about.

On the other hand, since some former Jewish property has been given to local Jewish communities, which intended to use this property – either as sacred space or office space – within non-academic Jewish discourse this property has been discussed as target for fundraise in further hope of re-establishing local Jewish life. It is important to notice that although the fact of lamentable condition of tangible Jewish heritage has become a thematic subject in the informal Jewish press from the region, this subject has always been discussed in connection to the past (blame for ruination) and never to future. For instance, never has the aliyah (immigration of Jews from diaspora to Israel) been discussed in connection to the prospects of further ruination of the tangible Jewish heritage in prospective absence of strong community caused, among other factors, by the aliyah.

The material gained within the research period also allows tracing the exact tools that newly established (in late 1980s) Jewish organizations, institutions and communities on (post)-Soviet space were using to publicly verbalize memory of the Holocaust and its victims. Although there have been present such tools as conferences, academic and non-academic publications; fundraising for, installation, unveiling and consecration of monuments – the same tools that are used today for the matter – the message behind these actions has been that memory of the Holocaust is rather an internal traumatic memory that unites the Jews. This has very much been dictated by the agency behind the Holocaust commemoration, which in late 1980s – early 1990s was represented by multiple public and private Jewish actors and has rarely involved the state as a decisive ‘stakeholder’. These public and private Jewish actors have been setting the tone for aesthetics and content of the Holocaust commemoration of these years, which may conditionally be defined as ‘an internalized framework’.

This state of affairs has been characteristic for informational environment at the end of the Cold War, when the concerns with the national past, history and competitive victimization have been at the center of the memory politics throughout the region, as well as separation on the matter along the ethnic/national lines. Such national-oriented discourse was also represented on the pages of non-Jewish informal press in Ukraine, Moldova and Belarus of the time, with rare random attempts to incorporate the Holocaust and its victims into the narrative of national history as ‘fellow-victims’.

2) Revision of the Soviet approach towards architectural heritage and conceptualizing ‘national heritage’ canon instead;

The gained material allows tracing carefully the interconnection between the ‘religious renaissance’ in the region after the dissolution of the USSR and development of the discourse and practice of what represents the body of ‘national cultural heritage’. Religious heritage represents a significant share of this body and although multiple churches and monasteries have been proclaimed to be historical monuments since the Soviet times, since late 1980s the concern of heritage preservation started being closely linked to practice of religion and to ‘national renewal’. The concern about religious tangible heritage, which sometimes included concern about (former) synagogues, in that time has been also closely linked to anti-Soviet rhetoric. This has contributed to gradual recognition of the former Jewish religious buildings as ‘heritage’ – phenomenon that would become widespread since second half of the 2000s.

However, cases of political use of such rhetoric have also taken place. In early 1990s the ‘heritage argument’ has also been equally widely used to express nostalgia for ‘old’, pre-Communist past of Moldova, Western Ukraine and Belarus. The ‘classical’ argument for civic, as

well as state responsibility for heritage preservation has been also widely circulated in the sources under study (see details below).

Appendix:

List of primary and secondary sources consulted during the scholarship:

Archival holdings

HU OSA 205 Records of the Open Media Research Institute

↓

HU OSA 205-4 Information Services Department

↓

HU OSA 205-4-207 Ukrainian Monitoring Archives (boxes #15, 17, 18, 42-44, 61-63, 66-67, 70-71, 79, 81-82, 86)

HU OSA 300 Records of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Research Institute

↓

HU OSA 300-5 Analytic Research Department, 19[85]-1995

↓

HU OSA 300-5-250 Subject Files of N. Mihailisko

HU OSA 300-5-260 Subject Files of Vera Tolz (boxes #1-3)

HU OSA 300-5-30 Subject Files of Oksana Antic (boxes #16, 19, 21, 23-24, 26-27, 30-33, 37-38)

HU OSA 300-80 Soviet Red Archives, 19[85]-1994

↓

HU OSA 300-80-2 New Code Subject Files, 19[85]-1994 (boxes #14-17, 23-26)

HU OSA 300-81 Monitoring Unit, 1979-1995

↓

HU OSA 300-81-2 Subject Files Related to Ukraine, 1983-1994 (boxes #11, 12, 15-19, 24-29, 31-33, 40, 42-45, 48-49)

Library

The USSR in 1989: a record of events / compiled by Vera Tolz; edited by Melanie Newton; foreword by Vladimir G. Treml. Boulder, Westview Press, 1990;

The USSR in 1990: a record of events / compiled by Vera Tolz; edited by Melanie Newton; foreword by Iain Elliot. Boulder, Westview Press, 1992;

The USSR in 1991: a record of events / edited by Vera Tolz and Melanie Newton: foreword by Iain Elliot. Boulder, Westview Press, 1993;

Periodicals from Ukraine

Bukovyns'kyi visnyk: vydannia Narodnogo Rukhu Ukraina za Perebudovu [Bukovina Bulletin: Publication of the People's Movement of Ukraine's Reformation], 1989

Einikait: biuleten' ievreis'kogo kul'turno-prosvitn'ogo ob'iednannia [Эйникайт: бюлетень єврейського культурно-просвітнього об'єднання], 1990-1993

Galytska sich (L'vivs'ke oblasne ob'iednannia 'Galyts'ka Sich') [Галицька січ], 1993

L'vivs'kyi visnyk: nezalezhne informatsiine shchotyzhneve vydannia [Львівський вісник : незалежне інформаційне щотижневе видання] 1989

L'vivs'ki novyny: ekspres - khronika : organ L'vivs'koi oblasnoi filii UGS [Львівські новини : експрес - хроніка: орган Львівської обласної філії УГС] 1990

Mova ie natsiia: gazeta tovarystva Ukrain's'koi movy im.T. G. Shevchenka [Мова є нація: газета товариства Української мови ім.Т. Г. Шевченка], 1989-1994

Prosvita: vydaie L'viv's'ka oblasna organizatsiia tovarystva Ukrain's'koi movy [Просвіта : видає Львівська обласна організація товариства Української мови], 1989-1994

Rukh: vydaie koordynatsiina rada Kyiv's'koi regional'noi organizatsii Narodnogo Rukhu Ukrainy za Perebudovu [Рух : видає координаційна рада Київської регіональної організації Народного Руху України за Перебудову], 1989

Periodicals from Moldova

Glasul națiunii: revista reîntregirii neamului, 1992-1994

Gomin : gazeta Ukrain's'koi gromady v Moldavii [Гомін : газета Української громади в Молдавії], 1992-1994

Library Special Collection

HU OSA 300-85-19 - Informal Press (boxes #57, 67, 88)

Informal Press from Moldova

Bastuiushchii Tiraspol': informatsionnyi biulleten' zabastovochnogo komiteta [1989]

Edinstvo: biulleten' Interdvizheniia Moldavii [1989]

Nash golos: gazeta Obshchestva evreiskoi kul'tury Respubliki Moldova [1990]

Probuzhdenie = Desteptarea: informatsionnyi biulleten' Narodnogo fronta Moldavii [1989]

Trudovoi Tiraspol': organ Ob"edinennogo soveta trudovykh kollektivov [1989]

Tsara: izdanie Narodnogo fronta Moldovy [1989]

Informal Press from Ukraine

Evreiskie vesti: Gazeta Respublikanskogo obshchestva evreiskoi kul'tury [1991]

Gamaiun: organ LAL - nezavisimoi L'vovskoi assotsiatsii literatorov [1990]

Narodna gazeta: visnyk Narodnogo rukhu Ukraïny za perebudovu [1990]

Postup: informatsiinii visnik Tovaristva Leva [1989-1991]

Shofar: izdanie Obshchestva druzei evreiskogo iazyka i kul'tury imeni Sholom-Aleikhema [1990-1992]

Sovest': vestnik Russkogo obshchestva im. A. Pushkina [1990]

Vestnik Rukha: informatsionnyi biulleten' sekretariata Rukha [1989]

Vozrozhdenie: informatsionnyi listok: [izd.] Kievskoe gorodskoe obshchestvo evreiskoi kul'tury pri Ukrainskom fonde kul'tury [1990]

Informal Press from Estonia

Khashakhar = Rassvet: infolistok: [izd.] Estonskii fond kul'tury. Obshchestvo evreiskoi kul'tury [1988]

Informal Press from Russia

Narod moi - ami: izdanie evreiskikh obshchestvennykh organizatsii Leningrada [1990-1993]