

**Spring School “MEMORYSCAPES OF THE
HOLOCAUST IN ROMANIA”**

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Șimleu Silvaniei

Holocaust Memoryscape in Oradea

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Overview of the research

Objectives

To address discourses on “the Holocaust issue” and perceptions on Jews among people from the city of Oradea, a territory where two thirds of about 27 thousand Jews were killed during the WWII.

To carry out an anthropological reflection on the (re)enactment of the Jewish past during the Holocaust through heritage-making and its social appropriation.

The memorial and educational projects of the Tikvah Association



**The statue of Eva Heyman in
the Bălcescu Park
(Oradea)**

Research Questions

What are the mechanisms leading to the Romanian state's political commitment to take on the responsibility of its participation in the Jews' genocide of during the World War II? What forms such commitment to rehabilitate a Jewish past, until then overshadowed, does it take?

How is the remembrance of the past shaped by “the top-down state policies of territorialisation and resources” or “bottom-up movements” of social responsibility? How does the memorial transmission of the Holocaust intertwine with heritage-work? What is its social impact?

Does the commemoration of the genocide of the Jews manage to fight against racism and to reaffirm the commitment to human rights in the Romanian contemporary society? Could be these processes considered as a tool for collective remembrance and identity formation?

Theoretical Background

I look at heritage assets as ‘relational’ and I use the ‘actor-network theory’ (Latour, 2005). I consider Jewish built heritage as new ‘forms of dialogism’ (Bennett, 2006), in connection with social practices.

I analyse built heritage not only as messages to be decoded, and signs to be interpreted, but also through its ‘performativity’ (Smith, 2006) in social processes.

Hypotheses

H 1. The public memory production through heritage is appropriated by private stakeholders when the Romanian state fails to do it properly.

H 2. The statue of Eva Heyman, although conceived to become a tool to transmit moral values does not succeed in satisfying this aim because it has not received either enough visibility in the public space, or local authorities' support.

Research Methods

- **A 10-day direct observation (2016, July 1-10) in the “Bălcescu” Park**
- **A qualitative survey with different agents concerned with the issue of the Holocaust**
- **15 in-depth, semi-structured interviews, of about one hour each, among inhabitants of the city of Oradea**
- **Online comments**

Main axes of my presentation

I. WWII, Nation-state and Historical Truths

II. Towards an active memory-work in Oradea. The Holocaust remembrance and its social reception

1. Fighting against prejudice, discrimination, racism and stereotyping through Holocaust remembrance resources: the case-study of the “Tikvah” Association

3. The “Tikvah” Association from Oradea: from Teszlers’ personal family history of to social action

3. The reception the Eva Heyman memorial: from online feed-backs to on the ground testimonials

III. Concluding Remarks

I. WWII, Nation-state and Historical Truths

Official efforts to work through Romania's dark past

- **2003, October 22: the International Commission on the Holocaust in Romania is established on the initiative of President Ion Iliescu**
- **2004, November 11: the “Elie Wiesel” Report is handed to the President**
- **August 2005: the “Elie Wiesel” National Institute for the Study of the Holocaust in Romania is set up**
- **Researchers revealed that Romania downplayed its role in the Final Solution and presented ways of collaborationism inside the Romanian society aimed at destroying the Jewish populations.**
- **2009, October 8, inauguration of a “National Memorial to the Victims of the Holocaust from Romania” (project started in 2005)**
- **Law no. 217/2015 called “anti-legionnaire law” or “memory-law”**
- **2016: Romania has taken on the chairmanship of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance**

Elie Wiesel's childhood home transformed into as a museum (Sighet)



2002: Elie Wiesel's childhood home = historic monument by President Ion Iliescu and transformed into a museum.

2014: Holocaust Cellar Education Centre = inaugurated to mark 70 years since the expulsion of the Jews of Northern Transylvania to Auschwitz;

= sponsored by the Romanian Government, the City of Sighet, the Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany, the Elie Wiesel National Institute for the Study of the Holocaust in Romania, the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, the Romanian Jewish Federation, Caritatea Foundation and Limmud Former Soviet Union (FSU).



Private initiatives to remember the Holocaust

Grassroots initiatives driven mostly by private individuals contributed to the restoration of synagogues and other Jewish built heritage, the foundation of Holocaust memorials and monuments, to displaying exhibits or initiating other cultural projects or heritage tourism projects, and making available Holocaust educational sources.

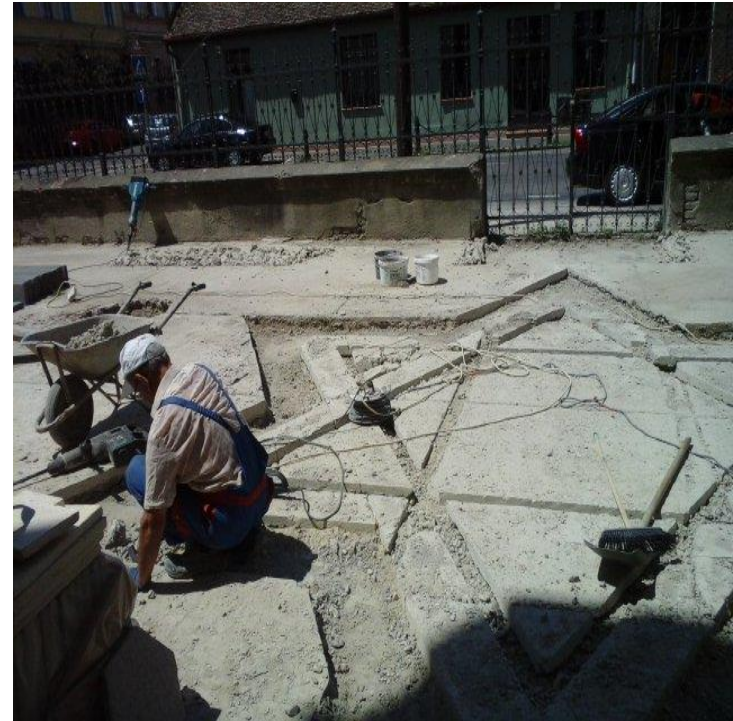
Northern Transylvania Holocaust Memorial (2005), Șimleu Silvaniei



Temple of Deported Jews from Northern Transylvania (memorial plaque, 2012), Cluj-Napoca



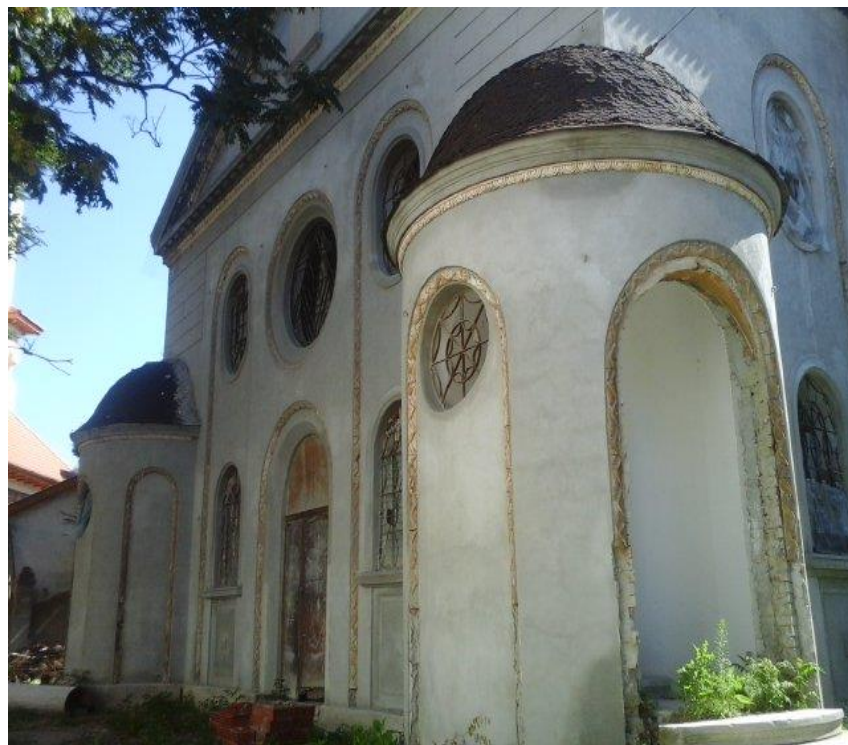
Synagogue used for religious purposes (Oradea)



Synagogue used as a concert hall, conference centre and tourist information centre (Oradea)



Synagogue to be transformed into a museum of Jewish history (Oradea)



Darvas-la Roche House, the first Museum of Art Nouveau from Romania

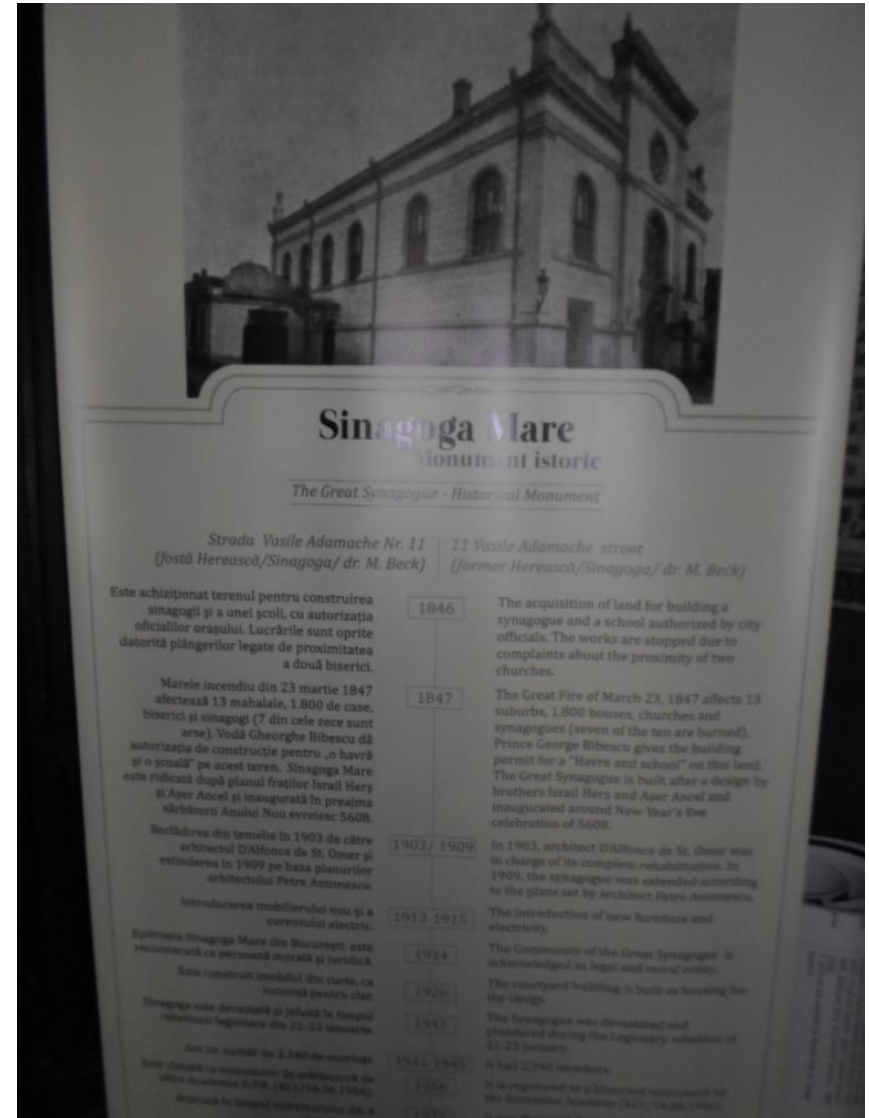


Choral temple (Bucharest)

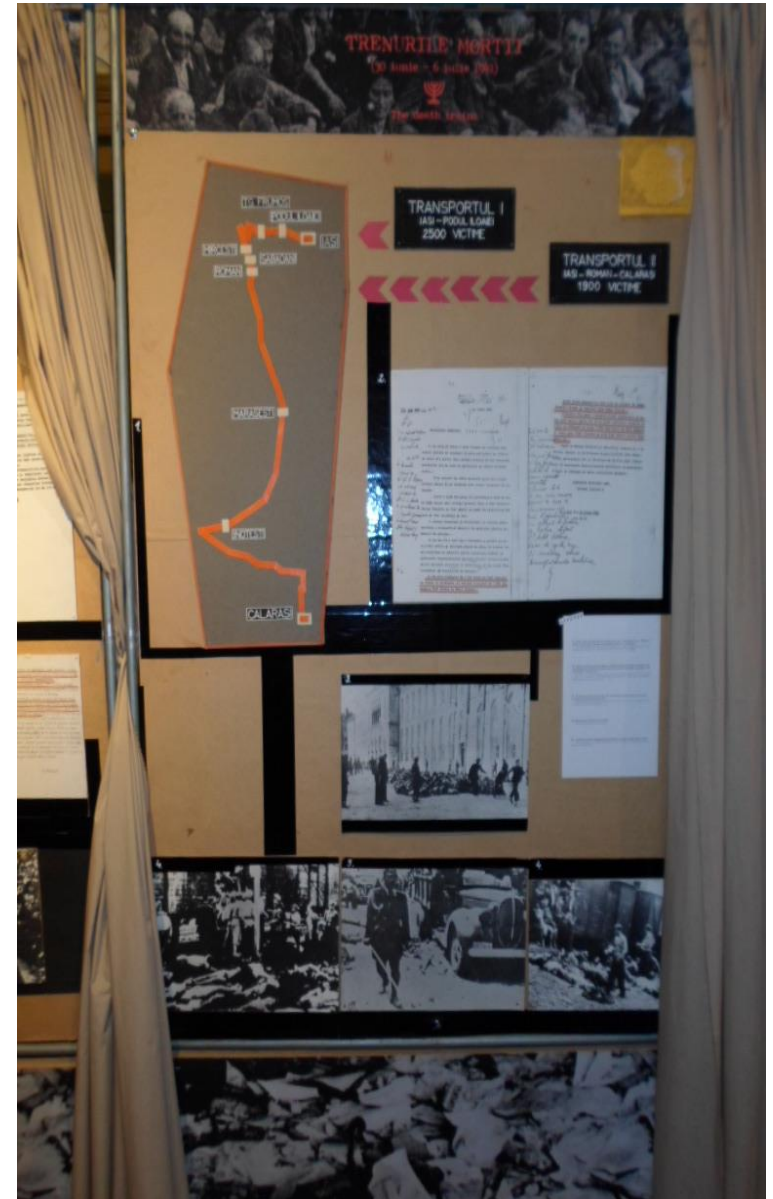
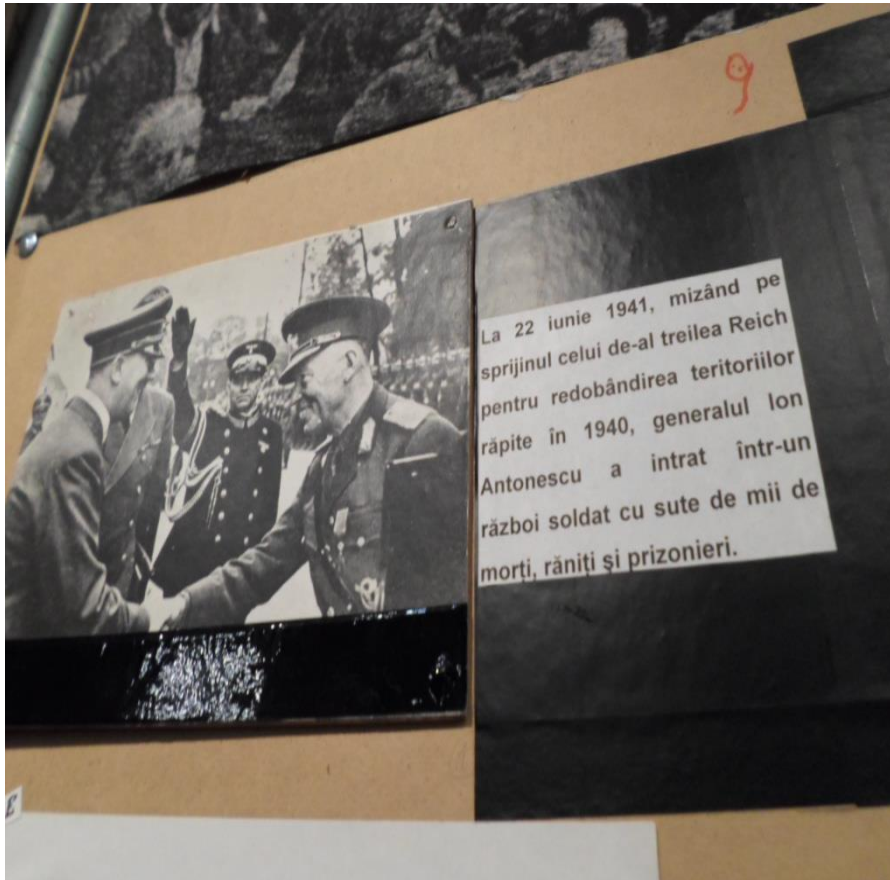




Great Synagogue used as a Holocaust Museum (Bucharest)



Holocaust Museum



Jewish theater



Jewish school (Bucharest)



Romania's map during the WWII

Source: <http://www.tikvah.ro/en/holocaust-ro/transilvania-de-nord.html>

(First Accessed October 20th, 2015)



Although at the level of the institutional memory, of the legislation and state institutions one can notice significant changes regarding the Holocaust issue, the foundation of a National museum of Jewish history is still an unsolved issue. The few officially standpoints on this matter do not contribute to advancing on the museum project.

II. Towards an active memory-work in Oradea: the Holocaust remembrance and its social reception

The educational projects of the “Tikvah” Association = the expression of a private initiative of revealing Jewish past through heritage-work, memorial and cultural practices.

Emilia Teszler = personal motivation to invest herself in “preserving the memory of these people... it seems that they **perished several times, being completely forgotten...” & moral obligation to Holocaust remembrance.**

The statue of Eva Heyman does not provide direct relationship with the past.

The lack of a “communally shared signification” of aspects from local history prevents the internalization of the Jewish past.

Another symptom present in Romanian society is its fragmentation when it comes to accepting other peoples’ cultural differences.

Concluding remarks

These “bottom-up movements” of memory-making developed by the “Tikvah” Association become the expression of social responsibility to create a medium or a space of communication to transmit societal values related to democracy.

The Eva Heyman memorial fails to be perceived as a symbol of an accurate local history and it does not transmit a motivational power devoted to internalize the Jewish local history into locals’ pro-social understanding and behaviour.

Although the “Tikvah” Association is striving to make available, to those interested, all kinds of resources on the Holocaust whose positive impact is undeniable, in order to reach other social categories less interested in this issue, their projects relating to the memorialization of the Holocaust need to be registered in a coherent educational and cultural policy. Otherwise, the impact of their agency on this issue will be limited only to certain social categories.

Thank you!

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