

Jewish Community Services and Jewish Continuity

The Jewish Community of France

David Saada

The Jewish community of France, like those of most countries, has many points in common with those described, and some points of divergence.

An ancient community, it strongly reflects a number of recent historical events. The first of these is the Holocaust, which left it weakened and diminished to a few hundred thousand Jews. As a result of other subsequent events, it has grown enormously, to the current figure of about 600,000, over three times the population of 1946. Institutions have had to be created to deal with this prodigious growth. The various waves of immigration have posed another problem, that of integrating differing cultures. The French Jewish population is heavily concentrated and also somewhat dispersed. The Greater Paris region included about 50 percent of the Jewish population, i.e. about 300,000 Jews, the rest being mostly concentrated in the South of France, the East, and the regions of Lyons, Grenoble and Toulouse. Unlike in London, Jews belong to many small communities, rather than being highly concentrated. The highest concentration of Jews is in a community like that of Sarcelles, a suburb of Paris, where they amount to 18 percent of the population. Another variable, not previously mentioned, is the degree of affiliation of the Jewish population to Jewish institutions. In France it is relatively low, according to research conducted by Doris Bensimon and Sergio DellaPergola, amounting to about 40 percent. There are other precise ways of measuring, such as according to the percentage of families giving to particular charities, or the percentage of children attending educational programs. Though figures currently available are not very precise, those available do indicate a similarly low level of participation – in the case of school

and youth group attendance, a figure of 25 percent. The low level of participation, and relative dispersion of Jews, indicate the type of problems with which the community has to deal.

The community organizations provide three types of services – ritual, education, and social services. A central organization, the Consistory, is responsible for ritual matters. Many new communities, especially from North Africa, have successfully reconstituted themselves all over France around their own synagogues. Ritual matters such as *Kasbrut* are also well provided for. Social services are also adequate in towns with large concentrations of Jews, but less so where Jews are dispersed. Enormous efforts have been made in education, so that the number of full-day Jewish schools have increased from about six or seven in 1960 to between seventy and eighty today, around the country. There has also been tremendous development in cultural facilities shown, for example, by the fact that there are twelve Jewish radio stations in France today.

Although such efforts help greatly with the problem of scattered families, there is a minimum size of community below which adequate services are difficult to provide. Social services can be provided for a community consisting of more than three hundred families, or about a thousand individuals. This is the “development threshold” in France. It would be good if Jews could be encouraged not to disperse so much, so that services and Jewish culture could be provided more efficiently.

Over the years, the French Jewish community has been able to respond well to new demands for services due to its centralization, which helped greatly in organizing the integration of large numbers of refugees, for example. The Fonds Social Juif Unifié (United Jewish Social Fund), as a centralized agency, has been effective in investing funds where the need exists, instead of where the wealthiest communities are. Centralization also helps youth movements to grow even in small communities with few facilities. Cultural services also benefit from centralization, as do summer camps for small communities. Drawbacks do exist, such as the fact that centralization can tend to stifle creativity and free enterprise, and the two systems have to be balanced.

In general, Jewish education is more successful than in the past in France, due to better coordination. All efforts to improve Jewish life can only succeed if there is good leadership. Mobilization to confront demographic problems can only be achieved if local leadership recognizes the need and is trained to do it. The essential factor is leadership development, in the sense of training.

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Brenda Katten agreed with the last point. Although she supports the proposal to have more accurate demographic statistics, she felt that the facts are already known and the main problem is to prod the leadership into responding to the crisis. Marlena Schmool noted that professional community administrators do have ideas on how to deal with the demographic problem and should be listened to by the Jewish leadership.

Jewish Population Issues in Eastern Europe

Kalman Sultanik

The demographic dangers facing the Jewish people around the world in the near future are infinitely more severe in the case of the Jews of Eastern Europe, where despite recent more liberal attitudes, the communities have dwindled, due to decimation during the Holocaust and subsequent emigration, to a mere semblance of their past.

In most countries, with the exception of Hungary and Romania, the communities amount to only a few thousand, many of whom do not openly admit to being Jewish.

The leadership is weak, the population is aging, and intermarriage is the rule rather than the exception. In Communist countries, one had to be a loyal party member in order to succeed professionally. Therefore a great proportion of Jews not only were not registered members of the Jewish community, but refrained from openly identifying with it. Nobody, in fact, is aware of the true number of Jews in Eastern European countries. The fact that Jewish life has been revived in Russia encourages us to believe that, if Israel and the Jews of Western countries reach out to Eastern European communities and try to foster Jewish culture and education, and research Jewish history, the communities can be strengthened.

There have been recent signs that are encouraging: non-Jewish Poles and Hungarians have expressed appreciation of the Jewish contribution to their countries' histories – if they can take pride in it, how much more so will the Jewish communal leadership, if given the chance.

Jewish Social Services in Europe

Fritz Hollander

One has to distinguish in Europe between services in the capital cities and those in the provinces. The capital cities mostly possess one very important social service, the Israeli embassy, which brings Israel visitors and provides contact with the country. This does not serve areas beyond the capital cities, so Jewish organizations and their social services need to be correspondingly stronger in the provinces. Some small communities do not even realize what they are lacking, and therefore do not demand more services. Trained educators and social workers are too few in the European Jewish communities, among which the use of at least ten different languages imposes a duplication of efforts, and frustrates attempts to unite. It is important to persuade people that being a Jew is not just something historically interesting, but can also be an immediate pleasure and worth continuing. Only if people become interested in remaining Jews, can the cause of improving Jewish demography be fostered.

Social Services and Jewish Population in Latin America

Emanuel Tennenbaum

The problem of location of social services is aggravated in Latin America by the vast size of the continent. In this huge area, in which capitals are only linked by many hours of flying time, there are about half a million Jews, who are both greatly concentrated and greatly dispersed at the same time. The majority are concentrated in seven large cities, Buenos Aires, Sao Paulo, Rio de Janeiro, Santiago de Chile, Montevideo, Mexico City and Caracas. However, there are tiny clusters of Jews in thousands of small towns and villages. Our problem resembles that of Europe: how to extend services to Jews living in far-flung locations. The physical challenge and effort involved in getting a *mohel* or a rabbi to distant places in the interior is forgotten by those who criticize the smaller communities for abandoning their Judaism. The official social services do not succeed in serving even the Jews of large cities well, as they are slow to transfer in response to

population moves and so always seem to be located in the neighborhoods from which the Jews have already moved away.

Thus Jewish life in Latin America is polarized between the two opposites of extreme concentration and extreme dispersion. The Spanish language links together Latin Americans, but leads to the relative exclusion of Latin American Jews from the main centers of world Jewry. Although there is concern as to the future of Latin American Jewry, we are proud of the fact that third and fourth generation Jews, who might by now have become totally assimilated, struggle to remain Jews under adverse circumstances. It is important that this First Demographic Conference acquire a general picture of the situation in the various world regions.

The Demographic Situation of Jews in Argentina

Leon Kovalivker

The AMIA, Federation of Jewish Communities of Argentina, carried out through its Institute for Social Research [Instituto de Investigaciones Sociales] a study of the social and demographic situation of Jewish parents who send their children to Jewish schools in Argentina. The information was gathered from the registration form which parents fill out, and which is standardized since the schools are all supervised by a central board.

The theme of the project was family life strategies, because this concept includes several aspects of social and demographic behavior. The study covered about 12,000 families comprising 50,000 persons. It covered the entire Jewish educational system in Argentina, including kindergartens, primary schools, junior and high schools, and yeshivot in Buenos Aires and surrounding areas. Information already processed concerns 5,818 families. From the registration form alone, information has been obtained on household size and composition, the gender and age of its members, country of birth, marriage date, number of children, level of general and Jewish education, ethnic origin, professional training, and occupations. Though this is not strictly speaking a census, the information obtained gives an outline of this group of parents who, though not representative of all Argentinian Jews, may be viewed as indicative of several characteristics of the Jewish population as a whole.

The data obtained can be used for various purposes, including improving education, based on our greater knowledge of the constitution of households and average age of the population studied. Though it does not propose solutions to the demographic problem, it provides some data on the basis of which, and with a clearer grasp of the situation, partial solutions can be proposed. It has emerged that most of the parents (82 per cent of fathers and 86 per cent of mothers) who send children to Jewish schools are themselves between 30 and 49 years of age. Of the fathers, 21 per cent are between 30 and 35, 27 per cent between 35 and 39, and 21 per cent between 40 and 44 years old. Mothers being a little younger, 14 per cent of them are between 25 and 29, 28 per cent are between 30 and 34, 27 per cent between 35 and 39, and only 16 per cent over the age of 40. Since immigration to Argentina virtually ended after World War II, 94 per cent of Jewish parents have been born in Argentina. Figures on marriage rates have also been obtained. The stability of the marriages of those who send their children to Jewish schools is shown by the fact that 95 per cent of fathers and 91 per cent of mothers stated that they were still in their first marriage. Only 2.8 per cent of fathers and 1 per cent of mothers had been married a second time. Divorced and common-law couples had no statistical weight. This reveals that Jewishly committed parents value stability very highly. The last significant data indicate average family size, which is 2.3 children per couple, as compared with the general average, which is around 1.7 or 1.8.

The Jews of South Africa

Rabbi Bernard Caspar

The following offers a few considerations arising out of the situation in which South African Jewry finds itself, from the point of view of Jewish life, and what makes the Jewish community tick.

It is a remarkable fact that with all the difficulties facing South African Jewry, perhaps because of them, there is less cause for concern about the Jewish identity problem in South Africa than in most other places in the world. Here are some of the factors which lead to that situation.

First, whatever one thinks about the political and social situation in South Africa, its emphasis on the separate identity of the various racial, tribal and cultural groupings of the population has in fact, whether we like it or not, created a framework favorable to the perpetuation of

Jewish communal life and conducive to the preservation of Jewish national consciousness. The Jewish community there is a small identifiable community, run within very strict parameters. Today's growing call for the removal of ethnic barriers, and the creation of a more open society will unquestionably confront the Jewish community with a new challenge, as elsewhere in the West. The process of acculturation and assimilation is bound to increase for future generations born and reared in circumstances undreamed of by Lithuanian forebearers.

The South African Jewish community is almost entirely an Orthodox community by affiliation. It has Orthodox Jewish roots, anchored in the Anglo-Litvak tradition. This has brought with it respect for rabbinic authority and a sense of discipline.

Together with a relatively low rate of intermarriage, there are conversions into Judaism in South Africa. The standards are very high and have become higher over the past ten or fifteen years. The people who are now converted into Judaism are very good Jews and one can rely on them and their children. The conversion is taken very seriously, and is not an empty formality. There is much more *kasbrut* and Shabbat observance in South Africa today than there was twenty-five years ago.

The rate of Jewish day school attendance is very high. About 60% of all Jewish children of school age, from kindergarten to university, attend one or another of the Jewish day schools. Almost all of the remaining 40% have some form of Jewish education.

There is also a very strong Zionist background. South Africa has always been a strong Zionist community. Its thinking is directed almost daily toward what is happening in Israel.

Nevertheless, there is concern for the future, from an internal Jewish point of view. South African Jews are worried about the future because they are already the third generation after leaving eastern Europe. They only know about life there through books and stories, not first hand.

Second, there is constant growth of the open society, in South Africa a fairly recent phenomenon.

Third, there is another new phenomenon: equal cultural and business opportunities for everyone except the blacks. Jews mix freely today with Africaners, and this fraternization is leading to an increased number of out-marriages, even though in most cases the non-Jewish partner first becomes Jewish.

Some of the things which worry the Jewish leadership in South Africa are at present only minor problems. Jewish life in South Africa is vibrant: Jewish education is excellent, the community is fairly observant and very Zionist. Such factors make others admire the South

African community. However, a change can be perceived, in that the Zionist values are not holding up today as much as they did in the past. Moreover, when young people with good home values go to university, there is a change in them. Despite these problems, many young South African Jews are coming to Israel, especially those who have a more religious background. The leadership in South Africa is just becoming aware of the new problems which are cropping up on campus, and intends to grapple with them.

We are battling hard against the threatened erosion of our past and values. South African Jewry is about fifty years behind American Jewry as regards its liberalization. There are no streams and no pluralism, the Judaism they have being the Judaism they or their parents brought from Eastern Europe, except for a few individual defections.

Despite emigration from South Africa to various places, the total Jewish population does not seem to be getting less. It is simply not growing. Despite emigration, there are strong inner stabilizing forces which hold the population.

In conclusion, if we want to increase the world Jewish population, we must remember that it is the audacity of faith which redeems. Only faith begets faith, and we must put this before our young people, in order to succeed in remaining a people.

Implications of the Geographical Movement of Jewish Population

Barry A. Kosmin

The data on geographical movement dealt mainly with Great Britain and the United States, since those are the only two countries in which real research has been done. They are the only countries, it appears, with permanent research units. From other countries we have good general overviews, but little in the way of basic surveying.

There is a need to define the principles for Jewish community planning. Should there be intervention in order to persuade Jewish people to either concentrate or disperse? Should we try to maintain Jewish areas, or resign ourselves to the Jewish community's no longer being concentrated geographically, but linked by cars, telephones, and computers? Should the Jewish community spend on maintaining the social periphery, recruiting Jews and actively bringing them in, or should it concentrate its efforts on those who are most likely to listen?

These are important ideological questions. Since mobility is usually in the interest of the individual and to the detriment of the community, there is a need to look closely at individuals' decision-making. Why do people move, and how important is it for them to have Jewish neighbors and Jewish facilities near their new homes? It is important for the Jewish community to know who the Jews are, what they think and what motivates them, as a basis for any planning. However, since these are individual decisions and the cultural decisions vary from place to place, it is not possible to generalize on the basis of a small sample. Local Jewish institutions must make it their business to know their own constituency.

There is much internal migration in the United States. Most families undergo a high number of displacements, each American family moving on average every five years. The average American makes eleven moves within a lifetime. The Jewish population of a particular city may not fluctuate much in terms of numbers, but over, for example, ten years, there will be a major change in the population due to the departure of children for college elsewhere, retirement or death of the elderly, and business relocations for professionals and their families. Other cities, such as Palm Beach, have seasonal Jewish populations, which require social and other services for only part of the year.

There are various patterns in the redistribution of the population: the central United States are losing to the two coasts, and within each region the old, industrial cities are losing to newer suburban or university communities. Beside the permanent population, university towns often have several thousand more Jews resident during term-time. An individual Jew who goes to another town for college, then to graduate school in a third city, then joins the business world and may move two or three times, then again on retirement, has moved about six times during his lifetime. Europeans notice that when they are invited to an American *simcha*, the children have to be introduced to their relatives, as members of extended families hardly know each other. Similarly, the Jewish community has to perform a socialization role which in the past the extended family fulfilled, in terms of acquainting people with many aspects of Jewish life.

Like France, described by David Saada, the United States is a national community, because American Jews are very mobile. Their mobility does not, however, obviate the need for a time lapse of about five to ten years before they can integrate into a new community. This creates a leadership crisis, and demands more cooperation among community institutions round the country, a problem which is also acute in Britain.

Incidentally, concerning the issue of local needs versus Israel's needs in fundraising, there is little real competition between the two needs, as they appeal to different types, or generations, of American Jews. Younger people with families, in America for several generations, care more about their local needs and the survival of American Jewry. Others with a more international or Holocaust-formed approach care more about the survival of Israel. The newest immigrants have obviously chosen the United States over Israel in the first place.

When one considers the distance people are willing to travel for community services in the United States, one finds that it varies widely. It is questionable whether all Jewish services should be centralized in one place, or spread out among several suburban sites. People are willing to travel further for less frequently used services than for others. However, Jews increasingly see themselves as consumers of Jewish services, their Jewish identity not being automatically conferred any more. Jews will only "buy" Jewish schools if they are better than the other schools, because such people do have alternatives.

Jewish institutions may no longer find it the best approach to invest in buying land, planning, and building edifices for their activities. By the time the process is completed, the need for them may have disappeared. In order to serve mobile people, the services themselves must be mobile. One should consider whether the best approach is to serve the core of the community only, or attempt to serve the periphery. Does spatial distance imply social distance from the Jewish community? Is there a correlation between out-marriage and distance from Jewish facilities? Do the young tend to live, both geographically and socially, on the periphery of metropolitan areas? These are community planning decisions, essential to the future survival and cohesion of the Jewish community.

Planning Large Metropolitan Communities

Peter Friedman

Our session was devoted to the location of Jewish community services in relation to the distribution of Jewish populations in metropolitan areas. We reviewed the general issues of Jewish communal service location and focused on specific experiences as diverse as Melbourne, Australia; Chicago; London; Flatbush in Brooklyn, New York; and Budapest, Hungary. We noted the similarities between these communities in terms of their historical migratory

character and their ever-growing tendency to urbanization, but also to reconcentrate in suburban areas. We also dealt with exceptions. The role and influence of the Jewish communal institutions and organizations in this mobility, as well as the influence of mobility on communal institutions and services, were also examined.

Let me make a few observations on the policy issues we examined in our discussions. The first observation refers to scientific data and planning, and it has two aspects:

1. Policymakers should have knowledge about the patterns of population and concentration movements in order to make the appropriate decisions about the provisional location of the community services. For example, we emphasize the movement of Jewish population from the city to the suburbs, but in fact studies have shown that there is much movement within the city and from the suburbs back to the city.
2. Research should provide data not only on the destination of the population movement and the way it takes place, but it should also provide a definition for "community". Does "community" mean a neighborhood or more? It perhaps should designate the entire Jewish population of a city. This distinction has broad implications for the kind of service that we provide in a location.

Today we have brought out the whole issue of the process of mobility. We have asked ourselves why Jews move and stick together at the same time? In this regard we examined a number of interesting examples and identified a number of factors which may play a role in the stability as well as the mobility of a community. For example, the role of identity; ideology among sub-groups within the Jewish population; the role that a concerted planning effort by the Jewish community institutions can have while maintaining a Jewish community and not only responding to changes that have already occurred.

In terms of policy, there is a need to think again about the issues of metropolitan dispersion, not only in terms of local or national considerations, but also on the international level. How do we, as an international Jewish community, help Jewish communities whose populations are dispersing but do not have sufficient resources to maintain community services, as well as provide additional services, to a dispersing population that needs these in order to stay connected to the Jewish community? This is not only a local or national but sometimes an international problem.

We have next looked at the role the community can play in affecting the mobility and the individual decisions of its members. What can the Jewish community do to help affect individual decisions? It can provide information on the location of Jewish communities in metropolitan areas, information that can be useful not only for those already living in these metropolitan areas, but also to those that have just moved there.

Finally, we examined the role that can be played by the various institutions in maintaining and strengthening the sense of belongingness to a Jewish community. In other words: How does a synagogue, a Yeshiva or a community center contribute to the feeling that this is in fact a Jewish community?

Strengthening Small Jewish Communities

Rabbi Bent Melchior

In trying to define the concept of “small community,” one realizes that a large number of factors are involved. The question is one of the minimum size of a community which permits the maintenance of a Jewish day-school, or provides every year 10 pupils for the first grade. We heard from Prof. DellaPergola that a community should be 1200–1400 members strong in order to consider it as such. We have found out that the problems of small communities are identical to those of large communities, but that in small communities they are more acute. We have found out that remoteness and isolation is the problem of rather small communities, especially of those far away from the capital city. Visitors prefer to come to capital cities to meet parliament members and ministers, especially when an international atmosphere prevails. But smaller communities which cannot provide such excitements nurture a stronger desire not to be forgotten when leaders embark on transglobal visits. Soon we are likely to reach the conclusion that meetings should also be organized in such communities, and that new communications media, such as video cassettes and computers, should be used in order to foster the feeling of belongingness through joint work.

There is, of course, the problem of language. It is less serious when small communities speak the main languages. They can be provided with educational material in French, English or Spanish. The question becomes problematic with communities such as those of Holland, Switzerland or smaller countries to which it is more difficult to provide material in their own language.

Smaller communities have another difficult problem. They do not live in a *shtetl* (a Jewish village) or in a ghetto anymore and they do not live all within the same area. Small communities are dispersed over large geographic areas whereas communal services – the community center, the synagogue, the school – are located in a specific place. The problem of transportation for bringing people to the services is a very serious one.

We have dealt with the most acute problem of trained people. Rabbis, especially good ones, are scarce. When they are available, there still remains the problem of their successful absorption in the community. There are very good rabbis and very good communities, but they do not always get along well.

The problem of teachers in small communities is a serious one. A partial solution is to convince teachers to voluntarily serve in a small community for a year. This program needs support since very little has been done in the area of voluntary service.

The structure of the international Jewish organizations and the difficulties faced by small communities in participating in these organizations has been discussed. We had the impression that the leaders of these organizations tend to elitism and a member of a small community who comes to an international conference finds it difficult to be part of the event.

We also concentrated on the problem of outmarriages. If the rate of outmarriages in the entire Diaspora is 33 percent, it undoubtedly reaches 50 percent in small communities. We have to decide what to do about it and especially how to handle children born to mixed couples. In this connection the question of conversions to Judaism arose. We felt that this question has to receive our attention, and I am speaking of conversion to Judaism according to the teachings of Beit Hillel and not to those of Beit Shammai. If there are people who come to us, with the genuine desire to identify themselves with the Jewish people, we should react as Hillel did, by inviting them to live in our midst. In this way we shall solve not only some of the problems of these people, but also the antagonism prevailing among Jewish groups on this question.

We dealt lastly with the problem of Aliyah. Let me stress that a small community faces a serious problem when a great part of it leaves it for Israel. We cannot but bless those members of the community, since, in fact, they were educated towards this objective. Nonetheless, it means that some young people, destined to leadership posts within the community, leave it to make Aliyah to Israel. However, all participants in the discussion concluded that this is a positive problem. Those who

come to Israel serve as a further link between it and the center of inspiration and renewal. The communities, and especially the small ones, are enriched with new ideas and Israel is further strengthened by Aliyah from small communities as well.

Geographic Distribution of Diaspora Jewry

Ernest Krausz

Our round table concerned the location of Jewish community services in relation to the distribution of Jewish populations. I shall relate to general problems in most of the countries we considered. I shall also mention, however, specific problems on particular continents or in different countries.

Regarding the first aspect, we came across a major problem: the location of the Jewish community services:

- a. There is a difference between providing communal services – religious, cultural or social – in large concentrations of Jewish populations, and providing these services to small, remote communities. The deeper question is: whom shall we provide with community services? Larger communities and communities more committed to Judaism? Or should we devote more resources to peripheral Jews, both in terms of geographic location and in terms of their identification?
- b. The high mobility of Jews, especially in the U.S.A., is a serious problem since time lapses until community services are brought to new regions of Jewish settlement, and until new families are integrated into the new Jewish environment and begin to avail themselves of the existing services.

We stressed the need for planning based on research. This need becomes even more important in view of the mobility and the new conditions prevailing in a modern society. Next, the need to form a cadre of professional people to solve the problem of recruiting trained people to supply the necessary services to the community. And finally there is a need to influence and convince the lay leadership of the importance of scientific planning in order to improve service facilities.

I would like to turn now to the more specific problems of specific continents and countries. Mr. Hollander, for example, drew our

attention to difficulties experienced during the reestablishment of communal services in Europe, at the beginning of the War and the Holocaust. These services were to some extent recreated both in Eastern and Western Europe, although proper facilities are still largely lacking.

I recently was in Moscow. Community services are still lacking there. The community there is now characterized by small groups that meet for studies and social encounters and are guided by a need for Jewish solidarity. I was struck by the great number of these groups in Moscow and across the Soviet Union.

As regards Latin America, Prof. Tennenbaum stressed the problems stemming from the great distances separating communities in this continent and the lack of professional people. Even rabbis are lacking in small communities.

For the United States of America, Prof. Kosmin stressed the tendency of the community to deconcentrate and the changes in its geographic distribution. Even the spread of the Jewish population in metropolitan areas brings about certain problems of travel in order to get to those services from one part of the big city to another part. The question is what is the tolerance of travel for Jews who have to make use of certain services but who do not have them locally.

As for Britain, Mrs. Schmoool told us about the old, well-established Jewish community which is, however, a small community. It tends to maintain the existing institutions and secure its needs now and in the future. All this, despite the evolution of the community, which is Anglo-Jewish in character, and its ever shrinking population.

With regard to France, the largest Jewish community in Western Europe, Mr. Saada argued that the centralized management of the communal organizations met well the needs of two post-war immigrant waves of Jews: those that came to France in the fifties, and those of the large community from North Africa that settled in France in the sixties.

Finally, the most provocative and important question is whether or not we know what is the link between decision-making and the policymaker, and the true needs of the Jewish communities we reviewed.