CfP: A Jewish Europe? Virtual and Real-Life Spaces in the 21st Century

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Conference, 3-5 May 2022, Gothenburg, Sweden

University of Gothenburg/University of Southampton

As the president of the Conference of European Rabbis recently stated, the European Union invited Jews to be part of the European project, “not as outsiders, but as fully fledged citizens of Europe”. But, given the continuity of antisemitism and the rise in attacks against Jewish institutions, “sadly, the Jews of Europe have had to ask themselves yet again if there is a future on the continent”. Yet again – this ambivalence has a long history indeed, marked by restrictions and tolerance, by antisemitism and fruitful exchange, by genocide and the common desire to learn from the past. Europe has been a home for Jewish communities for more than two millennia, and Jewish individuals have been fundamental to the development of enlightenment thought, science and law, the arts, civic culture and political integration. What and where would Europe be without the Jewish population? And what does Europe today mean for Jews, individually and as a community?

During the last thirty years scholars have discussed the development both of an enduring “Jewish space” as well as new “Jewish spaces” (Diana Pinto) and new forms of “virtual Jewishness” (Ruth Ellen Gruber), both referring to different forms of co-construction and co-operation. Given the fact that “Europe's Jewish population has dropped 60% in last 50 years” (The Guardian, 25/10/2020), are we left with just a “European Route of Jewish heritage”? Or are there new and promising options for “Being Jewish in 21st Century Central Europe”? Have non-Jewish memorial institutions, performances and practices created just an imaginary and nostalgic Jewish past, and if so, what is its role? And what roles are the historic and revived Jewish communities playing in the creation of a European Jewish future? European and global familial and scholarly networks, facilitated by the digital environment during the ongoing covid-19 pandemic, challenge us to look at the relationship between virtual and real-life encounters: can these digital spaces serve as a reminder that despite the current crisis Jewish life in Europe will continue?

Amidst the current revival of academic, cultural and civil interest in the notion of “Jewish Europe”, this workshop aims to explore the development, role, influence and shape of virtual spaces in different forms related to contemporary European Jewry. How are digital practices related to real-life practices and spaces performed and inhabited by Europe’s Jewry? What do virtual spaces reveal about Jewish engagement with the geographical location and the idea of Europe? And, ultimately, what do virtual spaces tell us about the existence and future of a “Jewish Europe”? What do they say about transcending the borders of “Jewish Europe” and fostering membership in a global Jewish presence?

We welcome papers that engage with the intersection of Jewish European-ness, real-life practices and
virtual spaces from topics related but not limited to:

- Networks and transnationalism
- Heritage institutions, memory practices and nostalgia
- Jewish/non-Jewish encounters
- Jewish ideas, meanings and conceptualisations of Europe
- Jewish contribution to European-ness and a European identity
- Historical and geographical comparisons
- Jewish responses to crisis, such as the pandemic, migration, antisemitism and violence
- Jewish sense of (non-)belonging to Europe
- Digital Humanities and digital history

We are proud to announce Ruth Ellen Gruber (coordinator of Jewish Heritage Europe) and Diana Pinto (independent researcher) as confirmed keynote speakers.

To apply, please send an abstract of 250 words and a short biography to maja.hultman@gu.se by 10 December 2021. Accepted participants will be notified at the end of December 2021. The workshop is planned to take place in Gothenburg, Sweden on 3-5 May 2022, granted that the pandemic is under control. Selected papers will be published in an edited volume.

The conference is generously supported by European Association for Jewish Studies and The Parkes Institute for the Study of Jewish/non-Jewish Relations, and PhD students and early career researchers will be able to apply for economic support towards travel and accommodation. Please state clearly in your application if you want to be considered for the scholarship.

If any questions should arise, please contact maja.hultman@gu.se.

Organisers:
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