

UNESCO Heritage, Remembrance, and Contemporary Identity: Festivities of Jewish culture in Small Towns in the Czech Republic

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Abstract: A renewed interest in Jewish culture has characterised the post-socialist period in Central and Eastern Europe. Devastated synagogues, rabbinical houses and other monuments in various locations across the Czech Republic have been restored and are now open to visitors. These sites provide a space for creating a virtual Jewish world that comes to life during local one-off events and annual festivities. This lecture presents long-term field research focusing on Jewish culture festivals in small Czech towns, paying particular attention to Třebíč. This town is one of a few in the world to have its Jewish quarter listed separately on the UNESCO World Heritage List. What other elements besides local Jewish material cultural heritage do Czech festivals of Jewish culture refer to? How are traces of Jewish culture, including music and dance, appropriated by non-Jewish performers? How do the festivities relate to the local Jewish past, and where do imagination and reference to historical facts converge and diverge? What are the current meanings and purposes of these festivals in terms of increasing subsidy opportunities for urban development and shaping local identity?

DISCUSSANT: ESSICA MARKS

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